

## Introduction

### *Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally*

The conception of this collaborative project emerged from a serendipitous meeting on a cold and gray November day in 1998. We were both attending a conference that was being held in the Luxembourg Palace in Paris. The dark corridors and heavy security of this major site of political power in a European capital led us to a conversation on the state of “ethnic studies” in the United States and Europe. In a café, over cups of hot mulled wine, we continued the conversation on our personal and institutional backgrounds, allegiances, and dissatisfactions until late into the evening. One main dissatisfaction, we found out, was over the disciplinary boundaries that would ordinarily keep us on very different professional tracks, and thus not lead us to meet with each other. Our paths would not have crossed were we back in our home institutions, too busy fighting our own battles within our narrowly focused disciplines to understand the possibilities of working across these disciplines. One a Mauritian of French descent working in francophone, African, and African American studies, and the other a Korean-born ethnic Chinese working in Chinese, sinophone, and Asian American studies, we were both in some sense “minoritized” in the major disciplines of French and Chinese. We were both too “ethnic studies” for the mainstream of our fields, but we would not normally have shared our common concerns and our common predicament. Had we not met through an arbitrary gathering in a major metropolis, the seat of power, our minor orientations would have remained invisible to each other. We realized, in retrospect, that our battles are always framed vertically, and we forget to look sideways to lateral networks that are not readily apparent.

Our encounter is symptomatic of the compulsory mediation by the mainstream for all forms of cultural production and interrelations among different minority communities. More often than not, minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups. We study the center and the margin but rarely examine the relationships among different margins. The dominant is posited, even by those who resist it, as a powerful and universalizing force that either erases or eventually absorbs cultural particularities. Universalism demands a politics of assimilation, incorporation, or resistance, instituting a structure of vertical struggle for recognition and citizenship. Like many scholars we find universalist constructs wanting, but our reasons are specific to our locations as multiply diasporic subjects in the United States occupying a peculiar, transnational space.

One such universalism is the French version of Republicanism, which aims to assimilate immigrants and minorities into a particular version of “Frenchness.” The official discourse flaunts an ideal of “Frenchness” as a promise to be achieved through the mastery of the French language and cultural codes. Thus to be “French” is to relate vertically to an ideal image of the French nation, not to find common ground with other immigrants who have embarked on this process of “becoming-French.” There is a clear lack of proliferation of relational discourses among different minority groups, a legacy from the colonial ideology of divide and conquer that has historically pitted different ethnic groups against each other. The minor *appears* always mediated by the major in both its social and its psychic means of identification.

Globalization increasingly favors lateral and nonhierarchical network structures, or what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a rhizome. The figure of the rhizome suggests an uncontainable, invisible symbolic geography of relations that become the creative terrain on which minority subjects act and interact in fruitful, lateral ways. Yet, even in these productive theoretical approaches, Deleuze and Guattari end up falling back into a recentered model of “minor literature.” For them, the minor’s literary and political significance rests on its critical function within and against the major in a binary and vertical relationship: “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16).

French philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida have given us tools for thinking about otherness, tools that are all too often appropriated and depoliticized. It is important

to remember that the historical and political context of poststructuralist theory is the experience of decolonization with which many of these thinkers were familiar. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* mentions the word *ethnocentrism* in its first few pages before it even brings up the now much more central concept of logocentrism. However, we do not readily associate Derridean deconstruction with a critique of ethnocentrism, except as rarified philosophical musings on difference and otherness. Derrida's personal experience of growing up Jewish in Algeria at the time of decolonization has inevitably colored his intellectual choices in the same way that it did Hélène Cixous's. But it isn't until Franz Fanon traveled from the Caribbean to Algeria, which is to say from one minor space to another, that we can begin to see the emergence of the profile of a minor transnational intellectual linking spaces and struggles laterally.

Derridean deconstruction, even though marginal to the European center in the middle of the century, has become a dominant paradigm in French theoretical discourse in the United States and, by now, even in France. The deconstructive procedure has the paradoxical effect of exercising the muscles of the European philosophical and literary tradition, which becomes even more complex and indeterminate for an infinite play of meanings. Critiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study. The deconstructive dyad center/margin thus appears to privilege marginality only to end up containing it. The marginal or the other remains a philosophical concept and futuristic promise: the other never "arrives," he or she is always "à venir." The ethical implications of this approach are important in that they prevent the reification of the other, one of the major pitfalls of identity politics. However, when seen from this perspective, the other continues to exist more as a promise than as a reality. To say it bluntly, this promise of an "à venir" may be analogous to the illusive and elusive promise of equality in Republican universalism.

