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**(Re)Turn of the Abject: Representation of Asian (American)  
Masculinity in the West**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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## 감사의 말

이 논문을 사랑하는 가족들, 특히 부모님께 바칩니다. 두 분의 무한하고 흔들림 없는 사랑과 인내와 지원이 있었기에 이 여정이 가능했습니다. 또한 안타깝게도 논문을 마무리하는 동안 세상을 떠나셨지만 이 소식에 많이 기뻐하셨을 할아버지와 외할머니께도 늦게나마 소식을 전합니다.

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## **Declaration**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

The thesis makes references to a thesis previously submitted for a master's degree at Yonsei University – the thesis is referenced in the bibliography list appropriately.

Jung Ju Shin  
September 2020

## **Abstract**

### **(Re)Turn of the Object: Representation of Asian American Masculinity in the West**

This thesis examines the Western representation of Asian masculinity in Anglophone literary and popular cultural texts, to discuss how and why these texts illustrate the ways in which the existing hegemonic racial and gender norms maintain and reinforce privilege. The concept of masculinity offers a coherent framework for the investigation of the nature of hegemony. Based on the theoretical frames of hegemonic masculinity and (racial) abjection, the thesis aims to offer an extended understanding of the ideological reconstruction of hegemonic relations between the East and the West and of the changing position of East Asia within contemporary Western as well as global imagination. The system of global neoliberal capitalism still assumes the hegemony of white masculinity and more importantly, works to maintain and reinforce it. I argue that as national/global abject, Asian (American) masculinity reflects relations of power and that behind the celebrated return of the abject to the centre, white hegemonic masculinity still directs the fate of the abject and eventually returns it to its own place of exile, causing the second(ary) abjection that is more difficult to recognise and challenge than before. Through investigation of topics such as racial and gender in/visibility, legacy and lineage, hybridity, the thesis highlights the continuing influence and legacy of white hegemonic masculinity in the allegedly post-racial, post-gender society we live in. The thesis also locates conflicting impulses of reinforcement of and intervention to hegemonic racial and gender ideals within the representations. It examines how hegemony operates within the texts to shape representations of masculinities to the advantage of white hegemonic masculinity, while they also harbour desires to explore possibilities of challenging and disavowing previous forms of hegemony, and asks how we can register progressive changes to the current uneven dynamics of racial and gender hegemony moving away from the repetitive cycle of abjection.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, national abjection, racial abject, Asian (American) masculinity, racialisation



## **Notes on Abbreviations:**

FS = *Full Sea = On Such A Full Sea*

PI = *A Person = A Person of Interest*

SP = *Snowpiercer*

TWD = *The Walking Dead*

## Introduction

### 1. Masculinities, Hegemonic Masculinity and Asian American Men

Han: Tonight you will do side work.

Max: Hold up girl, I have ten minutes till my shift starts.

Han: Max, that is not appropriate. I'm your boss, don't call me "girl."

Max: Yes, ma'am.

Han: Okay, you want to play? I will play. Hey sir, hey big Manny man, why don't you show me your penis?

Max: Han, you know I don't have a penis. It's the only thing we have in common.

*2 Broke Girls*. S03 E02 "And the Kickstarter"

That doesn't mean we give up. Steve goes to the gym; Joe buys every piece of Supreme clothing he can afford; and I've got jokes. They're the cultural modifications we see as antidotes to our issues with masculinity. But no matter how successful I was, how much self-improvement was made, or how aware I was that stereotypes are not facts, there were times I thoroughly believed that no one wanted anything to do with me. I told myself that it was all a lie, but the structural emasculation of Asian men in all forms of media became a self-fulfilling prophecy that produced an actual abhorrence to Asian men in the real world.

Hey, Steve Harvey, Who Says I Might Not Steal Your Girl?

Eddie Huang. Jan. 14, 2017.

We can't continue to allow China to rape our country and that's what they are doing

Donald Trump. May 2, 2016

Republican Party's presidential nomination campaign

What we are witnessing is the last gasp of a dying group

Michael Kimmel

America is a *man*. No one can deny it. "Why don't you show me your penis?" A Korean immigrant diner owner asks his white American *female* employee (named nothing other than "Max, Black," of course) who demasculinises him to show her

penis (2 *Broke Girls* S03 E02). Even as Max insists that she does not have a penis, she is masculine by default as an American. Her penis is real, unlike Han's symbolically non-existing one. Likewise, no matter how the president insists it is a she facing threats from other countries, the whole world can see America's swinging penis next to its guns and rockets. It is manlier than all of its enemies.

Yet of course, not all Americans are man enough. The masculinity of some Americans is subject to question, doubt, and ridicule. There can be many reasons for those men whose masculinity fall short of the standard of American hegemonic masculinity today. The thesis focuses on one particular criterion among them, that is, race. It may sound obsolete to say that Asian Americans, or Asian men, are considered non-masculine in the twenty-first century as we see celebrations of Asian masculinity, representations of strong, powerful Asian (American) men. There supposed to be no more hierarchy among races. Yet, the thesis asks questions for our Steve, Joe and Eddie: If we take pleasure in the seeming disappearance of the white supremacist hegemony, and the triumph of the East(ern men) in our everyday life and from the literary, cinematic, cultural texts that we encounter daily, why are Steve, Joe and Eddie still struggling? Why do we laugh at Max's joke, why does it make sense? Have we moved beyond the structural cycle of hegemony in our colourblind age of globalised, neoliberal capitalism? In order to answer these questions, the thesis turns to the fields of critical race studies, psychoanalysis, as well as literary and cultural, and of course Asian American studies, which provide a vocabulary for the critical articulation of the cultural, political, socioeconomic processes with which gendered racialisation occur and continue to persist, renew and transform in the age of neoliberal capitalism and multiculturalism that feast on the language of colour blindness. The thesis firstly looks at the history of the colonial relationship between the West and the East, and the gendered racialisation that categorised Asian as feminine following the gendered division of power that places masculinity above femininity. The thesis then proposes that the celebration of Asian (American) masculinity in recent years, its seeming ascendance, or what the thesis calls the "return" of it from its place of exclusion and abjection, is in fact only a part of a process of its second abjection that modifies but also consolidates its secondary position within the racially hierarchical structure of hegemonic masculinity. My framework for analysis is built upon Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and Karen

Shimakawa's concept of national abjection. Through what I call the "second(ary)" abjection, Asian (American) masculinity which returns from its abjected place returns from, and being returned to, its position of abjection, once its contribution to the reinforcement of the white hegemonic masculinity in its time of crisis and necessity is finished. Its abject position ultimately does not change; when it claims the status and identity of hegemonic masculinity it often ends up cooperating in its project of remasculinisation. The scenario is what the thesis discovers in many popular texts, such as movies, novels, and TV shows. I also propose that in the texts that feature Asian (American) heroes that we take pleasure in, there is the narrative of second(ary) abjection that actually reinforces racial hierarchy and repeats the abjection of Asian (American) masculinity.

The thesis builds on prior scholarship on Asian American cultural representation and 'U.S.' conceptualisations of masculinity including archetypes such as the cowboy or the Vietnam vet, to discuss primarily the racialised representation of Asian American masculinity. The thesis therefore also introduces some popular stereotypes of Asian Americans such as the model minority. However, gendered racialisation of Asianness can be found outside of the United States, spread across the globe indicating the globalisation of popular representations of particular gendered, racialised "types." There is a risk of generalisation to widening the scope of discussion from the U.S. to the world, to the general West-East relations. The thesis therefore focuses primarily on the representation of Asian American masculinity. Still, it often puts "American" in the brackets to say "Asian (American)" to remind the reader of the power of American discourses that are globally disseminated, and also the history of white, Western colonialism which runs prior to, and has shaped the U.S. discourses of race.

Traditionally, Asian American women were hypersexualised and hyperfeminised while men were desexualised, feminised/effeminised. Richard Fung describes the popular Western representation of Asian men as following two categories: "the egghead/wimp, or – in what may be analogous to the lotus blossom – dragon lady dichotomy – the kung fu master/ninja/samurai. He is sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism" (Fung 148). The stereotype is not simply native to the U.S. but comes, as can be inferred from Fung's analysis, from white European colonial

discourses that grades humans by race: the so-called hierarchy or ladder of races. Fung describes the Western discourse of racial gendering that places East Asians on one end of the spectrum and blacks on the other, so that whites can fall in the middle as the norm: “a dominant discourse on race and sexuality in Western society – a system of ideas and reciprocal practices that originated in Europe simultaneously with (some argue as a conscious justification for) colonial expansion and slavery” (146). As Fung indicates, with globalisation, Western, especially North American, media representation has gained worldwide influence, and with it, the discourse of white normativity has been widely disseminated throughout the globe. Condemnation of racial difference from hegemonic whiteness manifests in racialised gender and sexual stereotypes in Western literary and media representation. Racial others are ascribed with stereotypes that embody different cultural connotations for each racial group. In opposition to the “masculine” West, Asia has been considered feminine.

In Joon-ho Bong’s film *Snowpiercer* (2013)<sup>1</sup> the train runs on the blood of the other race – lower class passengers. In *Snowpiercer*, the earth has succumbed to a new ice age after a failed experiment to reverse global warming, and the last remnants of humanity are reduced to a single train, “Snowpiercer,” which circles around the globe in perpetual motion in order to remain alive. The lower classes, the surplus population who have “illegitimately” boarded the train, are crammed at the back of the train (“tail section”) and face threats to survival while the upper classes, “legitimate” passengers who have the rights to be on the train, maintain a luxurious life in the front carriages. Depictions of the appropriation of racialised labour and biopolitical control of racialised population reflect Bong’s concerns about institutional abuses, capitalism, neoliberal governance, issues of citizenship, migration, and refugees. *Snowpiercer* parallels human and food to reveal the ways in which cannibalistic exploitation continues within the system. In addition to routine exploitation of their labour and violence imposed on them to maintain hierarchy and order, the train consumes the lower class/racialised bodies in another shocking example. The beginning of the film shows Wilford’s guards take two small children,

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<sup>1</sup> The film is based on a French graphic novel series *Le Transperceneige* first published by Jean-Marc Rochette (artist) and Jacques Lob (writer) in 1982. It was later retitled *The Escape*. The series was continued in two volumes *The Explorers* (1999) and *The Crossing* (2000) by writer Benjamin Legrand, replacing Jacques Lob. A fourth and the last volume, *Terminus* (2015), was written by Olivier Bocquet.

Andy and Timmy. At the end of the film, it is revealed that they were being made to work as replacement parts for the engine.<sup>2</sup> *Snowpiercer*'s narrative and characters move in a linear direction, as Curtis, the leader of the tail section, leads the revolt that heads all the way up from the end of the train to take over the perpetual motion engine at the head of the train. The bottom-to-top movement corresponds to the train's linear movement that designates several meaningful parallels. Firstly, the linear movement is reflective of the hierarchy within the train, according to which, sub-class humans are placed at the bottom end of the food chain and resources value. Rows of cars for primary food resources and clean water come before the tail section. Another implication is that just as the train, while it is constantly on the move, is bound to its track, and their revolution inside the train will remain inside. Likewise, one-directional vision, both of the dominant and the dominated, can only run towards the same destructive end, or the endless repetition. It is a limited vision that cannot find a way out of a destructive path. Post-apocalyptic scenarios in particular tell us that competition and hierarchy are circumstantially *inevitable* in order to cope with the crisis at hand, such as *Snowpiercer*'s harsh environment and the new ice age in which the train has to continuously be on the move in order to survive – stopping would be death, end of the world, or so they say. The problem is the need inevitability to stay “within” – and the inability to imagine a life without. Curtis's revolt against the heart of the train fails because he is incapable of thinking beyond taking over the position of power, hence continuing the structure of hegemony. Wilford, the conductor and ruler of the train, suggests that Curtis could be a good successor of his.

Giorgio Agamben conceptualises such extreme condition as the perpetuated state of exception, in which (state) sovereignty holds absolute power to determine values and fate of individual life in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995; 1998). Sovereignty constitutes the political body of the state by deciding who can be recognised as meaningful and valuable, thus can be incorporated into it, and who is to remain outside as the “bare life.” In *Snowpiercer* the concept of *homo sacer* becomes more explicitly relevant as the tail section population is subject to

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<sup>2</sup> The realisation that, from the perspective of the controlling forces of the train, the rear carriages are *just another* industrial area for farming humans for labour exploitation is a concept that cripples Curtis. He realises that not only was the revolution an accommodated one, but also that the lower class is just a carriage of cattle – the Train consumes and survives on the blood and sweat of the rear carriage passengers.

complete control, violence, and exploitation by the train's administration in contrast to the valued legitimate passengers at the front. The liminal position and space the populations of *Snowpiercer* occupy in which they are excluded from care and protection but yet not completely expelled from the national/subject body, reminds us also of Julia Kristeva's abject. The process of abjection, by which one separates one's sense of self from that which threatens one's stable sense of identity and sense of life as Kristeva explains in her essay *Powers of Horror* (1982), helps us understand the abject population that are staved off from the normal protection and rights of the national/statal body. When Karen Shimakawa persuasively proposes that Asian Americanness is a "national abject" within dominant U.S. culture that cannot be permanently excluded from it but cannot represent Americanness, that contributes to exclusive and differentiating national/cultural identity formation (3), contradiction addressed in Shimakawa's conceptualisation still adheres to the idea that prefers assimilation and inclusion into the culture, rather than eradication of exclusive boundaries.<sup>3</sup> *Snowpiercer* suggests that this complicity, intended or otherwise, may be the biggest obstacle to a true rebellion against hegemony. The film recognises complicity as a problem – reiterating what the Gramscian framework of hegemony tells us, of the power of consent that accommodates even conflict and dissent.<sup>4</sup> And Foucauldian view of power that the subject is always positioned inside the field of power. Challenges to hegemony still are aimed at the establishment of new hegemony consequently resulting in the continuation, if not reinforcement, of the structure of power they intended to denounce.

At the end of *Snowpiercer*, Wilford, the creator and master of the train's sacred engine, waits for Curtis only to reveal that their revolt is what himself and Gilliam, the spiritual leader of the tail section as well as Curtis's mentor, who had inspired Curtis to lead the revolt, are the ones who had planned the revolt as a means to reduce the train's population. Wilford convinces Curtis that violence and sacrifice are necessary for peace and order and asks Curtis to take the role of the engine master, replacing himself. Although the hero of the film and the leader of the rebellion, Curtis's revolt meets an unexpected end. It is another man who takes

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<sup>3</sup> Asian(American)ness has been, and still to a large extent, is abject in the dominant U.S./Western cultural imagination. Yet, this relationship has changed – the repulsiveness of the abject, particularly emphasised by Kristeva, is alleviated and negotiated.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, the idea that hegemony is not omnipotent and can be eroded from beneath by multifaceted forms of political resistance, was not unnoticed by Gramsci (Brighenti 63).

charge of the film's ending. Namgoong Minsu, a Korean specialist engineer who designed the security of the train and was hired by Curtis to help them with the revolt, reveals that he has a different plan for the train's fate. At the end of the film, Namgoong Minsu is the one who makes a true *break* from the train's unstoppable movement both figuratively and literally.

The thesis offers an explanation for the movement between the circular and the linear that draws a narrative of racial and gender containment that runs through history, the history between the West and the East, of the subject and the abject, that results in the continuing project of the national identity construction of the United States and the West, against Asian America and Asia in what I call the "second(ary) abjection." It aims to reveal what is hidden beneath the smooth circle of hegemony that becomes invisible and more discreet in our contemporary world. Indeed, one core logic of hegemonic masculinity I explore in this thesis centres on the systemic exploitation of a racialised and gendered alien labour force, and the structuring role of the historical changes makes our neoliberal times an era of the abstract form of domination, what Petrus Liu introduces as "impersonal domination." Racially and genderly differentiated and abstracted labour of the alien abject as the foundation of the previous imperial domination returns and is re-turned as the abject in a circular motion that defines my approach to the less palpable, more sophisticated and abstracted form of global racial logic of hegemony we encounter today.

