

# Introduction



## QUEER LIBERALISM AND THE RACIALIZATION OF INTIMACY

Such changes can be defined as changes in *structures of feeling*. The term is difficult, but “feeling” is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of “world-view” or “ideology.” It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt.

—RAYMOND WILLIAMS, “Structures of Feeling”

In many ways this project began in the classroom. For over a decade now, I have been teaching on a regular basis an introduction to Asian American literature and culture. Although initially I could not have predicted that I would come to write a book about queer liberalism, the racialization of intimacy, Asian diaspora and migration, and the politics of family and kinship, I became increasingly interested in these issues for a simple reason. Over the years, a growing number of students in my Asian American literature and culture classes have come out to me—not as gay or lesbian but as transnational adoptees.

In recounting their experiences, my students would often employ the language of the closet and the vocabulary of shame.<sup>1</sup> They stressed how they felt invisible as transnational adoptees and how they felt compelled to come out of the closet time and again. They also admitted how such personal disclosures exacerbated their anxieties of being

stigmatized and of feeling neither adequately Asian American nor sufficiently white. Finally, they emphasized how such ambivalent impulses provoked fears that they were being disloyal or ungrateful toward their adoptive parents. The complexity of these issues sparked a series of extended classroom discussions: Is the transnational adoptee an immigrant? Is she Asian American? In turn, are her white adoptive parents Asian American?

Even more, such issues emerging at the intersection of queer studies and the contemporary politics of race made me start to think about transnational adoption as a new form of passing in our so-called “color-blind” age. Unlike prior histories of sexual or racial passing, however, the inscription of the closet in transnational adoption seemed to be less about the problem of detecting a hidden sexual or racial trait than about our collective refusal to see difference in the face of it. This refusal to see difference—to acknowledge race—marks the politics of colorblindness in our “post-identity” U.S. nation-state, which is characterized by the persistent disavowal of race in the name of freedom and progress.

Over time, the increasing presence of transnational adoptees in my Asian American literature and culture classes initiated a more sustained meditation on the unacknowledged ways in which race continues to structure and define both the public sphere and the private space of family and kinship relations. Moreover, it has demanded consideration of how contemporary evolutions in the meanings and values of social organization and community are, in Raymond Williams’s terms, “actively lived and felt” as structures of feeling.<sup>2</sup> In short, my students challenged me to examine emergent patterns of social belonging, both concrete and ephemeral, as they pushed me to reflect upon the feelings of kinship—the collective, communal, and consensual affiliations as well as the psychic, affective, and visceral bonds—that drew them to the intellectual and political projects of Asian American and critical race studies, as well as to theories of queerness and diaspora, as sites of critical response to the conundrums of race we face today. It is these cumulative reflections that shape the arguments and analyses of *The Feeling of Kinship*.

### *Queer Liberalism*

This book begins with an analysis of the historical emergence of what I describe as “queer liberalism” as well as its impact on conventional structures of family and kinship. Simply put, queer liberalism articulates

a contemporary confluence of the political and economic spheres that forms the basis for the liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects petitioning for rights and recognition before the law.<sup>3</sup> While gays and lesbians were once decidedly excluded from the normative structures of family and kinship, today they are re-inhabiting them in growing numbers and in increasingly public and visible ways. (Contemporary political debates on same-sex marriage and the inclusion of gay and lesbian couples on the “Wedding-Celebrations” pages of the venerable Sunday *New York Times* exemplify this remarkable historical shift.<sup>4</sup>) Our current moment is marked by the merging of an increasingly visible and mass-mediated queer consumer lifestyle with recent juridical protections for gay and lesbian rights to privacy and intimacy established by a number of interrelated court rulings on both the federal and the state levels. Most prominent among these is the landmark 2003 Supreme Court decision *Lawrence v. Texas*, overturning a Texas statute criminalizing homosexual sodomy as unconstitutional.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, recent legal decisions in Massachusetts and Connecticut legalizing same-sex marriage, as well as existing domestic partnership programs on the state level, in the municipal domain, and in the corporate arena, have remade the politics of kinship into “families we choose,” to invoke anthropologist Kath Weston’s important study of queer kinship, the lesbian baby boom, and the AIDS epidemic in 1980s San Francisco.<sup>6</sup>

Paradoxically, prior historical efforts to defy state oppression and provide a radical critique of family and kinship have given way to a desire for state legitimacy and for the recognition of same-sex marriage, adoption, custody, inheritance, and service in the military. In the following chapter, I explore the historical conditions of possibility for queer liberalism and its normative politics of family and kinship through an extended analysis of the *Lawrence* decision. Here, I emphasize how queer liberalism relies upon the logic of colorblindness in its assertion that racial difference has given way to an abstract U.S. community of individualism and merit.<sup>7</sup>

Today we inhabit a political moment when disparities of race—not to mention sex, gender, and class—apparently no longer matter; they neither signify deep structural inequities nor mark profound institutional emergencies. Our historical moment is overburdened by the language of colorblindness—especially with the recent election of our nation’s first African American President, Barack Obama—one marked by the erosion of a public language for discussing race and racism. At the same time,

it is distinguished by the cleaving of race from (homo)sexuality, and (homo)sexuality from race, the systematic dissociation of queer politics from critical race politics, the denial of their coalitional and intellectual possibilities. As I note in the Preface, the election of President Obama, accompanied by the passage of Proposition 8 in California, which invalidated the California Supreme Court's affirmation of same-sex marriages, marks one such significant cleaving.

