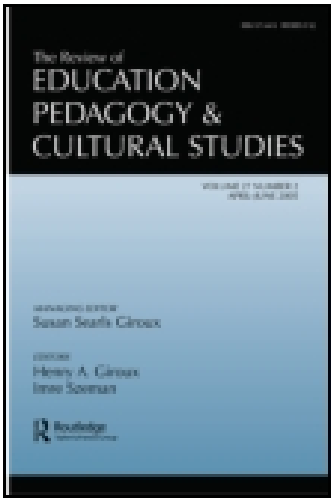

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At a conference in Singapore in December 1997, a US anthropologist gave a presentation on the Chinese diaspora or, as she preferred it, Chinese transnationality. When she was finished, a well-known Singapore sociologist stood up to object to her conceptualization, declaiming that he was a Singaporean, not a diasporic or transnational, adding for good measure that American scholars were always imposing identities of that kind on other people. He was joined by a distinguished historian of Chinese Overseas, who added that rather than impose diasporic identity on all Chinese Overseas, it would be much more productive to think of it in terms of recent migrants, not yet settled in their places of arrival, and classes who were in a position to exploit or benefit from transnationality. For either scholar, the issue was not one of Singapore nationalism, or an "essentialized" Singapore identity (Singapore prides itself in many ways on being a multicultural society), but a place-based identity against a transnational or diasporic one.[1]

Discussions of diasporas or diasporic identities in much of contemporary cultural criticism focus on the problematic of national identity, or the necessity of accommodating migrant cultures. The concept of diaspora or diasporic identity serves well when it comes to deconstructing claims to national cultural homogeneity. It is also important in expanding the horizon of cultural difference, and challenging cultural hegemony, at a time when the accommodation of cultural difference may be more urgent than ever in the face of the proliferating

transnational notions of people. It may be because of the urgency of these issues that relatively less attention has been paid to problems presented by notions of diaspora and diasporic identity; especially the quite serious possibility that they may reproduce the very homogenizations and dichotomies that they are intended to overcome. It is some of these problems that I would like to take up below, with some attention to the question of hybridity which has acquired considerable prominence with the emergence of a diasporic consciousness. As my goal is to stimulate questions on various aspects of diasporas, I present my thoughts as a series of reflections, without too much effort to achieve a tight coherence of argument. If diasporas are my point of departure, I rest my reflections on places and place consciousness, which I offer as a counterpoint to globalism and diasporas. While on occasion I may refer to other groups, my concern here is mainly with Chinese populations in motion, and it is those populations that I draw on for purposes of illustration.

The reconceptualization of Chinese Overseas in terms of diaspora or transnationality responds to a real situation: the reconfiguration of migrant societies and their political and cultural orientations. But diaspora and transnationality as concepts are also discursive or, perhaps more appropriately, imaginary; not only do they have normative implications, but they also articulate—in a very Foucauldian sense—relations of power within populations so depicted, as well as in their relationship to societies of origin and arrival.[2] Diaspora discourse has an undeniable appeal in the critical possibilities it offers against assumptions of national cultural homogeneity, which historically have resulted in the denial of full cultural (and political) citizenship to those who resisted assimilation into the dominant conceptualizations of national culture, were refused entry into it, or whose cultural complexity could not be contained easily within a single conception of national culture. Taking their cue from Paul Gilroy's concept of "double consciousness" with reference to the African diaspora, Ong and Nonini write of Chinese in diaspora that "they face many directions at once—toward China, other Asian countries, and the West—with multiple perspectives on modernities, perspectives often gained at great cost through their passage via

itineraries marked by sojourning, absence, nostalgia, and at times exile and loss."[3]

This critical appeal, however, also disguises the possibility that diasporic notions of culture, if employed without due regard to the social and political complexities of so-called diasporic populations, may issue in reifications of their own, opening the way to new forms of cultural domination, manipulation and commodification. To quote Ong and Nonini once again, "there is nothing intrinsically liberating about diasporic cultures."[4] In pursuit of their interests, diasporic Chinese elites have collaborated with despotic political regimes, pursued exploitative practises of their own, and have utilized the notion of "Chineseness" as a cover for their own class interests. The danger of reification is implicit in a contemporary culturalism which easily loses sight of the distinction between recognizing autonomy to culture as a realm of analysis versus the rendering of culture into a self-sufficient explanation for all aspects of life, therefore rendering culture once again into an off-ground phenomenon available to exploitation for a multiplicity of purposes. Moreover, since much of the discussion of culture and cultural identity is mediated by the new discipline of "cultural studies," there has been a tendency to carry questions and findings concerning one group of people to all groups similarly placed, in effect erasing considerable differences in the experiences of different populations through the universalization of the language of cultural studies. In either case, the erasure is the erasure of the social relations that configure difference within and between groups and, with them, of historicity.

Ambiguities in the discourses on diasporas, and related discourses of hybridity, warrant some caution concerning projects of overcoming "binarisms." While there is little question about the desirability of such projects where they seek to overcome debilitating (and worse) divisions between ethnicities, genders, etc., it is also important to note that they may also serve as ideological covers for proliferating divisions in the contemporary world, especially the new forms of class divisions that accompany the unprecedented concentrations of wealth within nations and globally. It is important, in any case, not to take such projects at face value, but to distinguish progressive efforts to overcome divisions from their manipulation in the service of new forms of power.

* * *

The problems presented by diaspora discourse may be illustrated through the recent case of John Huang, the Chinese American fundraiser for the Democratic National Committee. When Huang was charged with corruption on the grounds that he raised funds from foreign sources, the Democratic National Committee proceeded immediately to canvas all contributors with Chinese names to ascertain whether or not they were foreigners, turning a run-of-the-mill case of political corruption into a racial issue. The Committee's action reactivated the long-standing assumption that anyone with a Chinese name might in all probability be foreign, reaffirming implicitly that a Chinese name was the marker of racial foreignness. What followed may not have been entirely novel, but seemed quite logical nevertheless in terms of contemporary diasporic "networks" (perhaps, more appropriately in this case, "webs"). John Huang's connections to the Riady family in Indonesia which surfaced quickly not only underlined the probable foreignness of Chinese contributors, but also suggested further connections between Chinese Americans and other Chinese Overseas that seemed to be confirmed by revelations that several other Chinese American fund-raisers, or contributors, had ties to Chinese in South and Southeast Asia. As these overseas Chinese had business connections in the People's Republic of China, before long a petty corruption case was to turn into a case of possible conspiracy that extended from Beijing, through Chinese Overseas to Chinese Americans.[5]

This linking of Chinese Americans to diasporic Chinese and the government in Beijing has provoked charges of racism among Asian Americans and their many sympathizers. Racism is there, to be sure. But is this racism simply an extension of the historical racism against Asian Americans, or does it represent something new? If so, is it possible that at least some Asian Americans have been complicit in producing a new kind of racist discourse? The question is fraught with difficulties—chief among them shifting responsibility to the victim—but it must be raised nevertheless. My goal in raising the question is not to erase racism, but to underline the unprecedented depth to which race and ethnicity have become principles of politics, not just in the US but globally. If the Democratic National

Committee used Chinese names as markers of racial foreignness, is it possible that the government in China, or some Chinese transnational looking for recruits might do the same? INS agents at the US–Mexican border, upon finding out the Turkish origins of my name, have stopped me for a special search. On account of the same name, I have been approached by Turkish "grassroots" organizations mobilizing against condemnations of Turkey for its activities against the Kurds, or its refusal to acknowledge the Armenian massacres. The name does bring a burden, but the burden is the ethnicization and racialization of politics which is open to all for exploitation.