We live in the age of racial and gender diversity, the post-racial and post-gender era. The world has overcome Orientalism and Asian (American) men are among the most powerful/beautiful men in the world. There are more pressing problems at hand, we still need to solve the problems of poverty and labour exploitation, uneven development, and now climate change with all the melting ice and dying polar bears – so why is it still important, to pay attention to Asian (American) men who are privileged and such old terms as hegemony? Why, among many of the passengers of *Snowpiercer* does the thesis call for the audience to find something that is worthy of seeing from the Asian engineer, Namgoong Minsu? The film, with its unfolding of the ancient story of power dynamics in their unending circular and linear movements, is an excellent example of the workings of hegemonic masculinity that persists even in the future let alone today in its racialised and gendered forms without being considered so. The pleasure of viewing comes



from seeing the Korean man who had been locked up by the train's ruling class after his work was finished, finally breaking the circle of the train and rebelling truly against the train's hegemony. Texts that my thesis analyses feature many Asian (American) men, who are formed as abjects, perform a return from their abject status back into the (national) subject's consciousness. Yet not all returns are the same. Compared with other Asian (American) heroes in the texts that the chapters feature, Minsu's coming back from the abject position ends not merely with his (re)turning, a phenomenon which the thesis calls "the second(ary) abjection." Whereas other Asian men who have gained power return to their place of abjection after they fulfil their duties which eventually contributes to the reinforcement of white/Western hegemony, Minsu's final choice brings destruction to the train, that is, the structure of hegemony itself. The thesis calls the readers' attention to the difference in the seemingly voluntary and/or inevitable re-turns of the protagonists in the prior examples that make renunciation of (masculine) power of Asian (American) men seem natural, a logical conclusion. Repetition of such a narrative makes it familiar for the reader/audience to see the masculinisation of Asian (American) men end in failure so that the racial hierarchy remains unchanged and unchallenged. The thesis intends to make the reader uncomfortable at their comfortable and pleasurable moment of reading and viewing experiences of certain literary and cultural texts, moments in everyday life, which keep coming back, as seen most recently in the election of the United States' president and the "me-too" movement, that gendered and racialised hegemony does not easily change its core principle and structure, but only its form. Its coerciveness and conservatism making us take pleasure in regression, throughout the chapters, is what the thesis hopes to put highlights on.

The concept of masculinity has long been a popular subject matter for both academic research and general discussion. In her extensive research on the subject, *Masculinities* (2005), R. W. Connell also discusses the social construction of masculinity: "'Masculinity' is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced. ... If we broaden the angle of vision, we can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure" (*Masculinities* 67). Berger, Wallis and Watson's collection *Constructing Masculinity* (1995) examines various aspects of masculinity as a social and personal construct. Masculinity is a multiply defined concept which is "always ambivalent, always

complicated, always dependent on the exigencies of personal and institutional power ... mediated by other social factors, including race, sexuality, and class (Berger et al. 3). Feminist studies, gender studies, and queer theories have placed the concept of masculinity under scrutiny, and on occasion called into question its very existence to emphasise the instability and fictionality in the distinction of gender. In her influential work *Gender Trouble* (1990) published more than two decades ago, Judith Butler claimed that there was no concrete gender identity and that gender as a whole entity is performatively constituted. In opening the collection of essays on masculinity, the editors of *Constructing Masculinity* claim that if masculinity should still exist today, it should not be used for men's complicity in patriarchy; its boundaries should be challenged; it is fluid, temporal and possibly redeemable (Berger et al. 5-7). The phrase "crisis of masculinity" is more than familiar to those who have any interest in men and masculinity. In Western societies, with the advancement of feminist movements and socioeconomic changes stemming from the late twentieth century, men have felt that their dominant position in the society has become threatened and challenged. Yet, these investigations on the crisis of masculinity also signify that masculinity has and will endure all threats to their security through continual reconstruction and adaptation. Abigail Solomon-Godeau agrees that masculinity is always in a state of crisis, that they restructure, refurbish, and resurrect for each historical turn (70). For instance, Sam de Boise points out that the changing practices of male consumerism (e.g., buying cosmetic items) does not change the overall structure of unequal material distribution in contemporary society and does not mean the progressive reworking of gender relations ("Patriarchy"). A cornucopia of researchers, theorists and scholars who rigorously resisted, or at least questioned the notion of crisis, have sought to explore and reexamine the concept of masculinity. Many of these attempts discovered a variety of icons for predominant, ideal manhood and masculinity in Western culture, particularly in the U.S., that remain both effective and influential. Christopher Brue also emphasises that too much focus on the notion of crisis undermines the effectiveness of the concept of dominant masculinity and the reality of male power and privilege. He explains that appropriation of queer theory and social constructionist approaches which stress masculinity as inherently insecure led us to underestimate systematic inequality in gender structure (Brue 4). For more than 150 years, masculinity had been embodied

by the image of a cowboy, the hero on the frontier recognised around the world as an influential icon of American masculinity (Packard 1-2). Twentieth century American manhood sought emancipation from the preceding Victorian conception of the gentleman as the symbol of masculinity, opting instead for a more modernised and exteriorised manhood. Brue analyses what he calls “hard-boiled” masculinity, an iconic conception of modern male identity characterised by its “tough, shell-like exterior, a prophylactic toughness that was organized around the rigorous suppression of affect” (1). Hard-boiled masculinity emerged from the interwar period, which constituted itself in a twentieth-century form of “national manhood” which “inscribed gender and racial hierarchy in order to manage the destabilizing and exploitative effects of the nations’ commitment to capitalism” (Brue 1-5).<sup>5</sup> With keen accounts of socioeconomic changes in the U.S. during the last two centuries, Michael Kimmel describes the “Self-Made Man” whose self-earned economic success is the proof of his manhood. A term first coined in the 1830s, the enterprising, diligent and successful middle-class man soon emerged as a new symbol of American manhood and survived through the new century despite historical challenges and its inherent insecurity (Kimmel, *Manhood* 5-6; Ch.1). Connell proposes business and political executives who operate and interact in global markets and their confident, sexually libertarian “transnational business masculinity” as the new exemplary masculine in the globalised capitalist world order (“Masculinities” 16).

Despite radical theories of crisis both in academic and public discourse, a form of dominant masculinity, what Connell terms “hegemonic masculinity,” exists as a marker of masculinities. Connell applies the Gramscian concept of hegemony to describe the dominant masculinity amongst many kinds of masculinities: “To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. ... There is a gender politics within masculinity” (*Masculinities* 37). Hegemonic masculinity is, she explains, the masculinity that occupies a leading position in gender relations:

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<sup>5</sup> For the definition of “national manhood,” see Nelson (1998), pp.1-28. For more analyses of hard-boiled masculinity in film studies that Brue reviews in his book, see Frank Krutnik (1991), Robert Corber (1997), Kaja Silverman (1992), Steven Cohan (1997).

The concept of ‘hegemony’, deriving from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (*Masculinities* 77)

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is a useful point of departure for understanding the dynamics within masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity in the U.S., although it is a constantly contestable and changeable concept, reflects the tacitly agreed and shared qualities of a group that holds power in American society – white Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual men. Similarly, Kimmel stresses that among the multiplicity of masculinities, there has been one dominant model of American masculinity which all American men contend with – straight, white, middle class, native-born (*Manhood* 4).<sup>6</sup> Regardless of how they categorise it, these studies of masculinity agree upon one tenet: to define or confirm any version of the authoritative masculinity, one must exclude and marginalise all others in the process. The masculine often trivialises and condemns the feminine as its subordinate opposite; “[r]uggedness, ingenuity, and fearlessness are all qualities the cowboy embodies, while feminine qualities such as domesticity, weakness, and purity are anathema to his unwritten masculine code” (Packard 2). While it is true that the negative perception of femininity caused discrimination against women, it is not that every man is allowed hegemonic masculinity at their time, sometimes if at all. This thesis begins by paying attention to this marginalisation of the different groups of men which erstwhile discourses on masculinity had often taken for granted. Definitions of masculinities in the U.S. so far hold a similar presupposition that the very definition of *man* itself naturally refers to white American men.

The distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities is consistent in Messerschmidt’s writing and becomes more evident in his development

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<sup>6</sup> For Goffman’s description of the complete American man, see Goffman (1963) p.128

of the concept. In his later assessment of academic appropriations of the concept, Messerschmidt identifies a significant number of studies which still falls back on the concept as specific masculine character traits, emphasising once more that “any formulation of the concept as simply constituting an assemblage of “masculine” character traits should be thoroughly transcended” (“Engendering” 59). To make matters clearer, Messerschmidt introduces two types of nonhegemonic masculinity, “dominant” and “dominating.”<sup>7</sup> Dominant masculinities refer to the most widespread, common, celebrated forms of masculinity, dominating masculinities command and control interactions and exercise power and control. Yet neither of them is hegemonic if they fail culturally to legitimate patriarchal relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men (“Engendering” 72-73). Hegemonic masculinity not only retains the system of patriarchy that legitimises and maintains men’s domination over women and grants men’s privilege in the society, by what Connell calls patriarchal dividend at the expense of the overall subordination of women in the current gender order, produces and maintains hierarchies between men. Demetriou (2001) suggests that the mechanism of hegemonic masculinity could be divided into two forms of hegemony, external and internal, to distinguish between hegemony over women (femininities) and hegemony over masculinities. Applying Gramsci’s understanding of the dual nature of class domination, “leading” and “dominant,” to refer to hegemonic struggle against groups whose interest could be reconciled to hegemonic class, who must lead the group, “external hegemony” refers to men’s institutionalised dominance over women; “internal hegemony” refers to the dominance of one group (hegemonic) of men over other groups of men (Demetriou 340-45). While Connell dedicates a heavier focus on the external relationship between genders and men’s domination over women, in order to highlight the hierarchical construction of race, the thesis focuses on the workings of internal hegemony within masculinity. Internal or external, hegemonic masculinity transforms itself only in a way that it upholds patriarchy. Connell also emphasises the changeability of hegemonic masculinity, but her conceptualisation harbours stronger hope for the change in the patriarchal relationship between men and women. Concept of hegemonic masculinity risks overlooking the complexity of the relationships between masculinities without

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<sup>7</sup> The distinction is first proposed in Messerschmidt 2010.

considering the plurality and hierarchy within masculinity itself. The power of hegemony derives from its strategies of “cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives” (Connell and Messerschmidt 846). Through these strategies, hegemonic masculinity successfully claims authority without necessarily having to resort to violence. The hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony, and dominance simply based on force. Gramsci’s internal hegemony, Demetriou explains, creates a “historic bloc” that unites its allies (i.e., subordinated and marginalised groups) in a dialectical process that appropriates and integrates useful elements of non-hegemonic groups into the hegemonic system in the way that it helps maintaining the current order (344-45). This Gramscian “dialectical pragmatism” of a hybrid historic bloc that recognises reciprocal and mutual interaction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups is the most effective strategy for external hegemony (345-46). It is this “internally diversified and hybrid nature ... its constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that makes the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures” (348). On the other hand, Demetriou argues that Connell has understood internal hegemony in a unitary and “elitist” way, seeing subordinated and marginalised masculinities as having no impact on the construction of hegemonic masculinity (345). He argues that in Connell’s understanding of hegemonic masculinity, non-hegemonic masculinities exist only in tension with the hegemonic masculinity, considered as contradiction or even “weakness” (348). This dualistic understanding of masculinities leads Connell’s theory to undermine the reciprocal characteristic of the formation of hegemonic masculinity and the “potential pragmatic value” of non-hegemonic masculinities in the construction of hegemony and reproduction of patriarchy (Demetriou 346). What I emphasise from Demetriou’s criticism of Connell’s understanding is that in essence, it undermines the most efficient strategy of hegemonic masculinity which is the power to incorporate non-hegemonic masculinities in its continuation. By doing so, Connell not only undermines the power of hybridisation but also dissociates the project of internal hegemony from that of external masculine hegemony, which should be the ultimate goal of hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou 347). This power of hegemonic

masculinity to embrace not antagonise non-hegemonic masculinities is also what enables the mechanism of voluntary second(ary) abjection of racialised masculinities.

From the late twentieth century, literature and ethnic studies began to question the racial homogeneity in masculinity studies, yet their attention largely remained concentrated on black masculinity as the other race. Although Connell addresses the interaction between masculinity and other social structures such as race and class and the importance of examining their relations, her extensive study fails to engage in an in-depth investigation of race and masculinity as it lays more emphasis on male-female, white-black dichotomies. Asian American men had been characteristically absent, invisible from the discourse of masculinity. While analyses on white and black masculinity propound an important issue of race in masculinity studies, I find the concentration on the binary rather overlooking the complexity of racial composition within the U.S. today. Structural inequalities exist on a global scale between different races and nations, and the interaction between race and gender has been especially recognisable in the U.S. with its long history of settlement, slavery and immigration which resulted in the milieu of complex racial diversity today. Although discrimination and oppression against the black population have had a powerful and persistent impact in American history and culture, no other racial group is free from the uneven power dynamics between races in the U.S. in relation to the hegemonic racial group of white/Caucasian Americans. Asian Americans, for a variety of historical and socio-political reasons, are another mistreated and misrepresented racial minority group in the U.S. and Western culture.<sup>8</sup> Surely, more recently racial studies have paid much attention to Asian Americans and it is an established field today. Appropriating Connell's argument and Engels' concept of patriarchy in his assessment of the contemporary notion of the crisis of masculinity and patriarchy, Sam de Boise also argues that patriarchy and masculinity are not rendered obsolete or indeed in such a state of crisis as much academic research and popular opinion have enthusiastically claimed. Calling attention to Engels's initial concern for the uneven power arrangement between males, de Boise suggests that patriarchy and its figuratively gendered masculine

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<sup>8</sup> It has been critically discussed that the racial category of 'Asian' is too broad, since the term addresses to a wide range of ethnic groups, for example from Indians to East Asian and South East Asian, within which a more variety of nationalities exist. This thesis refers to 'Asian' race not to ignore the diversity of ethnic/racial groups which are referred to as Asian, but to apply the frame of hegemonic vs. subordinate dynamics with clear racial distinction.

authority of the father work similarly oppressively between different groups of men as well: “The initial formulation of patriarchy, based on a binary of men and women, was too over-generalised; white, heterosexual men (over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at least) tended toward denigration of gay and black men’s practices to construct their own gender identities, not just women” (de Boise, “Patriarchy”). This leads to the prevalent sense of powerlessness, anxieties, and insecurities of various people irrespective of their sex and gender.

This sense of powerlessness and insecurity, the psychical and social marginalization of racial minorities often found in Asian American literature forms the beginning of my inquiry into Asian American masculinity, which critically deals with a similar sensibility of racial minorities in the U.S. Racial minorities’ identities are formed through racialisation, what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) call racial formations, changing throughout time. While the specificities of racialisation change and vary, its implications for non-hegemonic race continue to be influential. Gender identity, specific to each group of minorities, is also a part of this racialisation of identities. This thesis agrees that masculinity and manhood restructure, recur, and resurrect themselves in alternating forms across time, yet perennially hold their place in the society. Nevertheless, what is crucial to the argument of this thesis is that masculinity and manhood as we commonly understand them are terms only allowed to certain types of men, and that they are constructed not only in the relationship between men and women, but also significantly within relationships among men through the exclusion and marginalisation of other men. Connell uses the concept of complicity to explain the way in which the majority of men who do not actually meet or practice the normative standards of hegemonic masculinity still gain from its hegemony and benefit from the patriarchal dividend (*Masculinities* 79). In addition to her emphasis on the polarity of men and women over the access to patriarchal dividend, I call attention to the aspect of complicity in racial dynamics within masculinities – that is, in the white-supremacist society, the majority of white men are complicit in racial dominance concerning other races.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Naturally, there are valid counterclaims that not all white men are always privileged – See Yúdice for example: “Precisely because straight white men are perceived by progressives within identity politics and multiculturalism as the center of the dominant culture, they are not permitted to claim their own difference. There is an irony here, for the very objective of progressive politics today – to dismantle privilege – ends up keeping in place in our imaginary an ever greater monolith of power. Difference, which functions as the grounds for a politics of recognition, is only for the



This thesis engages further in the discussion of racial hegemony with regard to masculinity and power still continuing today in an updated form. In Anglophone West, particularly in the U.S. which is the main setting for the texts I examine in the thesis, whiteness is complicit to hegemonic masculinity. White men gain from the illusionary effects of hegemonic masculinity the sense of authority and power in the society that are often not theirs in reality, and there is a substantial *racial* dividend in this complicity between white men even when they fall short of the standards of hegemonic masculinity. In this thesis, I focus on the disproportion between masculinities, which highlights uneven relations between different racial groups of men and the idea of hegemonic masculinity. I retain the idea suggested by many researchers of white/Caucasian heterosexual men's dominance in Western culture, and, based on the theoretical frame of hegemonic masculinity and racial abjection, suggest that the hegemony of white masculinity, the association between whiteness, masculinity, hegemony and national identity still continues, and continues to reflect and reinvent power dynamics between what is considered the West and the East. My objective in this thesis is to underline the gendered (and feminised/queered) representation of Asian (American) men and to bring attention to the continuing power of hegemony albeit rapid and extensive changes to the notions of race and gender and seeming disappearance of racial and gender discrimination. Still, the thesis also acknowledges the tensions stemming from these changes and examines the imaginations for the future that are represented in literary and cultural products.