Indeed, one of the main contentions of *The Feeling of Kinship* is that queer liberalism does not resist, but abets, the forgetting of race and the denial of racial difference. That is, the logic of queer liberalism in our colorblind moment works to oppose a politics of intersectionality, resisting any acknowledgment of the ways in which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another, each often serving to articulate, subsume, and frame the other's legibility in the social domain. In short, queer liberalism is predicated on the systematic dissociation of (homo)sexuality from race as coeval and intersecting phenomena. The "completion" of the racial project that marks the advent of colorblindness in the U.S. nation-state thus becomes the condition of possibility for the historical emergence of queer freedom as the latest political incarnation of "the rights of man." In this regard, the election of President Obama and the passage of Proposition 8 are not oppositional or irreconcilable events. Rather, they function within an entirely predictable teleology of (racial) progress and (queer) freedom.

How did we get to such a historical juncture? In the legal domain of family and kinship, we are said to have formally entered a colorblind society with the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia*, in which the Court struck down as unconstitutional Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute prohibiting marriages between whites and blacks. While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is typically regarded as the beginning of the end of legalized segregation in the *public* domain of education, *Loving* is commonly interpreted as the official end to legalized segregation in the *private* realm of family and kinship relations.<sup>8</sup> As such, *Loving* is seen as the legal culmination of a series of Constitutional challenges finally reversing the "separate but equal" doctrine of institutionalized segregation established by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision upholding state-sponsored separation of the races.

Today, after the formal end of state-sponsored segregation of the races—and under the official banner of colorblindness, multiculturalism, and neoliberalism—race is said to be irrelevant to the law, to politi-

cal doctrines of the liberal individual, and to U.S. citizens as abstract and equal subjects. Legal scholar Rachel Moran remarks that, in a colorblind society, race is nothing but an “accident of birth,” a “matter of physical appearance . . . no more germane to winning a government contract, getting a job, or gaining a seat at a public university than small ears or a freckled complexion.”<sup>9</sup> Along similar lines, legal scholar Twila L. Perry observes that race today can no longer be debated as a collective injury but can only be discussed as individual harm. In response, Perry seeks to develop a language of “private” racial torts in lieu of a “public” language of discrimination and Constitutional redress for racial conflict and tension that continue to haunt and fracture U.S. society.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, if race is defined in terms of its enduring social consequences, its ongoing legacies, and its continuing present of substantive inequalities, we can hardly say that we have entered a colorblind age. Indeed, our historical moment is defined precisely by new combinations of racial, sexual, and economic disparities—both nationally and globally—which are disavowed, denied, and exacerbated by official state policies that refuse to see inequality as anything but equality, and by a pervasive language of individualism, personal merit, responsibility, and choice. Contrary to liberal aspiration, the formal legal institution of colorblindness has not led to a U.S. society free of racial conflict, discrimination, and contradiction, as millions of people continue to be affected by race and afflicted by racism. Instead, a politics of colorblindness willfully refuses to acknowledge the increasing socio-economic disparities that mark our society, while also refusing to see these disparities as anything other than the just distribution of inequality to those who are unwilling to participate on the so-called level playing field of the neoliberal market.

Rather than accepting this teleological narrative of freedom and progress at face value, we ought to consider how colorblindness after *Brown* and *Loving* is only the latest historical incarnation of what legal scholar Cheryl I. Harris has described as a long and enduring history in U.S. law of “whiteness as property.” Harris argues that U.S. jurisprudence has continually evolved in both explicit and implicit ways—from the period of slavery to emancipation, from the era of Reconstruction to Jim Crow segregation, and from the time of “separate but equal” to desegregation under civil rights movements—to connect property rights to race, and to legitimate a property interest in whiteness as the persistent and continuing right to exclude others across different historical periods. Although *Brown* and *Loving*, unlike *Plessy*, might be seen

as taking “opposite interpretative stances regarding the constitutional legitimacy of legalized racial segregation,” Harris observes, “the property interest in whiteness was transformed, but not discarded, in the Court’s new equal protection jurisprudence.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, through each shifting era of U.S. racial history, the law has not de-legitimated whiteness as property. Rather, it has adapted and re-adapted it for a changing historical landscape in which “whiteness as property evolved into a more modern form through the law’s ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline.”<sup>12</sup> In short, racial attitudes shift, but the right to exclude remains a historical constant, one ultimately rendering liberal notions of continuous social progress illusory.

Today, we might consider how the politics of colorblindness reconfigure whiteness as property to focus critical attention on the private structures of family and kinship as the displaced but privileged site for the management of ongoing problems of race, racism, and property in U.S. society. That is, in a colorblind age, the intimate sphere increasingly becomes a crucial site for a reconsideration and reevaluation of racial conflict organizing not just the private domain but the public sphere as well. The current evisceration of a political and public language to address social inequality across both realms reveals only one part of a historical process that Lauren Berlant identifies as the incredible “shrinking public sphere,” a process solidified by the neoconservative Reagan-Thatcher revolution of the 1980s. Reacting against identity politics, the culture wars, and to the possibilities of a transformative multiculturalism, the Reagan-Thatcher revolution obviated the possibility for national political debates about race, sex, and class by displacing them into the “intimate public sphere” of privatized citizenship, normative family, and hetero-sexist morality.<sup>13</sup> Public discussions of race and racial discrimination have been systematically and precisely precluded through a rhetoric of colorblindness accompanying the incredible shrinking public sphere. As such, we must develop a critical vocabulary and analysis of the ways in which racial disparities and property relations embed and recode themselves within the private realm of family and kinship relations, only to seep back into circulation within the public domain.

