QUESTIONING IDENTITY: HYBRIDIZATION IN KAREN TEI YAMASHITA'S *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

BY

MR. SONGWUT JULLANAN

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
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ABSTRACT

Tropic of Orange is one of Karen Tei Yamashita's most renowned works. From hybrid identity and culture, border-crossing movement, and diversity of languages, the novel comprises several characteristics of globalization for which Yamashita is famous. Some studies of the book, therefore, emphasizes these elements of the book and link them with the context of globalization, while the characters' identities and American culture are taken for granted as hybrid. Consequently, the complexity of characters' identities portrayed by their interaction with each other, space, and language have not yet been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this study focus on the novel's textual elements. The analysis of the novel through Sten Pultz Moslund's theory of hybridization shows the more complex process of identity which throws a concept of racial, spatial, and social identity into question.

Keywords: Hybridity, Hybridization, Tropic of Orange

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Mr. Songwut Jullanan

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> "At home, Emi had a set with its own screening boxes. 'Look at this,' she had announced to Gabriel when she bought the thing. 'I can watch four stations at once if necessary.' This feature had almost finished the relationship. It was taking things to the edge when Emi tried it in conjunction with one of Gabriel's classic black and whites. He came back from the kitchen with Does Equis, salsa, and chips only to find *Murder, My Sweet* in the lower left quarter of the screen, competing with Hard Copy, CNN, and The Three Tenors..." (Yamashita, 1997, p. 109)

The picture of a high technology television with a function to feature several channels at once portrays a combination and interaction of several cultural products across time and space. The 1944 American film noir *Murder, My Sweet* is projected on the screen along with an operatic singing group of the 1990s *The Three Tenors* which consisted of Spanish and Italian singers and famous American news outlet *CNN*. Projected on the screen of the television are thus different genres of media from different places and times, moving cross border, travelling in time and having been compressed into small space of the TV screen. This passage from the 1997 novel *Tropic of Orange* gives us a glimpse of Karen Tei Yamashita's literary world. Born in Oakland, California in 1951, Yamashita has moved constantly and lived in many countries. She spent the initial years of her life in Los Angeles. After graduated from high school, she studied English at Carleton College and lived in Japan for a year as an exchange student at Waseda University. She is later granted the Thommas J. Watson Fellowship for a research on Japanese immigration in Brazil, where she stayed for nine years and married a Brazilian architect/artist Ronaldo Lopes de Oliveira. Yamashita begins her writing career as a short story writer and playwright before she makes her name as a novelist following her first novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) winning American Book Award in 1991 and the Janet Heidinger Kafka Award in 1992.

(Seiwoong, 2007, pp. 329-30) After that, she produces a number of novel, including *Brazil-Maru* 1992, *Tropic of Orange* (1997), *Circle K Cycles* (2001), and *I-Hotel* (2010).

Like the picture of television, Yamashita's novels often combine different genres of novel and media. Frequently compressed in her novels is also the interaction of characters with different backgrounds, experiences, and identities. For instance, in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, Yamashita characterizes three characters with different identities interacting in Brazil. "Her intricately interwoven cultural symbolisms of Japan, Latin America, and the United States," observed Seiwoong Oh, "produce a complex matrix of hybrid characters and cultures that challenges reader to question and probe established cultural norm" (p.285).

Similarly, *Tropic of Orange* is a combination of literary conventions and genres. The novel has an element of postmodernism, magical realism, and detective film noir. At the beginning of the book, Yamashita introduces HyperContexts which operates as the backbone of the book to combine elements and different ethnic characters (Pooch, 2016, p. 55): Gabriel Balboa, an American-born Chicano who works as a reporter in Los Angeles, Emi a fifth generation Japanese American, Buzzworm, an African American veteran, Bobby Ngu "a Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown" (Yamashita, p. 16), Rafaela Cortes, Gabriel's housekeeper in Mazatlan, Mexico, Manzanar Murakami, a third generation Japanese American who quits being a surgeon and become a homeless who conducts music out of the noise from freeway Los Angeles, and Arcangel, a Latin American artist and poet. Through the HyperContext, these characters, despite differences in their background, nationality, and identities, are systematically organized, categorized, homogenized and compressed into the space of the book.

In term of narrative, the main plot of the story is Gabriel telling story of himself seeking news story from Manzanar and his attempt to build a house in Mazatlan, Mexico. Along with Gabriel's storyline run six other stories told by six different ethnic characters. Different though these characters seem to be, they are connected and the stories they told are also interrelated. Gabriel is in a relationship with Japanese-American Emi who turns out to be a niece of Manzanar, and he is a friend of Buzzworm, who is also his new source and who recommends him to interview

Marzanar for the news story he is seeking, while Buzzworm himself consequently works with Emi for the *Newsnow.* Rafaela tells the story back and forth between her past when she lives with Bobby Ngu, her husband, in America and the present when she lives in Mazatlan with her son Sol as Gabriel's housekeeper during her separation from her husband. Rafaela later becomes friend with a magical character Arcangel who crosses border with a mysterious orange that distorts time and space in Los Angeles to wrestles SUPERNAFTA. This interaction between different ethnic characters creates what seems to be a network of multiculturalist characters within the space of global city Los Angeles and Mexico. Because of the wide ranges of issue that the novel address - the characterization of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characters and the display of their interaction throughout the story, the inclusion of border-crossing, mass migration, an elastic border line dividing North and South attached to a mysterious orange, and unconventional narratives - it comes as no surprise that the novel received a wide variety of feedbacks, with the criticisms going many different directions. Although criticisms on *Tropic of Orange* seem multidirectional, the study of the novel in the past tends to focus more on the context while the complexity of the novel and characters has largely been ignored.

Chiyo Crawford, for example, emphasizes the social context of Japanese Internment embedded within the story of Manzanar Murakami. She links Manzanar's experience with the context of Japanese displacement during World War II, as well as demonstrating Yamashita's portrayal of resistance to American oppression and racial discrimination. Anne Mai Yee Jansen reads the novel against the backdrop of Latin American literary convention and Latin American history so as to contextualize several elements in the text. The homeless, for example, represents "the growing poverty in the United States and illustrating the way even the poorest Americans are literally feeding on Mexico's future," while the history of the orange importation represents "a history of immigration" and "history of labor" (Jansen, p. 117, 118-19). She opines that the magical oranges serves as a symbol of hybridity while Arcangel is the embodiment of Latin American historical figures who fought against the domination of the North such as Che Guevara, Jorge Luis Borges, or Pablo Neruda while his crossing of border represents the return to Aztlan that destabilizes the order of America. Orange and

Archangel therefore represent the resistance against the United States. Crawford and Jansen emphasize certain characters and elements within the text while the interaction between characters have been overlooked.