The new consciousness of diaspora, and diasporic identity cutting across national boundaries, is at least one significant factor in this racialization of politics in its current phase. The linking of John Huang, Chinese Overseas, and the Beijing government, I would like to suggest here, has been facilitated by the new discourse on the Chinese diaspora which, in reifying Chineseness, has created fertile grounds for nourishing a new racism. The idea of diaspora is responsible in the first place for abolishing the difference between Chinese Americans and Chinese elsewhere (including in China). In response to a legacy of discrimination against Chinese Americans, which made them hesitant even to acknowledge their ties to China and other Chinese, some Chinese Americans and their sympathizers have been all too anxious to reaffirm such ties, in turn suppressing the cultural differences arising from the different historical trajectories of different Chinese populations scattered around the world. The anti-assimilationist mood (expressed most fervently in liberal "multiculturalism") itself has contributed in no small measure to such cultural reification by a metonymic reduction of the culture of the Other to "representative" ethnographic elements or texts divorced from all social and historical context, that may then serve purposes of self-representation by the diasporic population, or self-congratulatory consumption in the carnivals of the society at large. While in much of contemporary diaspora discourse the preferred term for representing difference is culture, the question of culture, to quote Gilroy, is "almost biologized by its proximity to 'race'".[6] *Because* of the fact that the very phenomenon of diaspora has produced a multiplicity of Chinese

cultures, the affirmation of "Chineseness" may be sustained only by recourse to a common origin, or descent, that persists in spite of widely different historical trajectories, which results in the elevation of ethnicity and race over all the other factors—often divisive—that have gone into the shaping of Chinese populations and their cultures. Diasporic identity in its reification does not overcome the racial prejudices of earlier assumptions of national cultural homogeneity, but in many ways follows a similar logic, now at the level not of nations but offground "transnations." The "children of the Yellow Emperor" may be all the more of a racial category for having abandoned its ties to the political category of the nation.

Let me add a note of clarification here. In taking a critical stance toward the notion of diaspora, I am not suggesting that Chinese Americans should therefore renounce ties to China, or other Chinese Overseas. The question is how these ties are conceived and articulated, and whether or not they erase very significant historical differences among the Chinese populations in different locations around the globe. I will illustrate again by reference to the John Huang case. A very important part was played in publicizing the case by Prof. Ling-chi Wang of UC-Berkeley, who alerted and informed many of us on the case by gathering and electronically disseminating information on the case. Over the past year, Prof. Wang's communications have ranged widely from the John Huang case to the election of Chinese officials around the country, from defense of the Peoples Republic of China against various allegations to reportage on anti-Chinese activity in Southeast Asia. Now a discursive field that covers all these elements appears at first sight to differ little from what I have been calling diaspora discourse, motivated as it is by bringing together information on Chinese regardless of place. What disrupts this field, however, is its unwavering focus on concrete problems of its immediate environment. Prof. Wang was quick from the beginning to distance Asian Americans from "foreign money," drawing a national boundary between Chinese here and Chinese donors of campaign funds from Southeast Asia.[7] The communications throughout have stressed issues of class and community, distinguishing community interests of Chinese Americans from the activities of transnationally oriented diasporic Chinese with economic and political interests of their own. And this

electronic discourse has remained focused throughout on the issue of campaign finance reform in the US, as campaign corruption rather than the color of money has been defined as the basic problem. In other words, the discourse, while ranging transnationally, has been quite grounded in its immediate environment. This, I think, is what distinguishes it from the diaspora discourse the way I understand that term here.

I will return to this issue of "groundedness" below. First a brief look at two products of this diasporic discourse in the realm of culture that are on the surface quite antithetical, but may also reinforce one another in surprising ways: the reification of Chineseness by erasure of the boundaries among different Chinese populations and the contrary move to break down such reification through the notion of hybridity.

* * *

In its failure to specify its own location *vis-a-vis* the hegemonic, self-serving, and often financially lucrative reification of "Chineseness" in the political economy of transnationalism, critical diaspora discourse itself has fallen prey to the manipulation and commodification made possible by cultural reification and contributes to the foregrounding of ethnicity and race in contemporary political and cultural thinking. There has been a tendency in recent scholarship, publication industry and arts and literature, for instance, to abolish the difference between Asians and Asian Americans. In scholarship, contrary to an earlier refusal of Asian Studies specialists to have anything to do with Asian American Studies, there have been calls recently to integrate Asian American studies into Asian studies, which partly reflects the increased prominence of trans-Pacific population flows, but also suggests the increasingly lucrative promise of reorienting Asian American Studies in that direction. Publishers' catalogues, especially those devoted to "multiculturalism" and ethnic relations, freely blend Asian with Asian American themes; and it is not rare to see these days a catalogue in which *Woman Warrior* is placed right next to *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. A film series on "Asian American film" at the University of North Carolina mysteriously includes many more films from Asia than from Asian America. This is either due to the imaginary China of its China

specialist organizer, or it is done to increase the appeal of the series, which may not matter much as the ideological effect is the same.

Moreover, and more fundamentally, within the context of flourishing Pacific economies (at least until very recently), some Asian Americans—most notably Chinese Americans—have been assigned the role of "bridges" to Asia, a role they have assumed readily for its lucrative promises. The metaphor of "bridge" as a depiction of Asian Americans is not quite novel. In a recent dissertation that analyzes with sensitivity Asian Americans' relationship to the Chicago School of Sociology, Henry Yu argues that in their association with the Chicago sociologists, second generation Asian Americans internalized an image of themselves as "bridges" between American society and societies of origin in Asia, advantageously placed to serve as cultural interpreters.[8] The advantage, however, came at a heavy price. The condition for successful service as "bridges" between cultures was marginality; it was their status as "marginal men" who existed between two societies without belonging fully to either that enabled the status of cultural interpreter. As one such "marginal man," Kazuo Kawai, wrote:

> My decision to be an interpreter has improved my relations with both races. I am happy because I don't try to be a poor imitation of an American. I am happy because I don't vainly try to be a poor imitation of a genuine Japanese. I am simply what I am. I don't try to imitate either, so I am never disappointed when I find myself excluded from either side....[9]

Kawai, of course, was not qualified to be a cultural "interpreter" in any serious sense of the term. He was American by birth and culture, and his claims of access to Japanese culture were forced on him by alienation from American society which excluded him, necessitating an imaginary affinity with his parents' society of origin. The notion that someone who did not belong to either society was for that very reason qualified to serve as cultural interpreter between the two glossed over fundamental problems of cultural orientation—which seems to have escaped both Kawai and his Chicago School mentors. Be that as it may, what is important here is that the metaphor of "bridge" between two societies was ultimately a

product of alienation from a society that refused to recognize him as anything but a foreigner.

While the latter may not be the case in any obvious way presently, the metaphor of bridge nevertheless continues to invoke the foreignness of Asian Americans. Much more so than in the case of those like Kawai, a diasporic identification may be a matter of choice rather than necessity. Contemporary "bridges," moreover, are most prominently economic brokers rather than cultural interpreters. Nevertheless, there is a racialization at work when diasporic populations, regardless of their widely different cultural trajectories internally, are expected to bridge the gap between places of arrival and places of origin by virtue of presumed cultural legacies that are more imagined than real. Thus Ronnie C. Chan, the Chairman of the Hang Lung Development Group, a Hong Kong real estate company, urges Chinese Americans in Hawai'i to become "bi-cultural" so as to serve as bridges between Chinese and US business, telling them that, "We all need our cultural roots, but put them away for a while and become truly bicultural." Roots in this case take precedence over history; so that Chan urges Chinese Americans not to learn to be Chinese again, but learn to be Americans![10]

The economic emergence of Chinese populations across the Pacific may be the single most important factor in the cultural re-homogenization of Chineseness. The most significant byproduct of this economic emergence may be the recent Confucian revival, which attributes the economic success of Chinese (in some versions also of Japanese and Koreans), without regard to time or place, to the persistence of "Confucian values." Such values were viewed earlier as obstacles to capitalism, but have been rendered now into the source of everything from economic development to the production of "model minorities." As I have discussed this problem extensively elsewhere, I will simply note here that this so-called Confucian revival reproduces within a context of transnationality the most egregious prejudices of Orientalism.[11] It is also a transnational product itself, for its emergence in the late seventies and early eighties involved, at least by way of intertextual collusion, experts on Chinese philosophy, US futurologists, and authoritarian regimes in East and Southeast Asia. According to its more enthusiastic proponents, Confucian

values of thrift, diligence, educational achievement, family loyalty, discipline, harmony, obedience to authority—a list that reads like a dream list of the ideal worker or employee—have been responsible for the unquestioning commitment of Chinese (and East Asian) populations to capitalist development. In the more socially based versions of the argument, Confucian values owe their persistence to the central importance throughout Chinese societies of kinship and pseudo-kinship ties—themselves products of the social diffusion of Confucian values: the networks of *guanxi*, that distinguish the socially oriented capitalism of the Chinese from individualistic and conflict-ridden "Western" capitalism. As with the Confucian argument, there is little sense of time and place in these social arguments, as if social relations and networks were not subject to change and fluctuation. The net result is a portrayal of Chinese where, networked through *guanxi* and driven by Confucianism, Chinese around the world are rendered into a "tribe," in the words of the Pacific visionary Joel Kotkin, committed to a relentless search for wealth. These same networks, needless to say, also make Chinese into ideal "bridges" with Asia.