Thus, for instance, while *Loving* may be said to have ended formal state-sponsored racial segregation in the private sphere of intimacy, this ruling (as all legal rulings regarding segregation) did not necessarily abolish *personal* prejudices, which are allowed to circulate, influence, and

redefine family and kinship relations outside the formal reach of the law. As Moran observes, “having required government to behave hyperrationally in matters of race and marriage, *Loving* refrained from any discussion of how individuals should responsibly choose a spouse.”<sup>14</sup> Building upon this argument, legal scholar Randall Kennedy points out that, while “statutes, judicial opinions, presidential directives, and voluminous commentary prepare us to assess racial discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and the administration of criminal justice,” there are in contrast “relatively few sources [to] give us guidance in evaluating racial discrimination in the choice of friends, dates, or spouses.”<sup>15</sup> If the law no longer formally discriminates as a matter of public policy (and there is certainly robust debate over such a contention), it certainly does little to redress private racism or discrimination.

To take a critical page from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s monumental book on the persistence of homophobia in the age of sexual toleration, contrary to popular opinion “advice on how to help your kids turn out gay, not to mention your students, your parishioners, your therapy clients, or your military subordinates, is less ubiquitous than you might think. On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large.”<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, while the law no longer criminalizes interracial marriage, advice on how to promote interracial union and harmony is less ubiquitous than our colorblind pundits would have it. Likewise, while the law no longer enforces racial segregation in schools, it certainly does little to abet the disestablishment of racism in the educational hierarchy, to redress the education achievement gap between white and black students, or to prevent the ever-increasing segregation of the races in schools. The systematic dismantling of affirmative action after *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, legal rulings handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court only a week after the *Lawrence* decision, as well as the more recent *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, underscores the law’s simultaneous endorsement of formal equality through the language of colorblindness, coupled with its willful refusal to acknowledge continuing racial disparities, to enforce the material redistribution of resources, or to “de-legitimate,” in Harris’s words, an unwavering property interest in whiteness.<sup>17</sup>

In a colorblind society, firmly based on liberal distinctions between the public and private sphere, the state regulation of race and racial discrimination within the private realm of family and kinship relations

would seem to be a preposterous idea, a fundamental affront to our sense of individual liberty and freedom. Indeed, it would seem to be an assault on privacy itself as a fundamental right to be protected. As the guardians of the liberal tradition, mainstream legal scholars thus find themselves at a conceptual loss to tackle enduring legacies of race and racial discrimination in the private domain of individual choice and economic self-determination, and in proffering adequate political as well as intellectual responses to the “afterlife” of post-identity politics.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, *The Feeling of Kinship* turns to the fields of critical race studies, queer studies, diaspora studies, transnational feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, cultural studies, and anthropology, which provide us with a thick critical vocabulary for examining the political, economic, and cultural processes by which race and racial difference continue to saturate our material and psychic lives, all the while denaturalizing liberal distinctions between the public and private domains by challenging its false divisions—“No More Separate Spheres!” in Cathy Davidson’s memorable phrase.<sup>19</sup> In other words, we must contest romanticized notions of privacy and family as outside capitalist relations of exploitation and domination or—as generations of feminist scholarship has taught us—as free of gendered labor and value. At the same time we must remind ourselves of Karl Marx’s insight in “On the Jewish Question,” that the public sphere presupposes the hierarchies of the private sphere, guided and regulated by norms that are not neutral but conditioned by the particular interests of the dominant group.<sup>20</sup> Even more, we must resist the idealized notion of family and kinship relations as somehow removed from or eccentric to the racial tensions, cultural differences, and national conflicts that continue to define our domestic and global political economies and conditions of existence.

Here, it might be useful to keep in mind Amy Kaplan’s insights on “manifest domesticity,” on the ways in which “international struggles for domination abroad profoundly shape representations of American national identity at home, and how, in turn, cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national are forged in a crucible of foreign relations.”<sup>21</sup> For instance, to return to an example from above, how is the practice of transnational adoption connected to modern histories of U.S. militarism and military intervention in Asia during Cold War conflicts and expansionism in the “American century”? More recently, how does the extension of liberal rights to privacy and family for gays and lesbians “over here,” facilitated by the *Lawrence* ruling,

relate to the demonizing of Arab and Muslim populations deemed intolerant, uncivilized, or inhuman “over there”? Both queries insist that we examine the ways in which liberal conceptions of the “domestic”—as public nation and private home—are “inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’.”<sup>22</sup>

Today, under the shadows of a U.S.-led globalization—capitalist development as freedom—the politics of colorblindness employs the depoliticized language of what Jodi Melamed describes as “neoliberal multiculturalism,” the most recent historical phase of U.S. racial advancement on a global scale.<sup>23</sup> Neoliberal multiculturalism, Melamed argues, functions to support U.S. ascendancy on the global stage today, as racial liberalism did for U.S. global power following World War II. It seeks to manage racial contradictions in both the national and the international arena by masking the centrality of race for an ever-increasing global system of capitalist exploitation and domination. The biologization and capitalization of human life that defines neoliberal multiculturalism, under the shadow of global capitalism, is premised on the naturalization of a “system of capital accumulation that grossly favors the global North over the global South” and depends upon the “hyperextraction of surplus value from racialized bodies.”<sup>24</sup> In the final analysis, neoliberal multiculturalism portrays racism as nonracism and neoliberalism as the key to a multicultural, post-racist world order of freedom, opportunity, and choice. Under its mandates, “racism constantly appears as disappearing . . . even as it takes on new forms that can signify as nonracial or even antiracist.”<sup>25</sup>