Similarly, Rachel Adams links *Tropic of Orange* with American postmodernist movement. She compares Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Tropic of Orange* to demonstrate that the American literature has moved beyond American literary postmodernism into what she calls "American literary globalism" because of its inclusion of the issue of border and border-crossing, the ongoing context of globalizing process, the interrelation of the US and Mexico, the reference to non-European influential figures and Latin culture and language, as well as the author's employment of multilingualism as a way to tell the stories. However, her analysis on characters and narrative are moderately superficial, largely due to the effort to link textual element with contextual events. Her proposal that the narrative of *Tropic of Orange* is hybrid, for instance, is explained roughly as the "creative fusion of Latin American-inspired magical realism with allusions to such Anglo-American sources as hard-boiled detective novel and Hollywood film" which reflects "the interrelation of North and South." The blend of literary genres and multilingualism, according to Adams, is the "... product of the age of globalizations as are the great inequities and threat of cultural homogeneity associated with the spread of transnational capital" (265). She comes to this argument without thorough explanation of the process of hybridity, particularly the term magical realism which itself can be regarded as hybrid. In other words, Adams takes for granted that the novel is hybrid and heteroglot and moves beyond the line of American postmodernism without explicit explanation of how and why it is hybrid and hetereoglot besides a mere combination of several genres and voices of characters.

Melenie U. Pooch provides thorough analysis of the novel. She explores in detail each part of the novel, from the HyperContext which she says serves as a "skeleton of the novel" to multi-ethnic characters and structure of the novel. However, her main argument is that *Tropic of Orange* manages to capture the essential qualities of Los Angeles in the globalizing age. It is the fragmented city with "no unifying center" and "no single logic" (p. 53). According to Poorch, the novel is hybrid and

heterogeneous, which situates in the in-betweenness because of the poetic of multilingual narration, the blend of different genres and literary conventions, as well as the inclusion of hybrid characters. Similar to Adams, Pooch focuses much more on the fact that the novel successfully captures the fragmentation of Los Angeles or the globalizing world, while the hybrid quality of the novel and characters as well as Yamashita's use of multilingualism have been explained simply as the combination of several pure identities, genres, and voices from several distinct ethnic characters. Both Pooch and Adam see hybridity as a state or condition - the combination of two or more essential identities or culture that creates the third space. This attempt essentializes Mexican, Asian, American, and other ethnicities. The mixture of two or more identities creating the third space is a mere acceptance that there was/is essential culture and identity, thus accepting the binary division that have long upheld American hegemony. Nevertheless, they ignore the process of hybridity and analytical aspect of the term as well as the complexity of the text itself. Rather, they see hybridity as ready-made term with ability to create the third space, an escape from the binary logic that is the legacy of colonialism. Adams and Pooch's reading of the novel is what Sten Pultz Moslund calls celebratory reading of hybridity.

According to Moslund, since the 1980, post-colonial theory becomes the dominant discourse. A number of scholars have adopted theories such as Bakhtin's heteroglossia or Bhabha's hybridity in reading literary works. Most reading, however, emphasizes whether or not the book is heteroglot or hybrid rather than looking closely on the process as to why and how it is hybrid and heteroglot. Moslund is against reading hybridity as a mixture of two essential qualities which creates "balanced third space." Rather, he suggests that hybridity is a "asymmetric dialectics, dichotomous poles cease from serving as state or condition, being reactivated, instead, as dynamic forces" (14). This is what Tabish Khair points out, as quoted by Moslund, that "hybridization is not the same as hybrid. Hybridization is an active term that connotes as ongoing process, while the hybrid… is static description. The hybrid *is*; it is not the endless process of becoming (14).

The hybrid identities of characters in *Tropic of Orange* are not the combination of two or more fixed identities or collision of two spaces. They keep on

changing, relatable to a particular character they interact with, how a particular character projects and perceives himself/herself, how they are perceived and the space they are in. In similar fashion, the American culture which is often praised as hybrid is not a mere combination of several essential cultures while the hybrid nature of the novel is not simply a combination of several literary genres deemed a characteristic of certain group of people or representation of a particular culture. Rather, the genres are fluid and overlap with several multiethnic characters. Nevertheless, heteroglossia is not simply a combination of several voices from different ethnic characters but also different voices in one character and differences between voices toward a particular object. As Moslund notes, "To Bakhtin, the heteroglot novel deals not with the relation between a word and its object but with the relation between two or more voices about an object. It deals with, indeed intensifies the exchange, clash and fusing of opinions about – or commonly-held representation of an object" (p.70).

Therefore, in the analytical parts, I will look closely at the identities of each character and demonstrate their hybridizing identities created by the interaction between multi-ethnic characters and the space in which they live and the shift of identity caused by the shift of a character with whom they interact. Then, through Moslund's notion - drawing on Bakhtin's theory of organic hybridity and intentional hybridity - that hybridization is the combination of the forces towards sameness and difference which will help the theory of hybridity "cease from serving as states or conditions, being reactivated, instead, as dynamic forces" (p. 14), I will show that *Tropic of Orange* is not a static hybrid space. In contrast, it is the space that contains the ongoing struggle between the characters, the space, and language. Nevertheless, several critics opine that despite identifying herself as Asian American writer and her works being included in Asian American literature anthologies, Yamashita does not write her work according to Asian American literary conventions. However, with the inclusion of Asian American characters and elements that reflect Asian American literary convention such as generational conflict or the history of Japanese internment, it is difficult to overlook the text as part of Asian American literary movement. Therefore, in the final part, I will read the novel against the backdrop of Asian American

literary history and explore how the novel follows and challenges Asian American literary conventions. Through this approach, hybridity and heteroglossia will not be a mere function that creates the balanced third space and escape from binary logic but also helps us understand the complexity of characters and of the language in the novel, and also the impact of the novel on ethnic American literary movement.

CHAPTER 2

CENTRIFUGAL FORCES IN *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* is composed in contrast to the conventional literary works. Rather than a story being told by one character or a narrator, it is divided into chapters, with seven different ethnic characters telling their own stories. The novel consists of Mexican American: Gabriel and Rafaela, Asian American: Emi, Manzanar and Bobby Ngu, African American Buzzworm, and a magical character whose identity is blurring Archangel. As several critics have already noted, these characters are culturally hybrid.