By contrast, Fanon's writings would instead help spur and partly undergird the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and by extension the discipline of ethnic studies in the United States. These writings inspired many other liberation movements and minority struggles in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, because Fanon was the first both to dissect the affective dimensions of oppression and to "translate" Hegelian or Sartrean definitions of alienation into a context where they could be used for nationalist struggles. These struggles were usually launched by those who were fighting for national and cultural autonomy and for racial equality. In the

United States, these struggles led to the recognition that minority populations are not just arriving, “à venir,” but have already arrived and contributed to the definition of what the United States is. All minority groups are constitutive of the United States as a national entity; they are not just “playing in the dark” (Morrison) and should not be viewed as “perpetual foreigners” with second-class status because of their linguistic differences. They should be granted full citizenship with due recognition of rights and obligations. One of the salient results of these struggles was the establishment of ethnic studies programs in various universities, and the important research that these programs have facilitated. For tactical and strategic purposes, minority identities have been constructed in strong and bounded terms that have unfortunately rendered invisible subject positions that did not readily fall into such accepted categories as those of official minorities.

The paradigm of arrival in ethnic studies led, by necessity, to a more or less exclusive focus on domestic dynamics and hierarchies. On the one hand, new immigrants in general have been placed in a paradoxical position with regard to the claims of authenticity and cultural nationalism that have fueled the development of ethnic studies. On the other hand, vertical models of resistance have tended to impede interethnic solidarity and international minority alliances. For instance, scholars in ethnic studies very rarely communicate or collaborate with scholars in francophone studies, although there are many geographical and cultural points of convergence between the two. Likewise, ethnic studies and area studies continue to be caught in a fraught relationship: if pan-Africanism has provided a limited platform for African and African American scholars, pan-Asianism is politically too suspect and threatening to be viable as an institutional concept. Ethnic studies remain an American domestic paradigm, while area studies continue to subscribe to an outmoded view of continental territories. National-language departments rarely question the metonymical relationship between language and nation.

Increased pressures from transnational movements of peoples and cultures have, however, challenged the above nation-state-based definitions of ethnic and area studies. As scholars working both within and across area and ethnic studies, we not only want to bring intellectual questions raised in one field to bear upon the other, and vice versa, but we also want to raise new questions that address specific issues of transnationality in the twentieth century. This project is the result of such dialogues and multi-year collaborations among the contributors here under the organizational

aegis of a Multicampus Research Group on Transnational and Transcolonial Studies at the University of California, codirected by the editors of this book. Like our working group, this book aims to create a bridge between constituencies that have overlapping interests and porous borders but are under institutional constraints to defend established territories. Our intellectual work has convinced us, however, of the theoretical and practical benefits of looking at transnationalism from this “minor” perspective. It is indispensable to a better understanding of the general logic of transcultural and transdisciplinary approaches, and it troubles the prevalent notions of transnationalism as a homogenizing force.

### *Minor Transnationalism*

In the last ten years or so, we have seen a new field of inquiry emerging in the name of transnational studies, aided by the increasing currency of theories of transnationalism in the social sciences, which are in turn legitimized by new theories of globalization. In general, it is understood that transnationalism as a consequence of the latest wave of globalization shares with globalization the historical moment of late capitalism, characterized by the logics of finance capital, flexible accumulation, and post-Fordist international division of labor (Hall 23; Harvey). Whereas the global is, in our understanding, defined vis-à-vis a homogeneous and dominant set of criteria, the transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal. The logic of globalization is centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture to be tested by its norm. It produces a hierarchy of subjects between the so-called universal and particular, with all the attendant problems of Eurocentric universalism. The transnational, on the contrary, can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center.

This definition of the transnational recognizes that transnationalism is part and parcel of the process of globalization, but also that the transnational can be less scripted and more scattered. In an effort to show the diverse ways that the transnational can work and is constituted, scholars have attempted to determine its parameters and track its movements. In one formulation, we have the so-called transnationalism from above, the

transnationalism of the multinational corporate sector, of finance capital, of global media, and other elite-controlled macrostructural processes (Mahler). This transnationalism from above is associated with the utopic views of globalization, which celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of a liberal global market, the hybridization of cultures, and the expansion of democracies and universal human rights. Dystopic visions of globalization, by contrast, point toward such negative consequences as environmental and health hazards, “McDonaldization” of cultures, the exasperated disparity between the rich and the poor, and the increased exploitation of Third World labor contributing to the financial wealth of the North at the expense of the South; in other words, the hegemony of Western capitalism and, according to Gayatri Spivak, the “untrammelled financialization of the globe” (262). The dystopic views generate a resistant site that some have called “the transnationalism from below,” which is the sum of the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state, including “everyday practices of ordinary people” (Mahler). Michel de Certeau’s formulation of the quotidian and the everyday as the quintessential locus of resistance is an earlier formulation of this view from below; so is James Scott’s emphasis of “hidden transcripts” and everyday forms of practice as always already resistant “weapons of the weak” (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance; Weapons of the Weak*). Neither de Certeau nor Scott considers transnationality as integral to these resistant practices, since theirs is a politics of the local. Similarly, local/global studies tend to romanticize the local as not necessarily pure but stubbornly the site of resistance. As has been pointed out, globalization is by no means a complete or thorough phenomenon, and neither does the global stand in binary opposition to the local. What has changed, however, are the parameters of the national. The national is no longer the site of homogeneous time and territorialized space but is increasingly inflected by a transnationality that suggests the intersection of “multiple spatiotemporal (dis)orders” (Sassen, 221). The transnational, therefore, is not bound by the binary of the local and the global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities.