Economists and legal scholars tend to view choice as the very definition of (neo)liberal freedom. In rethinking neoliberal multiculturalism in the context of the private sphere, it is important to emphasize that nowhere is the language of choice more important than in the intimate space of family and kinship relations. However, anthropologists Susan Coutin, Bill Maurer, and Barbara Yngvesson argue that choice “is part of the morality tale that animates Western stories of self and of nation,” justifying rampant practices of exploitation and domination.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the neoliberal language of choice now helps to reconfigure not just the domestic but indeed the global marketplace as an expanded public field in which private interests and prejudices are free to circulate with little governmental regulation or restriction. As such, we need to ask how neoliberalism’s rhetoric of choice works in tandem with a domestic

politics of colorblindness precisely to subsume race within the private sphere of family and kinship relations. Such efforts to isolate and manage the private as a distinct and rarified zone outside of capitalist relations and racial exploitation, as well as dissociated from its domestic and global genealogies, express what I describe throughout this book as the “racialization of intimacy.”

### *The Racialization of Intimacy*

The racialization of intimacy marks the collective ways by which race becomes occluded within the private domain of private family and kinship today. Attention to the racialization of intimacy draws awareness to the ways in which racialized subjects and objects are reinscribed into a discourse of colorblindness. It brings critical focus on the processes by which race is exploited to consolidate idealized notions of family and kinship in the global North, for instance, through the practice of transnational adoption, the outsourcing of productive as well as reproductive labor, and the importation of careworkers from the global South. Furthermore, an examination of the racialization of intimacy reveals the political, economic, and cultural processes by which race has been forgotten across a long history of colonial relations and imperial practices, dissociated from or subsumed by other axes of social difference, such that it can only return as a structure of feeling, as a melancholic trace demanding historical explanation. Finally, the racialization of intimacy indexes other ways of knowing and being in the world, alternative accounts of race as an affective life-world within but ultimately beyond the dictates of a liberal humanist tradition, eluding conventional analytic description and explanation. At a time when race appears in official U.S. political discourse as only ever disappearing, it becomes increasingly urgent to contest such sanguine pronouncements with, among other things, this one simple fact: ever since the Enlightenment race has always appeared as disappearing.

In “The Intimacies of Four Continents,” Lisa Lowe examines the sublation of African slave and Asian coolie labor that facilitated the rise of modern Europe, providing material support for the rise of republican states in Europe and North America, while helping to structure Enlightenment thought and the philosophical foundation for the universal “rights of man.” Colonial labor relations on the plantations of the New World, Lowe writes, “were the conditions of possibility for European

philosophy to think the universality of human freedom, however much freedom for colonized peoples was precisely foreclosed within that philosophy.” Modern racial hierarchies “appear to have emerged in the contradiction between humanism’s aspirations to universality and the needs of modern colonial regimes to manage work, reproduction, and the social organization of the colonized.”<sup>27</sup> This dynamic stretches back to colonial labor relations organizing the plantations of the New World, and reaches forward to our contemporary moment of U.S.-led globalization, whose political culmination is the official disappearing act of race under the banner of liberal freedom and progress. We need to investigate this dialectic of disappearance—to reflect upon, as Lowe urges, the ways in which the “affirmation of the desire for freedom is so inhabited by the forgetting of its conditions of possibility, that every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting. What we know as ‘race’ or ‘gender’ are the *traces* of this modern humanist forgetting. They reside within, and are constitutive of, the modern narrative of freedom, but are neither fully determined by nor exhausted by its ends.”<sup>28</sup>

In our colorblind age, it becomes increasingly important to draw attention to the ways in which intimacy has always been—and continues to be—racialized across what Fernand Braudel has described as the *longue durée*.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, we come to apprehend the spectrality of race, which, like capital in Jacques Derrida’s analysis, resists any straightforward narrative of affirmation and presence, any teleological progression from before to after.<sup>30</sup> As such, the advent of colorblindness in contemporary U.S. society might not be seen as the end of race. Instead, it might be approached as one significant event in a larger historical structure organized by colonialism’s world division of racialized labor and freedom, a division materially and philosophically consolidated by the economic, political, and aesthetic tenets of the Enlightenment. Across this *longue durée*, race is constantly rendered ghostly. Colorblindness is merely the latest installment in this historical narrative of freedom and progress.

Seen from this perspective, intimacy might be thought of less as the sexual, romantic, and conjugal relations defining the liberal individual, serving to consolidate and separate the private domain of the bourgeois home from the public realm of work, society, and politics. To the contrary, Lowe’s “Intimacies of Four Continents” underscores how a world division of racialized labor on the plantations of the New World pro-

vided the very conditions of possibility for the emergence of bourgeois notions of intimacy and concepts of privacy marking the rise of Euro-American modernity and the production of the liberal individual. That is, the racialized political economy of colonialism “founded the formative wealth of the European bourgeoisie,” while the “labor of enslaved and indentured domestic workers furnished the material comforts of the bourgeois home.”<sup>31</sup> In turn, the material consolidation of the bourgeoisie as a distinct class provided the ideological support for the separation of private and public spheres, all the while fueling the demand for the universal “rights of man” defining eighteenth-century revolution and the Enlightenment tradition.