Originally born and raised in a Chinese family in Singapore, Bobby Ngu migrates to the US after the Vietnam war pretending to be a Vietnamese refugee. But instead of living in a Vietnamese or a Chinese community, he has been living in a Korean town with his wife Rafaela who has also migrated from Mexico. His hybrid identity is best portrayed through the description of himself as "a Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown" (Yamashita, p. 16). With this description, Pooch states that Bobby "can be considered a hybrid of Asian American and Chicano who has created a 'third space' for himself in the United States" (p.186). Unlike Bobby who is born in his homeland and migrated to the US later in life, Emi is born and raised in the US in a Japanese American family. Thus, she associates herself more with her profession and technology as well as American culture, dating a Mexican American, watching American movies, "instead of being nostalgic about her heritage" (Pooch, pp. 189-190). Apart from Asian American characters, *Tropic of Orange* also features other ethnic characters. They are also characterized with hybrid identities. Gabriel, an American-educated reporter, lives and works in Los Angeles since he was young and thus being able to speak English fluently. He is also in a relationship with a Japanese American Emi. Mexican American character Rafaela is born in Mexico, but she moves to live in the US with her husband Bobby for a while before their separation that leads her back to live once again in Mazatlan. Buzzworm is an African American. According to Pooch, Buzzworm's culturally hybrid

identity is reflected by the music style to which he listens. “Buzzworm is listening to the radio constantly, which is a metaphor for his understanding of different cultures because he enjoys any kind of music style… thus he has a good ear for cultural difference. He understands in the sense of listening to and comprehending cultural diversity on the radio and on the streets” (Yamashita, p.194). Yamashita has included the characters with different backgrounds, cultures, and identities into her narrative as well as uses different styles of writings to represent the diversity of ethnic dialects. These hybrid characters co-exist and interact with each other in the main setting of the story Los Angeles. Because of the diversity of the characters, criticism on *Tropic of Orange* has been focused on the diversity and heterogeneity of both the characters and city of Los Angeles, while little has been said about the sameness or the homogenizing force that lurks underneath the difference and heterogeneity in the narrative.

In America politics of identity, the concept of melting pot was first in use in the late eighteen century to demonstrate the “multidirectional blending of people and culture in the US” (McDonald, 2007, p. 50). While it is believed that the concept of melting pot is a creation of “a new American culture (which) derives from numerous sources, in reality, they meant forcing ethnic minorities to adopt Anglo-American value (p.53). This assimilationist concept, or what Fredrick Jackson Turner called “Americanization” is opposed in the twentieth century with the belief that the it would destroy diversity of culture and ethnicity while promoting cultural homogenization (McDonald, p.51). Therefore, the pluralist notion of the diversity of ethnicites in the US is promoted. However, this notion also proves problematic, one of which, according to Jason McDonald, is that they “tend to treat ethnic cultures and groupings as though they are static, unchanged entities…” (McDonald, p 61). This is where Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* intervenes. The novel portrays neither assimilationist nor pluralist notion of American culture but the new assimilation-pluralist dichotomy, the fluidity of American cultural space (McDonald, p.61.) This demonstration throws into question not just assimilationist and pluralist but the whole idea of hyphenated identity.

It is inarguable that *Tropic of Orange* highlights the hybrid culture, character, or narrative through the diversity of ethnic minorities and multilingualism.

However, the fact that critics proposing that hybridity - both by the characterization of characters and their multilingualism - create the new order is simply a sweeping claim, which in turn overlooks the constant movement and struggle as well as deprives the narrative of its dynamic complexity. Nevertheless, recognizing only the difference within the narrative would only make the character's identities static and conditioned, which in fact is contradictory to Yamashita's characters in *Tropic of Orange*.

Explicitly explaining the difference between the terms hybridization and hybrid, Tabish Khair states that "hybridization is an active term that connotes an on-going process, while the hybrid... is static description. The hybrid *is*; it is not the endless process of becoming. (Moslund, p. 14). Through the notion of hybridization, Moslund suggests that it will:

> ...bring together the dichotomous poles they operate with, not to fuse these poles in a transcendentally balanced third space but to make them enter into an asymmetric dialectic in which each side of the binary is contaminated by the other but in an uneven fashion. Within this asymmetric dialectics, dichotomous poles cease from serving as states or conditions, being reactivated, instead, as dynamic forces. For instance, the implication of a finite condition or a state of self-sufficiency in nouns like 'monoglossia' or 'heteroglossia' or 'homogeneity' or 'heterogeneity' is replaced by the dynamic infinity of the present participle... (14).

This is why I believe hybridization best encapsulates the narrative of *Tropic of Orange*. It is important to note, first of all, that the novel contains a continuous struggle between centripetal force, the force toward sameness and centrifugal force, the force toward difference. The centripetal force is the central forces that confine people into predominated concept of identity and the dominant discourse of a culture. In contrast, the force toward difference, or centrifugal force, is the force that an individual struggles to be incorporated and confined. These two forces have been struggling against each other throughout the story. Reading *Tropic of Orange* in this perspective reveals that the novel does not portray a static identity of the hybrid characters nor illustrates a static organism of American culture that celebrates

only the difference. Rather, it demonstrates a continuous process of hybridization, which challenges the idea of identity, stereotype and nation state. In this chapter, I will explain the centrifugal forces in *Tropic of Orange*, the resistance by the characters against being incorporated into the dominant American cultural space. In the following chapter, I will look closely into the centripetal forces that critics in the past overlook, the forces that confine and organized these chaotic diversities.

One of the centrifugal forces in the story is demonstrated by the Asian American and Mexican American characters through their resistance to the identity given to them in the American cultural space. They refuse to conform to the oppressive forces as well as denying having a single, essentially static identity. Beginning with Bobby, a Chinese Singaporean whose identity seems to be changing constantly, Bobby is a Chinese descend who is born and raised in Singapore, but he pretends to be a Vietnamese in order to be qualified as a Vietnamese refugee migrating to the US. "Get questions. Bobby's gotta have a name. He says Ngu. Everybody's Ngu. He's Ngu too" (Yamashita, p 17). What Bobby does is to disguise his national identity, while his personal identity - his name - is also altered, all of which through his own choice. Bobby manages to do away with both his personal identity and national identity that he unconsciously received since he was born. However, Bobby consciously and intentionally turns from a Chinese to Singaporean (or Chinese Singaporean) then to Vietnamese by his own choice and finally to Asian American once he enters the United States. In Deleuze's term, Bobby sets himself in the line of flight, always on the constant becoming, a true groundless person. It should be noted, however, that although growing up eluding pure and homogeneous identity, Bobby's identity in the American cultural space becomes more static, having been defined and assigned a place in the dominant culture. How Bobby lives his life in the US is exactly like the so-called model minority, which is the role that Bobby is expected to play in the American cultural space. It is centripetal force of racial identity that governs Bobby's behavior in the U.S.