Some of this argumentation, where it is promoted by Chinese scholars or leaders, no doubt draws upon a newfound sense of economic power and presence to reassert a Chinese identity against the century old cultural hegemony of Eurocentrism, which utilizes earlier Orientalist representations to turn them against claims of EuroAmerican superiority. Nevertheless, they have been attached most prominently to questions of economic success, with a consequent commodification not only of the so-called Confucian values, but of Chinese as well. To quote from a recent piece by the same Joel Kotkin, "With their cultural, linguistic, and family ties to China, Chinese-American entrepreneurs like [Henry Y.] Hwang are proving to be America's secret weapon in recapturing a predominant economic role in the world's most populous nation."[12] Never mind the problematic question of "cultural and linguistic ties to China" on the part of many Chinese Americans, it may not be very far from Kotkin's portrayal of Chinese Americans as American economic moles in China to William Safire's depiction of John Huang as a Chinese political mole in Washington, D.C.

The attitudes that lie at the root of these recent tendencies are not less productive of racism for being produced by or sympathetic to Chinese and other Asian populations. They are also quite unstable, in that the sympathy itself may be subject to significant fluctuation, on occasion even turning into its opposite. This has happened to some extent with the recent so-called "economic melt-down" in Asia, with which "Asian values," among them Confucianism, once again lost their luster. It turns out now that "Asian values" have been responsible for creating a corrupt "crony capitalism" that inevitably led to economic break-down.

Chinese populations are no less divided by class, gender, ethnic and place differences than other populations. Not the least among those differences are differences of place and history. Reification of diaspora erases, or at the least, blurs, such differences. As Appadurai has written of "ethnoscapes,"

> the central paradox of ethnic politics in today's world is that primordia (whether of language or skin color or neighborhood or kinship) have become globalized. That is, sentiments whose greatest force is their ability to ignite intimacy into a political sentiment and turn locality into a staging ground for identity, have become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move, yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities. This is not to deny that such primordia are often the product of invented traditions or retrospective affiliations, but to emphasize that because of the disjunctive and unstable interaction of commerce, media, national policies and consumer fantasies, ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large), has now become a global force. . . .[13]

While the globalization of ethnicity is no doubt bound up with abstract forces that contribute to global restructurations, it is important nevertheless to draw attention to agencies engaged actively in inventing traditions and producing retrospective affiliations. If differences of history and place are erased by the shifting of attention to a general category of diaspora (which I take to be equivalent to Appadurai's "ethnoscapes"), it is necessary to raise the question of whom such erasure serves. There is no reason to suppose that the government in Beijing (or, for that matter, Taiwan) is any more reluctant than the government in Washington or US transnational corporations to use diasporic Chinese for its own purposes. On the other hand, both from a political and an

economic perspective, some diasporic Chinese are obviously of greater use than others and in turn benefit from the erasure of differences among Chinese, which enable them to speak for all Chinese.[14] Reconceptualization of Chinese populations in terms of diasporas, in other words, serves economic and political class interests (it is not accidental that the Chinese American John Huang was connected with the Riady family, which made him useful in a number of ways).

* * *

The concept of hybridity is intended to destabilise cultural identities of all kinds and, at least on the surface, provides a clear alternative to the reification of identity described above. Popularized through the works of influential theorists such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Soja, among others, hybridity is an important keyword of contemporary cultural studies. Judging by the pervasiveness of the term in discussions of identity, hybridity also has come to define the self-identification of intellectuals around the world, in effect becoming a social force of sorts. In the field of Asian American studies Lisa Lowe through an influential article has been a prominent proponent.[15] Hybridity, too, has a lineage in its application to Asian Americans, which may not be very surprising given its kinship with marginality. While some Asian Americans may have found a resource for hope in their marginality or hybridity, others view it as an undesirable condition to be overcome. Rose Hum Lee, another product of the Chicago School, observed in a discussion of the "marginal man" that, "when the 'cultural gaps' are closed... the cultural hybrid no longer poses a problem to himself and others. This is brought about by the processes of acculturation and assimilation."[16]

The contemporary idea of hybridity is in a basic way quite the opposite of what Rose Hum Lee had in mind. Hybridity (along with associated terms such as "in-betweenness" and "thirdspace") is intended to challenge the homogenization and essentialization of cultural identity, most importantly in the present context, ethnic, national and racial identity (it has also been influential in discussions of gender and class identity, especially the former). Its goal is to undermine the

assumption that boundaries may be drawn around nationality, ethnicity, and race on the grounds of cultural homogeneity. What marks it as diasporic is that the argument is directed not only against the society of arrival, where the dominant culture demands assimilation of the migrant for full political and cultural citizenship, but also against the society of origin, which likewise denies political and cultural citizenship to the migrant on the grounds that emigration is inevitably accompanied by distancing and degeneration from the culture of origin. Thus placed at the margins of two societies, the migrant is denied cultural identity and autonomy. Hybridity in contemporary culture is in a fundamental sense a rebellion of those who are culturally dispossessed, or feel culturally dispossessed, who not only assert hybridity as an autonomous source of identity, but go further to challenge the cultural claims of the centers of power.

There is no doubt much that is radical in the challenge. And it is not difficult to see why the notion of hybridity should be appealing at a time of proliferation of the culturally dispossessed. Hybridity is appealing for a different, more intellectual, reason. Its breakdown not just of political and cultural entities but also of the categories of social and cultural analysis releases the imagination to conceive the world in new ways. This has been most persuasively argued recently by Edward Soja, who locates "Thirdspace" not just in between societies, but between society and imagination, where the imaginary may claim as much reality as the real of conventional social science.[17]

Why then should hybridity also be a deeply problematic concept, especially in its social and political implications, and how could it reinforce the reification of identity when its intention is exactly the opposite? It is problematic, I think, because in its vagueness it is available for appropriation for diverse causes, including highly reactionary and exploitative ones. It reinforces the reification of identity because not only does the metaphor of hybridity invoke the possibility of uncontaminated identities, but also because such identities are essential to the discourse on hybridity as its dialogical Other. The discourse of hybridity is a response to racial, ethnic, and national divisions, but is sustained in turn by foregrounding race, ethnicity and nation in problems of culture and politics.

Apparently transparent, hybridity is in actuality quite an elusive concept that does not illuminate but rather renders invisible the situations to which it is applied—not by concealing them, but by blurring distinctions among widely different situations. Pnina Werbner has observed as a "paradox" of the fascination with hybridity that it "is celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and pervasive."[18] If hybridity is indeed pervasive, it is in and of itself meaningless—if everything is hybrid, then there is no need for a special category of hybrid—and can derive meaning only from the concrete historical and structural locations that produce it. While some theorists of hybridity such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Gayatri Spivak have been attentive to distinguishing hybridities historically and structurally, others such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja have rendered hybridity (and its associated concepts of "thirdspace" and "in-betweenness") into abstractions with no identifiable locations. It is my impression that in recent years the use of the concept has unfolded in the latter direction, as hybridity has been universalized in its application, or rendered into a "universal standardization," as Feroza Jussawalla puts it, gaining in abstraction, but progressively deprived of meaning.[19] The "off-grounding" of hybridity no doubt derives additional force from the postmodern, but especially the postcolonial, suspicion of history and structures; the demand to historicize hybridity appears from this perspective to imprison the concept within the very categorical prejudices it is intended to overcome.