We offer, in this volume, a conception of minor transnationalism that intervenes in the above formulations in multiple ways. When we take a minor or minoritized perspective, we inevitably need to shift the accents and revise the above formulations. Major discussions of transnationalism and globalization assume that ethnic particularity and minoritized per-

spectives are contained within and easily assimilated into the dominant forms of transnationalism. We concur that the minority and the diasporic necessarily participate, though differentially, in the moment of transnationalism, either from below or above, or that the minority and the diasporic live within the space of increasing global integration brought on by globalizing forces in communication, migration, and capital flow, within the circulation of global cultures, ideas, and capital. However, the minority and the diasporic peoples, even under duress, develop cultural practices and networks of communication that exceed the parameters of these theories. What is lacking in the binary model of above-and-below, the utopic and the dystopic, and the global and the local is an awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries. All too often the emphasis on the major-resistant mode of cultural practices denies the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples and hides their micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires. Common conceptions of resistance to the major reify the boundaries of communities by placing the focus on action and reaction, excluding other forms of participation in the transnational that may be more proactive and more creative even while economically disadvantaged. By extracting the site of resistance and defining it as transnationalism from below, it appears that there are two different transnationalisms in opposition and conflict, when in reality the minor and the major participate in one shared transnational moment and space structured by uneven power relations.

We claim that theories of transnationalism continue to exercise a “politics of recognition” (see Taylor; Fraser) in valorizing the most dominant and the most resistant. The binary model presupposes that minorities necessarily and continuously engage with and against majority cultures in a vertical relationship of opposition or assimilation. The Foucauldian overemphasis on the capillary operation of power of the dominant contributed to this vertical model from which horizontal communication amongst minorities is made invisible. Thanks to the global reach of the media as well as the intensified migration of peoples, transnationality in minority cultures has become a given and their mutual communication is also enhanced. Minority cultures are part of our transnational moment, not a reified or segregated pocket of cultures and mores waiting to be selectively incorporated into what qualifies as global or transnational by

the powers that be. What has prevented the admission of the integral role played by minority cultures is the politics of recognition exercised by theorists of transnationalism that in arguing for a borderless world have continued to adhere to a binary North/South, dominant/resistant model of culture.

Our emphasis is on transversal movements of culture that are distinguishable from the “arenas of postnational identification” (Joseph 17). This cultural transversalism includes minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds), as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether. This transversalism also produces new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, thus allowing for the emergence of the minor’s inherent complexity and multiplicity. New requirements of ethics become urgent, and expressions of allegiance are found in unexpected and sometimes surprising places; new literacies are created in nonstandard languages, tonalities, and rhythms; and the copresence of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial spaces fundamentally blurs the temporal sequence of these moments. This conception of minor transnationality differs from the postnational, nomadic, and “flexible” norms of citizenship (Appadurai; Joseph; Ong). Unlike the postnational or nomadic identities that are relatively unmoored from the control of the state and bounded territories, minor transnationality points toward and makes visible the multiple relations between the national and the transnational. It recognizes the difficulty that minority subjects without a statist parameter of citizenship face when the nation-state remains the chief mechanism for dispersing and regulating power, status, and material resources. Flexible or nomadic subjects function as if they are free-floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces. By contrast, minor transnational subjects are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces, often waiting to be recognized as “citizens” to receive the attendant privileges of full citizenship.

The postnational assumes that nations have discreet boundaries in order to go beyond them, but our conception of minor transnationalism takes as its point of departure Edouard Glissant’s theories of relation. For Glissant, cultures are not monadic entities or bounded spaces tracing national borders. Such a conception was and is an illusion. According to his definition of creolization, within contact zones, the creolization of cultures occurs not because pure cultural entities have come into contact

with each other, but because cultures are always already hybrid and relational as a result of sometimes unexpected and sometimes violent processes (*Poétique de la relation*). Therefore, the transnational is our language to designate this originary multiplicity or creolization, which foregrounds the formative experiences of minorities within and beyond nation-states. Nation-states are alive as mechanisms of control and domination even when transnational corporations are supposed to have dissolved their boundaries. Minority cultural workers are transnational not because they transcend the national, but because their cultural orientations are by definition creolized in Glissant's sense. Samir Amin, for instance, has also noted the hypocrisy of recent theories of globalization, as if prior to our contemporary moment all nations, cultures, and languages were separate and pure entities (*Capitalism in the Age of Globalization; Eurocentrism*). Jean-Loup Amselle's theory of "branchements," modeled on technological networks, and his study of the N'ko minority Islamic group, has also opened new avenues for the analysis of cultural change while demonstrating that transcontinental patterns predate contemporary definitions of globalization. If we posit, after Glissant, Amin, and Amselle, that creolization and mixture are the a priori conditions of culture, we can further evince minor expressivity as even more necessarily mixed and transnational. By virtue of their marginality within the nation-state and by their experience of migration and various forms of (neo)colonialism, they had to fall upon cultural resources outside the dominant ones (including those promoted by transnational corporations) that pretend to singularity and authenticity. Not that the dominant cultural resources are inherently monological, but the rhetoric, management, and deployment of these resources by the dominant aggressively assert their authenticity in order to rationalize the dominant's sense of entitlement. For the minor, however, authenticity is the "othering machine" (Suleri) that historically denied them access to full citizenship; it is also that mechanism that produces in the minor a reactive notion of authenticity in the form of cultural nationalism.