"What'd we do without you, Bobby, You saving our lives. Without you nothing gets done around here," (Yamashita, p.137) someone says to Bobby as he was cleaning garbage which implies that without him no one would do the job. Bobby,

however, does not respond, and when someone tells him he can go back to Vietnam, “he don’t say nothing. Pretends he was too little to remember” (Yamashita, p.137). Through these derogatory remarks, the Americans impose on Bobby the role he is expected to play in the society, propelling him into his peripheral place in the American cultural space, a subservient low-paid worker. Yet, Bobby is happy to perform that role: “Gotta be happy he’s alive in America. Saved by the Americans. New Country. new life. Working hard to make it. American through and through. Clearance proves it. he can haul out all the shredded documents he can carry. Doing America a favor. Doing his duty. That’s it (Yamashita, p.137). From a character whose identity is constantly changing, Bobby’s identity of Asian American model minority is defined. He works all kind of low-paid jobs, from washing dishes to chopping vegetables, cleaning floors to painting wall (Yamashita, p. 71), yet never complains about the discrimination nor underpayment. This is the example of centripetal forces of Los Angeles which confine its residents into the structure of power. Bobby seems to succumb to the centripetal force, with his identity designated and incoporated into the structure of power. However, Bobby whose identity has constantly changed since he was born willingly adopts this identity of an Asian minority only for the sake of his and his family’s welfare, like he has done when he distinguished himself as a Vietnamese in order to be transported into the US as an immigrant. Pretending to be an Asian minority gives him a new life, a son, a wife and a happy life in the US. What Bobby does is make the most use of the idea of identity in order to live a better life. If the centripetal force confines Bobby based on his race and gives him a place in the U.S., the centrifugal force is the fact that Bobby goes with the flow with whatever identity that is able to help him lead a better life. This, in effect, shows how arbitary the idea of identity is.

While Bobby makes the most use of the idea of identity by going with the flow, his wife Rafaela is totally against it. Growing up in Mexico, Rafaela becomes a member of the American society through the help of Bobby. But living in America with Bobby, Rafaela’s role is largely based on her Mexican identity and gender identity. Socially, Rafaela is forced to conform to the norm and accept the discrimination. In terms of gender, her role is to be mother and take care of Sol. The demand for Rafaela to comply with the dominant rule is the centripetal force that tries to

incorporate Rafaela into this structure of power. If she conforms, Rafaela will be part of the society with identity labeled on her. She will be defined and consequently be arranged by the city's central authority as to what group she belongs. Rafaela, however, decides to take the power into her own hands. She struggles against this domesticating force, taking part in the Justice for Janitors to call for the rights of the minority workers. In terms of gender, Rafaela is expected to stay home and raise a son. She, again, refuses to be identified by her gender, deciding instead to leave her husband. Bobby bought a vehicle through money he earned working the jobs for which he is discriminated in order for Rafaela to take care of Sol. This car signifies his attempt to confine Rafaela to be satisfied with her social and gender role. Rafaela leaving the car behind metaphorically stands for her resistance against this oppressive force. Although in the end she still has to take care of Sol, at least it is her choice to do so.

Nevertheless, as a culturally hybrid individual, Rafaela is able to understand both Mexican and American cultures. Her hybrid identity is demonstrated through her ability to perceive two worldviews. Rafaela is able to perceive magical events as described in the opening of the book:

> Rafaela Cortes spent the morning barefoot, sweeping both dead and living things from over and under beds, from behind doors and shutters, through archways along the veranda.... An iguana, a crab, and a mouse. And there was the scorpion, always dead... Every morning, she swept this mound of dead and wingling things to the and off the side of the veranda and into the dark green undergrowth with the same flourish (Yamashita, p.1).

This magical event is described as if it were a normal, everyday occurrence. According to the passage, Rafaela is neither scared nor surprise. She perceives it as if it were the event that she experiences every day. In fact, it is the worldview that she inherits from her mother, from whom she learns to read palms. Reading palm is considered superstition in the western world because it cannot be explained scientifically. Rafaela does not even know "why (she) reads palms. (She) always just done so" (Yamashita, p.11). Like the magical events mentioned above, the reading palm has automatically

become part of her worldview growing up. Therefore, she does not need to find the explanation for it, the same with the way she does not need explanation for the magical event happening at Gabriel's house. However, having been in the U.S. and studied in American education system, Rafaela somehow receives the scientific worldview. Therefore, although in the opening of the book she experiences the event as if it were something ordinary, occasionally she seeks logical answers to the events, asking the neighbor whether or not the crabs are normal in the area, and provides the logical answer for herself that "perhaps the crabs fall out of the trucks coming from Mazatlán" (Yamashita, p. 60). While she tries to understand the reason there are dead crabs in the house, she leaves the reason of the existence of snake, iguana, mouse despite closing all the windows and the doors unexplained. This double vision shows Rafaela's inability to stick to either worldview and demonstrate her hybridizing identity. Her identity is neither Mexican nor American but being both at the same time.

Though Bobby and Rafaela's idea of identity differ, their behaviour put a question mark on the idea of identity in the American cultural space. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition between Bobby's and Rafaela's view toward identity also demonstrates that the diversity of ethnic are not unidirectional.

Like Rafaela, Manzanar is trying to evade the centripetal force that defines him based on his racial and social identity as well as the organizing force of the central authority. Racially, Manzanar is a third generation Japanese American. Socially, he was once a highly respected surgeon. However, Manzanar neither considers himself a part of Japanese society nor cares about his position in the American cultural space. He gives up being a surgeon to become a homeless who conducts music on a concrete podium above a freeway of Los Angeles, a spot where people "most likely never noticed him" (Yamashita, p. 33), and although the Japanese American community try to convince him to come down from the podium because they consider Manzanar's behaviour a "blight on their image as the Model Minority" (Yamashita, p.34), the attempt is in vain. Through his own choice, Manzanar turns from a respected person to a "blight" of his racial community and "crazy" through the eyes of other L.A. residents. Becoming a homeless, Manzanar manages to do away with both his social identity and racial identity. As a result, his identity becomes blurring. While his current

identity is erased, the fact that he is a homeless manages to destabilize the credibility of his past identity. “He may or may not be an ex-surgeon. Manzanar may or may not be his real name, and he may not have been born at Manzana” (Yamashita, pp. 88-89). It is probable to state that Manzanar has become a non-binary. His decision to walk away from the norm of American cultural space and be *nobody* implies a resistance to the centripetal forces that defines a person by means of biology, career, or the place in which they live.

Similar to Manzanar, Emi struggles against the definition of her racial identity by refusing to conform to its racial code. From the outside, Emi is so “distant from the Asian female stereotype - it was questionable if she even had an identity” (Yamashita, p.20). However, she is still perceived by others as an Asian American and is required to behave according to her racial role. “Whatsa matter with you? your dad and I don’t talk like that. Your brother and sister don’t talk like that. In fact, no J.A. talks like that” (Ymashita, p.22), her mother said to her. Emi’s answer shows, however, that she denies conforming to the fixed code of behavior a Japanese American is expected to comply: “Maybe i’m not Japanese American…”

While her boyfriend Gabriel is struggling with his decision whether to move back home or stay in L.A. permanently, a dilemma which demonstrates his attempt to reconcile his Mexican and American identities, Emi never once thinks about or express her interest in her homeland nor her Japanese American community. Emi defines herself as more as a modern woman interested in technology and her career than being preoccupied with how to assimilate into the American society or how to reconcile with the conflicting identities that ethnic American literary works usually portray. This is shown through how Emi refuses to be neither Asian nor Asian American in the scene where she is dining with Gabriel in a sushi restaurant. Emi says “cultural diversity is bullshit,” adding later that “I hate being multicultural” (Yamashita, p. 111).