Today, we continue to struggle with the political, economic, and cultural legacies of colonialism and its constructions of race as one significant project of Euro-American modernity. *The Feeling of Kinship* enters this critical conversation by examining the historical rise of queer liberalism as one recent incarnation of liberal freedom and progress, constituted by the racialization of intimacy and the forgetting of race. At the same time, the book explores how we might read through and against this history of racial forgetting—acknowledging its ghost and identifying its contradictions and denials—by turning to the concept of “queer diasporas.”

### *Queer Diasporas*

Much of *The Feeling of Kinship* focuses on the impact of queer diasporas—in particular, queer Asian diasporas—on conventional structures of family and kinship. Turning to queer Asian diasporas opens up forgotten histories of racialized intimacy within the received genealogies of liberal humanism, one largely defined by the dialectic of white-black race relations in the black Atlantic. A turn to queer diasporas allows us not only to queer the black Atlantic by expanding the oceanic limits of its social cartographies into other geographical spaces and times but also to consider the dynamic relationship between Asian migrant and African slave labor in a comparative context.

From this perspective, *The Feeling of Kinship* seeks to constitute one piece of a larger intellectual endeavor for the study of race and racialization in our colorblind age: the collective rethinking of the Enlightenment project and New World modernity from the perspective of Asia and Africa. In doing so, it attempts to move beyond the geographic

boundaries of the nation-state and, more urgently, beyond the ideological boundaries of U.S. exceptionalism, which insists on the disappearance of race in the name of freedom and progress. It is precisely Asian American and Latino studies that brought the question of area studies—of other Asias and other Americas—into the field of American studies, provincializing the U.S. and its dominant critical discourses.

In this book, queer diasporas is not only an object of knowledge—a collection of novels, films, documentaries, legal decisions, and case histories—highlighting intersections of queerness with the global impact of Asian diasporas and migrations. Equally important, it is also a critical methodology, a reading practice that responds to queer liberalism and its racialization of intimacy by imagining otherwise, and by providing alternative knowledges and possibilities.<sup>32</sup> Diaspora, meaning “to disperse” or “to sow,” is conventionally understood as the scattering of a people from a single place of origin. Khachig Tölölyan notes that today “[we] use ‘diaspora’ provisionally to indicate our belief that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.”<sup>33</sup>

The political implications of diasporas, both old and new, are unstable in regard to the entity of the modern nation-state. While diasporas can be sites of resistance to the nation-state, they can also function, Tölölyan argues, as “its ally, lobby, or even, as in the case of Israel, its precursor.”<sup>34</sup> From either perspective, diaspora is firmly attached to genealogical notions of racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability. Configuring diaspora as displacement from a lost homeland or exile from an exalted origin can thus underwrite regnant ideologies of nationalism, while upholding virulent notions of racial purity and its structuring heteronormative logics of gender and sexuality.

By invoking queer diasporas as a methodological approach, I seek to explore contemporary Asian movements and migrations in the global system not through a conventional focus on racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability, but through the lens of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency. The methodology of queer diasporas draws attention both to the nostalgic demands of diaspora and to a history of modernity built on the forgetting of race. It declines the normative impulse to recuperate lost origins, to recapture the mother or motherland, and to valorize dominant notions of social belonging and racial exclusion that the

nation-state would seek to naturalize and legitimate through the inherited logics of kinship, blood, and identity. Instead, the methodology of queer diasporas denaturalizes race precisely by contesting and rethinking the pervading rhetoric that “situates the terms ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’ as dependent on the originality of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘nation’.”<sup>35</sup>

Gayatri Gopinath observes, “If ‘diaspora’ needs ‘queerness’ in order to rescue it from its genealogical implications, ‘queerness’ also needs ‘diaspora’ in order to make it more supple in relation to questions of race, colonialism, migration, and globalization.”<sup>36</sup> Refusing to subsume sexuality within overarching narratives of national identity and racial belonging, or to incorporate these latter categories within a Western developmental narrative of capitalism and gay identity, the methodology of queer diasporas becomes a theoretical approach for telling a different story about the contemporary politics of nation-building and race under globalization, along with its accompanying material and psychic processes of social belonging and exclusion.

If the methodology of queer diasporas provides critical resources to denaturalize heteronormative discourses of racial purity underwriting dominant nationalist as well as diasporic imaginaries, it simultaneously complicates the homogenizing narratives of globalization that take for granted the totalizing logic of commodification, the inexorable march of economic development as the guiding beacon of (neo)liberal rights and freedoms. Rather, if capitalism, contrary to its classical formulation by Marx, has proceeded not through the homogenization of the globe but through the racialized differentiation of labor markets, production, and consumption, the turn to queer diasporas methodology serves to mark the uneven effects of capitalist exploitation and social domination “over there” as well as “over here.”<sup>37</sup> In the process, it provides a particular perspective on globalization and reveals “alternative modernities,” other cultural forms and practices that operate as potential sites of contradiction and refusal.<sup>38</sup>

The resistance to the universal translatability of (homo)sexuality as a stable category of knowledge traveling across different times and spaces is one such important site. As a methodological tool, queer diasporas draws attention to other forms of family and kinship, to other accounts of subjects and subjectivities, and to other relations of affect and desire dissonant to traditional conceptions of diaspora, theories of the nation-state, and the practices and policies of neoliberal capitalism. In short, it highlights the breaks, discontinuities, and differences, rather than the

origins, continuities, and commonalities, of diaspora. By indexing what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “diversity of human life-worlds,” outside of capitalism’s logics of empty, homogeneous time and space, the methodology of queer diasporas offers a critique of modernity and its forgetting of race that calls attention to unauthorized subjects and to unacknowledged structures of feeling beyond an empirical tradition of liberal rights and representation.<sup>39</sup>