The question of authenticity is two-pronged, from our perspective. It includes a politics of retrieval and a politics of inclusion and exclusion. Insofar as the politics of retrieval allows subaltern groups to reclaim lost and suppressed cultural identifications, it is an empowering practice. But insofar as the politics of retrieval presupposes a desire to recapture a lost purity, it is a dangerous impulse that can lead to problematic forms of cultural essentialisms and mythical views of authenticity. Once authen-

ticity is evoked or normalized, a politics of inclusion and exclusion sets in, where arbitrarily fixed categories of identity in the form of identity politics can police cultural expressions and practices. Differences within a given minority group are suppressed in the interest of forming a cultural unified front against domination. However, minor cultures as we know them are the products of transigrations and multiple encounters, which imply that they are always already mixed, hybrid, and relational. It has been politically useful to disavow such multiplicities, but strategic uses of authenticity have a limited life span, as points of politicization change within a given minority group over time. Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism was never meant to be solidified or fixed into truth claims. Not that we do not need a strategic essentialism or a politics of authenticity, but that we need to be cognizant of its limited usage in changing contexts of application and its exclusivist tendencies even toward its internal members.

What makes it even more imperative now to rethink the politics of authenticity from a transnational or relational perspective is the increased speed, frequency, and expansion of cultural conjunctures and disjunctures in the formation of various spaces of contact, physical and virtual. The garb of authenticity today in the transnational context would fall prey to the "stranger fetishism" wherein the authentic stranger becomes a commodity whose difference is contained and consumed by those with purchasing power (Ahmed). A new global multiculturalism is thus engendered where strangers of various origins constitute the shopping list of cultures. As nationalisms decline on the transnational front, the hardening of minority identity becomes more visible and out of step with economic globalization and is soon ready material for global multicultural consumption.

Within the new formation of global multiculturalism, what constitutes the "minor" or "minority" needs to be reframed from the erstwhile nation-state-based model of understanding. When we juxtapose *minor* with *transnationalism*, a new field of meanings emerges with an array of combinations of issues that depart from existing notions of "minority discourse." The formulation of "minority discourse" emerged within American studies as a way of theorizing diversity. But this approach to diversity remains largely monolingual, even though multilinguality is a given within minority communities. When non-U.S. forms of transnationalism and transcolonialism are brought into play, the "minority discourse" model is helpful only to a limited extent. Not all minorities are

minoritized by the same mechanisms in different places; there is no universal minority position as such. By looking at the way minority issues have been formulated in other national and regional contexts, it is possible to show that all expressive discourses (such as music, cinema, autobiography, and other literary genres) are inflected by transnational and transcolonial processes. Here transcolonialism denotes the shared, though differentiated, experience of colonialism and neocolonialism (by the same colonizer or by different colonizers), a site of trauma, constituting the shadowy side of the transnational.

Many European nations, such as Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain, and the Asian nations of China and Japan, along with the United States, all have a history of colonial and imperial dominance. As a result, their cultures, literatures, and languages have reached peoples and nations far beyond their borders. While postcolonial studies has proven to be an important tool for the exploration of colonized cultures, sociocultural developments since decolonization now call for better contextualization using transcolonial perspectives. For example, the very notion of postcoloniality seems insufficient in its focus on the historical period since independence was achieved. It remains concerned with the exploration of relationality between dominant (colonizing cultures) and dominated (colonized) spaces and therefore does not provide an adequate framework for the study of those cultures that remain effectively colonized or those cultures subjected to the colonizing effects of globalization and multinational capital and the accompanying cultural markers. Most importantly, postcolonial studies fails to foreground the productive cultural work of minorities resulting from their transcolonial and transnational experiences. Postcolonial cultural studies has been overly concerned with a vertical analysis confined to one nation-state, such as the effect of British colonialism in India, where the vertical power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is the main object of analysis. Finally, it reinforces the hegemony of English as the language of discourse and communication.

In contradistinction, we recognize the persistence of colonial power relations and the power of global capital, attend to the inherent complexity of minor expressive cultures on multiple registers, take a horizontal approach that brings postcolonial minor cultural formations across national boundaries into productive comparisons, and engage with multiple linguistic formations. Methodologically, for this particular volume, this means dialogues on multiple fronts involving questions of theory, history,

spatiality, culture, and disciplines across national boundaries and ethnic/area studies divides. Nation-based research in American ethnic studies as well as area studies enters into productive encounters with traditional others, such as European studies and the field of “theory.” For instance, how do we theorize an ethnic American subjectivity when it is situated elsewhere and is read as the representative of the global? How do we map the immigrant subject-in-process from being a national subject (at the place of origin) to an ethnic subject (at the place of settlement) when the two are porously interactive and, shall we say, intersubjective? Is the immigrant subject postmodern by definition? How do the two terms *minority* and *theory* inflect each other, when theory as such is Eurocentric? How do we then, “provincialize” theory (as Chakrabarty might say) so that universalizing theories will be returned to their contexts and exposed of their specificities?