## **2. Racial Castration and Representation of Asian American Man**

Although masculinity has always been a contestable concept, Asian men within Asian societies do not seem to struggle as much to prove their claim to masculinity any more than white/Caucasian men in Western societies. Rather, masculinity itself is a concept under constant revision and challenge in both Asian and Western societies. It is particularly apparent in the encounter with the West that the Asian man (the East) faces an unusual degree of challenge regarding their sense of masculinity. Gender identities and stereotypes are constructed in order to secure

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oppressed. What, then, are progressive, straight, white, men permitted to do in this context?" (Yúdice 280).

and further privilege the position of certain dominant groups within society. Aside from gender discrimination based on sex, racial minorities have been sexually mythicised and fetishised in sexist and white-supremacist culture. Unlike the common assumption that men occupy a higher position in the dynamics of gender, racial minorities, especially Asian American men, are positioned in a subordinated place in their relationship with white/Caucasian American men. Such racial subordination is illustrated in literary and cultural productions as well as everyday practices and legal and political discourses. Economic and political powers were and are asymmetrically distributed to different sexes, classes, and races, and in addition to biological distinction between men and women, these structural constraints influence collective and individual perceptions about gender identities. Lisa Lowe analyses the legal gendering of Asian American men in the early American immigration history by questioning the early U.S. immigration law's definition of a subject as a citizen. By denying American citizenship to Asian men, the state "ascribed 'gender' to the Asian American subject" in its legal discourse which recognized only white men as males because "the 'masculinity' of the citizen was first inseparable from his 'whiteness'" (Lowe 11). Karen Shimakawa also observes that "[o]n the most material level, as feminist, critical legal, and critical race theorists have demonstrated, the legal parameters of U. S. Americanness have been premised on racialization (and sexualization) in order to construct the 'ideal' subject of the law as an Anglo-European heterosexual male" (*National Abjection* 4). Although the bar to citizenship was removed decades ago, the gendered implication is marked in the psyche of the American public, and the identity formation of an Asian American male subject. David L. Eng credits Lisa Lowe's analysis of the immigration exclusion law that it reveals the inseparable relationship between sexuality and race in Asian American studies: it "provides a provocative model for thinking about Asian American sexual and racial formation not as separate processes of identity formation" (Eng 216). In her analysis of social construction theory and sexuality, Carole S. Vance offers an overview of the deconstruction of the sex/gender system as two separate domains. Although their connection seems natural and seamless, Vance emphasises that gender and sexuality are historically and cross-culturally organised within larger social relations (39). Her criticism of preceding models that obscure the specifically formed connections between sexuality and gender arrangements raises a

valid question regarding the general belief that assumes natural causality between sex and gender. Thus, the social constructionist approach enables new investigations into the relationship between the two categories. This thesis attempts to avoid confusing male sexuality with masculinity. That sexuality and gender are separate systems should not undermine the close connection between the two. Sexuality is an important key to approaching the gendered and racialised construction of masculinity. In the discussion of Asian American masculinity and sexuality, the racial brand of “Asian” often imposes feminine characteristics on Asian American men as well as women. Albeit the general impasse of the hegemonic masculinity that not all white men, let alone all men, meet the standard of the supposed heterosexual normativity or are comfortable with it, Asian American men are still sentenced to further marginalisation and subordination within the U.S. relations of power. Condemnation of racial difference from hegemonic whiteness manifests in desexualisation and effeminisation of Asian American men in literary and media representation. Racial others are ascribed with sexual stereotypes which affect their masculinity. Racial sexual stereotypes and prejudices exist for all races in Western culture, yet in different dimensions for each racial group. Rather than being recognised by individual differences, certain races are given certain cultural connotations for their sexuality. Although there is a “sambo” stereotype of a desexualised and childlike black slave/servant, a black man has been often feared for his stereotypically imagined aggressive and primitive sexuality and his huge penis as its symbolic proof. The threatening sexuality of black men was violently suppressed by actual lynching which often involved castration. White society, or more specifically white men’s fear for the sexuality of a man of a different race and criminalisation of interracial relationship are also present in Asian American history and literature, such as in the brutal and sadistic lynching and castration of Filipino immigrant men in Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946).

Yet, African American and Asian American sexual representation have taken different directions, which Daniel Kim explains in his comparison of the two racialised manhoods: “While the body of the black man has long been a focal point of the racial imaginary in the United States, the body of the Asian man has tended to figure as a kind of absence” (1). The threatening black sexuality has become the more dominant stereotype in the U.S. culture, but after decades of effort to

appropriate black bodies and sexuality, and with the rapidly changing U.S. cultural atmosphere of celebration of sexuality, based largely on the profitability of the sex industry, such stereotypes of black masculinity and sexuality have become desirable, even if only out of curiosity or obsession. Cornel West explains that from the 1960s to 1970s and 1980s, black male sexuality has come to be familiar and accepted on an equal basis within the changed climate of race and sex, especially in American popular culture, as Afro-Americanisation of white youths and subsequent appropriation of black masculinity shows (120-22). Even though popular adaptation of black machismo style reinforces the myth of black male sexual prowess, the image and the myth have rendered “black men desirable sexual partners in a culture obsessed with sex” (West 127-28). On the other hand, Asian men in Western receptions and representation have historically been often asexualised, effeminised, and emasculated. An Asian (American) male is often featured unsuitable as a sexual partner, for his lack of sexuality if not for his racial inappropriateness. Western anxieties about miscegenation that materialised in physical castration for the African American men took the form of psychical, racial castration for Asian American men.<sup>10</sup> In the culture obsessed with sex and in which sexuality becomes a valued commodity, lack of sexuality becomes more problematic. That Asian American men are overlooked and excluded from this prevalence of sexualisation does not mean that they are free from commodification but rather indicates their neglect from the discussion. Therefore, when Song Liling, in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*, declares that “I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man” (83), his failed claim to masculinity poses a specifically racialised problem to the crisis of masculinity. Eng opens *Racial Castration*, his study on Asian American masculinity, with Song’s (in)famous testimony to discuss “the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary” within which “the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized” (1-2). Eng investigates this feminisation, or in his term, “castration” of Asian American men and the inseparable relationship between race and sexuality. He emphasises the integral affiliation between racial formation and gender and sexuality in the political, economic, and cultural construction of a

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Kim rightly observes the discourse of homosexualisation of African American men that trivialises and otherises the black male sexuality as well. However, this thesis puts more emphasis on the relative contrast between African American and Asian American male sexuality. See Kim, especially the introduction.

mainstream social order. Despite the physical proof of Song's maleness, Gallimard, the white diplomat, cannot see the Oriental who he once believed to be a woman as a *man*. Eng assesses Hwang's drama as a work which "ultimately exposes the production of whiteness as a universal norm that attempts to project the burden of racial difference onto the Asian American male body" (31). Eng sees in the example an Asian man who is "psychically emasculated, foreclosed from an identification with normative heterosexuality, so as to guarantee the white male's claim to this location" (151). Gallimard's refusal to acknowledge Song's penis reveals a racial denial that is "an invisible alignment that ... attempts to secure heterosexuality and whiteness as universal norms in a colonial world order" by devaluing Asian racial positioning (152). I adopt Eng's notion of racial castration because it explains the social and psychical construct that links race, gender, and sexuality together. Eng's application of race to the concept of castration shows the direct connection between the sexuality of men of racial minority and their masculinity. As they are (psychically) castrated, Asian American men are ousted from their position of heterosexual normativity:

How might we understand homosexuality and race to converge at the outside limits of the symbolic domain governed by norms of heterosexuality and whiteness? These questions are especially relevant to our investigation of Asian American masculinity. If Asian American male subjectivity is psychically and materially constrained by a crossing of racial difference with homosexuality – what Fung describes as the conflation of "Asian" and "anus" – then its relation to these dominant social norms and prohibitions takes on a distinctive critical cast and an urgent critical dissonance. (14)

Amongst the wide variety of factors that enable the continuing existence of white masculinity as the hegemonic one in the U.S. and more extensively in the Anglophone West, I focus on the continuing circle of racial abjection that connects race and gender so as to investigate more complex gendered relationships within masculinities that are complicated by the ideas, stereotypes and power structure of the society and therefore not simply reducible to the biological difference of sex.

Celine Parreñas Shimizu, in her approach to the “straitjacket sexuality” ascribed in the U.S. popular culture, criticises “the easy and inaccurate assessment of asexuality, effeminacy, and homosexuality as emasculation” (3). She reprimands the coercive nature of the norms that “straitjacket assignments of falling short of the norm of manhood contribute shame to the being of Asian American men” and explores the ways to be liberated from such ideological confinement (29). Nevertheless, as Shimizu also admits, it is certainly true that such “straitjacket” judgments exist in the popular view of society and impose shame and self-negation on its targeted group. Tan Hoang Nguyen similarly calls for a “politics of bottomhood” that is truly antiracist and antihomophobic without sacrificing femininity with its discourse as many mainstream gay and lesbian strategies of remasculinisation tend to result in (14). Additionally, I argue that the bottom position, as particularly gay antiracist theorists assume, is no more evident for many of the representations of Asian (American) men in popular literary, cinematic, cultural and media representations. Yet, there are still continuing remnants of the existing imageries being reproduced in those representations, seemingly raceless and even glorifying. Therefore, I return here to the concept of second(ary) abjection.

### **Framework: The Concept of Second(ary) Abjection**

Julia Kristeva explains abjection as the process by which one separates one’s sense of self from that which threatens one’s stable sense of identity and sense of life. Within the boundaries of what one defines as subject (a part of oneself) and object, there resides pieces that were once categorised as a part of self that has since been rejected – the abject. The abject is rejected by the subject because it disrupts the subject’s stability, system and (symbolic) order, yet cannot be completely expelled from the subject and remains, separated off, in a liminal space. In Kristeva’s theory, the process of abjection is important in defining and defending identity and subjectivity, sense of self and selfhood/subjecthood of the subject. Diverging from Kristeva’s theorisation which is more concerned about the effect that abjection has on the subject/deject, or other psychoanalysts such as Butler, my project’s primary concern is the abject. Kristeva’s conceptualisation is carried out from the perspective of the deject, the abjectifying subject, and focuses on understanding the identity

formation of the deject-subject, in relation to abject and ultimately his self-abjection. I intend to give more attention and weight to the abject. My project, in accordance with Karen Shimakawa's and David Leiwei Li's, pays more attention to the process's impact on the abject. As well as the process itself and the reason/agency behind it – that is, in this case, American/Western culture/state/public, etc., those that produce popular discourses and representations. The process of abjection works as the identity formation and boundary building of the subject as well as the abject, solidifying the separation between the two. The significance of abjection lies in the concept's potential to inaugurate the investigation of many axes of the formation of identities that the project is concerned about and intends to address – in/visibility, in/authenticity, il/legibility, belonging and non-belonging, status and conditions of citizenship, etc. of racialised abjects. The questions I ask concern various ways in which the texts engage with the process of abjection – primarily, how they re/present abjects, and what it tells us about the ways in which they understand, define, shape, negotiate the process; and their positioning of the subject/deject. The thesis asks what the relationship certain contemporary literary and cultural texts have with abjection are like – i.e., whether they actively perform, endorse, implement abjection or resist or deny it, how they reflect and/or reveal the intent and impetus that motivates the process of abjection. How does the strategy of racialisation and deracialisation function and for what purposes are they employed? How do specific examples show different strategies and mechanisms of abjection? And to what extent and what effect are the abjects represented to resist, transcend, or submit to it? How, and whether, representations of characters who are marginalised can help us understand how abjects enact agency and resistance in a world that systematically conditions and submits them in abjection. Even though many studies of abjection seem to claim that their subjects of investigation are “abject,” in many cases the subjects are agencies of abjection, which consequently means that they are subjects/dejects and not abjects. It is a subject-deject-abject who is a writer of their own abjection. What I try to look at is the abject that is subject to abjection, and the processes of abjection that make it into an abject, or, represent it as such. Although, think of it another way, Asian American male abject can also be a subject who will inevitably perform their own abjection which will involve a kind of racialisation – but this becomes more complicated in – and only in – the context of the U.S./West.

The thesis intends to expand and reformulate Li's and Shimakawa's theory, as well as Kristeva's, to conceptualise Asian (American) masculinity – on one end I want to expand the concept of Asian Americanness as the abject in the United States, to Asianness as the abject in Western imagination; in another direction, I want to see how Asian *masculinity* especially can be an abject and goes through the process of abjection in the Western imagination, politically, socially, and culturally. The framework works to explain the position of Asia and Asian masculinity within Western discourses of the relationship between the West and the East, the position of the East in the Westward, Anglo-European “international/global” stage, and the representation and reception of Asian masculinity.

To situate and conceptualise the process of abjection within a larger frame/scale of the society/world beyond an individual identity formation, Karen Shimakawa's theorisation considers the axis of race in the process of abjection. Shimakawa, in *National Abjection*, applies Kristeva's concept of abjection to the US project of national identity building and formulates Asian(ness) as a US national abject within the project. Shimakawa conceptualises “[t]he paradigm of abjection as a national/cultural identity-forming process” (3), arguing that Asian Americanness is a “national abject” in relation to Americanness within dominant U.S. culture. “Not absolutely or permanently excluded from that latter identity and yet not quite representative of it,” Shimakawa explains, Asian Americanness is characterised by “its constantly shifting relation to Americanness, a movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness, and domestication/assimilation; it is that *movement between* enacted by and on Asian Americans, I argue, that marks the boundaries of Asian American cultural (and sometimes legal) citizenship” (3). Within the context of U.S. racial/ethnic relation Shimakawa identifies a pattern of exclusion and inclusion in the representation of Asian Americans: “at times embracing/ingesting them, at other times violently (if often symbolically) expelling/excluding/segregating them ... may be understood as a product of the continually collapsing project of abjection as a fundamental element of national identity formation” (17). For the West, the East has always been an abject, even if it was considered the Other before. More clearly so now because it is not the Other anymore – because the West has seen itself as the universe, and the whole world, but cannot ignore or exclude the East from the concept of the “world” anymore – the need for coexistence and makes it not the



Other in the sense that it is a part of the West's sense and definition of the world. East Asia is, undoubtedly, represented predominantly by China – both for its power and its foreignness especially to the U.S., as “Asia” can mean different locations in the U.K. and other European countries. China, Japan, and Korea are now easily “legible” on the global stage, and while the rhetoric of “invasion” still persists, it cannot be the complete Other anymore. It is hard to ignore the “shared” territory, also as they try to tackle shared concerns such as environmental crisis. Also, the high level of (im)migration and the “flexible” or honorary citizenships make it hard to separate Asians from Asian Americans or distinguish between them. Shimakawa points out that “the legal parameters of U.S. Americanness have been premised on racialization (and sexualisation) in order to construct the “ideal” subject of the law as an Anglo-European heterosexual male” (4). Drawing from Haney López (legal categories shaped our understanding of “biological” racial difference and identities) and Lisa Lowe (U.S. American citizenship, both legal and symbolic, have been founded by “discursive manipulation of the categories of (Asian) ‘immigrant’ and ‘citizen’”) Shimakawa focuses on the expulsion of Asianness as a means of establishing and maintaining a (racially specific) “Americanness” (5). I attempt to find a way to apply this framework of definition, category, and boundaries of citizenship defining and shaping a national identity, by extension, to “global citizenship” as well as U.S. domestic on one hand, and hegemonic masculinity, on the other. Adding different areas of citizenship such as cultural, economic, political to legal citizenship would allow the motivation and relations of interests behind representations of Asian/Americans. The thesis investigates more deeply into the dimension of gender from Shimakawa's conceptualization whilst also aiming to expand and extend the framework of national abjection beyond the U.S. border and Americanness. Therefore, on one hand I attempt to bring in an aspect of gender, masculinity in particular, and introduce the concepts of differentiated citizenship(s) on the other side to reshape Shimakawa's framework and engage with it on a different dimension. The expulsion of the Asian immigrant cannot be simply copied and applied to Asian American, of course; that is why Shimakawa writes “Asian exclusion” rather than “Asian American” exclusion when she emphasises that “[t]he conceptual U.S. citizen-subject comes into being, in other words, through the expulsion of Asianness in the figure of the Asian immigrant” (5). This also leads to

my hypothesis that in order for the Asian immigrant/American to be a “meaningful being (full American),” it, not only the “national body” that contains the Asian (American) as an abject, but also the Asian (American) oneself as the “subject” needs to expulse Asianness from the figure of the Asian immigrant (foreigner).

Asian Americans are certainly not the first, let alone only, abjects of the nation. They are one of the nation’s many abjects – all of whom contribute to the formation and consolidation of the national identity, the symbolic body of the nation. Likewise, the subject/deject does not have to be only one entity, either – there will be many levels to the processes of abjection of one abject. This thesis investigates more specifically Asianness as the target of abjection to ask some specific questions connecting race and gender in a nation’s identity building, formed globally as well as domestically. What is the relationship between the Asian (American) abject, and the national body that has abjected it? Especially when, the relationship between them is not simply the body-abject but also a nation-citizen; who is the “mother/maternal” in this relationship? Is (imaginary) “Asia” (motherland) the maternal that the abject Asian (American) wants to expel from it, in order for it to be accepted by the subject? In international politics, power comes into play to compete for hegemony which is often verbalised in the language of gender. The gendered formulaic of masculinity persists in the stage of international politics, from news headlines to political interviews, from the interpretations of the photos and analyses of international relations (Hooper). Differentiated citizenship, on one hand, redefines and reassembles the category of “race” in relation to citizenship and rights, in the sense that full citizenship equals whiteness – hence, honorary whites. I argue that full citizenship also equals masculine. Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts* declares that “Racialization along the legal axis of definitions of citizenship has also ascribed “gender” to the Asian American subject. ... Whereas the “masculinity” of the citizen was first inseparable from his “whiteness,” as the state extended citizenship to non-white male persons, it formally designated these subjects as “males,” as well” (11). Therefore, Lowe argues that “the administration of citizenship was simultaneously a “technology” of racialization and gendering” in that it excluded female immigrants from citizenship law, legally assuming/presuming “Chinese immigrant” as male (11). Broadening of the subject of citizenship, or, the inclusion of non-male and non-white could be thought of as, in other words, their incorporation into the realm of white

masculinity, rather than dismantling of it. The concept of fully qualified male citizen still remains at the root – therefore, (honorary) white, (honorary) male, which can be interpreted as, with (mostly economic) competence/capability and rationality, white masculinity – or, “Anglo-European” masculinity. “Other” race and gender identities are washed away in the process of inclusion – cf. multiculturalism and assimilation.