This may indeed be the case. After all, theorists such as Bhabha and Soja do not intend hybridity or Thirdspace in a physical descriptive sense, but rather to disrupt the hegemony of social and historical categories, and to overcome binary modes of thinking. On the other hand, there is an elision in almost all discussion of hybridity between hybridity as a strategically disruptive idea, operating at the level of epistemology, and hybridity as an articulation of an actual human condition. And it is this elision that may account for the elusiveness and opaqueness of the term. Thus Katharyne Mitchell is quite correct, I think, to inquire of Bhabha's boundary-crossings, "What are the actual physical spaces in which these boundaries are crossed and erased?," or to point out with regard to Soja's liberating claims for "Thirdspace" that

"this space is able to accomplish all these marvelous things, precisely because it does not exist."[20] As I noted above, hybridity no longer appears as an intellectual or psychological strategem, but seems to be pervasive in certain quarters, mostly among intellectuals, as a self-definition, which makes it into a social and ideological force. What is not clear is whether the hybrid is "everyman" (what Werbner observes to be the commonplaceness of hybridity), or "nowhereman" (the stranger, as Bauman puts it, who disrupts the existing order of things).[21] The confounding of the two has led to a situation where the promotion of hybridity, out of political correctness or universal standardization, has taken the form of an intellectual and ethical imperative that will brook no alternative, as when Iain Chambers states that, "We are drawn beyond ideas of nation, nationalism and national cultures, into a post-colonial set of realities, and a mode of critical thinking that is forced to rewrite the very grammar and language of modern thought in directing attention beyond the patriarchal boundaries of Eurocentric concerns and its presumptive, 'universalism.'"[22] Hybridity is no longer disruptive or just descriptive, but prescriptive; if you are not hybrid, you are a Eurocentric patriarch!

Hybridity, abstracted from its social-historical moorings for critical purposes, but then returned to society as an abstraction, most importantly blurs in the name of difference significant distinctions between different differences. Hybridity reduces all complexity to a "statement of mixture,"[23] as if the specific character of what is being mixed (from class to gender to ethnicity and race) did not matter—partly stemming from its originary assumptions that all "binarisms" are equally undesirable regardless of context. It also reads into all mixtures a state of hybridity, disregarding the possibility that mixtures and hybridization may produce new identities. As Jussawalla puts it, "despite mixing and merging, like a martini in a cocktail shaker, the [South Asian] writers do not become hybrids or 'mongrels,' and we do not need a median point along the 'scale' or 'cline' of authenticity to alienation indicating 'hybridity.'"[24] Indeed, hybridity in its abstraction serves not to illuminate but disguise social inequality and exploitation, by reducing to a state of hybridity all who may be considered "marginal." And it covers up the fact that there is

a great deal of difference between different marginalities—between, say, a well-placed social elite hybridized and marginalized ethnically and members of the same ethnicity further incapacitated by their class and gender locations. We have had a good illustration of this only recently, in the flare-up of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, which the ordinary Chinese have to deal with as best as they can, while the wealthy Chinese plan refuges in Western Australia, in the same spaces occupied by Indonesian generals![25] Given such inequality, the claims to undifferentiated marginality and hybridity on the part of the elite confounds the culturally dispossessed with the culturally privileged who travel with ease across cultural spaces. The result is the appropriation by the elite of the margins, making hybridity available as a tool in intra-elite competition, but further erasing the concerns of the truly marginal. As Friedman puts it:

> hybrids and hybridisation theorists are products of a group that self-identifies and/or identifies the world in such terms, not as a result of ethnographic understanding, but as an act of self-definition—indeed, of self-essentializing—which becomes definition for others via the forces of socialisation inherent in the structures of power that such groups occupy: intellectuals close to the media; the media intelligentsia itself; in a certain sense, all those who can afford a cosmopolitan identity.[26]

The "unmooring" (in Mitchell's term) of hybridity from concrete social-historical referents also invites by the back door the very cultural essentializations that it has been intended to overcome, which is the second problem with hybridity. While it may be possible to speak of the hybridization of hybridity, as I will suggest below, most writing on hybridity ignores this possibility perhaps because the acknowledgment of hybridity as a perennial condition would weaken considerably or even render irrelevant the claims made for hybridity, which is the paradox posed by Werbner. As a result, the discourse of hybridity is sustained by a tacit premise, reinforced by its claims to offer a radical alternative, of the purity of hybridity's constituent moments. "Hybridity," Friedman states, "is founded on the metaphor of purity."[27] Referring specifically to Bhabha's use of hybridity, Nira Yuval-Davis writes that "it may interpolate essentialism through the back door—that the old 'multiculturalist' essentialist and homogenising constructions

of collectivities are attributed to the homogeneous collectivities from which the 'hybrids' have emerged, thus replacing the mythical image of a society as a 'melting-pot' with the mythical image of society as a 'mixed salad'."[28] Hybridity taken out of history also dehistoricizes the identities that constitute hybridity which, if it does not necessarily rest on an assumption of purity, nevertheless leaves unquestioned what these identities might be.

The biological associations of the term contribute further to this underlining of an assumption if not of purity, then at least of clearly identifiable entities that go into the making of hybridity. To use an analogy I have utilized elsewhere, the hybrid nectarine is constituted out of a peach and an apple, both of which have clear identities, whatever their levels of purity (and it may be instructive to reflect that the hybrid nectarine also has a clear identity!). In fact the biological notion of hybridity, on the basis of clearly definable identities, even renders hybridity quantifiable, which is quite visible in the human realm in the prolific racial categories employed in nineteenth century Latin America, still alive in the United States in "the blood quantum" used to define the authenticity of Amerindians.[29] While such quantification would be difficult to transfer to the realm of culture, it does point to serious questions that are elided in discussions of hybridity, chief among them degrees of hybridity: are all hybrids equally hybrid? There are other questions as well. Robert Young has documented the centrality historically of biological assumptions in the conceptualization of hybridity, which persist in contemporary usages of hybridity if only as traces, and as inescapable reminders of the biological associations of the term, as with the author who remarked to Jussawala that "hybridity smacks of biological blending of plants."[30] While it is not my intention in the slightest to ascribe a racial intention to those who speak of cultural hybridity, it is nevertheless unavoidable that the use of a biological term as a metaphor for culture and society is nevertheless pregnant with the possibility of confounding cultural, social, and political with racial entities—especially where the term is divorced from its historical and structural referents. Such is the case, I suggested above, with the reified concept of diaspora, where discussions of culture slip easily into identification by descent.

While hybridity could easily refer to "in-betweens" other than national, ethnic, or racial "in-betweens," such as the "in-betweens" of class and gender, it is remarkable that most discussions of hybridity revolve around the former categories. The mutual articulation of categories of gender, class, and race have been present all along as a basic concern in recent discussions of hybridity;[31] it is remarkable nevertheless that questions of race and ethnicity—often conflated—overshadow all others. This may or may not be a consequence of the logic of hybridity as biological concept. I am inclined to think, however, that the discourse on hybridity, while it may refuse to engage the limitations of its historical and social context, is itself subject to the forces of that context. Within a social and historical context where identity claims are very much alive, and proliferating, the condition of hybridity itself is quite unstable. The benign reading of hybridity perceives in such instability the possibility of opening up to the world. That may well be the case. But it is staked too much on a libertarian faith in the autonomy of the hybrid self, which can negotiate its identity at will in a market-place of equals, as it were. There is another possibility as well: oscillation between the identities out of which hybridity is constructed and fragmentation into one or another of those identities in response to the pressures of everyday life. How else to explain the simultaneous break-down and proliferation of identities in the contemporary world? There are also the personal stakes involved. It is worth pondering Jussawala's observation, which may be familiar from the everyday circumstances of cultural encounters even within academia, "that true hybridity cannot be achieved because those who would most speak for hybridity most want to retain their essentialisms—the natives, the insiders of cultural studies, those who feel they best represent the post-modern condition and can speak for it."[32] Hybridity may be like inter-disciplinarity in academia, which everyone lauds but no one really wants, not unless it can be shaped according to their disciplinary orientations. It is difficult often to avoid the impression that more often than not the motivation underlying the promotion of hybridity is to center the marginal and render visible cultural identities that have been rendered invisible by coercive or hegemonic suppression. The quite apparent predicament here is how to achieve

this quite significant and worthwhile goal without slippage into the reification of the marginalized, as in the case of the diasporic identity I discussed above, to achieve genuine dialogue rather than merely assert one "essentialism" against another—especially under circumstances of unequal power.