### *Transformative Practices*

*Theory, history, performance, spatiality, culture, and discipline* are posited here as terms of action that can be deployed outside of their conventional parameters and by inauthentic agents, those presumed to be “without history” and “without theory.” “Theorizing” is a practice that challenges Eurocentric theories’ universal claims while at the same time not giving in to naive empiricism and documentarity with assumptions of transparent representation of reality. Theories as such have always already implicated minoritized subjects, even if the modes of implication may merely be neglect, misrecognition, and disavowal. The other, as such, is constitutive of the self of theory; its absence at every moment calls for its emergence and arrival. Our modes of engagement with theory as such, therefore, are multiple, including critique, reinscription, and invention, not allowing theory to monopolize the power to make generalizations about our transnational world.

It is in this vein that Suzanne Gearhart delineates Etienne Balibar’s notion of “interior exclusion” in her theorization of the intersection of the minority and the transnational. The minority and the immigrant are constitutive of the national in its status as the object of interior exclusion, integral to what the national means and how citizenship is defined. As the putative European self exercises exclusion of the minoritized other, it is involved in a “transindividual” or intersubjective and intrasubjective relation with the other, just as its subjectivization process requires the interior

exclusion of the self from itself. This double process determines the ambivalence of identification in terms of national citizenship and belonging. Similarly, the immigrant and the minority are constitutive of the transnational—whether in its “good” or “bad” versions, corresponding to the distinctions between “transnationalism from below” and “transnationalism from above”—through its double engagement with their difference and sameness, exclusion and inclusion.

Literalizing the constitutive character of the minority in the formation of the transnational is the phenomenon of migration and traveling between the West and the non-West. While there have been adequate critiques of mainstream Western travelers to the faraway and not-so-faraway colonial and Third World sites tracing colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial trajectories and routes (Clifford; Kaplan), very little has been said about the multidirectional travels by the other except in terms of immigration studies where the immigrants are granted subjecthood, albeit a problematic one, only when they enter the West. There are also the categories of the Third World cosmopolitan and the flexible citizen (Ong) who possess the wherewithal to float above national determinations of economy, politics, culture, and citizenship. But what about the others, whose travels and movements do not fall into these categories?

The nonwhite Western person who traverses the forces of globalization to the non-West presents one such subject position fraught with ambivalence, and so does the nonwhite, non-Western person en route to the West without intending to be an immigrant and without the wherewithal to be a Third World cosmopolitan or a flexible citizen. Globalization has brought many others home but also sent many abroad, producing alternate circuits of transnationality that have been largely undertheorized. David Palumbo-Liu’s and Shu-mei Shih’s essays ask questions about ethics in the transnational context when both virtual and face-to-face contacts between selves and others have increased to an unprecedented degree. What are the responsibilities of the self to the other? How may these responsibilities be expressed, concretized, assumed, or fulfilled? Does the other bear responsibilities also?

Framing his argument on transpacific circulation of intersubjective affect in the context of globalization, Palumbo-Liu begins his essay via a provocative critique of the two seemingly unrelated discourses—rational choice theory and American pragmatism—as holding up “the logic of self-interest and exclusivity.” What is the role and function of literature in such a context? Can literature function today as the site of production of

ethical affect against the dehumanizing forces of the global economy and media? How should it deal with sentimentality, which rational choice theory dismisses and pragmatism manipulates? The paradigmatic text in question turns out to be a minor text written by Japanese American writer Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*. Her postmodern novel, so to speak, retains the residual modern in its ability to lend information an ethical context and to imagine communities (albeit spatially and temporally discontinuous ones like the Internet or faxes) that are possible. The novel also does not shy away from deploying sentimentality but rather sees it as an expedient means of expressing and representing the regard for others. Here, the putative, racialized other within the United States — the Japanese American protagonist in Ozeki's novel — becomes emblematic of the Western self and its responsibility to the non-West as well as other ethnic minorities in the United States.