Shimakawa finds “the links they articulate connecting psychic, social, visual/perceptive, and bodily experiences of identity” particularly useful for studies of politics of representation, and particularly of *performance*, moving onto more specific examples from theatre performances (4). While Shimakawa focuses on the *performance* of Asian Americanness, and I indeed see Asian (or any other) Americanness as performative and acknowledge its performativity, the project considers it more as *representation*; that is, I am less interested in the *agency* of the abject than the process of abjection, and formation of the abject. Having said that, although I follow Shimakawa’s investigation of “the complex relationship between affective experience and cultural expression in the formation of Asian Americanness,” I diverge from Shimakawa’s focused investment in “the trajectory of Asian American theatre” and investigation/evaluation of the “political/performance responses to anti-Asian American racism” as the goal of the research in form and spirit of activism (4). Moreover, Shimakawa’s project is as much a call for resistance to abjection as it is a theoretical application and formulation of the process. Her project invites resistances to abjection. This thesis seeks to apply the concept more broadly, and to extend and modify it to examine the continuing abjection of Asian American masculinity domestically within the U.S., and Asian masculinity more generally in the Western imagination. To understand the process of abjection, it is important to distinguish the subject/deject from the abject. For the purposes of this study, I am firstly specifying the relationship to (racialised) hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic, racialised masculinities. However, the distinction should be applicable to, and noted in any general understanding of the concept. What I want to make clear here is that hegemonic masculinity is not, and cannot be, an abject. Although an abject can, also be a subject of its own right and perform an act of abjection, that is a different matter. Hegemonic masculinity is the subject/deject that implements and performs the process of abjection to form and secure its identity, and its hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity is not the abject (cf. King’s article; where it is *posing* as one), Asian

American masculinity is made into the abject through the processes of abjection. While the representation of Asian (American) masculinity as an abject inevitably involves its representation as an *abject* being – a state, rather than as a status, that is wretched and miserable, what happens as the figure of the abject is identified, analysed, and familiarised (and this is also what happens as Kristeva’s theory proceeds), is that the *other* side of the abject surfaces, which is what makes the abject acceptable (disregard the fact that it already has been within the subject). From Kristeva, I take the irresistible appeal of the abject, as well as repulsiveness that is also foregrounded in *Strangers to Ourselves* as the character of the foreigner. In similar ways, in order for the subject to recognise the stranger – abject – within the self, Kristeva’s theory reveals the necessity to make (or recognise) the abject *appealing* – that is, it has to be registered as a being somehow, despite its ugliness and repulsiveness and *differences*, relatable, legible, or at least attractive in its mysteriousness, to be *allowed* to be a part of myself. This, I argue, reveals the critical part of the formation – Kristeva does not recognise, therefore, the radical differences between ourselves and the foreigner, but rather finds herself (or her desired self that she *wants* to be radical) from, projects her desires and fetishes onto, the foreigner. Therefore, to assert that abject being as belonging to one’s self, is not a radical act of acceptance, or of risking breaking or disrupting the boundaries of oneself, but an act of reinforcement, of mending the self that is threatened by difference. David Leiwei Li’s comprehensive introduction connects legal, juridical, and political history and cultural history of immigration and citizenship, in associations with the formation of Asian exclusionary practices and sensibilities – from the Yellow Peril alienation to the Model Minority abjection. Li’s conceptualisation of the abjection of the Asian (and Asian American) focuses on “assimilation” – that is, the inevitable inclusion of the Asian, at least legally and in other domains more increasingly. While he states that their participation is *derealised* because of their still minoritarian status, and cultural resistance, this has changed over the course of the last two decades; now the Asian (American) is much less alien than before. Yet, that being said, they are still foreign, and the increased influx and movement of (East) Asian migrants who are distinguished from the previous generation because of their heightened flexibility and mobility – we can see the indication from the mode of production in Li’s second phase of Asian exclusion – transnational capital(ism). Transnational capital from

East Asia and changing nature or characteristic of the Asian labourer/migrant (in this case East Asian more specifically, as skilled and highly educated, since a significant majority of South Asian migrants still represent and signify underdeveloped economy and unskilled labour) have re-shaped the figure of the Asia(n) in both the U.S. and the Western world's imagination.

Shimakawa focuses on the dynamic and unstable aspect of abjection in her conceptualisation of Asian Americanness. Concluding that it is impossible to wholly or finally differentiating the abject from the deject, Shimakawa suggests that the U.S. in its attempt to concretise national boundaries is nevertheless unable to wholly differentiate Asian Americans from the nation, since they are lawful American subjects – therefore making Asian Americans “a site of national abjection within U.S. American culture” (10). Shimakawa briefly mentions Li's application of abjection in her note to the introduction to her book (14), to emphasise her focus on contradictory juxtapositions that make Asian Americanness the abject from its conception, rather than as a “developmental progression from excludable alien to tolerated abject” as she defines Li's formulation (167). Shimakawa's reservations about Li's argument partly come from their differences in the starting points of their conceptualisations. While Shimakawa's theory concerns only Asian Americans, Li's framework clearly distinguishes Asian Americans from Asians in the U.S. – i.e., non-citizens – and begins from the history of non-citizen, *alien* Other Asia(n) to examine and scrutinise the shift between the two different modes of exclusion. Unlike Shimakawa's, Li's framework begins from the Asian immigrant – i.e., non-citizen alien Asian Other. Therefore, it distinguishes Asianness from Asian Americanness more clearly and distinctively than Shimakawa's and leaves the possibility of becoming an object open to Asian American(ness) as well. Whereas Shimakawa's departure point is the Asian American who is already a citizen and not a foreigner, therefore an abject within the national body, Li begins from the point in which Asians in the U.S. are de jure as well as de facto foreign. It enables Li to foreground the shift and continuity in the perception of Asian and Asian American, which enriches his discussion and makes the relationship clearer. The end product – Asian American abjection – is the same in both authors. Li is not saying that “the juxtaposition of alienation/exclusion and inclusion/recognised participation,” “the radical vacillation between extremes” (Shimakawa 166) do not exist in the Asian American abject. What he says is rather,

that there is a strong sense of the necessity to make Asian acceptable, the shift from the (even if imaginary) belief or idea that they were the Other that was not a part of myself, from the realization or recognition that they have become a part. Li's conceptualisation suggests that the reader thinks about the concept of "Asian" and the possibility of more active and concrete exclusion and denial of the Asian as the Other – as he suggests that Asian American, the abject, can always be returned to that status. Especially in the national and global *imagination* of the Anglo-European (American) subjecthood/community, Asia was the Other, not the abject. It was indeed *made into* abject after it has been perceived as inevitably "within." Therefore, I agree with Li's argument that there is always a possibility of objectification, as well as abjectionification of Asian and Asianness.

The thesis proposes to examine the changes in the status of the racial abject in the twenty-first century as an updated form. On the one hand, Asian masculinity may seem to be going through de-abjection – that may no longer be an abject, although Asian (American) masculinity continues to face denial and rejection, or animosity. Race and gender representations are rapidly changing and diversifying. Overt endorsement of so-called "traditional" masculinity has been subject to ridicule and underplay for decades now, and said to have been in crisis, because masculinity is associated with uneven power, privilege, and is seen as responsible for inequality, discrimination, violence within gender relations. Masculinity on the one hand is something that needs to be either demolished or refashioned. Yet on the other hand, the attractiveness of the masculine, as the representative of power and privilege, still remains as cultural, social, political currency as exemplified in political discourses. Of course, now Asian masculinity is recognised and celebrated, and race seems not to be a criterion for what is considered masculine in global culture. Particularly in the media, strong, powerful, and beautiful Asian men occupy the screen boasting their masculinity which is no longer in question. The criteria for what is masculine become more complex and heterogeneous. Despite the changes, in the white majority West, Asian masculinity is always a minority and set against, or tested against the normative standard of measuring, "hegemonic" masculinity. As globalisation spreads from the West/Anglophone world and since English dominates most of the inter- and trans-national communication, the ideas and ideals remain inevitably Anglo- and Euro-centric. Even when people's ideas and views are shared

worldwide, English as the means of communication inherently creates a hierarchy among opinions and ideas, and the differences among sheer volumes of the information available in English make originally Anglophone ideas much more “mainstream” than it is proportionally allowed. The reach of the “Anglophone” has become broader and larger today – not simply major English-speaking countries, it covers the rest of the world’s population who accept English as the lingua franca, and who communicate in that language with the rest of the world. English shapes and dictates thoughts of those population, and Anglophone ideas and cultures dominate the world under the influence of the domination of English. It is not merely direct users of English that are affected, but the rest of the non-English speaking population who are influenced by the discourses of the English-speaking others, who claim superiority and authority by proxy and claim to bring in “the world” to the backward local. Hence my focus on Anglophone representation of Asian (American) masculinity. I put American in the brackets to indicate that it is acknowledged partially, or occasionally and conditionally – e.g., when the masculinity should be claimed as American – inclusive and innovative and redemptive. The masculine wants to ignore the ugliness of masculinity and maintain privilege without a price, and Asian masculinity can be presented as a cure, although, being the cure, which was traditionally the role of femininity, Asian masculinity then assumes the role of the feminine/non-masculine in our inevitably dichotomous mode of thinking. Hegemonic masculinity’s necessity, if not existence, is increasingly being questioned, particularly in the case of “cultural/social” position and representation of masculinity. The general consensus now, at least nominally, is that masculinity no longer should dominate, and the division of masculinity and femininity is limiting and discriminatory. Although it is not obsolete in common sense and everyday use, increasing demand for gender equality advocates for the necessity to dismantle gender prejudices and categories. However, denying that masculinity is representative of power, is not the goal of my study; it is subject to appropriation, yet outright denial is counterproductive. Instead, I propose to question the seeming decline and demolition/restructuring of racial and gender hegemony and binarisms. My questions ultimately arrive at the *end* of masculinity/hegemony/gender. Can there be no hegemony, and is the ultimate goal of the world dismantling hegemonic discourses? I suspect that some narratives of racial/gender reversion, although

hopefully not all, highlight and repeat (whether intentionally or unwittingly) gendered racialised abjection; and I ask the reader to share my suspicion to look more thoroughly at the persistent strength of older racial and gender discourses and their impact on seemingly innocuous or even rebellious cultural representations that please and deceive the reader/audience. There are groups of writers and producers who are in favour of disregarding and dismantling race and gender divisions. Yet, do the celebrated representations of Asian (American) men in today's texts always work against hegemony? How do they participate in the discourse of race and gender? What are their contributions, and what are the limitations? The thesis sees that the structure of hegemony is not so crude and obsolete as to be collapsed as the cultural, political, social practices and standards change. It adapts to, modifies itself, and reinforces itself ultimately for continuation. Second(ary) abjection of Asian (American) masculinity is one such process of rehabilitation of (racial) hegemony. This thesis is a study of Asian (American) masculinity in popular cultural representation. Second(ary) abjection characterises the portrayal of Asian (American) masculinity in the narratives that are commonly repeated in popular culture. The concept as an analytical tool allows the consumer of those popular cultural products including, but not limited to, novels, comics, TV series, and films to identify an ideological intention or influence that promotes and fosters the existing structure of hegemony. Without such critical attention, popular cultural products are a significant source of uplifting the preservation of current, and familiar ideas about race, gender, sexuality and other identities that define and discriminate persons.

The texts that the thesis examines offer some examples of the framework of "second(ary) abjection" that I propose here. Asian American men (or Asianness, by extension) return from their relegated place of abjection, becoming seemingly the hero of the story. The Asian (American) man comes to the centre of the plot and gains or regains masculine power and authority as the plot unfolds. He becomes the hero and is no longer a racial abject. His formerly inadequate race is no longer in question as his masculinity (which is colourless/white) stands out more than his colour. The subject of his abjection, white hegemonic masculinity (or national hegemonic masculinity, in domestic narratives), is in crisis. The newly emerged Asian (American) masculinity seems to enter into the realm of hegemony. However, as a part of the structure of hegemonic masculinity, the non-hegemonic masculinity



that temporarily gained power of masculinity also works within the structure, towards the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity and not the destruction of it. The Asian (American) men who boast of their masculinity which now can be recognised as hegemonic reproduce the recognised form of hegemonic masculinity, that is, white hegemonic masculinity within the narratives they perform in. Their performance of masculinity strengthens the hegemonic white masculinity – be that the white national masculinity, or a white leader/ruler, which benefits from the actions of the Asian (American) heroes. Sometimes they fight on the side of, or on behalf of the hegemonic masculinity; at other times their enemies coincide with those of the hegemonic masculinity. Their power is accepted and granted because, and as long as, it is used to serve the interest of the hegemonic masculinity and not threaten it. When their role as a hero/returned abject is completed, they are relegated to their status of the abject, the process which I call the “second(ary) abjection.” This process of abjection that I theorise in the thesis is called “second(ary)” in the following senses. Firstly, it is the abjection that is enacted for the second time. The Asian (American) men who go through this process already were racially abjected and have been reinstated before they are subjected to the second abjection. Secondly, the process of this abjection clarifies the secondary position of the Asian (American) men. As the first phase of this process is the recovery of their abjected masculinity, they are placed at the centre of the narrative, becoming, temporarily, the hero. However, when their duty is fulfilled and the actual subject of the abjection, the original hegemonic masculinity, achieves what it wanted, Asian (American) men surrender their glory and reassume their position of the abject, therefore proving their function as secondary characters in a larger and more complete narrative. The Asian (American) male characters perform masculinities that follow and often ultimately defer to an idealised masculinity (racialised as white and American/Western), of which they always fall short due to their racial difference. Within the structure of hegemonic masculinity, those racialised male characters are not only racially abjected but also are abjected “secondarily” relative to norms of masculinity. Whereas the first abjection was more evident, the second abjection is more effective, dangerous and significant because the narratives present it as voluntary. The racial abject himself seems to be the subject of his own abjection. This narrative of second(ary) abjection, unlike prior narratives of first racial abjection, which records

the history of oppression, poses as the heroic narrative of a former abject. Such guise makes it easier for those stories to appeal to a broader range of readers/audiences who are uncomfortable with obvious racial discrimination and stereotypes. Even though the narratives end with the supposed hero's exit from the hegemonic position, the second(ary) abjection is not as disagreeable as the previous one and accepted, oftentimes, even as heroic or reasonable. The true benefactors of the narrative stay safely behind even as they achieve their goal of remasculinisation, recovery or reinforcement of their hegemony.

The texts that the thesis analyses exemplify these narratives of remasculinisation and reabjection of masculinities, revealing contentions between masculinities and a tenacious scheme of hegemonic masculinity that sustains the structure of hegemony in a more discreet guise. The thesis introduces a variety of "popular" genres and media to explore ideas about race and gender that are commonly and widely spread in the contemporary (Western/global) world. Susan Choi's detective fiction *A Person of Interest* (2008), Jackie Chan's action thriller film *The Foreigner* (2017), AMC's speculative/post-apocalyptic dystopian horror TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-), Chang-Rae Lee's dystopian speculative fiction *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), and Joon-ho Bong's post-apocalyptic, speculative science-fiction action film *Snowpiercer* (2013) all feature Asian (American) characters whose roles can be analysed through the framework of second(ary) abjection.<sup>11</sup> Within those texts, theories of critics such as Kristeva, Shimakawa and Li's abjection are repeated to further strengthen the U.S. national masculinist hegemony rather than put an end to it. Asian American men, as well as Asia/n America, return from the margin and come out to the centre only to strengthen the national hegemonic white masculinity and then to be relegated to its second phase of abjection, that is, the "second(ary) abjection."