With so much uncertainty over the content of the concept, it is not surprising that the political implications of hybridity in action should be equally indeterminate, or that hybridity should lend itself to a variety of politics, ranging from the radical to the reactionary. Hybridity in and of itself is not a marker of any kind of politics, but a deconstructive strategy that may be utilized for different political ends. To a bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha or Edward Soja hybridity may be a significant means to create new kinds of radical political alliances by opening up and articulating to one another categories of race, class, and gender. To a John Huang, or to the Hong Kong investors in Vancouver of whom Mitchell writes, hybridity is a means to creating alliances ("bridges") between different states or national and diasporic capital, the consequence if not the intention of which is to erase those radical alliances. As Mitchell writes:

> The overuse of abstract metaphors, particularly within frameworks which foreground psychoanalytic approaches, often leads to thorny problems of fetishization. As concepts such as hybridity become disarticulated from the historically shaped political and economic relations in which identities and narratives of nation unfold; they take on a life and trajectory of their own making. Second and third readings, borrowings, interventions, elaborations—all can contribute to conceptualizations that are not only removed from the social relations of everyday life, but which also, because of this very abstraction, become ripe for appropriation. The disingenuous move of the 'third space' is to occupy a position 'beyond' space and time, and beyond the situated practices of place and the lived experience of history. The space thus satisfyingly transcends the kind of essentializing locations that characterize a certain branch of work in historical materialism and feminism. But without context, this 'in-between' space risks becoming a mobile reactionary space, rather than a traveling site of resistance.[33]

Abstraction is one problem, as in its very divorce from its own social and historical locations, hybridity conceals and contains the differential relationship to power of different hybrids, making the concept available for appropriation by those whose goals are not to promote alternatives to the present but

rather to gain entry into existing spaces of power, further consolidating its domination. What Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux write of postmodern and postcolonial preoccupation with language also applies, I think, to hybridity as discursive liberation:

> As essential as these theoretical forays have been, they often abuse their own insights by focusing on identity at the expense of power. Language in these texts becomes a discursive marker for registering and affirming difference but in doing so often fails to address how they are related within broader networks of domination and exploitation. In part, this may be due to the ahistorical quality of this work. Lacking a historical context, they fail to engage the political projects that characterized older versions of critical pedagogy and end up failing to locate their own politics and its value for larger social, political, and pedagogical struggles.[34]

To engage those political projects, it is necessary, I think, to overcome the anxiety that seems to legitimize an unquestioning commitment to hybridity; anxiety over what Werbner describes as "the bogey word of the human sciences": essentialism.[35] Essentialism is surely one of the most inflated words of contemporary cultural studies. It seems like any admission of identity, including the identity that may be necessary to any articulate form of collective political action, is open to charges of essentialism; so that it is often unclear whether the objection is to essentialism *per se*, or to the politics, in which case essentialism serves as a straw target to discredit the politics.[36] In its extremist logic, such suspicion of "essentialism" may be resolved only at the level of a libertarian individualism, if even that, since the run of the mill libertarianism also "essentializes" the subject. Notions of hybridity informed by such extremism rule out any kind of serious radical politics, which requires at least some assumption of commonality, what Gayatri Spivak has described by way of compromise as "strategic essentialism." As bell hooks has written,

> One exciting dimension to cultural studies is the critique of essentialist notions of difference. Yet this critique should not become a means to dismiss differences or an excuse for ignoring the authority of experience. It is often evoked in a manner which suggests that all the ways black people think of ourselves as "different" from whites are really essentialist, and therefore without concrete grounding. This way of

> thinking threatens the very foundations that make resistance to domination possible.[37]

While an anti-essentialist hybridity at its extreme undercuts the possibility of "resistance to domination," no less important is its failure to come to terms with the world as it is, so as to confront its very real challenges. As a commitment to hybridity takes hold of intellectuals, the world at large presently is experiencing a proliferation of identity claims, often in the most obscurantist essentialist guise. It will not do to dismiss this historical phenomenon as an aberration, as some kind of a deviation from normalcy as stipulated by the principles of hybridity, which not only reifies hybridity contrary to its claims to open-endedness, but also shows how much the contemporary discourse of intellectuals may be in need of a reality check. What needs urgent confrontation is whether or not hybridity and essentialism generate one another.

I will conclude this discussion of hybridity by returning to the paradox posed by Werbner: if hybridity is indeed a condition of everyday life, what is radical about it? One possible answer has been suggested by Robert Young in his invocation of Bakhtin's idea of hybridity in the novel.[38] According to Young, Bakhtin's idea of hybridity was itself hybrid. Bakhtin referred to two kinds of hybridity; unconscious "organic hybridity" and "intentional hybridity." As Bakhtin put it:

> Unintentional, unconscious hybridization is one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages. We may even say that language and languages change historically primarily by hybridization, by means of a mixing of various 'languages' co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language, a single branch, a single group of different branches, in the historical as well as paleontological past of languages.[39]

On the other hand,

> The image of a language conceived as an intentional hybrid is first of all a *conscious* hybrid (as distinct from a historical, organic, obscure language hybrid); an intentional hybrid is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness . . . What is more, an intentional and conscious hybrid is not a mixture of two *impersonal* language consciousnesses (the correlates of two languages) but rather a mixture of two *individualized* language consciousnesses (the correlates of two specific utterances, not merely two languages) and two individual language-intentions as

> well.... In other words, the novelistic hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented... but is also double-languaged; for in it there are not only... two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are two socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs, that, true, are not here unconsciously mixed (as in organic hybrid) but that come together and fight it out on the territory of the utterance.[40]

Bakhtin, Young observes, "is more concerned with a hybridity that has been politicized and made contestatory," rather than hybridity that "remains mute and opaque," for the former is by far the more radical in its consequences.[41] He continues, "Bakhtin's doubled form of hybridity therefore offers a particularly significant model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically."[42]

If I may revise the vocabulary slightly, it seems to me that "organic hybridity" refers to what we might otherwise call historicity, that language, or in our case, cultural identity, in its historical progress is subject to transformation in the course of daily encounters with different consciousnesses, so that it becomes impossible to speak of a pure, self-enclosed consciousness travelling through time and space untouched by its many encounters. The transformations are moreover unarticulated, but concrete and specific. Intentional hybridity, on the other hand, is self-conscious and contestatory; it brings out into the open the encounters that remain unarticulated in organic hybridity and confronts them as structural contradictions. It is radical because this very revelation of everyday encounters as contradictions may bring to the surface the relations of inequality and hegemony in everyday life, demanding some kind of a resolution.

While this opposition may help explain why hybridity may be both pervasive and radical, it raises other questions. If hybridity is a condition of history, why does it remain silent most of the time while finding a voice at other times? The question is easier posed than answered, but it seems to me that the articulation as structural opposition of what is lived ordinarily as a condition of life suggests at the least that some kind of sense of empowerment is necessary to even risk the articulation. This may be as much the case with the assertion

of cultural hybridity as with class, gender, and ethnic structurations of everyday life.

The thornier, and more immediate, question is whether or not, having found expression in the recognition of structural contradictions, it is possible to resolve those contradictions to return cultural identity to its historicity? The question is crucial, I think. In his reading of Bakhtin, Young tends to overemphasize the conflictual nature of intentional hybridity. While endless contestation and conflict may have a place in the novel or in academia (which I also doubt), it is hardly a desirable condition of everyday life, which requires some coherence and unity.

Intentional hybridity is important to Bakhtin in challenging the hegemony of a single voice, but equally important I think is Bakhtin's stress on the illumination of one consciousness by another, which binds together the contestants in their very contest, in a "unity of opposites"—reminiscent readily of the dialectical notion of "contradiction," which in many ways is preferable over the term hybridity itself because it allows for the same open-endedness as hybridity while remaining attentive to questions of historicity and concreteness. While intentional hybridity interpreted as conflict may be radical for revealing the inequalities and hegemonies imbedded in everyday life, it also fragments—not just collectivities, but "the dialogical self" itself.

I borrow the latter term from Hubert Hermans and Harry Kempen, who apply Bakhtin's ideas to the study of individual psychology. The authors caution against the confounding of "multiplicity of characters" implicit in the idea of the dialogical self, with the pathological state of "multiple personality." The difference lies in the ability of the "multiplicity of characters" to engage in a dialogue, rather than speak sequentially, one at a time, unaware of the existence of other characters, as in the case of "multiple personality."[43] The goal of the dialogue is to synthesize the self, "to create a field in which the different characters form a community."[44] This mental community, moreover, resonates with the social context of the individual:

> The inside and the outside world function as highly open Systems that have intense transactional relationships. The self, as a highly contextual phenomenon, is bound to cultural and institutional constraints. Dominance relations are not only present in the outside world but, by

> the intensive transactions between the two, organize also the inside world... the possible array of imaginal positions becomes not only organized but also restricted by the process of institutionalization... some positions are strongly developed, whereas others are suppressed or even disassociated.[45]

The synthesizing activity takes place in a definite social context, which has a strong presence in the nature of the synthesis achieved. The inquiry into the hybrid or the dialogical self returns us to the social context of the self, without reducing it to the former, but underlining nevertheless the crucial importance of concrete circumstances in the shaping of subjectivity. One implication is that even intentional hybridity as a form of subjectivity is subject to organization, a return to the historicity of organic hybridity.