While Emi and Manzanar struggles against the centripetal forces through the denial of social and racial definition, identifying themselves neither with Asian nor Asian American, Gabriel’s reaction against the centripetal force is similar to Rafaela. The centrifugal force in Gabriel’s case is demonstrated through the fluidity of his identity. Gabriel is suspended between the two identities. His identity is unstable and

does not root firmly in either Mexico or America. Originally from Mexico, Gabriel is an American-educated reporter who lives and works in Los Angeles for a long time. At the same time, he tries to build a house in Mexico, hoping that once it finishes, he will move there. The house he is trying to build symbolically represents his hybridization identity. It is being constructed within Mexican territory with "a kind of old-style ranchero, circa 1800, with rustic touches, thick adobelike walls and beams, but with modern appliances" (Yamashita, p. 9) while several trees around the house were brought down from the North. The combination between Mexican-style house, modern appliances and trees sent from the North makes the house hybrid, like Gabriel's identity. Gabriel's desire to relocate to Mexico is equivalent to his attempt to reconnect with his own root, but as a hybrid, he is unable to do so without bump. Much as he wants to return, he is unable to abandon the fast-paced and vibrant life in Los Angeles "for the endless lull of a private paradise" (Yamashita, p. 41). Gabriel is wavering either to reconnect with his root or being American. In other words, he is unable to reconcile the two identities. His identity is thus unstable, so is the house he tries to build. If the house in Mazatlan symbolically stands for his attempt to reconnect with Mexican identity, the fact that it will never finish demonstrates Gabriel's endless process of trying to reconcile the two identities within him, representing the process of hybridization. This process, nevertheless, shows that Gabriel is a rootless individual, and the fact that he keeps asking himself whether he can actually connect with his root ridicules the idea of authentic identity and rootness.

Bhabha (as quoted in Moslund, 2010) points out that "[t]he aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization" (66). Relying on this notion, Moslund states that migration literature often resists totalization through the hyphenated identities:

> In migration literature the deliberate foregrounding of hybridity, or the thematisation of a centrifugal kind of hybridity, is often expressed through hyphenated identities.... The hyphenated identity of, say, an 'Indian-English' protagonist may serve to illustrate what I see as the two principal ways in which intentional hybridity is proposed as an assertion of

> difference and a deterritorialisation of sameness – that is, two ways of escaping the supposed Sameness of both Indian and English identity (p.66)

These hyphenated identities, noted Moslund, are expressed two ways: first through the characters that "incorporate(s) not one but several cultural identities simultaneously, forming a multi- and transcultural identity which is not *either* one *or* the other but *both and*" (67) and through the creation of characters who have "no ground, of restless, nomadic groundlessness, a hybridity of *neither-nor"* (67). The centrifugal forces against centripetal forces of racialized identity is illustrated through the self-definition as *both and* and *neither-nor* hyphenated identities of Asian American characters and Mexican American characters. Emi and Manzanar represents the *neither-nor* through their refusal to be neither Japanese nor Japanese American, while Gabriel and Rafaela represent the *both and* type, being both Mexican and American.

Instead of creating a stable third space, the hybridization identities of the characters - the fact that their identity is unstable and fluid - indicates that identities are a constant process rather than a state. The characters express their resistance against the centripetal forces of American culture and its structure of power through their self-definition and identity fluidity which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to categorize them based on their racial identity, background, and gender identity.

Apart from the centripetal force of racial identity, English language is another centripetal force in the story. English language is regarded as the lingua franca in the American cultural space. It is a medium through which characters and the city's residents communicate as well as govern their expression and perception. The centrifugal force, though, lies on the distinctive ways that the characters use the language. Critics have pointed out that the novel features several narrative voices to represent each ethnic dialect in order to highlight the diversity of characters' identities. Raussert, for example, states that "(by) giving every character an individual narrative voice, seven perspectives are featured to envision seven different worlds coexisting and later collaborating in Los Angeles. Thus, a 'narrative polyphony" (Pooch, p. 21). Borrowing Murashige's term, Pooch states that *Tropic of Orange* contains the

multilingual narration. Explaining thoroughly about the multilingual narration of the novel, Pooch states that

> In the novel, specific language is used as an indicator for ethnic diversity when, as Yamashita states in an interview, the "rhythmic sound sensibility" is translated into the seven protagonists' different narrative voices. While speaking through the main characters, the style of writing is altered from, for example, simple and basic (Bobby Ngu), to street-talk (Buzzworm), to poetic (Arcangel), and to a kind of detective style (Gabriel Balboa). This "chorus of voices" emphasizes the 'pan-cultural' approach in the novel. Moreover, English, Japanese, and Spanish are incorporated to highlight the diversity of the novel's characters because global processes of hybridization are translated into literature with the use of multiple languages (p.184).

It is inarguable that each character uses English, but the different way of using it represents multilingualism and consequently underline the diversity of American ethnic groups. Nevertheless, how the characters use the language is another way to define their own selves. In line with his character as an uneducated, subservient worker, Bobby's story is told through simple, incomplete, ungrammatical sentences. The story of the fourth generation Japanese American Emi, who is depicted as modern woman, very much interested in technology rather than ethnic identities, is therefore narrated with slang, electronic jargons and pop culture terms. Having been educated in the US, Rafaela and Gabriel tell their stories in complete, grammatically correct sentences, with the latter containing report-style overtone that represents his profession. Arcangel, whose identity is always on the process of becoming, tells the stories through several languages as well as using both prose and poetry in a few different genres. As a result, it is impossible to put him in any particular pigeonhole.

Archangel is the character who most obviously resists the confinement of America's language identity. The only character in the story who has never lived in Los Angeles, or at least as we learn throughout the story, Archangel's background is vague, much as his identity: "No one knew where he came from/ or how long he had lived,/

how many years,/ decades,/ and yet he seemed a child,/ yet not such a child to be without season/ nor such an old man to be without reason" (Yamashita, p.42), he speaks both Spanish and English. His accent is "a jumble of unknown dialects, guttural and whining, Latin mixed with every aboriginal, colonial, slave, or immigrant tongue, a great confusion discernible to all and to none at all" (Yamashita, p.43). He is nevertheless a mixture of literary conventions. With wing on his back, hole on his torso, ability states to shapeshift, etc, his characteristics is described with magical realist elements, narrated both in prose and poetry. In terms of poetry, "he did big epics and short poetry—as short as a single haiku—romantic musicals, political scandal, and, as they say, comical tragedy and tragical comedy" (Yamashita, p.43). Throughout the story, Archangel tells that he has been to numerous places and doing countless jobs. It is thus impossible to put him in one particular identity pigeonhole. Like Bobby before coming to the U.S., Archangel manages to evade any possibility to be defined and categorized. He was always on a process of becoming. However, arriving at the U.S. border, Archangel faces the centripetal force that operates within the territory, regulating and domesticating the residents. The immigration officers ask for his identification card, for his social security (Yamashita, p.181), and even force him to speak English. The function of green card is to identify who the holder is, where he/she comes from, when he/she is born. In other word, through green card, Arcangel's identity is to be defined based on his race, language, and jobs. He will be categorized and organized in the American system. Archangel resists against the domesticating force by refusing to speak the language he is forced to and denies to comply to what the immigration officer tell him to do.