## Overview of Chapters

The contribution this thesis seeks to make is the identification, definition and comparative textual analysis of Asian (American) masculinity in Anglophone

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<sup>11</sup> *The Walking Dead* and *Snowpiercer* are based on comics and *The Foreigner* on a novel. The thesis mainly analyses the adaptations.

popular fiction and cultural texts such as fiction, films and TV shows, within a framework of hegemonic masculinity and abjection that draws from several elements from masculinity studies, Asian American studies and literary and cultural studies, theories of hegemony, abjection and racial formation, citizenship, and the global economy more broadly. The project makes visible the persistent success of hegemonic masculinity and the abjection and second(ary) abjection of racialised and gendered Asian (American) men(liness), at its seemingly triumphant appraisal to remind the reader and the audience of the revival and the lasting grip of the ghostly spectre of racial and gender oppression. While the thesis, due to its scope, focuses on the context of the U.S., it also provides opportunities to extend the research to a broader one at the end and within the chapters. Therefore, while the thesis builds on Asian American studies and discourses, it introduces works that are not entirely identified with the U.S. diegetically. Although aware of the danger of conflating the U.S. with 'the West,' the thesis extends the geo-social background of the texts beyond the boundaries of the U.S. in an effort to highlight the power and ubiquity of gendered racialisation that originates from the binary of the West and the East circulating beyond the boundaries of one nation. While it addresses racial stereotypes and discourses that are recognisably American, it also argues that such stereotypes are not merely American firstly because they are also influenced by preceding European racism and secondly because they acquired a global influence. This choice is also based on the belief that globalisation and so-called 'global culture' are asymmetrical, and that old discourses coexist with newer ones.

The thesis is an intervention to the common, contemporary discourses of gender and race that hastily celebrate the post-racial, non-binary identities and the end of toxic hegemonic masculinity. It requests the reader and the audience to pause at the moment of the celebration to reconsider the restatement of the racial abject, the nationalistic discourses that reassure the seeming reinstatement of the wronged and abjected Asian (American) masculinity. It also highlights how the so-called crisis of masculinity, or crisis of whiteness, do not run to their ends but endeavour, many times successfully to maintain and recover their hegemony. The texts the thesis features present narratives of remasculinisation, seemingly of their Asian (American) characters who are racial abjects. Yet I argue that their projects of remasculinisation ultimately serve the hegemonic, white masculinity, intentionally or otherwise. In the

end, the Asian (American) men are proven to be secondary in the narrative's ultimate project of remasculinisation, and are returned to their abject status, going through the second abjection. Second(ary) abjection functions as the containment for any heroic roles that the Asian American men do, redirecting the glory to the national hegemonic body. The chapters are divided broadly into sections that explore each thematic topic under the umbrella of race and gender. The chapters theorise the dialectic dynamics of the reformation of the Asian American subject as the result of US and Asian imperialism using the concept of the double/second(ary) abjection to synthesise theories of hegemony, racialisation, gendering and psychoanalysis, cultural and critical legal studies all within literary and cultural studies. Using popular fiction and cultural texts, the chapters are divided largely into two sections discussing the earlier post-civil rights movement, neoliberal America in which race and gender relations experienced socio-political changes, then the post-9/11 and beyond until the early twenty-first century. Temporally, I have chosen to focus on what I identify as the later stage of neoliberal capitalism, from the 1990s to the present, to analyse how in the era of neoliberal capitalism Fisher's "capitalist realism" survives, not only in capitalist but also racist and sexist senses in what I call racial and gender realisms, and continues on to the future in our imaginations. The first two chapters broadly examine the politics of neoliberal multiculturalism which reveals the continuing remnants of the gendered racial formation of the previous era, while the latter two chapters then look into the future, to examine how neoliberal capitalism utilises biopolitical control over its racialised population to maintain its masculinist hegemony in the hypothetical future, highlighted through its sense of crisis and reproducing the gendered and racialised hierarchy of the past. Geographically it is mainly located in the U.S. as the site of gendered racialisation, where the abject Asian American men reside and return from and are returned to, and Asia in the global one, and focuses on the U.S. national project of reinforcing its racial hegemonic structure.

The thesis analyses a range of genres for several reasons. Above all, the thesis has selected "popular" genres that exemplify common and accepted ideas of race and gender in the contemporary world. Detective and speculative fiction, as well as horror and action thriller, are genres that appeal to a broad reader/audience. Additionally, the genres are closely related to masculinity, oftentimes featuring

competitions among men. These genres are built on the conditions of emergency, such as a crime, apocalypse, disaster, terrorism and war in which the characters inevitably compete against each other for survival. Therefore, they offer a good opportunity to examine the dynamics of power between different types of masculinities. The specific texts that the thesis studies feature, among others, Asian (American) characters that exemplify the phenomenon of second(ary) abjection. By examining the phenomenon of second(ary) abjection across a range of expressive forms and extending to wider geographical backgrounds, the thesis indicates that the phenomenon is not unique to one particular genre or a small part of the world. To be able to identify the narrative of second(ary) abjection in a variety of genres and forms, especially among popular genres, is to verify that the phenomenon is widely spread, testifying to its effectiveness in supporting the existing structure of hegemonic masculinity.

The thesis uses theories of abjection from Kristeva, Shimakawa and Li, alongside Susan Jeffords's concept of the hard bodied hero and the remasculinisation of a nation, to analyse the texts through the framework of the second(ary) abjection. The texts and their protagonists/narrators search for father figures from the past, and heirs to the future to look for adequate models of masculinity. Using the theme of spy investigation and terrorism, chapters I and II engages with the racial hegemony of the national masculinity, and the project of remasculinisation. The first two chapters look at first generation immigrant narratives that look back at their past to examine the representations of national hegemonic and Asian (American) masculinities from the past to the present. Using the theme of post-apocalyptic dystopia, chapters III and IV explore the future of the relations, how we imagine the world to change and yet are unable to draw an appropriately progressive world even in those arenas of imagination where we are encouraged to be more diverse and freer, and ultimately remain regressive in our imagination. The thesis traces and explains how the narrative, affective, and rhetorical registers of the texts are used to the reconstruction of an exceptionalist and masculinist U.S. national identity against a gendered and racial projection of Asian America and Asia. Using the texts as case studies, each chapter shows how the returning abject willingly accepts the second(ary) abjection, as well as the reader/viewer, who find pleasure in their experiences of it. In this way, the thesis proposes that the seemingly "unwitting"

static comfort that these representations of Asian (American) masculinity offer in our allegedly post-racial/gender/hegemonic world is being produced and reproduced from the literary and cultural texts that we consume. These representations are not always accidental or coincidental but uphold the continuation and rejuvenation of racial and gender hegemony globally. The theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity sets the stage for the analysis of the literary and cultural texts that I examine in the following chapters, and how they in their own ways define the discursive regime that they belong to. The chapters are discursive and critical interventions for the cultural, geopolitical, epistemological, and ontological *colour* of the regime that claims and promotes colourblindness. Each of the chapters proceeds in the chronology of the U.S. history of neoliberal capitalism, post-Cold War projections of Asia, Civil Rights movements through to the current paradigm of post-racial, post-gender and post-colonial empire, providing the analysis of how Asian (American) literary and cultural works imagine the U.S. hegemonic power and offer alternative projections for the future. The coda links the past and present racial and gender hegemonic dynamics to the post-apocalyptic projections of the future and expands the framework of second(ary) abjection in terms of the broader temporal and geographical implications of the thesis to allow further discussions. In this way, I want to juxtapose historical reflections with cultural imaginations and introduce their dialogues with each other in order to demonstrate how the epistemological project of the U.S. national hegemonic masculinity produced in and outside of the nation in multiple forms and genres is itself a powerful articulation of knowledge that still persists. Using the framework of hegemonic masculinity and double/second(ary) abjection, Part I of the thesis looks at the nationalistic response to the crisis perceived as internal and present, through their references to “cold” and “hot” wars of the past and the U.S. military presence in Asia that continue to haunt the contemporary U.S. national and global hegemonic status. Additionally with Chapter II, it expands the analysis to the more globalised connection and the anxiety of the West responding to the changing power dynamics between the East and the West. Part II looks at the imaginations for the future through the framework of the post-apocalypse and the crisis resulting from more global changes such as climate change as well. The coda looks beyond our past imaginations for the future and shifts our gaze to the current, positive change that actually takes place, to claim its direction of

research not as one of denial of the changes, but as the one that points out the true direction our society is heading towards.

Chapter I, “The Beginning of Containment: Placing the Local within the National Hegemony,” maps the invention of the hegemonic masculine national identity and its narrative strategies cast the Cold War as the historical background of the invention of Asian American identity and its relationship to America through the reading of Susan Choi’s *A Person of Interest* (2008). Moving between the past and the present of a first-generation Asian American immigrant Lee who becomes involved in a terrorist attack that becomes a national issue, the text exemplifies the first and secondary abjection of the immigrant as a national abject. Through his engagement with the national hegemonic power, Lee is given a chance to claim hegemonic American masculinity, but eventually the novel returns the abject to its original place of reclusion, giving back the prestige to its original white owners. The text performs here as a nationalist developmental narrative of the U.S. hegemonic exceptionalism from the mid-90s to early 2000s. In suggesting and rationalising specific ways of reading practice focusing on the rhetorical and narrative force of a gendered racial conjuring of the figure of the spy/national hero, the chapter trace and critically detect Orientalism and the conjuring of the “Asiatic” as a legitimate knowledge that forms his identity and enforcement of this narrative from the top down and the bottom up, from the national hegemonic masculinity to the regional and the local. In Chapter II “The Remasculinisation of the Asian: *The Foreigner*,” I analyse Jackie Chan’s film *The Foreigner* (2017) to further consider the rhetoric of America’s continuing project of remasculinisation. The chapter introduces the peculiar symbolism of the figure of Rambo and traces how the popular images of the nation’s iconic heroes such as presidents and war veterans merge with the image of the foreign yet domestic Asian hero so that he contributes to the nation’s project of rejuvenation and containment of non-white, abject population. Turning from the “war” of Vietnam to the British domestic ethnic war against the IRA, and relocating the War on Terror to its ally, the United States, the film offers a reading of the broader project of the West against the East and the persistent problematic and preoccupying symptom that reveals the West’s anxieties about its declining racial hegemony in its updated form in the new century. I argue that while such products make important interventions to the masculinist hypervisibility of the wars in global

popular imaginary and imperial memory by offering complicated “return” of Vietnamese subjects as refugees or veterans to the American/British metropole, they still contribute to the building of the same narrative that they intend to challenge. Chapter III: “Post-Apocalyptic Narratives and Speculation of the Future: *The Walking Dead*” offers a reading of AMC’s popular zombie TV series to examine how American cultural products critically disclose the gendered racial dynamics within the U.S. in their imaginations of the future and demonstrate how these products thematise the end of the world and its inhabitants as a part of the continuing U.S. imperial project of racialised hegemonic masculinity. Even as the series promotes multiracial casting, it ultimately betrays the producers’ claim for diversity and normalises whiteness as the body of the Asian American (re)turns to its abject state as a different race. The last chapter, Chapter IV: “On Such a Full Sea Are We Now Afloat,” exposes the discourse of model minority and meritocracy, reproductive futurism, and racial hybridity as a part of the nation’s projects of the biopolitical control of the population and what Jodi Kim calls “gendered racial rehabilitation.” It considers how Asian American cultural imaginings offer a hermeneutic of the creation of the segregated post-apocalyptic global space that remembers the past. Even as the newly created world gestures towards progressive future relations among peoples and nations, it also reveals the conservatism inherent in the text that limits its imagination. Characters that hold interesting, progressive possibilities remain in the background as a never-realised symbol of an uncoming future. Capitalism has produced racialised and gendered difference to create an abstracted abject working population that remains abject and abstract under hegemonic masculinity. The examples in the chapters suggest that even as they are brought back to the centre of the power for their benefits, the more subtle, updated form of hegemonic domination in the contemporary world still wants to protect and continue its fundamental shape. The updated form of hegemony calls upon the abjects they have rejected once, and returns them to their place of relegation again, but this time makes it seem as though it is their own choice. Cultural and literary texts, sometimes even despite the producers’ conscious efforts to fight the uneven distribution of hegemony, remain trapped in the circle of abjection in their use of characters and plots. Neoliberalism in an updated form, the seeming celebration of endless creation of new gender and racial categories, and diminution in the whiteness/West/masculinity’s share in the



hegemony home and abroad, all seem to have brought changes that liberate abject populations. However, I argue that conservatism remains even when the abject seems to be the leading agent and producer of the imaginations for the new dynamics. Moreover, it remains strong because the efforts seem so genuine, successful, and fully incorporated in our current world that it is hard to doubt the power of progressivism. With “diverse,” “rainbow” casting, the products disguise themselves and make the reader/audience believe that the current state is the ultimate progression and the demise of conservatism while they keep falling back into the same discourses of previous decades. Yet the differentiated, abject populations do not remain so, but (re)turn in individual ways that allow for the breakage with the limits of hegemonic structure. This is why it is important to recognise the ways in which conservatism survives despite the efforts to move towards a future that does not discriminate against people for their colours or genders. The coda: “Imagining the unimaginable – Hegemony and Alternative Futures” looks toward the future returning to Jun Ho Bong’s *Snowpiercer* and Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea*. The post-apocalyptic epistemology continues to generate and disseminate “new” knowledge and discursive constellations about race and gender. What brings changes to the dynamics of hegemony are those prognoses of the world in which hegemony as a current structure, and the power of one particular race or gender, disappear.

## Chapter I. “The Beginning of Containment: Placing the Local within the National Hegemony”

Susan Choi's *A Person of Interest* (2008) features an elderly Korean American math professor named Lee, narrating through an ambiguous voice Lee's life who tries to make sense of and come to terms with his present self by revisiting his past, and to find a way to move on from his past self to (re)establish his current and future self. It is his resolve to complete an unfinished mission; the novel follows the protagonist Lee's retrospective journey to his past to piece together the character who is at the beginning only partly presented. What I propose is that the reconstruction of his self/identity is also a reconstruction specifically of a *masculine* self, providing a useful example of how masculinity works against and alongside hegemony by presenting Lee's constant comparison between his and other men's masculinity. The novel follows Lee's life starting with a bombing that kills his colleague, whom he had secretly been regarding as a competitor or dislikes, and a letter from the terrorist who he suspects to be his former colleague/competitor. The event brings his rather colourless life attention and fame, as well as a closer relationship to a higher level of white hegemonic American masculinity that he deems as ideal. It also brings attention to his racial marginality as the novel shows how stereotypes of the Asian influence others' reception of Lee when he is presented in the media and later becomes “a person of interest” of the bombing's investigation. From his initial appearance as a sympathetic and compassionate colleague who receives unprecedented attention from people around him, Lee's stance changes dramatically when he is suspected of a terrorist. Choi incorporates two famous real-life characters into her novel, a Taiwanese American engineer Wen Ho Lee who was suspected as a spy for China, and Theodore John “Ted” Kaczynski, known as the “Unabomber” who in protest to the advancement of modern technology sent bombs targeting people who he considered to be involved with modern technology. Choi mixes the two characters partly into the novel's protagonist Lee, who becomes a racialised suspect as a bomber targeting university professors nationwide. Monica Chiu argues that the persistence of racial scrutiny, illuminated through the authors' reliance on tenets of detective fiction, specifically the resurrection of a pre-existing social order that might include racial and heterosexual paradigms or gendered

domestic and ethnic urban divisiveness, is the sustaining problem rather than the solution in *A Person of Interest* (69). The real bomber, who later turns out to be Lee's former fellow student Donald Whitehead, is modelled after the Unabomber.

As Lee traces the terrorist, Lee's investigation leads him to participate in the FBI's pursuit of the terrorist, and Lee's relationship to and performance of masculinity changes through the course of the novel as he meets other people from the past and finally find another competitor from his past to be an unexpected terrorist. The novel chronicles Lee's journey, his mission to find, fend, (re)establish, reconstruct and closer to the ideal his masculinity. Yet, the novel presents, even for Lee alone, multiple masculinities and multiple hegemonic masculinities in different contexts as they coexist and change. What Choi does is to shatter the idea that there is one ideal masculinity, and particularly white hegemonic masculinity, and show that its power is imagined after all. Choi does this successfully through the characterisation of Lee and demonstrating the changes in his perception of ideal masculinity through contact with various levels of hegemonic masculinities as Lee's life expands beyond his initial limited world of a small-town university. Yet, the novel's ending still maintains that there are hierarchies within masculinity and that Lee, as a racialised non-hegemonic subject, cannot achieve hegemonic masculinity. I highlight that the novel is heavily concerned with the idea of masculinity. The novel could be read as a fictional account of the framework of hegemonic masculinity that the thesis proposes – in other words, the return and re-turn of the racial abject. The novel exemplifies the framework of second(ary) abjection at play, in which the abject is called upon to serve the interest of the hegemonic masculinity and then returns, masked as its own choice after its glorious success and achievement of hegemonic status, to its place of exile. The text, albeit unintentionally, forces the abject to renounce the hegemonic power that it temporarily gained. The novel's investigation of masculinity closely engages with hegemonic masculinity situated in the United States of America.

To better comprehend the novel's representation of masculinities, those of both the protagonist Lee's and generally, as well as Lee's understanding of masculinity, it needs to be specified as an Asian American one, as a non-hegemonic, racialised one within the framework of hegemonic masculinity in the context of the United States as the site of racialisation of Lee's masculinity. There is always a sense

of marginalisation that accompanies the novel's and Lee's attempt at the affirmation of his masculinity that finds its root in the condition of racialisation. Lee's racial awareness is also rooted in his ethnic background as the novel subtly includes pieces of his experience in the Korean war while not directly specifying his ethnic origin compared to how much he is seen by others as a more generalised "Asian" man. While Lee is also more aware of this generalised identity, his sense of racial hierarchy also comes from his origin as a war refugee to America: "For all that he'd lived through a violent and crude civil war, he'd never been this close to the heart, the hot core, of a bomb" (*PI* 7). Lee's experience of the bomb exploded in Hendley's office is intertwined with his experience of the Korean war at the beginning of the novel hinting at the shadow of the war in Lee's life in the United States. His standard of hegemonic masculinity also derives from his ethnic background as well as the situational hierarchy between the two countries.