Returning from the self to the collectivity, we may well inquire where this synthesis, this re-historicization of hybridity may be achieved most effectively without abandoning the self-consciousness necessary to the non-hegemonic cultural identity, and how? Other questions follow inevitably, most crucial among them, what kind of histories could accommodate the new consciousness, and what kind of social transformation and political projects might produce such histories?

* * *

Diasporas do not provide an answer. While the diasporic imaginary is obviously capable of disrupting a world conceived in terms of nations as homogeneous entities, or even transgressing against the borders of nation-states, diasporas themselves may serve as sources of new identities in only the most off-ground reified sense. Diasporic consciousness has no history; indeed, its claims may be sustained only in negation of history and historicity. This consciousness, whether in its homogenizing or hybrid forms, may serve the purpose of cultural projects of various kinds; it is much more difficult to imagine what progressive political projects it might produce—unless it is qualified with a consciousness of place.

Criticism of diasporic consciousness need not imply an urge to return to the nation with its colonial, homogenizing, and assimilationist ideology. Whereas recent critiques of the nation

have introduced new insights, they often fail to address the question of who stands to benefit the most from the erasure of national boundaries. Whatever its colonizing tendencies may be, the nation is still capable, properly controlled from below, to offer protection to those within its boundaries.[46] It is not very surprising, therefore, that those Chinese Americans devoted to social issues and community building should be suspicious of the claims of diasporas, or the questioning of national boundaries. In this case, too, place consciousness is a fundamental issue, for it leads to a different conception of the nation; bottom-up rather than top-down.[47]

To raise the question of places is to raise the issue of difference on a whole range of fronts, including those of class, gender, and ethnicity. It is also to raise the question of history in identity. Identity is no less an identity for being historical (is there any other kind?). Contrary to a hegemonic cultural reification or a whimpering preoccupation with the location of "home," which seem to have acquired popularity as alternative expressions of diasporic consciousness, what is important is to enable people to feel at home where they live.[48] This does not require that people abandon their legacies, only that they recognize the historicity of their cultural identities, and that those identities are subject to change in the course of historical encounters. In the words of the Indian writer, Farrukh Dhondy, "what makes people is not their genes, is not their nostalgia, it's their interactions of daily existence."[49]

The historicity of identity is by no means transparent, since history itself makes sense in terms of its social locations. One of the prominent phenomenon of our times is the fragmentation of history into a number of seemingly irreconcilable spaces, most importantly ethnic spaces. The proliferation of histories without any apparent connections to one another, or that consciously repudiate such connections, has led to the substitution for history of heritage, as David Lowenthal puts it, or more pessimistically, a condition of "schizophrenic nominalism," in Fredric Jameson's words, that has deprived history of all temporal and spatial meaning.[50]

Such negative evaluations stem at least partially from the breakdown of a Eurocentric temporality that provided coherence, but only at the cost of repressing other histories than its own. The break-down of history may be viewed, from a less

pessimistic perspective, as the assault on a hegemonic history of the previously repressed, who have now returned to visibility to demand a presence for themselves. The challenge is how to create new unities out of this fragmentation, which may be a precondition for achieving a more democratic unity to transcend an earlier illusion of unity that could be sustained only through a hegemonic history. A further, and crucial, question is: Where to locate this new history or histories? The effort no doubt has to proceed at more than one location; but one location that is indispensable, I think, are places.

Diasporas are dispersals from some remembered homeland, from some concrete place, which after the fact is conceived in terms of the nation (at least over the last century), although concrete places of origin retain their visibility even in their incorporation into the language of the nation or of diaspora. The dispersed also land in concrete places in the host society which, too, is captured in national terms, even if the very fact of diaspora, if nothing else, disturbs efforts to define nation and national culture. Ling-chi Wang tells us that one Chinese metaphor for the diasporic condition is "growing roots where landed" (*luodi shenggen*).[51] While a prejudice for the nation makes it possible to speak of "national soil," and demands assimilation to some "national culture," rootedness as a metaphor points inevitably to concrete places that belie easy assumptions of the homogeneity of national soil or culture. Kathleen Neil Conzen writes of German immigrants to the United States that, "...as change occurred, it could proceed without the kinds of qualitative shifts implied by the familiar notions of acculturation and assimilation. Culture was more strongly localized—naturalized in the literal botanical sense of the term—than it was ethnicized, and the structures of everyday life, rather than being assimilated to those of some broader element within American society, responded to the transforming pressures of modern life on a parallel trajectory of their own."[52] The statement points to both the concrete place-basedness and the historicity of diasporic identity. James Clifford uses the metaphor of "routes" to capture the spatio-temporality of cultural identity; I will describe it simply as "historical trajectory through places."[53] Encounters in places traversed involve both forgetting and new acquisitions. The past is not erased, therefore, but rewritten. Similarly, the new

acquisitions do not imply disappearance into the new environment, but rather the proliferation of future possibilities.

What attention to place suggests is the historicity of identity. The "assimilation theory" to which Conzen objects presupposed dehistoricized and placeless notions of culture; assimilation implied motion from one to the other.[54] One could not be both Chinese and American, but had to move from being Chinese (whatever that might mean) to being American (whatever that might mean); hence failure to become "fully American" could produce such notions as "dual personality," which precluded being American—as well as suggesting that such an identity represented the degeneration of the components out of which it was formed. The very formulation of the problem precluded what from our vantage point would seem to be an obvious answer: that it is possible to be Chinese without being like other Chinese, and it is possible to be an American without being like other Americans. In either case the history traversed makes a crucial difference in the formation of new identities that unite and divide in new ways.

Ironically, contemporary critiques of assimilation theory, to the extent that they ignore place and history, end up with similar assumptions. Multiculturalism may evaluate hybridity differently than an earlier monoculturalism permitted, but it nevertheless retains similar culturalist assumptions (some notion of Chineseness conjoined to some notion of Americanness to produce a hybrid product). And since culturalism still runs against the evidence of difference, it is still potentially productive of the reification of ethnicity and, ultimately, race. If diasporic reification erases the many historical legacies of the past, hybridity disallows the future. Without a clear account of how different "hybridities" may be productive of new cultures, hybridity in the abstract points merely to an existence between cultures frozen in time.

On the other hand, place consciousness is quite visible in Asian American literary texts. The inhabitants of these texts move through ethnic spaces out of choice or necessity, but the ethnic spaces are themselves located in places with a variety of co-habitants. The classic example may be Carlos Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart*, which literally traces the author's motions from place to place, starting in Phillipine places, and then up and down the US West coast.

Place-consciousness is most readily evident in contemporary Asian American literature in the literature of Hawai'i—of writers such as Milton Murayama, Gary Pak, and Wing Tek Lum—whose forays into the histories of different ethnic groups share in common a language that marks them as irreducibly Hawai'ian. Another example, especially interesting because of the deep contrast between the author's literary output and his more formal discussions, is that of Frank Chin. Chin's literary works are quite attentive to places, and to the historicity of Chinese American identities. On the other hand, when the author turns to formal discussions of identity, his representation of Chinese identity match the most egregious reifications of an earlier Orientalism. This itself may be revealing of a gap between depictions of concrete everyday life and an imagined ethnicity constructed very much in the course of daily life, but lifted out of it to be represented as an identity that transcends history. The contrast raises interesting questions concerning the ways in which transnationalization and diasporic consciousness may affect a place-based understanding of ethnicity.

* * *

The insistence on places against diasporic reification has consequences that are not only analytical in an abstract sense. It draws attention, in the first place, to another place-based kind of politics. One of the dangerous consequences of undue attention to diasporas is to distance the so-called diasporic populations from their immediate environments, to render them into foreigners in the context of everyday life. Given the pervasiveness of conflicts in American society that pitch different diasporic populations against one another, it is necessary to engage others in political projects to create political alliances where differences may be "bridged" and common social and cultural bonds formed to enable different populations to learn to live with one another, rather than retreat behind reified identities that further promote mutual suspicion and racial division.[55] A Chinese living in Los Angeles has more of a stake in identifying with his/her African or Hispanic American neighbors than with some distant cousin in Hong Kong (without implying that the two kinds of relationships

need to be understood in zero-sum terms). Following the logic of the argument above, I suggest that place-based politics offers the most effective means to achieving such ends. Place-based politics does not presuppose communities that shut out the world, but refocuses attention on building society from the bottom up.