From this perspective, the concept of queer diasporas focuses attention on the epistemological and ontological limits of the liberal humanist tradition, bringing into relief disparate ways of knowing and being in the world that evade the purview of capitalist modernity. Even more, by providing a site for the interrogation of what Williams terms the “affective elements of consciousness and relationships,” queer diasporas mark not only the tangible but also intangible areas of social existence and belonging, the feelings of kinship that threaten, in Walter Benjamin’s words, “to disappear irretrievably” if we do not recognize and seize hold of them.<sup>40</sup> Throughout, *The Feeling of Kinship* thus explores not only the political economy of globalization, which gives rise to new forms of family and kinship, but also the psychic economy of globalization and the psychic dimensions of queer diasporas. It pays particular attention to structures of feeling, not just to formal concepts, structural analyses, and systematic beliefs, but also to the more ephemeral, intangible, and evanescent feelings of kinship as they are “actively lived and felt,” in Williams’s words, “thought as felt and feeling as thought.”<sup>41</sup>

From a slightly different perspective, this book focuses on the following theoretical question: Why do we have numerous poststructuralist accounts of language but few poststructuralist accounts of kinship? In the 1970s, feminist anthropologists such as Gayle Rubin turned to structuralist accounts of kinship, most notably those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, to compare the exchange of women to the exchange of words.<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler observes that, when the study of kinship was combined with the study of structural linguistics, the exchange of women was likened to the trafficking of a sign, the linguistic currency facilitating a symbolic bond among men. To recast particular structures of kinship as “symbolic,” Butler warns, “is precisely to posit them as preconditions of linguistic communicability and to suggest that these ‘positions’ bear an intractability that does not apply to contingent social norms.”<sup>43</sup> In this manner, structuralist accounts of language have burdened us with structuralist accounts of kinship underwritten by the dominance of the Oedipus com-

plex. Here, the Oedipus complex is not a developmental moment but a constitutive prohibition that emerges with the very inception of language, a structuralist legacy privileging certain forms of kinship as the only intelligible, communicable, reproducible, and livable ones.

We have moved beyond structuralist accounts of language, but have we moved beyond structuralist accounts of kinship? In our colorblind age of globalized capitalism, is the Oedipus complex still the guiding principle by which we can describe and measure structures of family and kinship? If not, how might we delineate a new terrain of material and psychic relations not bounded by the foundational structures of the incest taboo and the Oedipal myth, one attentive to questions of race and (homo)sexuality not withstanding the amnesias of modernity? The incest taboo inscribes a psychic pathway for displacement into the social world, while the Oedipus complex mandates the psychic affiliations—the normative identifications and desires—that we must make within this social world in order to live as intelligible beings and recognizable subjects. Queer diasporas fall out of normative Oedipal arrangements precisely by carving out other psychic pathways of displacement and affiliation, by demarcating alternative material structures and psychic formations that demand a new language for family and kinship. If poststructuralist theories of language reveal the ways in which our identities are discursively inscribed and thus open to the possibilities of re-signification, the concept of queer diasporas helps us rethink a poststructuralist account of language precisely in order to develop a poststructuralist account of kinship attentive to questions of state formation, racial taxonomies, sexual politics, and globalization—indeed, a retheorization of family and kinship relations after poststructuralism still largely absent in current debates in queer theory and anthropological accounts of kinship.

### *The Feeling of Kinship*

The remainder of this book is organized into five chapters. Chapter one, “The Law of Kinship” begins with the law and an analysis of the landmark 2003 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Lawrence v. Texas*, in relation to the contemporary emergence of queer liberalism. As I note above, *Lawrence* overturned the Court’s infamous 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision, and declared a Texas statute banning same-sex sodomy unconstitutional. By offering legal protections to gay and lesbian intimacy, *Lawrence* marks a significant historical moment in which a long Enlightenment liberal

tradition of privacy, as a political right to be protected, is for the first time being extended to certain gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects willing (and able) to accept a heteronormative version of bourgeois family, domesticity, and marriage.

Chapter one considers how the *Lawrence* decision inaugurates queer liberalism by marking a particular confluence between the political and economic spheres, but it also questions whether the ruling can be considered an unmitigated victory for queer liberalism. Mainstream gay and lesbian activists frequently invoke *Lawrence* in relation to a legalized past of racial discrimination—that is, invoke *Lawrence* as “our” *Brown v. Board of Education* or “our” *Loving v. Virginia*. By analogizing *Lawrence* to *Brown* and *Loving*, gay and lesbian activists configure queer liberalism as a political project in the present while consigning racism as a political project to the past. This analogy denies the coevalness of sexual and racial discrimination, subjecting them to a type of historicist violence by casting them as radically discontinuous. In other words, queer liberalism functions not in opposition to but with the logic of colorblindness that deems the racial project historically “complete.”

In contrast, chapter one argues that the ghost of miscegenation haunts this landmark legal decision—that the emergence of queer liberalism depends upon the active management, repression, and subsuming of race. It asks what it might mean to begin with the material facts of the case: that the plaintiffs were a mixed-race black-white “couple” (according to legal scholar Dale Carpenter, they were, in fact, a one-night stand involved in a messy love triangle); that the Houston police entered *Lawrence*’s apartment on the report of a weapons disturbance; that the caller who phoned in this racial trespass used the following language: “[There’s] a nigger going crazy with a gun.”<sup>44</sup> How is it, then, that what begins as a story of racial trespass ends as a narrative of queer freedom?