The novel's narrative features two narratives of the "stranger in the village" kind of testing masculinity exemplified in precedents such as the film *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955). The film also features two narratives of the "stranger in the village" – a stranger in search of a person, and a shadow of a perpetual stranger in town. A man (John J. Macreedy) comes to Black Rock looking for a Japanese American man named Komoko, to find the local men becoming hostile at the mention of the name. He learns that Komoko has been long dead, as he faces attacks from the local men including Reno Smith, who killed Komoko because of his racial hatred against the Japanese after he failed to enlist in the military after the Pearl Harbour attack. Macreedy reveals that he came to the town to give Komoko a medal Komoko's son received, who died in combat. Confrontation with the local men reinvigorates Macreedy, who was suffering from a sense of incompetence and lack of masculinity due to the loss of his arm in the war. He manages to kill others, prove his masculinity, and leaves town, leaving Komoko's medal to wish for Black Rock's healing and peace. What I suggest here is to read another narrative that is hidden in the film, a narrative of a *racialised* stranger who comes to town. While it is a story of Macreedy coming into the town, there is a shadow of Komoko, the original stranger in town. Moreover, he is a racialised stranger, casting perpetually as the outsider in the village. Behind the competing various masculinities of the film's other men, Komoko's persecuted Asian masculinity haunts the film as a racialised, abject

masculinity. Komoko's medal within the narrative works eventually as a device not to revive or honour Komoko's masculinity, but to reinvigorate white masculinities and the all-American town of Black Rock in which Komoko's existence is buried forgoing the chance to be revived. Komoko's name seemed to have been resurfaced from the space of racial liminality, hence, coming back from abjection. Yet, the film ends with Komoko's second abjection after it has been the source of motivation for the rejuvenation of the film's hegemonic masculine protagonist. Likewise, I suggest reading *A Person of Interest* also as two narratives of the stranger in the town, as Choi skilfully incorporates both in Lee's journey. Firstly, Lee arrives in Idaho looking for clues of Gaither, his former colleague's whereabouts who he believes to be the bomber to clear his name as a person of interest. The mission is also a way to revive his masculinity as he has always suffered from a sense of competition toward the man. Lee's search leads him to further investigation that results in his cooperation with the FBI's investigation of the bomber, which allows him an inclusion to the status of the American hegemonic masculinity of the FBI. It clears his suspicion as a racialised abject, allowing his return from his abjection. The FBI agent suggests that Lee is a hero. However, his experience as the person of interest forced him to remind that he is still a perpetual stranger in town in his own town that he has been living for decades. Ironically to become assimilated again, to de-racialise, Lee decides that it is best not to publicise his name in the case. He willingly returns to his place of exile, quiet life as the second abjection. Therefore, in the novel, Lee makes the character for the double narrative of the stranger in town, as the perpetuate racialised stranger in his own town. Paralleling Komoko's narrative, Lee's name is buried behind the glory of the white (national) hegemonic masculinity after he served to fulfil its remasculinisation.

While Choi, through the novel's constant presentation of Lee's performances of masculinity, suggests that there are *performances* of different, and varying *degrees* of masculinity, I contend that the novel accepts the existence of ideal masculinity and masculine identity in spite of itself, ultimately reversing and betraying its efforts to criticise the fictionality of idealised, white hegemonic masculinity. Choi's critique of the idealisation of white hegemonic masculinity is successful to the extent that the novel highlights its fictionality and process of racialisation clearly. Yet, I suggest that while Choi shows that there is not one ideal masculinity for everyone and it does not

complete a man who has more dimension than his sense of masculinity, the novel's narrative still presents Lee's sense of failure and renunciation at claiming hegemonic masculinity as inevitable. Male bonding is a part of masculinity, and making Lee feel more complete through other means than remasculinisation, that is, by dissociating himself from the multiple types of American hegemonic masculinities that he obviously desired, is in a way denouncing Lee's masculinity and rendering it marginalised. I suggest that this denunciation presented as Lee's own is grounded in racial abjection, and result in the second(ary) racial abjection of the Asian (American). Lee constantly seeks reassurance for his masculinity, which has been his life's unfinished mission for him. Despite, or perhaps because of his old age, the mission is brought back to the surface with unexpected events following a bombing targeted at his colleague. The novel begins with the explosion of a bomb delivered to a professor named Hendley, Lee's junior colleague at the department of mathematics in a Midwestern state university who is in his 40s. Popular among young students and assistants, surrounded by high-tech equipment and enjoying a heterosexual relationship, Hendley is an example of a man around Lee who is closer to hegemonic American masculinity according to Lee's standard. While Lee distances himself from what he perceives as hegemonic American masculinity, or rather appears to have accepted it as an impossible goal to achieve specifically because of his *Asianness* (and non-native-born – therefore not “truly” American), the novel still presents the Asian American masculine subject as desiring the hegemonic ideal haunted by the lasting influence of racialisation. Therefore, it provides a fictional account of the framework and theory of hegemonic masculinity, with its demonstration of the constructedness of the idealised hegemonic model itself, and the levels of hegemonic masculinities, and the complicity of non-hegemonic masculinities within the dynamic. And the novel's narrative unfolds this contention around hegemonic (American) masculinity. In addition to Lee's own sense of competition with other men in the novel, mostly Gaither, Whitehead, and Hendley, whom he meets as fellow students and colleagues, the novel's narrative follows through Lee's life working against and toward the idealised masculinity that he himself has created. By primarily casting himself in the category of the marginalised, Lee dissociates himself from the challenges to the hegemonic masculinity itself. His sense of marginalisation is often accompanied by his sense of racialisation that is

imposed on him throughout the years in the U.S. However, he is presented as still desiring the hegemonic ideal and therefore complicit in it. In this way, his masculinity does not pose threat to hegemony but rather, following the novel's narrative, eventually aligns with hegemonic masculinity and helps to defend and reinforce the structure of hegemonic masculinity. The novel creates Asian American masculinity as an ultimately marginalised one that returns to the margin.

The novel denounces a localised version of hegemonic masculinity that Lee has created in his imagination represented by his idealisation of Whitehead's hegemony – and for a moment produces a critique of the fictionality of hegemonic masculinity – before, and in order to although unintentionally, revalidate the existence and legitimacy of the national level of *authentic* hegemonic masculinity through Lee's second(ary) abjection. What maintains hegemonic masculinity hegemonic is that it makes its fictional power seem real, and the illusion of power produces real power in the world that makes it continue to hold the hegemony over others who are made powerless and relegated into peripheries as abject beings. One way of producing this illusion of power is through the narratives that validate hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, when reading through the framework of second(ary) abjection, the novel's ending is conspicuously suspect. It promotes a more hegemonic, legitimate masculinity – while highlighting the futility and fictionality of the idealised hegemonic model on Lee's local level, it eventually seems to accept that there still is one such model that should be preserved; ultimately the novel fails to question the fictionality of masculinity itself. It validates and supports Lee's pursuit of *masculine* self/identity. The novel's ultimate position, therefore, is not against hegemonic masculinity and hierarchy among masculinities. Even though the novel offers a critique of the constructedness and futility of the competition for masculinity, it does not allow Lee the position of hegemony and returns him to his minority status. And again, even more suspect is the ending where Lee has his surrogate male heir while waiting for his disqualifying female heir. Although he values his daughter and seeks to repair their relationship, Lee is presented as a more wholly rounded being in the end after he meets Mark, Aliene and Gaither's son who was raised by Gaither and his new wife after their divorce. The reconciliation is a form of reinforcement both for Lee's and the higher (national) level of hegemonic masculinity which calls for the continuation of the lines of white

American men. The novel suggests that the fulfilment of Lee's role as the model minority will derive from his indirect male child rather than his biological daughter, as that will be the way to serve his role to serve the continuation of the white national hegemonic masculinity.

It is in this sense that the death of his unacknowledged competitor, Hendley, is a meaningful starting point of the novel – as a reminder of his unfulfilled mission to secure and complete his masculinity, a sign that he needs to reestablish and reinforce his masculine self that he has been neglecting. The incident gives him an excuse to reclaim his dwindling masculinity more actively as he makes a national appearance on TV demonstrating his sense of passion and patriotism. Lee “had launched into riveting, righteous invective” stating that if Hendley, being one of the great thinking men of today, dies, “we all lose—not just those of us who are his friends and colleagues, but this country” (*PI* 13). Lee's interview aligns Hendley to the wider part of the nation and not just his community, and by association his concern is on the national level, and his passion becomes patriotic. Heightened sense of competition that is reminded also from the letter from the past of his youthful competition, reminds him to, or forces him to resume the mission of completing his masculinity – the mission that was never completed before. Whereas he failed to win in his intellectual competition to solve a shared math problem, this time he could have a chance of winning against the mysterious threat that he assumes to be his former fellow student. He may have been given one more chance to prove and complete his masculinity. He has been concerned about “losing” his masculinity as he constantly compares his status with others and doubts his validity. The novel emphasises that masculinity is something that needs to be proven again and again, something that requires continuous work and effort, suggesting that it may be impossible to “complete.” Yet it leads him to embark on a journey of finding and reinforcing his masculinity, giving him a chance to expand his boundaries of life and a chance to align himself with *American* masculinity. The events allow him to claim his “American” side of masculinity. The novel ultimately suggests that hegemonic American masculinity is racialised as white. The novel's representation of the “Asian American” masculinity is one that is marginalised, and aspires to hegemony, rather than challenge it or question it, and one that would ultimately comply with hegemony and nourish it. In the end, Choi seems to counter this by suggesting that



Lee's life has not been as lonely/solitary as he might have thought, and that there could be lonelier lives (e.g., Whitehead), again representing loneliness as a result of *men's* problem and suggesting male bonding as the solution to it. It almost seems to suggest that completion of his masculinity can only be done by participating in a more legitimate alliance with proper masculinity, i.e., the FBI. However then also, Lee finds solace from Fasano and Mark – so that the “brotherhood” saves the men. In the end, the failure of hegemony is not genuine, because there is the other, authentic hegemony. The success of the FBI operation clears Lee's name as the person of interest, and gets rid of the dangerous, fictional, degenerate local-hegemonic, or in fact, non-hegemonic masculinity of the bomber, becoming the final hero of the narrative. The novel follows through hegemonic masculine models and changing masculinities during the periods relevant to the novel – from 1960-70s American to 1980s-90s American that ultimately reflects the mid-2000s America. It examines the changing representations and definitions of masculinity offered by the novel in the two previous decades and its relationship to hegemonic masculinity. The novel provides a specific hegemonic model in the 1980s in the guise of hypermasculinity while at the same time highlighting its flaws, which led to its transformation and seeming demise in the late 1990s, with the appearance of alternative models of masculinity. Coinciding with the other chapters' time in its most recent version of national hegemonic masculinity in the twentieth-first century, the current model of hegemonic masculinity features its updated form from the excessively masculine or seemingly toxic masculinity.

## **1. Bombing and Lee's Sense of Competition**

*A Person of Interest* captures the essences of Lee's character, the novel's protagonist, already in its earliest pages as it narrates Lee's realisation of his own sense of jealousy and competition against Hendley. Choi suggests that the event is significant more because of a brutal revelation it has brought to Lee than for the brutality of the explosion itself as it makes Lee see his own mind. The novel is narrated ambiguously through the third person's voice that is close to Lee's yet not quite himself. The ambiguous narrator presents Lee in a mediated way that makes a room for what is seemingly Lee's own mind is still not his own statement, making it

ambiguous and unreliable to an extent. The novel announces Lee's shock at the discovery of his ill-feelings towards the young colleague before presenting that of experiencing the blast from the next door: "It was only after Hendley was bombed that Lee was forced to admit to himself just how much he'd disliked him: a raw, never-mined vein of thought in an instant laid bare by the force of explosion" (PI 3). The novel in this way indicates Lee's lack of self-awareness, as well as also the possibility that his feelings and thoughts might have been unconsciously suppressed. This narrative trope of the lack of self-awareness also sets up Lee's misidentification of his fellow student from the past, Gaither, as the terrorist later in the novel. Lee was not prepared for "the cold shock of his first, addled thought when he'd felt the vast fist of the detonation ... briefly thinking, *Oh, good*" (5).

The novel, narrated through Lee's mediated voice in a free indirect speech that sounds like an objective observer of himself as if talking about a third person, nevertheless in an unforgiving light reveals him as a character who is gripped by jealousy and constant (self-)judgement, veering between pride and self-doubt. Again, the narration's denial of his uncomfortable, ill-feeling towards Hendley is rather a confirmation that he had been having the feeling from the past than support for Lee's idea that he was not aware of the feeling, or that the feeling did not exist. The novel captures in detail and depth his almost arrogant sense of pride weighed down by relentless self-doubt, and his hidden competitiveness. His evaluation and validation of himself, his self-regard, often depend on comparisons with other men around him, and validation from others. He often judges other men's values in association with masculinity to validate his own. Lee finds solace in thinking that the students "didn't scorn Lee quite as much, he felt sure, as they did the other professors his age, the old men with their elbowpatched tweeds, and their stay-at-home wives who made cookies and tea for the very few students who still bothered to seek professorial counsel" (PI 4). Lee seeks to achieve the never-enough validation by putting himself in competition with other men, real or imagined. There is a strong sense of rivalry in Lee's accounts of his life. Although he does not admit or always seem aware of it, he constantly sees himself in competition with other men. Hendley, the victim of the bomb which eventually kills him, is an "exemplar of a new breed of professor, computer-science division, worldly, engaged, more likely to publish in a magazine full of ads for a mysterious item called Play-Station than in a moribund university

quarterly” (6). Although the narration, mimicking Lee’s voice, does not elaborate on the description, it presents the hint of jealousy and disapproval at this new kind of successful professor, unlike Lee himself. Hendley is successful, brimming with self-confidence and self-satisfaction that Lee – and many other colleagues in his otherwise (at best) mediocre university, Lee bitterly admits – lacks. Hendley also represents changing society’s standards that Lee disapproves of, or rather, disapprove of Lee. Lee sits in his office all by himself listening through the wall to the sound of Hendley chatting with his visitors, “punctuated by the robotic bleeps and the primitive honks Hendley’s two huge computers gave off,” holding his Montblanc fountain pen and a yellow legal pad that are a symbol of his difference from Hendley (4). Unlike the old days, students now “wanted teachers who acted like pals – this way why they’d loved Hendley” (3). Although Lee dismissively refers to Hendley as a “man-boy” who dresses and plays like (and plays with) young students (8), Lee had envied Hendley’s popularity among students, his success, his easiness with people and with life (we will return to Lee’s sense of relative uneasiness in a moment).

Then the bomb, and Lee’s terrible gladness: that something was damaging Hendley, because Hendley made Lee feel even more obsolete and unloved. ... He was deep in disgusted reflection on his own pettiness when the bomb squad found him. (*PI* 9)

Lee at first denies his sense of animosity towards his successful young colleague, stating that he is different from other “obsolescent” professors his age, the “diminishing elders” who had a tendency to resent junior colleagues (3). He believes that his “harsh princeliness” and “aristocratic hauteur” still impressed his students, distinguishing him from other colleagues around his age (3). However, an immediate doubt follows his sense of self-regard in the next paragraph: “Then again, there were times he was forced to believe the exact opposite: that his students had neither respect nor affection for him” (4). This struggle at maintaining his pride, want of validation and assurance almost always accompanied by doubt, is the pattern that dominates Lee’s life that the novel unfolds throughout, one which also directs the plot of the novel – driving force of the narrative of the novel.

Recounting the night of the attack, the novel directs the reader's attention to Lee's sense of loneliness, "which Lee possessed in greater measure and finer grade than did his colleagues – of that he was sure – made men more discerning" (9). Regardless of his seeming choice for solitude and disengagement, or perhaps because of that, Lee is gripped by a deep sense of loneliness that he views as a source of his unhappiness. Choi constructs loneliness as a part of the element of men's lives – and likely a consequence of competition that it characterises as a part of masculinity – as Lee, Whitehead, Hendley are all depicted as lonely men. Lee claims that he saw "Hendley was a lonely man, too, in his own way. ... Hendley loved to be loved; there was never enough to put an end to his restless quest for it" (9). The sense of loneliness is what makes Lee able to assume that Hendley must have been going through mail when he was alone at his office. It is what allows him to claim his identification with Hendley. Through the characters' shared sense of loneliness, the novel in this way associates (Lee's) masculinity with affective loneliness and jealousy. It is a part of the novel's understanding of the common characteristic of masculinity. Such representation of men's lives stained by negative affective emotions such as loneliness and jealousy due to the "nature" of men's lives, is part of the common discourse of the crisis of masculinity. By making these common characteristics of masculinity, the representation on one hand validates the self-victimisation of "masculinity" in general, which often used for the self-justification of its flaws, and simultaneously presents Lee's (mis)understanding of his masculinity as a general one. As Lee admits that his generation of professors shares these characteristics, the novel highlights this shared sense of masculinity, particularly in the context of Lee's life in academia, as a base for the novel's efforts to claim Lee's masculinity as universal and colourless. Yet, the characteristics are also consistent with the typical, general representation of Asian American masculinity, in which it is always presented as marginalised, associated with senses of inadequacy and inferiority. Lee's racial and gender marginalisation is also characterised this way.