Radical (perhaps unrealistically radical)[56] as a place-based politics may seem, it is unlikely to fulfill its radical promise unless it also challenges the hegemony of the global imaginary that utopianizes transnationalism. My use of places is somewhat different than in discussions of the "local" in some postcolonial literature, which tend to view places in isolation from the larger structures that inform them and the categorical allegiances (such as class or gender) that enter into their constitution. The reassertion of place that I am suggesting could hardly be accomplished, therefore, without challenging those larger structures, and working over such categorical allegiances. Without reference to structures, the notion of historicity itself readily disintegrates into a jumble of empirical phenomena with no meaning outside themselves. To speak of places presently is to set them *against* the new global or transnational imaginaries, with their fetishism of a dehistoricized developmentalism and placeless spaces.

Liberal multiculturalism seeks to make room for different cultures, but with a hegemonic containment of difference within the structures of capitalism assumed to offer a common destiny for all, which perpetuates fundamental hegemonies under the new requirements of broadened cultural tolerance. Culturalism without history may serve to divide (as it does), it may also serve to consolidate hegemony. It may not be too surprising that we witness exactly such a hegemonic unity at the level of transnationalized ruling classes, whose claims to cultural difference are negotiated with the assumption of common interests, while the same culturalism is often manifested in deadly conflicts among the population at large. The return to history from culture is important precisely because it may serve as a reminder of how people at the level of places are not just divided by different cultural legacies but also united by common histories and interests without which those differences themselves may be incomprehensible. What needs to be resolved at this level are different memories; not

just histories remembered differently but also histories remembered jointly.

History is important for another reason than the possibilities it offers for resolution of past and present differences. Released from a hegemonic containment within contemporary structures of power, the recognition of different pasts inevitably invites the possibility of envisioning the future differently. The historicization of cultures—the recognition of different historical trajectories—may have a crucial role to play in opening up a dialogue over different futures. Political projects that account for the different historical possibilities offered by their constituents may fulfill their radical promise if they may, on the basis of those possibilities, imagine alternative futures as well.

The other consequence is also political, but within the context of academic politics, for there is a pedagogic dimension to realizing such political goals. It is rather unfortunate that recent ideological formations, backed by the power of foundations, have encouraged the capturing of ethnicities in "diasporic" American or cultural studies. In the case of studies of Asian Americans in particular, the most favored choices these days would seem to be to recognize Asian American Studies as a field of its own, to break it down into various national components (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, etc.), or to absorb it into American or Asian Studies. Each choice is informed by political premises and goals. Asian American Studies as a field is under attack from the inside for its homogenizing implications, as well as its domination by some groups over others. Breaking it down, however, does not offer any readily acceptable solution, as it merely replaces continental homogeneity with national homogeneities. Why should there be a Chinese American rather than, say, Fuzhounese American Studies? And why stop at Fuzhou?

On the other hand, absorbing Asian American Studies into either Asian or American Studies would seem to achieve little more than bringing it as a field under the hegemony of the study of societies of origin or arrival. On the surface, American Studies would seem to be an appropriate home for Asian American Studies, as Asian American history is grounded in US history, which continues to be the concrete location for Asian American experience. On the other hand, it is also clear

that Asian American history extends beyond the boundaries of US history, and by virtue of that has special requirements—chief among them language—that are not likely to be accommodated with ease within the context of American Studies as presently organized. These needs have prompted some scholars to advocate some kind of a merger between Asian and Asian American Studies. After all, Asian Studies would benefit from greater awareness of Asian American populations, which might complicate their notions of Asia with beneficial results. On the other hand, closer integration with Asian Studies would bring into Asian American Studies a closer grasp of societies of origin, as well as a disciplinary training in languages, which may be necessary for more sophisticated scholarship as is indicated by the growing number of Asian American scholars who have extended the boundaries of Asian American Studies. I am thinking here of scholars such as Yuji Ichioka, Him Mark Lai, Marlon Hom, Sau-ling Wong, and Scott Wong, to name a few, who have produced works that have enriched the field by using non-English language sources.

Dialogue between the different fields is not only desirable, therefore, but is necessary. Mergers are a different matter. The reasoning underlying these proposed mergers is full of pitfalls, especially when viewed from the perspective of politics. Absorbtion of Asian American into American Studies *prima facie* would perpetuate the hegemonies that do not disappear but are in fact consolidated under the guise of multiculturalism. The case with Asian Studies is even more problematic, as the justification for it is fundamentally diasporic, with all the implications of that term that I have discussed above. One of the most important characteristics of Asian American Studies, as of all the ethnic studies projects that were born of the political ferment of the 1960s, was its insistence on ties to community projects. This was a reason that Asian Studies scholars for a long time disassociated themselves from Asian American scholarship, for such explicit ties to political projects made the field suspect in terms of scholarship (which, of course, did not apply to scholars of Asia with ties to other kinds of political projects, respectable because of their ties to power). The new interest of scholars of Asia in Asian American Studies may be attributed to something so

mundane as the lucrative promise of a field in demand all of a sudden due to the explosion in the numbers of students of Asian origins. I suspect, however, that what makes the association tolerable is the respectability Asian American Studies has acquired as it is transnationalized, or diasporized, achieving respectability at the cost of alienation from its radical political projects. It may be noteworthy here that a panel in the recent annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies ("Crossing Boundaries: Bridging Asian American Studies and Asian Studies") "bridges" the gap not by addressing Asian American issues, but by including in the panel Evelyn Hu-De Hart, the only participant recognizable as a serious scholar of Asian America (to be distinguished from being Asian American). Judging by the titles of the papers listed, the panel reveals little recognition of the integrity and coherence of Asian American Studies as a field with its own problems and paradigms, not to speak of the intellectual and political implications of those paradigms.[57] The danger (and the quite real possibility) here is the disappearance into some vague diasporic field of problems specific to Asian America.

If education has anything to do with politics, and it does have everything to do with it, the wiser course to follow in overcoming ethnic divisions would be to reinforce programs in Ethnic Studies, which initially had as one of its fundamental goals the bridging of ethnic divisions and the pursuit of common projects (based in communities) to that end. Ethnic Studies since their inception have been viewed with suspicion by the political and educational establishments, and suffered from internal divisions as well. Whether or not these legacies can be overcome is a big question, imbedded as they are in the structures of US society and academic institutions. The irony is that while Ethnic Studies might help ideologically in overcoming ethnic divisions, it is not likely to receive much support unless inter-ethnic political cooperation has sufficient force to render it credible in the first place. The ideology of globalization, of which diasporic ideology is one constituent, further threatens to undermine its promise (and existence). Here, too, place-based politics may have something to offer in countering the ideologies of the age.

Notes

1 While the issue of place against transnationality is quite central, as I will suggest below, in this case the criticism was not entirely fair. The anthropologist in question, Nina Glick-Schiller, is among the earliest critics of transnational cultural homogenization, and its manipulation by business and political interests. See, for, example, Nina Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton-Blanc, "Transnationalism: a new analytic framework for understanding migration," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645 (1992): 1–24. The colleagues in Singapore were Chua Beng-huat and Wang Gung-wu. A colleague in Hong Kong, Siu-woo Cheung, responded in similar fashion, this time to a talk by Greg Lee on Chinese hybridity. Cheung informs me that he feels "silenced" by a concept such as hybridity, which erases his differences from other Chinese, not just elsewhere but in Hong Kong.

2 This double aspect of the concept is investigated in several of the essays, especially the editors' introduction and epilogue, in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

3 "Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity," in Ibid., pp. 3–33, p. 12. For Gilroy, see, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

4 Ong and Nonini, "Toward a Cultural Politics of Diaspora and Transnationalism," in *Ungrounded Empires*, pp. 323–332, p. 325.

5 There is a great deal of material on the John Huang case, although no studies as yet. For a blatant example of the unscrupulous linking of John Huang with the Riady's and the PRC, see, William Safire, "Listening to Hearings," *The New York Times*, 13 July 1997.

6 Paul Gilroy, "'The Whisper Wakes, the Shudder Plays': Race, Nation and Ethnic Absolutism," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. By Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996): 248–274, p. 263.