Ultimately, by bringing together a longer history of privacy rights in liberal legal theory with more recent scholarship from critical race theory, I describe the emergence of privacy in the *Lawrence* decision as a racialized property right, one extending the long juridical history of “whiteness as property”—a long legal legacy of property and racial privilege in U.S. law—into our colorblind moment. Through this extension, a long and troubling history of African American race and intimacy as spoiled kinship is transformed into idealized notions of queer family and kinship precisely by folding domesticated gays and lesbians into the liberal project of the U.S. nation-state.

Chapter one concludes with a coda that turns our attention to the psychic structures of queer liberalism. The coda focuses on Sigmund Freud's infamous case history of Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber (1842–1911). In his 1911 “Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides),” Freud analyzes the mental gymnastics of the paranoid Schreber, a distinguished German judge and once chief justice of the Saxony Supreme Court, in order to explore how Oedipal norms conscript the voice of the law to enforce and maintain its normative boundaries of family and kinship. This reading of Schreber illuminates the psychic structure of queer liberalism by illustrating how homosexuality can be reconciled with the demand of the super-ego, good citizenship, and the moral majority. At the same time, this reading of Schreber establishes a tension between the material and the psychic registers—the political and psychic economies of queer diasporas—that the remainder of the book examines in its exploration of poststructuralist accounts of family and kinship.

In sum, *Lawrence v. Texas* traces the advent of queer liberalism in a U.S. domestic landscape ordered by the politics of colorblindness and post-identity. In subsequent chapters of the book, I turn from the domestic to the diasporic in order to investigate queer diasporas as concerted political, economic, and cultural response to the predicaments of our colorblind age. Chapter two, “The Structure of Kinship,” begins with a consideration of the incest taboo as that primary psychic structure regulating the emergence of the social, and with a meditation on subjects of modernity who, in Joseph Roach's memorable phrase, are “forgotten but not gone.”<sup>45</sup> Monique Truong's novel, *The Book of Salt* (2003), set in 1930s Paris, and Wong Kar-wai's film, *Happy Together* (1997), set in late-1990s Buenos Aires, bookend the early- and late-twentieth century through their focus on queer Asian migrants laboring in the diaspora. Collectively, Truong's and Wong's bachelors draw attention away from authorized East-West movements of immigration and assimilation to focus instead on unauthorized South-South axes of migration and disenfranchisement. In the process, Truong's novel and Wong's film transport us from the realm of fiction to the domain of history by considering how queer diasporas and desires become central to the narration of modernity, to the problems of historicism, and to the dialectic of affirmation (of freedom) and forgetting (of race) that defines the liberal humanist tradition.

Binh, Truong's fictionalized distillation of a series of Indo-Chinese

cooks appearing on the pages of the eponymous *Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, is employed as household chef and servant to Gertrude Stein and Toklas during the couple's famous expatriate residency in Paris. By installing her protagonist in the intimate quarters of the Stein Salon, and by centering him in the historical margins of Old World Europe, Truong draws insistent attention to who and what must be forgotten so that the high modernism exemplified by Stein and Toklas might be affirmed. Truong asks, what remains unassimilable, unrecognizable, and untold in the making of the political and aesthetic realm of Euro-American modernity? How is it that Stein and Toklas can appear in history as the iconic lesbian couple of both literary modernism and historical modernity while Binh, the queer Vietnamese colonial, can never appear in history? In this regard, what is the relationship between the aesthetic inscription of Stein as the doyenne of literary modernism in her time and the current political inscription of Stein and Toklas as the exemplars of queer liberalism in our time?

Binh inhabits the interwar years, which mark the political and aesthetic upheaval of European modernity and enlightenment in the face of total war. In turn, Wong Kar-wai's protagonists Lai and Ho are part of a queer diasporic underclass whose unacknowledged labor secures the boundaries of a globalizing new world order under the shadows of late capitalism and decolonization. Wong's couple departs (post)colonial Hong Kong on the brink of its 1997 turnover from British to Chinese authority. They travel halfway around the world in order to jump-start their failing relationship—in the words of Ho, “to start over.” In the final analysis, the impossibility of the couple's relationship—their consummate psychic deadlock—forces us to imagine an alternative sphere of family and kinship relations lived outside the sanctioned boundaries of the Oedipus complex and incest taboo. If the incest taboo demands displacement from kin or, more accurately put, establishes kinship relations precisely on the basis of displacement, Lai and Ho challenge particular mobilizations of the incest taboo and its principles of displacement that sanction and establish the Oedipal as the only livable, knowable, or inevitable form of family and kinship.

Chapter three, “The Language of Kinship,” extends this exploration of displacement and the incest taboo by focusing on an ostensibly “privileged” figure of neoliberalism—the transnational adoptee—along with the problems of affiliation coerced and configured by the dominant language of kinship, the Oedipus complex. In this chapter, I explore the

psychic and material histories of postwar transnational adoption from Asia through an analysis of Deann Borshay Liem's documentary *First Person Plural* (2000), a film that examines both Borshay Liem's 1966 adoption from a Korean orphanage by a white American couple in Fremont, California, and her discovery, some twenty years later, of her Korean birth mother. *First Person Plural* situates the practice of transnational adoption firmly within gendered histories of military violence. At the same time, by focusing on Borshay Liem's dilemmas, both on not having enough space in her mind for two mothers and on her wayward feelings of kinship, the film highlights the psychic consequences of the transfer of infants in the global system from South to North.