That *A Person* begins with the death of Hendley, the envied, young, white male colleague (competitor), and a letter from another white male competitor from the past indicates how masculine competition is the central narrative of the novel. The event and the letter force Lee to resume his unfulfilled imaginary competition,

against the competitor(s) of his past. By presenting Lee as a suspect, whilst allowing the reader to know that he is not, the novel places him in a competition in which Lee is a symbolic participant as it is imagined by Lee. This is one of the many competitions in the novel that Lee creates in his own imagination. It is important to recognise the role of competition in the novel, as Choi uses it not only as a natural part of hegemony but also to emphasise the repetitiveness and futility of it in her critique of hegemonic masculinity. After all, Lee suffers from his imaginary competitions, while he remains as the abject and returns to the abject position again. The bombing is also significant because it is a call to recall Lee from his abject status as Shimakawa (2002) recognises, as an insignificant professor who is relegated to the periphery of the nation as well as academia, to eventually an important accomplice to the national level investigation. It is the beginning of the process of second(ary) abjection that happens by the end of the novel. The temporary position of fame gives him a moment of association with American masculinity, and it allows the reader to see that his desire for it still exists after years of dissociation from it. Although he eschews claiming the “hegemonic” masculinity, Lee wants to prove his masculinity to himself and to the world around him, and particularly to his competitors, whom he could not shake from the past. The novel continuously brings back his competitors from the past, mostly Gaither and by association Whitehead. Lee believes that Gaither is the one who has sent him the letter – a fictional killer/threat. Lee feels he had never truly won against Gaither, the first husband of Aileen and the father of her first child, even though Lee is the one who had stolen her from Gaither and eventually married and had a daughter named Esther with her. As becomes more evident at the end of the novel, as it turns out that Gaither has been dead all along, it is also an evident metacommentary on the constructedness of identities. His newly embarked mission begins with some hope, since at least at the beginning the elimination of a symbolic competitor seems successful until Lee realises that Hendley has been made into a symbol and a national hero through his death, of which he is dissociated from because of his race. As soon as he becomes a person of interest, Lee learns that his Asianness has remained conspicuous and abject despite his seeming assimilation at the town he lived and worked in for decades. His Americanness disappears.

Lee imagines that Gaither had killed Hendley before he could; or while he could not. Lee's identity is conflated with, and imagined as, that of a bomber who killed his envied colleague whose identity he had also claimed to represent temporarily in his attempted and seeming return from the status of a marginalised abject. In this sense, the novel allows Lee to symbolically and temporarily assume the position of the killer (i.e., winner) in the masculine competition without compromising his morality. Gaither and Lee's relationship, once homosocial as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests in *Between Men* (1985), strengthened young Lee's masculinity. The temporary and symbolic homosocial bonding with his competitor is a modification of his homosocial bonding with him in the past, this time without Aileen in between them. In his imagination, his racialised abject status as the suspected bomber becomes de-racialised as he assumes that the actual bomber is his white American counterpart. It brings him back to the status of the non-abject from his abject status.

That Lee's fictional competitors all must die (either literally or symbolically) also reveals the destructive elements of the competitive nature of masculine identity building, of the mechanisms of "establishing" masculinity at the cost of others that centres around hegemonic masculinity. As Lee is informed of Hendley's death, Lee's fear and remorse are effectively shown through Choi's free indirect speech. The novel delivers the moment when Lee's frame is reflected in a glass door. As the scene presents Lee's sense of death with the reflection of his old body, it connects him to Hendley and connects Hendley's dead body back to Lee's sunken appearance bringing the two men together:

There was his reflection in the glass door again, as clearly cast against the night as it would be in a mirror. His lean face, his sharp jaw, his slight leathery jowls of age, not as if he had grown fleshier but as if his outlines had surrendered to gravity very abruptly. His mouth a little downturned at the corners, his eyes very remote, hiding fear. Every kind of death frightened him, whether of one he had loved or of one he had loathed. And it was that fear, anyone's fear of death, that now sat anxiously at his sternum, a pressuring fist—though it felt similar to remorse (*PI* 77).

The connection between the images of death and the two men effectively evokes the destructive nature and the destructive end of the cycle of competitive feelings toward other men that Choi narrates throughout the novel.

## **2. Lee's Performance of American Masculinity**

As much as Lee sees other men as competitors, the novel shows moments of Lee's desire and attempt for identification with them as the means of establishing and consolidating his sense of masculine self. While Hendley was still alive after the terror attack at the hospital, Lee finds himself with an irresistible sense of identification with Hendley: "Lee felt Hendley's non-existent presence like a phantom limb on the far side of the wall of his hospital room, and he wanted to go to Hendley, to speak to him, even speak for him" (*PI* 11). Lee states that he finds "unexpressed sympathy for Hendley as if he and Hendley were one" and begins telling his assumptions with more conviction – "he wanted everyone to understand that he overheard Hendley, that the soundtrack of Hendley's daily life underscored Lee's life, too" (11). While on a first glance his reaction could be seen simply as a natural, post-traumatic reaction to the terror attack he experienced in close proximity, I read that Lee finds reaffirmation of/for his sense of "American" masculinity in his identification with Hendley. Lee is, in a sense, taking it from Hendley. In other words, the identification is Lee's chance to consume Hendley's identity and voice, to claim Hendley's position and authority of his American masculinity. And claim it he does in the following passages.

The recollection of Lee's interview about the bombing is an example that shows the novel's view of Lee's masculinity as a dualistic one that swerves between Asian and American. The passages reveal Lee's relationship with Asian American masculinity, and his performance of American masculinity. The recounting, introducing Lee's interview and showing Lee watching himself on TV, highlights the instances that his performance of masculinity is framed as racially dualistic. This sequence presents Lee's aspiration for "American" rather than "Asian (American)" masculinity. Lee's sense of triumph and validation comes from his confirmation of "American" masculinity rather than a specifically Asian one. Or even, "in spite of"

Asianness – so while his sitting on the ottoman was his initial (and *true* (natural)) choice, he deliberately chooses to move to the La-Z Boy (it is not just any recliner chair) in his glory/celebration. Lee is also proud of his “natural” performance of American masculinity. Through the narration Lee gladly recounts the confirmation of his “naturalness/authenticity” (of his performance). Others are surprised by Lee’s interview, which even surprises Lee himself: many people asked Lee “if it was really his first time on TV, because he seemed born to it. Lee had had no trouble staring into the camera, his eyes blazing with rage. He had delivered his side of the story without pathos or exaggeration ... launched into riveting, righteous invective” (13).

Lee watched himself that night on the eleven o’clock news, squirming with not entirely pleasureless discomfort at the strange sight of his own downturned mouth, his own vertical furrow like a knife wound between his eyebrows, betrayals of age he could hardly believe he possessed, and the messy white thatch that apparently passed for his hair. Seeing himself on TV was like seeing a stranger perform a harsh version of him, under the merciless lights, and then hearing his voice, the strong accent that still stained his English despite decades of rigor, was its own agony. Yet his words sounded good. The vein suspicion that had sustained him through unbroken disappointment at every stage of his career—that he was at least a good lecturer, charismatic and bracingly scary—now found new confirmation. He moved from the ottoman— where he’d been squatting like a true Oriental, elbows on his knees, focused motionlessly on the screen of his blizzard-prone Zenith—into the tattered La-Z-Boy, with his bowl of fried beef and green peppers and rice and his can of Bud Light. (*PI* 13-14)

Choi directs our attention to the performative nature of the interview by emphasising Lee’s position as a spectator of his own performance (“like seeing a stranger perform a harsh version of him” [14]). While he expresses dissatisfaction at the physical signs of his old age, and more importantly his immigrant accent “agonizingly” unbearable to witness, he finds comfort in the fact that his words were “good” – “charismatic



and bracingly scary” (14). Lee is pleasantly surprised by his eloquence as it is a proof of his successful accommodation of the American language as well as sentiment. His gladness reveals both sides of his relationship to Americanness – to assimilate, and the anxiety that he could still be seen as an outsider. The sequence of his movement from the passage above, as a reaction to his performance, is of importance as it separates Lee’s Asian and American sides and shows Lee’s movement from one to another, revealing Lee’s preference. His flow of thoughts from his dissatisfaction at and the disapproval of his age and immigrant accent, to his satisfaction at and approval of his performance in the interview despite those conditions, leading to his departure from his Oriental ottoman to his American La-Z Boy, holding his bowl of rice and can of Bud Light. He finally settles with satisfaction in his American recliner. He is successfully turned into a typical All-American from a “true Oriental.”

Then Lee’s remark aligns his sense of righteousness to patriotic passion, declaring that “Professor Hendley is one of the great thinking men of today. If he loses life, we all lose – not just those of us who are his friends and colleagues, but this *country*” (13). Lee’s sense of the nation as a part of it not as a racialized abject, and his desire for American masculinity is present in his speech. Again, the sequence here is important as Lee’s willing ceremony claiming American masculinity firstly with his show of patriotism and then his fatherly appearance. After he finishes his speech, he walks over and hugs Emma Stiles, “And she’d come to him all in a rush, like Esther when she had been small and he’d had to awaken her from a nightmare. A gesture so natural to him, and yet so unexpected of him by the people who thought they knew him” (13). In this scene Lee reveals his side of masculinity firstly as an eloquent and passionate speaker and a patriot, a spokesman for both his vulnerable male colleague and the American nation; and a natural-born speaker (authentic) – which leads to the idea of the native-born and unsurprisingly, to American patriotism (against terror, reversing the post-Cold War fears of infiltration by foreign agents and the stereotype of the foreign spy), which later turns out to be a significant foretelling of his mission with the SWAT team for his access to American masculinity. Secondly, he reveals his hidden side of masculine authority through the performance of his fatherhood that also replicates innocently Hendley’s authority over the female student. Emma Stiles, an undergraduate student at the math department, is significant

to Lee only in relation to Hendley, as Hendley's female follower. "[A] known acolyte of Hendley's," Emma is a hard-working, popular student who passionately follows Hendley; "he might have thought that Emma had taken her job, which as dull as work-study jobs went, because it brought her into regular, casual, exclusive contact with Hendley" (7). It is a pattern of Lee's measurement of masculinity, a validation from (attractive) women. While Hendley is still alive, and Lee has spoken *on behalf of him*, as a survivor and a *defender* of Hendley, Lee has won the competition. For once, Lee is getting the attention and *love* in place of or, on behalf of Hendley. And the novel shows Lee's winning ceremony.

The recliner, as well as some other pieces of Lee's furniture, has symbolic significance regarding not only his personal history but also his understanding of American masculinity. The novel presents Lee as a character who gives symbolic significance to his possessions, despite his contradicting claims probably because in a sincere sense he does not own that many. It is one of the very few items left after his divorces, since even his rapacious second (ex-)wife Michiko did not want to, but also could not, take it away from him. Women don't get the value of it; both of his wives did not appreciate the chair; it represents Lee's American masculine self – in contrast to his wives' dislike of them – La-Z Boy is (with the stabbing demonstration) bought for himself not for his wives; it belongs to him. Lee has probably spent twenty per cent of his past twenty years on "this hideous chair"; it is made of "supposedly wearproof, stainproof, punctureproof miracle fiber of the mid-1970s" that sounds clearly American when he and Aileen were married and Esther was young (14). The recliner is an icon of the 1970's America, representing both an American identity as well as a male identity.

At the peak of the America-I-Was-Promised hierarchy is a weekend afternoon with a beer in hand, watching football (US pigskin or otherwise) on TV while ensconced in an overstuffed La-Z-Boy recliner. It's an image that was pushed deliberately in the 1970s, when NFL heartthrob quarterback Joe Namath appeared in magazine ads for the brand, a vision of masculine potential energy surrounded by a lot of brown tones and vaguely sleazy taglines. The La-Z-Boy recliner is

one of the last viable vestiges of the 20th-century American Dream.  
(Robey)

It is a reminder of Lee's young, American masculine self that ages with him through his new bachelorhood. Lee recalls the comical and almost theatrical moment of its purchase, with a "mentally unstable salesman at the La-Z Boy store, leaping onto the chair like a hunter onto a felled elephant and stabbing it again and again with a silver nail file, ... the salesman had shouted, panting with effort. "No ... holes! No ... holes!" (*PI* 14). It is a symbol of their American life, that they'd, of course, bought on instalment – because, what could be more American than that, and it is not second-hand. The recliner captures two sides of America that Lee endeavours to fulfil, the financial power in the capitalist system that is the quintessential characteristic of America, and masculinity that distinguishes him from his spouses. La-Z Boy is "an object that taps into our deepest, most American anxieties about comfort and leisure and bodies at rest" (Robey) that once represented Lee's generation's American Dream and the iconic image that's survived into Lee's present, the 2000s. It is an American heritage that can be purchased. It is a symbol of his loyalty to the American hegemonic masculinity, and the state of Lee's own masculinity as well as the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as Choi emphasises Lee's emotional attachment to the recliner's exaggerated endurance and the actual worn-down description of the chair. Even after twenty years, "there weren't any holes. Instead, the coarse weave had grown less and less like a fabric and more and more like a net, barely restraining the chair's flesh of crumbling foam rubber. A chair after my own heart, Lee thought as he made it recline – and it still reclined effortlessly. Worn down so it looks like garbage, but at least no holes" (*PI* 14). Choi likens Lee's crumbling, ageing masculinity to the chair's cover that has started to show its flesh and suggests that Lee's heart has started to reveal its contents. Yet however worn, it is a symbol of Lee's Americanness and the American dream, and Choi suggests that Lee still holds onto that ideal, celebrating his satisfactory and successful performance of masculinity with the American recliner, with a beer in his hand. It is necessary to introduce more of Lee's understanding and definition of masculinity, and his idealised model – in other words, Lee's hegemonic masculine model.

### 3. Lee's Understanding and Definition of Masculinity

The novel presents Lee's sense of moderate success in terms of social standing. Lee takes pride in that

He was still capable of the harsh princeliness he'd possessed in his youth, although now he was half through his sixties, and his hair was all white. That old aristocratic hauteur would return suddenly, and his loose, dowdy trousers, always belted too high, would seem to sit on a younger man's waist. The liver spots that had come to his face would be bleached by the glare pouring forth from his eyes. His wasn't the kind of temperament spouse or child or friend had ever wanted to cleave to, but for his students it had the power to impress. (*PI* 3)

Lee's scorn for other men of his age, and his pride at the exhibition of intellectual and physical vigour as a man who holds onto his sense of authority, introduce the reader to some of his definition and understanding of masculinity. I would reiterate that a great part of Lee's sense of self and his assessment of it are tied to his performance of masculinity; the novel narrates his mission to confirm the existence and endurance of his masculinity and masculine self. Lee's sense of self is largely connected to his "masculine" performance – authority, measures of professional and economic success, competition within and among institutions. His own sense of masculinity depends largely on his sense of competitiveness, mastery, and intellect(tual superiority). By the society's and especially by Lee's own measure, Lee's masculinity is not altogether a failure. Lee's academic success – a tenured professor – is an important source of his sense of self and self-validation, even when he often finds his position less than satisfying; Lee often compares himself with more successful peers working at more prestigious universities. Lee bitterly admits that "the rest of the school's departments were considered subpar by the rest of the schools in the country, an assessment that included the math department of which Lee was a member" (6). The status of his university is important, because it's one of the measures of masculinity that links his ambition to the national level. Otherwise,

the characteristics of the hegemonic masculinity for him are primarily on a local level rather than on the level of the whole America until he meets and interacts with a broader community. Lee's exposure to the media and his later interaction with the FBI due to the bombing expands the boundaries of Lee's world confined to his life at the local university and therefore influences his ideas of masculinity. Intellectual reputation plays a minor role in the criteria for hegemonic masculinity compared to physical strength, both on a personal level and metaphorically in international power relations, but to Lee's localised standard of hegemonic masculinity, it plays a greater role even as it in the broader society feeds him into the stereotype of Asian (American) men as mathematicians and scientists who are not considered masculine. Lee's limited world, situated within the academic institution, provides him with a ground for his sense of Americanness and masculinity even as Choi indicates his underlying sense of dissatisfaction. Lee gained more power through his incorporation into the professional, intellectual class compared to his prior status as a war refugee, and gained a part of his previous class privilege before immigration and marginalisation. The "boundedness of a particular Asian American life-world, even or perhaps especially that of the Asian American professional classes and their historical dependency on the pathways to social integration afforded by higher education ... Prior to his present adventure, Lee's abstract self-regard as "purely American" is mediated more concretely by his identification with the professorial class" (Lye 270-271). With ambivalence, Lee grounds his standard of masculinity within academia and harbours both self-confirmation and self-doubt.