Los Angeles seems to be portrayed as a city with no centre. in *Tropic of Orange* Lurking underneath the chaotic portrayal of identity and movment within the city however is the centripetal force operated by the central authority which attempts to categorizes the characters and its residents based on their racial identity and assign them a space in Los Angeles. Agianst this central power is the centrifugal forces illustrated by the characters' resistance to obey the central authority or their plan to build the city and divide people based on racial and social identity. Bobby, for example, have been living in the Korean Town despite his racial identity as Asian

American. Similarly, Manzanar destroys the boundary drawn by central authority by turning a public space into an accommodation. Buzzworm, who studies the master plan of the bureaucrats, has the plan which he called "gentrification," the plan that "people living there become their own gentry. Self-gentrification by a self-made set of standards and respectability. Do-it-yourself gentrification" (Yamashita, p. 74). While the centrifugal forces portrayed by the Asian American and Mexican American are the resistance against racialized identity, African American character Buzzworm's centrifugal force is portrayed through how he tries to mark territory against the bureaucrat power, the reaction against spatialized identity.

While the characters resists against the centripetal forces from within the established structure of power, the orange functions as the external factor that destabilizes the static geographical identity of the U.S., challenges the idea of spatialized, social, racial identity determined by dominant American culture, and destroys binarism that divides people based on spatialized identity, social identity, and racial identity. The magical orange is the novel's symbolic centre. Falling from an orange tree brought from Riverside, "maybe the descendent of the original trees first brought to California from Brazil," planted in Mazatlan and described as "aberrant" (Yamashita, p. 14), the orange represents a hybrid. The magical orange comes into being in the land that the tropic of cancer cuts apart the world into north and south. If hybridity is the idea that two or more things combined symmetrically which challenges the traditional concept of pure identity, then the mobility of this magical orange takes the concept of hybridity a step further, presenting the idea of hybridization. The movement of the orange shows that the world is not a mixture between two balanced hemispheres. It is always on a constant movement and as a consequence throw into question the geographicalized identity of the US territory.

When Arcangel brings the orange with him as he is to cross the border, the arbitrary orange, which has an imaginary line attached to it, drags the line that divides the north and the south. The shift of the U.S. border line demonstates that the border is illusionary. Nevertheless, the movement of orange into the U.S. territory consequently distorts time and space in Los Angeles. The characters sense the distortion differently. The following quote describes how Buzzworm perceives the distortion: "He was talking

about the rain, how it flooded, how the sun was out right after like it never happened. Something about it being like Alaska. The sun never going away" (Yamashita, p.56), while Manzanar "could see the undulating patterns and the changing geography corrupting the sun's shadows, confusing time..." (Yamashita, p. 177). As the orange moves into Los Angeles, social identity and spatialized identity are redefined. The binary division of centre and periphery is reversed. The whole order and organized system of the city is disrupted. The freeways become a space where homeless live. Cars become accommodation. The voiceless and peripheral homeless L.A. people move into the centre and are featured all over the television, becoming central attention of the city. While the internal centrifugal forces of the characters against the centripetal force of predefined identity, the magical orange function as an external centrifugal force that challenges the concept of geographicalized identity, destabilizes static racial and social identity, subverts the binary, and sets the city of Los Angeles and US on constant movement.

The centrifugal forces in *Tropic of Orange* are portrayed through the characters' denial of social, racial, and spatial definition. The orange, nevertheless, disrupts the order of the whole Los Angeles city. These show that the hybrid characters, the city and its cultural space is not a mere static state of hybridity, but the the struggle between the sameness and difference, the hybridizing process.

CHAPTER 3

CENTRIPETAL FORCES IN *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

From diversity of languages and identities to the characters' resistance against the oppressive forces that attempt to confine them, the centrifugal forces manifest clearly throughout the novel. As such, the study of the novel has focused largely on such terms as diversity and hybridity. Discussion have been circulating around how Los Angeles contains heterogeneity and portrays globalization. However, the forces that confine and organize the characters and its diverse social and racial identities into the structure of power, those which operate underneath the portrayal of Los Angeles' as a vibrant and diverse city, have been largely overlooked. Therefore, over the course of this chapter, I will explore the forces that organize and categorize the characters into the dominant American cultural space.

One mechanism that "channels and distributes force of difference… to a certain regularity" (Moslund, p 48) in *Tropic of Orange* is a fixed code of race and social status which require residents to adhere to based on their identity. Identity is imposed upon the characters, defining and categorizing them according to their race, gender, job, etc. Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* suggests that identity, from race to nationality, gender to class, assigns a place in a society, gives reasons to do things, tells how to behave according to the group that his/her identity belongs to, and "give others the reason to do things to you" (24), and apart from which, the use of identity is to succumb one to the structure of power:

> Among the most significant things people do with identities is use them as the basis of hierarchies of status and respect and of structures of power. Caste in South Asia means some people are born into a higher status than others… and so an important form of struggle over identity occurs when people challenge the assumptions that lead to unequal distributions of power (24).

Through the fixed code of race, the characters in *Tropic of Orange* are gradually confined and incorporated into the American culture. They perform the role based on their social and racial identities. How they are treated and how they treat others is also based on such ideas.

Bobby, whose identity constantly shift since he was born, is forced to succumb to the structure of power when he lives in the U.S. From Chinese to Singaporean to Vietnamese, Bobby's identity keeps shifting to the point it is difficult to pinpoint his authentic identity and his original homeland. Bobby's identity in the U.S., however, is defined as an Asian American. Based on his racial identity, he is thus expected to live as a model minority. He has to work under-paid jobs, yet unable to complain. The centripetal force Bobby faces is the force that confines him into the system that an Asian Americans are supposed to be living in the periphery.