The circulation of ethical affect can also begin from the non-West, when the so-called Third World native other overcomes the reactive affects of nationalism and nativism and escapes from the binary logic of the politics of recognition. Shu-mei Shih analyzes the bind of binarism in the discourse of Orientalism and anti-Orientalism as well as the withholding of and the struggle for coequality as expressions of the paucity of Western liberal imagination about the other, and the ambivalent compliance of the other's response to that imagination. The other's compliance is most readily observable in the discourses of cultural nationalism and nativism, resisting and refuting the injustice of the totalizing discourses of Orientalism and the withholding of coequality, one important aspect of which for the Chinese in China is a deeply embedded sinocentrism. The frustration of this sinocentrism to effect a powerful rebuttal to the West is often displaced to its internal and external others: ethnic minorities in China, and those "inauthentic" people of Chinese descent residing elsewhere. Shih suggests that part of the ethical responsibilities of the continental Chinese is precisely to shed the burden of sinocentrism as a reaction against Western hegemony, just as the West also needs to shed its dominating ways and arbitrarily manipulated discourses of difference and sameness. Shih's example is feminism's negotiation across the China/West divide, a divide complicated by immigration, traveling, and diaspora, and that has thus become at least a tripartite construct. In a synthesis à la Emmanuel Levinas, Karatani Kōjin, and Li Xiaojiang, Shih then proposes a transversal and transpositional politics where to be ethical is to be able to shift positions to those of the other and many more oth-

ers beyond the binary logic of First World hegemony and Third World nationalism.

Susan Koshy likewise questions the assumed universalism of Western globalization theory that continues to posit the Third World as the recipient of theory, emptying out what she deftly calls the “transformative agency” of Third World figures as well as their participation in the co-authorship of the global order. Conceptualizing minor transnationalism as the site of emergent, nonnormative regimes and “practical humanism,” the framework for “aggregating numerous movements, groups, and discourses” engaged in a guerrilla war against a major transnationalism, and the network of “transnationalized communities,” Koshy proposes a “sustainable universalism” that better marks the Third World’s constitutive role in globalization. For example, the task of monitoring the transnational trafficking of sex slaves, having dropped through the cracks of national and transnational legal regimes into a legal void, has now fallen on minor transnational organizations that can exercise forms of practical and sustainable universalism to better represent the context-specific as well as transcontext situations of the postmodern subaltern: the sex slaves.

Equally important to the project of rethinking transnational ethnic and migratory relations is the urgent need to consider the disciplinary principles that guide the production of academic knowledge about minority subjects and their histories. By “historicizing” the field of minority discourse production, it is possible to show how transdisciplinary academic practices can construct transnational objects of knowledge, thereby transforming our established interpretive frameworks and disciplinary conventions, while also producing alternative genealogies and narratives of the past.

Tyler Stovall’s essay adopts a historical and a critical practice that enacts a minor transnational critique. He brings insights from one field to illuminate questions raised in another, and thus demonstrates how traditional disciplinary paradigms would not allow for a complete understanding of the 1926 Crutcher murder case he examines. He uses perspectives from French, francophone, and African American studies, adopting a postcolonial and cultural studies approach to this Parisian murder case in which a white French woman murdered her black American husband. Stovall produces a historical analysis of the way dynamics of class, race, sex, gender, and violence were being destabilized by the arrival of non-white subjects in the metropole, and he reveals the new relations of power and the “fault lines” that were developing in the “*années folles*” of 1920s

French society. Stovall shows how it is necessary to consider this case “from three different geographical and theoretical perspectives” in order to fully understand it as an example of “postcolonial criminality” that involved metropolitan, colonial, and American contexts. His method of doing a cultural history that is simultaneously transnational and transcontextual allows him to show that “American-style patterns of race relations” were already developing in France in the interwar era. Such a reading proves that contemporary questions about race and multiculturalism in France have a longer genealogy than is generally understood.

In a similar vein, Kathleen McHugh brings together problems of theory, history, and geography to show how minoritarian filmmakers undo mainstream narrative and cinematic conventions that purport to capture the “truth” of coherent selves rooted in national space and historical time. She shows how “ethnic” American filmmakers set out to register “the representational absence and invisibility integral to transnational minority experience.” The Japanese American Rea Tajiri’s *History and Memory* does so by incorporating “historical modes of visual representation” that document this absence, whereas the Chicano artists Ramiro Puerta’s and Guillermo Verdecchia’s film *Crucero/Crossroads* use space to “fracture the coherence of the subject.” These experimental approaches to filmmaking and narration produce images that exemplify the fragmented consciousness common to the transnational minority experience of “border subjects” for whom the private and the public, the personal and the historical, the real and the fictional are closely intertwined. McHugh’s careful analyses highlight the extent to which the minority experience lives out the theories that have developed about so-called postmodern narratives of absence and incoherence. But here, this absence, she points out, is given a presence, a past, and a possible future through visual representations of the racialized body. These filmic images expose the myriad ways in which “the fissures and inadequacies of the nation and the state locate themselves in the body of the transnational minority subject.” But these representations do not reconfigure in an oppositional or essentialist mode the minority body as a cohesive or homogeneous entity; instead, the filmmakers keep to a logic of the fragment in their cinematic practice, thus illuminating the always already discontinuous and multiply coded forms of identifications that are those of “marginal” subjects.