In the age of global capitalism, domestic and reproductive labor are increasingly outsourced to women from and in the global south. *First Person Plural* suggests how transnational adoptees today, in turn, provide a new type of affective labor, one helping to consolidate the social and psychic boundaries of white middle-class nuclear families in the global north by shoring up Oedipal ideals of family and kinship not only for heterosexual but also, and increasingly, for homosexual couples and singles. Borshay Liem's "documentary of affect" also illustrates how the transnational adoptee's assimilation into her new American family depends on the strict management of her affect, in which racial difference and the racial past—losses associated with a Korean birth mother and motherland—remain unaffirmed by those closest to her. Ultimately, I argue in chapter three, transnational adoption is not just another unacknowledged instance of the racialization of intimacy; even more, the practice opens upon and complicates the terrain of racial melancholia and loss, which is particularly complicated due to its profoundly unconscious and intrasubjective nature. As such, chapter three concludes with an analysis of Freud's concept of the negative Oedipus complex as rejoinder to the traditional Oedipal romance of one father and one mother. Only here can the psychic possibility of two mothers outside of normative structures of the positive Oedipus complex become thinkable and the possibility of a poststructuralist language for family and kinship become viable.

Chapter four, "The Prospect of Kinship," expands upon this reading of racial melancholia through a psychoanalytic case history about a U.S. transnational adoptee from Korea, Mina. Co-written with Shinhee Han, a New York-based psychotherapist, the chapter analyzes Mina's racial melancholia by turning to theories of affect in object relations that

bring us to another psychic alternative and possibility: the prospect of racial reparation. Mina's loss of mother and motherland triggers a series of primitive and violent psychical responses such that we are forced to rethink Melanie Klein's theories of infantile development—of good and bad objects, and good and bad mothers—in terms of good and bad *racialized* objects, good and bad *racialized* mothers. Mina's case history demands a consideration of racial difference as constitutive of, rather than peripheral to, Klein's fundamental notions of splitting and idealization, of depression and guilt, and of reinstatement and reparation. In short, we come to recognize that Klein's psychic positions are also and at once *racialized* positions. For Mina, negotiating the depressive position and addressing her racial melancholia ultimately entails the racial reparation of the lost and devalued Korean birth mother.

Chapter four concludes by focusing on the ways in which Mina's case history draws attention to the materiality of the psychotherapist as a racialized subject. In particular, we consider how the dynamic of transference between the patient and her Korean American analyst is framed by the public fact of their shared racial difference as well as by the public nature of the analyst's pregnancy, which ensued during the course of the Mina's treatment. Here, we examine how Han's pregnancy constitutes her, to reformulate D.W. Winnicott, as a "racial transitional object" for Mina, which allows her to negotiate a reparative position for race by resignifying her vexed identifications with not only a disparaged Koreanness but also an idealized whiteness. Ultimately for the transnational adoptee, racial reparation involves creating psychic space for two "good-enough" mothers—the Korean birth mother as well as the white adoptive mother.

In the final chapter of the book, "The Feeling of Kinship," I turn from racial reparation as an individual psychic problem to racial reparation as a collective political predicament of our colorblind age by examining the relationship between psychic and political genealogies of reparation. Chapter five analyzes a growing body of U.S. cultural productions—novels, documentaries, and films about Japanese internment by *sansei* (third-generation) artists born after World War II. It focuses on vexed feelings of kinship and on affect as a political project. Unlike their parents and grandparents, these writers and directors did not live through internment. For the most part, their works have been published and produced after House Resolution 422, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Signed into law by Ronald Reagan, H.R. 422 not only offered a national

apology for the evacuation, internment, and relocation of 112,000 Japanese Americans during World War II; it also provided monetary restitution of \$20,000 to each surviving internee. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 is commonly heralded as the conclusion to a regrettable but anomalous chapter of U.S. history. But, as these cultural works collectively insist, political reparation and psychic reparation are hardly coterminous.

Thus, we are left with an urgent question: What does it mean to take responsibility for a historical event one never actually experienced? Ultimately, I argue, to take responsibility is as much an affective as a political affair—all the more so in the face of internment's putative historical resolution, and in a U.S. political climate that declares the project of human freedom accomplished within the domestic borders of the nation-state. Chapter five analyzes Rea Tajiri's documentary on Japanese internment, *History and Memory: for Akiko and Takashige* (1991), as a documentary of affect, like *First Person Plural*. I argue that, unlike mainstream gay and lesbian activists who enact a certain form of historical violence by reifying an analogy between (homo)sexual and racial progress, Tajiri presents us with an unexpected set of *affective* correspondences. These emotional analogies and feelings of kinship world forgotten creatures and things by bringing them into the time and space of history in a fundamentally different manner from that of historicism. In the process, Tajiri helps us to rethink the parameters, not just of family and kinship, but of identity and history, by insisting on a new relationship between affect and language after poststructuralism.

By configuring affect and language not as oppositional but as supplemental, *History and Memory* illustrates how the linguistic binds of identity might be loosened while the dominant narratives of historicism are simultaneously redefined. In this respect, Tajiri's film returns us to a set of issues raised here, and expanded upon throughout the pages of this book, concerning the affirmation of freedom and the forgetting of race that mark the establishment of the Enlightenment project, the rise of Euro-American modernity, and the tenets of liberal humanism under which we continue to labor in our colorblind age. Like the other cultural productions in this book of queer diasporas, Tajiri's feelings of kinship demand a new model of historical understanding animated under the sign of the affective, one keeping us open to the world, and one for which we all must learn to take responsibility.