7 Ling-chi Wang, "Foreign Money Is No Friend of Ours," *AsianWeek* (November 8, 1997), p. 7.

8 Henry Yu, "Thinking About Orientals: Modernity, Social Science, and Asians in Twentieth-Century America," Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, Princeton University, June 1995. See, pp. 162–189.

9 Quoted in Ibid., p. 184.

10 "Entrepreneur Applauds U.S. Money Move," *Hawaii Tribune-Herald*, Thursday, 18 June 1998, pp. 1, 10.

11 Arif Dirlik, "Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2*, 22.3 (November 1995): 229–273.

12 Joel Kotkin, "The New Yankee Traders," *INC* (March 1996), p. 25.

13 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy," *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 1–24, p. 15.

14 For an important discussion, see, Peter Kwong, *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor* (New York: The New Press, 1997), especially Chap. 5, "Manufacturing Ethnicity".

15 Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora*, 1.1 (Spring 1991): 24–44.

16 Quoted in Yu, p. 229. For another study that also stresses the debilitating consequences of hybridity, see, William Carlson Smith, *Americans in Process: A Study of Our Citizens of Oriental Ancestry* (New York: Arno Press and the NY Times, 1970). Originally published in 1937.
17 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).
18 Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Moddod (eds), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997): 1–26, p. 1.
19 Feroza Jussawalla, "South Asian Diaspora Writers in Britain: 'Home' versus 'Hybridity,'" in Geoffrey Kaine (ed), *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1997): 17–37, pp. 20, 21. Lawrence Grossberg has argued that there has been an increasing tendency in cultural studies to identify it with problems of identity, which may well have something to do with the abstraction and universalization of hybridity. See, Grossberg, "Identity and Cultural Studies—Is That All There Is?," in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (eds), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1997): 87–107, p. 87.
20 Katharyne Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity," *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, 1997, volume 15: 533–553, pp. 537, 534 (fn).
21 Zygmunt Bauman, "The Making and Unmaking of Strangers," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, pp. 46–57.
22 Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 77. Quoted in Jonathan Friedman, "Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity, and Intellectual Porkbarrelling: Cosmopolitans versus Locals, Ethnics and Nationals in an Era of Global De-Hegemonisation," in Pnina Werbner (ed), *The Dialectics of Hybridity* (London: Zed, 1997) pp. 70–89, p. 77.
23 Friedman, p. 87.
24 Jussawala, p. 26.
25 For a discussion of class differences, see, Leo Suryadinata, "Anti-Chinese Riots in Indonesia: Perennial Problem but Major Disaster Unlikely," *Straits Times* (Singapore), 25 February 1998. For the Indonesian Chinese elite's plans, see, "Elite Making Contingency Plans to Flee to Australia," *South China Morning Post*, 28 February 1998. It might be worth remembering that this is the same elite some members of which were implicated in the John Huang case.
26 Friedman, p. 81.
27 Ibid., pp. 82–83.
28 Nira Yuval-Davis, "Ethnicity, Gender Relations and Multiculturalism," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, pp. 193–208, p. 202.
29 See, Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 176, for a tabulation of degrees of "mongrelity" in Peru. See also Anthony P. Maingot, "Race, Color, and Class in the Caribbean," in Alfred Stepan (ed), *Americas: New Interpretive Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 220–247,

p. 229, for similar categorizations in Santo Domingo. For "blood quantum, see Mariana Jaimes Guerrero, "The 'Patriarchal Nationalism' of Transnational Colonialism: As Imperialist Strands of Genocide/Ethnocide/Ecocide," paper presented at the Conference, "Asian Pacific Identities," Duke University, March 1995.

30 Young, *Colonial Desire*; Jussawala, p. 34.

31 Theorists of abstract hybridity such as Bhabha and Soja nevertheless refer to the quite grounded work of a bell hooks, who seeks such articulation from a black feminist perspective. See the essays in bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990).

32 Jussawala, p. 35.

33 Mitchell, p. 534.

34 Peter McLaren and Henry A. Giroux, "Writing from the Margins: Geographies of Identity, Pedagogy and Power," in Peter McLaren, *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: Pedagogies of Dissent for the New Millenium* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997): 16–41, p. 17.

35 Pnina Werbner, "Essentialising Essentialism, Essentialising Silence: Ambivalence and Multiplicity in the Constructions of Racism and Ethnicity," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, pp. 226–254, p. 226.

36 I have in mind here the essentialism that Lisa Lowe discovers in the early Asian American movement of the late sixties and the seventies. There is little in the texts of that movement to suggest that Asian American radicals assumed any kind of ethnic or social (class and gender) homogeneity for the groups encompassed under the term. If there was erasure of gender differences to begin with, that was challenged very quickly. On the other hand, the movement did have political goals that have become less desirable to new generations of Asian Americans. See, Lowe, *op. cit.*

37 bell hooks, "Culture to Culture: Ethnography and Cultural Studies as Critical Intervention," in bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990): 123–133, p. 130. See also Stuart Hall for the importance of history and place in identity. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Padmini Mongia (ed), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold Publishers, 1996): 110–121. Hall distinguishes a "hegemonising" form of ethnicity from a hybrid one, which is subject to change, but does not therefore deny the importance of ethnic identity: "difference, therefore, persists—in and alongside continuity." (p. 114). For a similar reffirmation, this time contrasting ethnicity to race, see, Werbner, "Essentialising Essentialism."

38 Young, *Colonial Desire*, pp. 20–22.

39 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, tr. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 358–359. Quoted in Young, p. 21.

40 Bakhtin, pp. 359–360.

41 Young, p. 21.

42 Ibid., p. 22.

43 Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, *The Dialogical Self: Meaning As Movement* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1993) p. 89.

44 Ibid., p. 93.

45 Ibid., p. 78.

46 For a defense of the nation from what may seem to be a surprising source, see, Sub-Commandant Marcos, "Why We Are Fighting: The Fourth World War Has Begun," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (August, September 1997).

47 For a parallel argument, see, Partha Chatterjee, "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?," *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 4–11, 1997, pp. 30–34.

48 I am referring here to the title of a conference held in early November 1997 at New York University, "Where is Home?" (previously the title of an exhibition on the Chinese in the US). The preoccupation has its roots in a particularly narcissistic and manipulative offshoot of cultural studies. The "yearning" for home need not be a consequence of such narcissism. Jussawalla defends her case for "home" in response to the oppressive refusal of the society of arrival to recognize genuine political and cultural citizenship to the ethnically, racially and, culturally different even after generations of residence in the new "home," which indeed has been the experience of many. On the other hand, I find implausible her alternative that, "the answer is to assimilate and yet to keep our distinctness, our senses of nationality" (Jussawalla, p. 36).

49 Quoted in Jussawalla, p. 32.

50 David Lowenthal, *Possessed By The Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (NY: Free Press, 1995), and, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). Jameson's pessimism is related to a yearning for an earlier class politics of socialism. He describes the contemporary fragmentation of history with the same vocabulary that he uses to describe the new social movements: as having emerged from the "rubbles" of an earlier unified and coherent history and politics. This yearning does not allow him to see the progressive potential of the new "rubble."

51 "Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States," *Daedalus* (Spring 1991): 181–206, pp. 199–200.

52 Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Making Their Own America: Assimilation Theory and the German Peasant Pioneer," German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., Annual Lecture Series, No. 3 (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990) p. 9.

53 See the collection of his essays in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). I may note here an aspect of the contemporary dissatisfaction with history for supposedly ignoring questions of space out of a preoccupation with questions of time. While this may be a legitimate criticism for certain kinds of histories, such criticism itself seems to be more concerned with nineteenth century historicism and conceptions of history than with the actual practise of historians. To this historian at any rate, the concept of historicity as a concrete concept is inseparable from location in time *and* space-within a *social* context (to complete Soja's "trialectics!")

54 Henry Yu argues that the Chicago sociologists de-historicized the experiences of their "oriental" subjects by rendering into static universal categories what were stages in their life histories. See the discussion in Yu, pp. 185–188.

55 The divisive effects of diasporic discourse as I approach it here is similar to the divisive effects of the idea of a "model minority".

56 The difficulties are obvious, but then we do not seem to have too many choices. For a sensitive discussion of the difficulties involved in what she calls "transversal politics" (a term coined by Italian feminists), see, Yuval-Davis, *op. cit.*

57 A concomitant round-table discussion, subtitled, "Where Do Asia and Asian America Meet?" may have been more promising, with the participation of Gail Nomura and Scott Wong.