Minority bodies matter: their visible (racial, sexual) difference has been instrumentalized by a variety of discourses. Bodies are put in the center of many disciplinary debates about the technologies of the self. Together

with the body and physical appearance, language is a crucial marker of identity and nationality. But in Africa, where everyone is multilingual, the monologic approach to language and identity no longer obtains. Moradewun Adejunmobi surveys the debate about language and literacy under French and British colonial policies of assimilation or indirect rule, respectively. She argues that some anticolonial writers and critics framed the language issues “with the very same tropes” used by colonial advocates of vernacular literacy: “alienation,” “respect for the past,” and the need “to speak to each community” in its own language. She describes the territorial logic at work in colonial or “major” discourses of the vernacular that used it as a pretext for the containment and separation of different linguistic communities that were thus *constructed* as distinct. By questioning the oppositional status of the vernacular as a pure nativist space, she also demystifies the most common clichés about the “minor” politics of language choice. The vernacular does not automatically exist as an uncontaminated field; rather, it is either an instrument of colonial administrative control or part of a program to win political autonomy. It is rarely an end in itself for most African writers who usually see past the binary opposition between the European language and the mother tongue, being more interested in the concept of a lingua franca for transcultural communication. As a result, language use in Africa seems to be an interesting example of a de facto minor transnationalism that connects overlapping and multiply-identified communities who are more interested in a lateral cultural engagement with each other than in asserting themselves as purely ethnic and oppositional vis-à-vis the major transnational forms of economic global power.

In the section on “Reading, Writing, Performing,” Françoise Lionnet adds another perspective on the uses of the vernacular in the Indian Ocean–African zone. Focusing on Dev Virahsawmy, the popular Mauritian dramatist who has produced radical adaptations and reinterpretations of Shakespeare’s plays, she argues that his *Toufann* is best understood not just in relation to the Shakespearean original (*The Tempest*), its explicit intertext, but rather as a transcolonial critique of power that echoes the work of several sub-Saharan African authors, such as Chinua Achebe or Sony Labou Tansi. The play’s success, when translated into English and produced in London in 1999, underscored the paradoxes of the reception of “marginal” cultural texts. A profound statement about the politics of knowledge, control, and power, *Toufann*’s critical and sexual edge was blunted by its travel back to the metropole, where it seemed to have

become just another “cultural” manifestation of well-worn critical paradigms instead of the astute critique of such paradigms.

The questions of language, literature, and postcolonial modes of interpretive reading are underscored by what Ali Behdad calls “the predicament of reading ‘minor’ literature.” What is at stake in the institutionalization of this literature? And to what extent do its themes of exile, mobility, and metaphoric vs. real displacements create a field of discourse that tends to idealize homelessness and the advantages of a free-floating subjectivity rooted only in language? The utopian impulse of postcolonial intellectual approaches to this literature has led to a romanticized view of the “seductive power of geographical displacement.” In a self-reflexive move about his own critical practice, Behdad demonstrates the importance of social, economic, political, and historical contextualization for a thorough understanding of the real-life conditions and contexts of exile and immigration in the Algerian Driss Chraïbi’s 1955 novel *Les boucs*, which depicts the fate of postwar Maghrebian immigrants in suburban France.

Postcolonial theory’s aestheticization of displacement, as Behdad points out, marks a utopian dimension of transnationality. The transnationalism of elite and diasporic theorists can be read as a form of transnationalism from above. Michael Bourdaghs’s essay deals with what is seemingly an aerial and ethereal form of transnational movement, that of jet-setting pop musicians over two metropolitan sites, but his reading of Sakamoto Kyū’s “translations of rockabilly” points to the limits imposed upon the mobility and translatability of non-Western performers and artists in the American context. Although Sakamoto Kyū is not a “minority” subject in the United States, his music became culturalized and racialized to represent “Japaneseness.” The universally understood culinary connotations of the imposed title of his song, “Sukiyaki,” became part of an international lingua franca that trivialized an otherwise major voice in his home country. Translation produces differences and hierarchies that reinforce the difficulty of traveling from a major mode to a minor one. This ethereal Japanese pop traveler died in a plane crash and never got his star on the Hollywood walk of fame. What Michael Bourdaghs’s critical practice also demonstrates is that there are fruitful and productive theoretical borrowings across “minor” transnational discourses. Indeed, it is the work of *Black Atlantic* theorist Paul Gilroy on black music that allows Bourdaghs to develop his own views on rockabilly music.

When questions of globalization, immigration, and transnational flows are discussed, there is a tendency to conflate the notion of the global with

that of the urban, with the rural regions of the globe being perceived as existing outside of modernity and globalization. In our final section, “Spatializing,” Jenny Sharpe’s essay shifts the focus to rural Jamaica, providing a different take on Gilroy’s work and alerting us to the persistence of old colonial patterns of exploitation that are now “driving a greater wedge between city and country.” In the country, it is not cyberspace but radio that becomes the true site *and* metaphor for black female subjectivity and agency. If the major global forms of transnationalism tend to correspond to a virtual network of urban spaces, in Jamaica, dancehall culture, radio, and dub poetry are powerful forms of “minor” globalizations through which rural women express their material cultures and stay connected to national and international news about many daily struggles that echo their own. Thus, the dub poetry of Jean Binta Breeze “gives faces to the nameless women who are otherwise absent from our cartographies of transnational cultures and globalization.” Sharpe’s is a salutary reminder that there exist minor moods and modes of existing both musically and globally, and that women’s performances make this plainly visible and audible.