However, as long as his family lives well in the U.S., Bobby does not mind what identity he has been given. In Bobby's perception, he can adopt whatever identity in order to have a better life. This is the worldview that Bobby expects his wife, Rafaela, to have. For Bobby, Rafaela should be happy with what they have despite discrimination due to their minority identity. But while all Bobby wants is to work and earn enough for the benefit of the family, Rafaela wants more. She is aware of the discrimination she and Bobby has to endure in Los Angeles: "...we're not wanted here," she tells Bobby, "Nobody respects our work. Say we coast money. Live on welfare. It's a lie. We pay taxes..." (Yamashita, p.71). Therefore, Rafaela joins Justice for Janitors to call for the rights of the minority workers as well as keeps encouraging Bobby to understand his rights. Bobby, however, does not. "He says he works the morning job and gets benefit. Why is she complaining" (Yamashita, p. 18). Their separation is thus due to the difference of their views toward the notion of identity.

Like Bobby, Asian American characters in *Tropic of Orange* - Emi and Manzanar - are also expected to be Asian regardless of how they define themselves. Emi was born and raised in America. Therefore, she associates herself more with technology and her job as an editor in a local news outlet, while occasionally denies defining herself as Asian nor Asian American. But as a Japanese descent, Emi is expected by people around her to speak and act like a Japanese and be

knowledgeable about the community to which her racial identity belongs. Her mother, for example, complains that she does not talk or act like Japanese American. Likewise, Gabriel expects her to know about people in the Japanese community, asking her whether she knows Manzanar because "he's sansei" (Yamashita, p.97). Saying she does not know him, Gabriel replies: "Do you know anything about your community at all?" These indicates that although Emi defines herself differently, she is yet expected to be a Japanese by the others.

Manzanar, once a respectable Japanese American surgeon, decides to become a homeless conductor on the freeway of Los Angeles. His behavior is considered "a blight on their image as the Model Minority" (Yamashita, p.34) by the Japanese American community which attempts to remove him from the overpass. Similar to Emi's case, the Japanese American community's attempt shows that there is a standard behavior to which Manzanar, a member of the community, is required to adhere. No matter how Manzanar thinks of himself, based on his racial identity, he is part of Japanese American community. The force toward sameness to confine Asian American characters in *Tropic of Orange* is the requirement for them to behave according to the fixed codes of their racial identity, either as part of an Asian American group or as model minority. Those who do not conform to the norm, Manzanar and Emi for instance, are considered *crazy* and *unacceptable.*

Originally from Mexico, Gabriel is an American-educated reporter who lives and works in Los Angeles for a long time. At the same time, he tries to build a house in the land in Mexico, hoping that once it finishes, he will move there. Though from Mexico, Gabriel is a foreigner through the eyes of Mexican in Mazatlan while more of a native in L.A. territory. For Mexican, "Gabriel is a "young Chicano who had a college education and whose grandfather had fought with Pancho and ended up in Los Angeles" (Yamashita, p.9). Gabriel is an American middle class who loves living in the vibrant L.A. city. He speaks English language frequently, while struggling with the Spanish which he thinks is "foreign words…" (Yamashita, p. 22), works in American media industry and consume American cultural products. Both Gabriel and Emi are capable of understanding the American cultural products and terms commonly

understood among residents living in the US, especially old American movies that normally sounds unfamiliar to foreign ears.

Another centripetal force that regulates and confines the difference in *Tropic of Orange* is the main setting of the narrative, Los Angeles, the city that a critic defined as "a city with 'no unifying center' (Pooch, p.174). Represented by the novel as a fragmented and heterogenous city, L.A. is a place where distinct ethnic residents, from Asian American, African American, Mexican American to Anglo American, coexist. Accordingly, there are numerous languages and several communities. Its intertwined freeway system functions as a representation of the dynamicity, while the movement of people on the freeway and the fact that the characters are constantly moving domestically and internationally gives readers a picture of highly dynamic city. The following quote shows that even the city itself is described as changing from time to time: "Buzzworm remembered conversations he had with people saying they used to live here or there. Now here or there is a shopping mall, locate the old house somewhere between Mrs. Field's and the Footlocker. Or here or there is now the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, or Union Station, or the Bank of America, Arco Towers, New Otani, or the freeway" (Yamashita, p.72).

While the city and its people seem to always move or change disorderly, there is somehow an organizing system and a pattern operating behind these seemingly chaotic dynamic. Manzanar stands on his podium on freeway, overlooking the city. As he excludes himself from the system, looking from outside and above enables him to see the big picture of the city and allows him to distinguish the pattern or system out of its chaos. For example, the freeway system, which seems to be chaotic, is described by him as a "manageable traffic," where "cars swooped at steady intervals…" (chapter 5). Looking at the traffic, Manzanar can predict at what time the commuters will arrive at their destination, and the pattern of how people live their live in this city before they merge into this manageable traffic, those who are divided based on the categories of the industries in which they work:

> Spread across these infrastructure was yet another of Manzanar's grids: his map of labor. It was those delicate vulnerable creature within those machines that made this happen: a thing called work. Every day, he

> saw them scatter across the city this way and that, divvying themselves up into the garment district, the entertainment industry, the tourist business, the military machine, the service sector, the automotive industry, the education industry, federal, county, and city employees, union workers, domestics, and day labor. *It was work that defined each person in the city, despite the fact that almost everyone wanted to be defined by their leisure* (emphasis added, Yamashita, p. 203).

This pattern and organized system are governed by the centripetal force of social identity that is imposed on the residents of Los Angeles. Manzanar's *map of labor* shows that residents are defined and divided based on the concept of job categories. Their movement is based on the idea of social identity shaped by what they do for a living. Similar to Manzanar's map, what Buzzworm calls a *map* functions as a centripetal force that defines people based on their racial identity. Showing "which police departments covered which beats; which local, state and federal politicians claimed which constituents; which kind of colored people (brown, black, yellow) lived where; which churches/temples served which people; which schools got which kids; which taxpayers were registered to vote…" (Yamashita, p. 72), the contemporary Los Angeles map demonstrates that there is a central American authority that categorizes the residents based on their skin color, social status, and religion, in other words, their identities. With the characters being labeled based on their skin color and racial background, the City of Angels arranges residents with the same identity into the same place of the city. L.A. has the ability to decide who should be where. Buzzworm's grandmother spent her whole life working to buy a house in which Buzzworm is living. However, the house can be easily displaced as "time and paper on their side" (Yamashita, p. 73). The bureaucrat is thus the force toward sameness that regulates the diversity of its resident, put together people with same identity and arrange them in places.

As demonstrated, the city of Los Angeles has the centripetal forces that define its residents according to their racial and social identity and consequently categorize them. How the characters in *Tropic of Orange* are treated is based on their

social identity which is defined by their jobs. Bobby who works a low-paid job, for example, are often discriminated. Manzanar was highly respected when he was a surgeon, but when he became a homeless, he turns to be a "blight" of the Japanese American community and crazy in the eyes of the majority.

Language also functions as a centripetal force. When Arcangel is about to cross the border from South to North, he spoke Spanish to the immigration officers even though the officers speak English to him.