If a major transnationalism flaunts the supercompression of space or the elimination of distance, minor transnationalism charts a much more complex configuration of space and heterogeneous “spatial practices” (à la Henri Lefèbvre). These practices occur in the nonspaces of boundaries and borders, spaces which are nonetheless infinitely expansive and full of possibilities. Seiji Lippit’s essay delineates the conceptual limits of national culture by way of its paradoxical view of minority culture as the site of both abjection and incorporation. It reflects a particular form of organization of the inside and the outside, as Yuri Lotman’s notion of “semiosphere” suggests, where the boundary between the two spaces both separates and unites the two spaces. One of these boundary spaces is the *roji*, the term used by novelist Nagakami Kenji to designate the outcaste village into which and out of which the Japanese subject wanders. Just as this space has an ambivalent relationship with other “authentic” national spaces as being both their outside (exclusion and abjection) and their inside (assimilation and incorporation), so does the minor culture have a paradoxical relationship with national culture. The abject has the “potential of becoming the sacred” at any moment within this national imaginary—thus the *roji*’s “strange power” which has obsessed writers such as Nagakami.

Similarly, Elizabeth Marchant’s piece uses a concrete historical site, the Pelourinho, the historic center of the city of Salvador, the “Black Rome,” to examine the condition of the Afro-Bahian’s simultaneous marginality

and centrality to Brazilian national culture. Marchant's Pelourinho is Lippit's roji, in this sense; Lippit's "abjection" echoes Marchant's "subjection," as the Pelourinho is the site of black suffering and violence. The paradoxical prominence or centrality of the Pelourinho, Marchant goes on to expose, however, is the Brazilian nation's need to promote tourism to the area, which requires a romantic rhetoric of racial democracy and harmony and a cultural promotion of blackness. This romantic valorization of black culture does not change the conditions of blacks in terms of their class status; rather, it reifies ethnicity and culture. The valorization occurs at a level different from the socioeconomic; the cultural is decontextualized to carry the rhetoric of racial democracy and cultural mixing as part and parcel of the definition of Brazilian national culture. Marchant's essay provides an important perspective on the layers of meaning that subtend the appropriation of a "minor" space for a "major" purpose. It puts into question the very marginality of what this space is meant to represent historically and nationally.

The Chicano/a construction of the mythic homeland of Aztlán as an oppositional and alternative geography against U.S. territorialization likewise registers a challenge to normative citizenship. Rafael Pérez-Torres engages in a radical valuation of *mestizaje* and interstitiality within the transnational space of the border. Despite romanticization, on the part of some critics, of the tropes of borderland and *mestizaje*, Pérez-Torres shows that these ultimately resist fetishization. He argues that for Chicano/a artists, poets, and scholars, the trope of *mestizaje* is empowering and melancholic, ironic and ambiguous, all at once. Historical dislocations create ideological ruptures while embedding individual subjects within the material conditions of constraining social relations. That is why the mythic space of the homeland in Chicano expressive culture keeps on shaping individual projects in which anticolonial triumph and melancholy remain intertwined, articulating both a gain and a loss of embodied subjectivity. Pérez-Torres's essay brings in a crucial dimension within the field of U.S. ethnic studies. Unlike the Asian or African minorities, whose histories are those of displacement (whether through immigration or slavery), the Chicanos/as occupy an ambiguous space: their transnationalism is not one born of the movement from a national context to another but rather one produced by the historical realities of shifting borders in the southwestern United States. Pérez-Torres argues that Chicano/a art intervenes in the social production of space within the Southwest, and that it presents a challenge to "accepted notions of American

identity . . . premised on the exclusion of the racial in the service of the national.” This is an important point that, we feel, adds a unique dimension to this volume on “minor” transnational encounters. There are specificities here that do not echo those of the African (as discussed by Adejunmobi) or Mauritian (Lionnet) contexts, but rather describe a form of *mestizaje* that, had we more space to do so, would provide an interesting parallel to the kinds of geographical and political issues that the Basque people of France and Spain, say, are dealing with in their own cross-border multilingual cultural identities and dissident practices.

The constantly changing and troubling terrains of identities and cultures under contemporary transnational conditions echo both the specific material circumstances that we have described above and the shifting psychic identifications that border writers and artists are able to negotiate with acute sensitivity. This melancholic valence of the border is perhaps that which most resonates with the “minor” key in a musical sense. If the minor mood in music is an introspective and mournful tone different from the more triumphant “major” key, then “minor transnationalism” is perhaps the mode in which the traumas of colonial, imperial, and global hegemonies as well as the affective dimensions of transcolonial solidarities continue to work themselves out and produce new possibilities. Beyond the nostalgic and the melancholic, these solidarities point to ways of becoming more engaged with present and future promises of transformation through active participation in the production of local knowledges and global cultures. We offer this volume as testimony and as example of the dynamic possibilities of the work of border-crossing friendships, collaboration, and scholarship.

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