> "What is your name?
> "Cristobal Colón."
> "How old are you?"
> "Quinientos y algunos años."
> "When were you born?"
> "El doce de octubre de mil cuatrocientos noventa y dos" (Yamashita, pp. 170-1)

Finally, Archangel is ordered to speak English: "SPEAK ENGLISH NOW." People coming to live in this territory will gradually be incorporated into this structure of language regardless of their background, race, and gender. Thus, English lays a common ground for the characters in the story. It is the central structure governing the characters' expression and perception. With English language, although the characters are different, they are able to communicate and interact with each other. Language thus function as the organizing core of this diverse community, striping people of their language diversity and weave them together difference with dominant language identity.

Traditionally, society and culture are considered autonomous. According to Nikos Papastergiadis in his book *The Turbulance of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization*, how people used to think of society can be compared to a machine; it was systematic, "pattern could… be determined and outcome predicted" (Papastergiadis, p. 101). Similarly, culture was a set of practices and beliefs characterizing a group of people" (Papastergiadis, p.101). Nikos notes that this "encouraged a way of thinking about the identity of subjects and places as if they could be defined prior to the interactions between them" (p.101). Through the struggle between centrifugal

forces and centripetal forces as I have demonstrated, Los Angeles in *Tropic of Orange* presents instead the diversity and constant movement of identities, thus managing to do away with the thinking of society, culture and identity as pure and static, but under the surface of the diversity, dynamicity, and movement of people and space, the space of Los Angeles and culture still contains organizing system. Its mobility progresses in pattern with organized diversity. The characters' force toward difference versus dominant American culture's and Los Angeles' force toward sameness shows the process that Moslund calls hybridization. American culture as well as the characters' identities are portrayed by *Tropic of Orange* as a constant process of becoming.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

The terms hybridity and heterogeneity have become buzzwords as postcolonial theory rises in the late twentieth century. The concept has been widely adopted to reading literary works. Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* is no exception. Many of its criticism discuss its diversity, hybridity, and heterogeneity, with the emphasis on the context of the current globalization era. It is no surprise though, as the novel consists of the characters with diverse backgrounds, the dynamic of Los Angeles, as well as vibrancy of cultures and diversity of languages. American culture represented by the main setting Los Angeles is regarded as a hybrid culture, while the characters are considered hybrid because of their background and dialects. However, while the context have been thoroughly discussed in many of previous studies, the process of hybridity portrayed by the novel as well as its textual elements have largely been overlooked. This study therefore turns the focus back onto its textual elements, and with the concept of hybridization, the new shades of these character's hybrid identities, Los Angeles' dynamicity, and narrative complexity are revealed

Instead of celebrating hybridity and diversity, closer look into the narrative reveals the centripetal forces that confine the characters to spatial, racial, and social identity through central authority and dominant American ideology. Remaining in heterogeneous cultural space of *Tropic of Orange* is the commonness among these diverse identities and stability in the complex dynamic of Los Angeles. Meanwhile, there are forces toward difference or centrifugal forces which are illustrated through the characters' struggle to conform to the central forces and be homogenized. The two forces struggle against each other, portraying the constant movement of a culture and the hybridization of identity over the course of the book. Therefore, the American cultural space in *Tropic of Orange* is not a space with diverse yet static identities. Rather, it portrays the hybridization process that raises questions not only on personal level but also on the form of geographialized identity, spatialized identity, and language identity.

Nevertheless, through the hybridization, *Tropic of Orange* moves a step further in Asian American literary movement. In the past, Asian immigrants in the US were stereotyped as either bad Asian, "a sinister villains and brute hordes, neither of which can be controlled by the Anglos and both of which must therefore be destroyed" or good Asian or model minority, the subservient figure who succumb to dominant American. Therefore, Asian immigrant writers from the early period tried to subvert this stereotype by asserting the new identity by representing Asian American apart from the picture imposed on them by dominant American culture (Kim, Elaine H., 1982). This attempt, however, lies on the essentialization of race and binary logic that divided Asian and American, as Youngsuk Chae notes, "most literary works presented by Asian American writers have been understood within hierarchical binaries of us/them, Self/Other, First world/Third world, and familiar/exotic. The hierarchical perspective in effect differentiates "Americans" internally into colored races (p. 13). The long-standing attempt of Asian American writers to assert the new identity of Asian American is consequently challenged by the more recent theorist and critics, especially in the late twentieth century which saw the emergence of the postcolonial theories advocating such terms as hybridity, heterogeneity, and diversity. According to Bella Adams, heterogeneity emerges as a new, important theme of Asian American literature because of several reasons, for instance, the effect of Asian American identity politics, other minority movements, the emergence of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak and novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan (pp. 143-6). Lisa Lowe in 1991 published an influential article "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" in which she introduces a new approach to the writing and reading of Asian American literature. She points out that, in the past, Asian American literature has been written and studied based on the binary logic of Asian and American and the essentialization of Asian American. The assertion of Asian American identity, thus, destroys the diversity among Asian American and Asian immigrants, as she says

> I want to suggest that essentializing Asian American identity and suppressing our differences—of national origin, generation, gender, party, class—risks particular dangers: not only does it underestimate the

> differences and hybridities among Asians, but it also inadvertently supports the racist discourse that constructs Asians as a homogeneous group, that implies we are "all alike" and conform to "types"; in this respect, a politics based exclusively on ethnic identity willingly accepts the terms of the dominant logic that organizes the heterogeneous picture of racial and ethnic diversity into a binary schema of "the one" and "the other (p. 30).

According to Lowe, binarism dividing American and Asian operates two ways based on “difference” and “sameness.” The “difference” is to exclude Asian American because they are different from Anglo-American, while the “sameness” is to essentialize and unify Asian Americans (p.31). Drawing on Franz Fanon’s proposal that binarism is the legacy of colonialism and in order to subvert it, one needs a new order, Lowe cautions against politics of nationalism and separatism, while promoting heterogeneity and hybridity among Asian American as the site of resistance to dominant American ideology.

Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* is composed in contrast to the conventional Asian American literary works that tried to assert the new, yet single essentialized Asian identity. Rather, she utilizes hybridity and heterogeneity that Lowe proposes in her fiction to create the new order as opposed to the counteractive discourse. This approach is apparent in the characterization of the characters. Nevertheless, the novel does not focus only on Asian American characters but in fact creates the networks of different ethnicities, and as I have demonstrated, it does not portray only the static hybridity but the process of hybridization. With identities constantly shifting, it is impossible to put the characters in a single pigeon hole. The hybridization demonstrated through the shifting of characters’ identities, disrupted order of Los Angeles, and the moving space of US border throw into questions the concept of social, racial, and geographical identity. Accompanied by the combination of several ethnic characters and diversity of language, these have set the novel on the new direction of ethnic American literature.

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BIOGRAPHY

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