### **Jealousy**

He is also full of doubt about his masculinity largely due to his sense of racialisation. The following examples support my suggestion that Lee's mission to confirm his masculine self is a result of displacement and relocation of his position both within class and racial hierarchy, and therefore cannot be universalised as a universal (gendered) quest of a man to find his manhood. Surely, it also is a part of *that* quest, the one which is too often generalised as the grand narrative of everyman's quest to find the (universal human) self in which a masculine self stands in for a universal human being. However, race is a particular problem in Lee's quest. The novel explains that while "[j]ealousy had stained much of Lee's life," Lee as a

young man had never had to experience jealousy before emigrating to the US. He originally comes from a fallen aristocrat, “an exceptionally privileged family” who had accepted their circumstantially inexorable fall with anguish than envy (*PI* 15). Jealousy, in other words, is a symptom of his migration/displacement that is not a mere common characteristic of men but has a particular background in racialisation he feels as a migrant/war refugee. Choi introduces this racial awareness through the narration:

Lee felt fierce love for the naïve and arrogant young man he’d been, and sometimes, in his immigrant life, this love almost seemed to reanimate that former self, so that to outsiders he seemed both arrogant and remarkably blind to own circumstances. They thought he believed in himself as an exception, whatever the case, but the truth was exactly the opposite: Lee knew that his exceptional status was irrecoverably lost. If he sometimes resembled the young man he’d been, it wasn’t in defiance to new circumstance but from the painful awareness of how immutable the new circumstance was. (15)

This passage introduces Lee’s relationship with his past self. Lee is shadowed by his past self – an ideal that is irretrievable (lost) but the one that he cannot help but return to as a point of reference, to his lost privilege that constructed a part of his ideal identity. His life in the US begins with the loss of his privilege and an unwanted partition from hegemony as a racialised, national abject. The distance he feels from hegemony and hegemonic masculinity, the sense of marginalisation, are linked to his sense of jealousy and (racial) inadequacy, found in the following instance of Lee’s uneasiness with Hendley.

This revelation comes with the first clue that Lee’s sense of masculinity is a racialised one to the reader. Choi specifies Lee’s sense of uncomfortableness when Hendley talks to him as rooted in his sense of racial minority. His new circumstances, a fall from hegemonic social status in which his privilege is lost and he is marginalised is a result of him becoming a racial other in a new country. It serves as an instance showing Lee’s relationship to specifically *Asian American* masculinity as he perceives it, as well as to American masculinity. Lee’s sense of inadequacy and

inferiority/marginalisation is inevitably linked to his sense of *racial* inadequacy, an immigrant sensibility. I argue that the “volatile mix of pride and timidity” (Prose; “Presumed Guilty”) that Choi assigns Lee has its origin in racialisation. The narration examines in retrospect Lee’s uneasiness with/towards Hendley’s cordiality. Choi’s subtle observations explain Lee’s small actions that may otherwise be considered as mere personality traits, as one that is rooted in racial awareness and therefore, make Lee’s seemingly willing dissociation from American hegemonic masculinity by the end of the novel decidedly unwilling and give strength to the interpretation that the framework of second(ary) abjection is at play in his case.

Had he known [his dislike of Hendley], he might have forgiven himself his eager awkwardness in the face of Hendley’s camaraderie, the oh-yeses he would hear himself helplessly blurting whenever Hendley found him at their faculty coffee events. (4) [...] And in response Lee would hear him saying “Oh, yes,” would feel his head bobbing in dumb agreement, as if the past forty years hadn’t happened and he was fresh off the boat with ten phrases of English etched painstakingly in his mind. (PI 5)

Hendley’s “naturalness” not only makes him feel small, but feel small *as if he were an FOB again*, makes Lee’s tongue freeze; in other words, it is a racialised sense of inadequacy and inferiority, and subsequent failure of masculine performance in the face of Hendley’s performance of confident, and what Lee considers to be American, masculinity. This also sets a tone for his perception of racialised identity – as his sense of inadequacy, as well as jealousy, partly comes from his racial difference.

### **Prestige Objectified**

Allow me to diverge and introduce an example of the novel’s (and Lee’s) presentation of Lee’s masculinity by returning to an object mentioned in the earlier paragraphs: the Montblanc. Lee is pictured sitting at his desk in his office with a Montblanc fountain pen in his hand. Lee admits that black ink is “an affection he’d suffered since youth. A sign of arrogance, his first wife might have said; of humility, he might have parried. Ink kept one’s errors on record” (PI 4). As his first wife has

diagnosed, intellectual exclusionism can be found from his use of fountain pen and from his half-joking presentation of feigned humility. The Montblanc is one of many examples of the objects that represent his adherence to his sense of what symbolises traditional (aristocratic and intellectual) masculinity (as seen in the example of his holding it *against* Hendley's tech-prone, "New Man" type masculinity). While the bomb that explodes at Hendley's office is an object from Lee's competitor to another competitor, the pen is Lee's direct assertion of his masculinity in this competition. Objects often represent the owner, whether intended or not, and this particular pen requires attention, appearing several times in the novel. The novel admits to the symbolic value of some objects that it highlights, that "Lee's material world was made up of these two categories, the fleeting generic and the eternal and iconic" (42). The fountain pen belongs in the latter category along with a few of his possessions, which is also related to and highlights Lee's situated existence in an academic institution:

the Montblanc pen, a gift from his undergraduate adviser, in the pocket of his cheap Penney's button-down shirt, a type of shirt he bought three to the package, ... Gaither, he thought, was correct: he was not a sentimental man. He was pragmatic, and cheap. If he lost the Montblanc, he'd buy a Bic at the drugstore. But somehow he never had lost it, in almost forty years. (*PI* 42-43)

It is easy enough to read between lines his attachment to the Montblanc, to forgive his feeble attempt at masking it with indifference; after all, his tendency to modulate his attachment is another example of Lee's "masculine" behaviour, distancing himself from emotion and sentimentality that he seems to associate with femininity. As a gift that acknowledges his position as a scholar, it is also a symbol that strengthens his masculinity in the context of his life in academia. It also is a reminder of his more youthful, and hopeful years. Despite his statement that he does not have too much care for the pen, Lee certainly places more value on the pen. The fountain pen by itself as an object and as a product is in general categorically associated with men and masculinity. Some researchers take it further and have looked more deeply into the specific ways in which "the fountain pen is gendered in a peculiar,



hegemonic manner ... as characterized by an ideal masculine pen for executive men” (Kaygan et al. 87).<sup>12</sup> While in Lee’s case the pen may designate more academic achievement and excellence (a gift from his academic mentor) than the wealth and power more associated with economic status and class as it may in the world of business, it is still a sign of his (intellectual) class status and, a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. The product design, and experience of using fountain pens, compared to other pens, and discourses surrounding them, are highly gendered in a way that naturalises and privileges masculinity; “fountain pens represent a *hegemonic* gendering structure for artifacts whereby *the prototypical member of a product category is strongly gendered in contradiction to a sheer variety of alternatives*” (Kaygan et al. 93; emphasis in original).

What makes Choi’s choice more conspicuous and relevant here is the representability of the Montblanc of hegemonic masculinity. Montblanc as a brand is a distinctively masculine, high(er)-end one that comes to represent, or dominate, the discourses surrounding the whole product category. Kaygan et al. find that the online hobby group influences the gendering of the whole product category by designating, through repeated references, “a product that is considered to be highly masculine, as the prototypical fountain pen”— which is the *Montblanc* (94). The research demonstrates extensively the symbolic status of the Montblanc.<sup>13</sup> The authors also support the idea that the fountain pen, let alone a conspicuously expensive one, is linked to the notion of entitlement: “being a man may not be sufficient to be a credible owner of such pens; in some work settings, only executives of certain weight can display them without looking pretentious or overly ambitious” (Kaygan et al. 91). It is not difficult to see how the fountain pen, specifically one with a certain prestige like the Montblanc, could appeal to Lee as a symbol of status, almost a weapon against the world within which he continuously puts himself in an imaginary, veiled competition (again, holding the pen *against* Hendley). At this point,

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<sup>12</sup> Here the authors, through empirical research and observation in office environment and online user forums, discuss hegemonic masculinity in business masculinity – (e.g., “a specific form of business masculinity associated with executive men is constructed as more authentic in their adoption of fountain pens” [Kaygan et al. 93]); the gendering nature of the construction of the product remains relevant outside particular environment and particular model of (executive business) masculinity.

<sup>13</sup> The authors cite one online hobby group member’s comment that Montblanc 149 is the “epitome of masculine pens ... an oversized, cigar shaped pen that exudes sheer majesty” (Kaygan et al. 88). Of course, the cigar shape itself “has the self-evident connotations of wealth and manliness, which invoke occasional jokes on the forums that allude to the phallic character of the cigar form” (Kaygan et al. 88).

one may argue that the Montblanc is not Lee's choice but a gift, therefore is not representative of his taste; however, for the forty years of loyalty to it (hence making it "eternal and iconic") means that while Lee did not choose it himself, it must in some parts have *marked* his identity. And precisely the way that he displays the pen reveals another strategy of Lee's presentation and performance of masculinity. The Montblanc is one of Choi's choices in displaying Lee's understanding of, and style of presenting masculinity. By making Lee display it in his generic shirt pocket, Choi not only emphasises it as a quotidian companion piece but also depicts a man who carefully negotiates his character. It is how Lee negotiates the appearance of ambition or pretension that he shuns, revealing his complicated relationship to "hegemony" and hegemonic masculinity. He is not unaware of its value, but distances, or distinguishes himself from it, in a similar way that he presents his façade of indifference and casualness.

Kaygan et al. highlight the pen's role as a part of the gendered dress code, which complements my reading of Choi's portrayal of Lee. The study focuses on "the complementary relationship of fountain pens with executive men's professional suits" (91); in particular, carrying the pen in the shirt pocket is itself a masculine gendered dressing style (see further 91-93). The authors again return to Montblanc's status, in discussing pens' function as a statement piece (particularly associated with men's suit):

Montblanc was compared to expensive phones, computers and cars, and to Rolex and Omega watches as opposed to Seiko and Casio. ... In this sense, fountain pens are not only comparable but also complementary to these other products, being used – as one writer suggested – 'to complete the look'. At the office, the fountain pen does not merely exist as a single object, but within a structure of style, of which the pen is one element. (Kaygan et al. 91)

While Lee may not be caught in expensive professional suits (he is rather found "shrugging his shoulders into undersize secondhand suits," in his graduate school days (*PI* 48)), the pen is his statement piece in otherwise generic and unimpressive fashion. As a man who values and covets privilege, the casual but constant display

and possession of the high-end pen in his “practical” and “unsentimental” shirt indicate Lee’s performance of unpretentious authority. The pen is a part of his dress code that masks privilege/authority with casual indifference and pragmatism. Lee’s seeming disregard for economic success is partly out of necessity than a choice; he has no choice but to be a “practical man” without great economic means or inherited wealth. Because of this, the fact that he did not buy the pen himself but that it is a *legacy* (differing from the second-hand items he had to buy) that Lee so desires also adds significance to it. We are also aware that Lee’s economic struggle is linked to his personal history of immigration (cause and condition/symptom) – which leads me to introduce his masculinity/masculine identity once again as racially constructed, particularly as a stereotypical scholarly one. The Montblanc is a crucial instrument to his performance of a “serious and nonchalant scholar” as it not only distinguishes him as a different type of professor to the young, less mature professors, but also is an object that has created, recorded, and retains the history of the (self)inscription of his life in the US. Waiting in his office for students who almost never come:

he [Lee] sat poised on the brink of the legal pad, seemingly lost in his putative thoughts, the Montblanc in his fingers. Each set of footsteps he heard in the hallway launched him on a theatrical scratching of pen upon notepad; he would feel his face stiffen with self-consciousness and will his eyes not to dart toward the door. The footsteps were almost never for him. The rare occasions they were, he was always the same, as if reluctantly drawn from the pool of deep thought: “Ah,” he would say, tempering his forbidding absorption with a lift of the eyebrows. (PI 4)

The Montblanc, therefore, is a device that introduces performance/performativity of Lee’s identity, presenting him as someone who constantly *tries* to build his character, as well as the coexistence of contradicting/contrasting elements as characteristic of the construction of Lee’s masculine identity. The language of performance (“a theatrical scratching”) indicates and stresses that his use of the pen, even though his acquisition of it may have been, is not coincidental, and that Choi is pointing to the nature of performance/performativity in Lee’s masculinity, which, is taking more

concrete shape as intellectual, aristocratic, disinterested/disengaged – revealing Lee’s understanding and definitions of masculinity.

#### **4. Lee’s Models of (Local) Hegemonic Masculinity**

Returning to Connell’s and Messerschmidt’s emphasis on the contextuality and situatedness and contemporariness of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is best explained through contextualized and idealised models, historically, geographically specific models (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Connell and Messerschmidt divide the masculine models on the level of the local, the national and the global, and the novel shows how Lee moves from a localised understanding and standard of masculinity to the national level. Among the multiple kinds of masculinities and multiple kinds of hegemonic masculinities, Lee’s initial understanding of hegemonic masculinity that becomes his object of desire is based on his context, the academic life. Lee, as a “foreign” student from “Far East” – the identity he is so acutely aware of – has envy, and a fetish, for white, American hegemonic masculinity that is the norm in his small world. Donald Whitehead, who Lee regards as the “paragon” of the fellow students in his PhD programme who are “all white and American-born ... goldenly handsome and brooding in the Byronic vein; ... young, well-bred, unapologetic introverts whose lack of cordiality and warmth was admired by professors and women alike as evidences of their genius;” (17). These are the qualities that he admires and desires. As he lives only within a very limited and narrow world comprised mostly of his university, his definition of hegemonic masculinity has a very limited context (although it is influenced by the broader hegemonic masculinity on a higher level (of the U.S.). Exposure to the media brings him to see the broader community of life even around him, and consequently different standards of hegemonic masculinity. Susan Jeffords’s (1989) analysis of Ronald Reagan’s 1980s, a “distinctively ideological period in the renegotiation of masculinity in the post-Vietnam era,” recognises masculinity as a reconstruction of national identity. While bound by the dominant standard of the US hegemonic masculinity, mainly “white, heterosexual, native-born,” he prizes class and intellect as important criteria, showing that his understanding and criteria remain local under the category of national hegemonic masculinity. Race, of course, is the

most distinguishable element. Lee dissociates himself from the other students except for Gaither in the PhD programme, who are all white Americans. In *A Person of Interest*, there is one clear, immediate hegemonic model for Lee, in the name of Donald Whitehead. Donald Whitehead is his peer mathematician who young Lee idealises, almost idolises. Unlike Gaither, whom he looks down upon, Lee describes him as almost god-like, and manly, and more importantly for his criteria of masculinity, *American*. Even though Whitehead does not seem to be a particularly strong-bodied character in the novel's description, Lee views him as the hard-bodied, ideally masculine one, the "hard body" that Susan Jeffords speaks of, one that stood out as "hypermasculine" as Marianne Kac-Vergne calls, again showing that his criteria remain at this moment local.<sup>14</sup> Hard lines replace the toughness and physical strength of the body. While Lee does not prioritize "body" as to be hypermasculine, his definition of masculinity still relies on "hardness" of maleness/manliness: Lee admires Whitehead's "square forehead and jaw and his strong nose stood out handsomely. He was shorter than Gaither, Lee's height, but more classically built, Lee decided; he entirely lacked Gaither's gentle effeminacy" (33).

Wealth, not borrowed second-hand but *legitimately inherited*, is another sign of hegemonic masculinity and an object of envy to Lee. As he gazes at Whitehead's clothes, he compares them with his own as he thinks that he would never be able to find and possess something genuine like those old, but well-kept and exclusive ones. It later turns out that Whitehead's privilege was entirely in Lee's imagination, as Whitehead comes from a poor background not East Coast, single, unwed mother, and therefore his clothes were likely not as expensive as he had thought, or may have been second-hand, again making the two equals. Lee's inability to discern Whitehead's class in his life in America, and his assumption of Whitehead's wealth indicate that Lee associates Americanness with wealth. Such association becomes a racial sense of alienation and inferiority from his fellow, American-born students. However, Choi also gives clues to the constructedness of the ideal in earlier passages prior to the more explicit, complete exposure at the end. While Lee perceives that Whitehead's approach to him is a self-centred, almost indifferent occasion, it turns out later that Whitehead had the same obsession and fetish about Lee, and for that, a

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<sup>14</sup> See Kac-Vergne, "Losing Visibility" and *Masculinity in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*.

specifically racial one. Although Lee is unaware, the novel's narration for the scene suggests Whitehead's interest in Lee. Even in a brief conversation in which Whitehead asks Lee to teach him Japanese, Lee perceives it as an imaginary competition that he faces – so much so that he “did not notice that Whitehead had flushed, as if he'd realized he'd entered a realm in which he was a stranger, where not even a Japanese phrase could reconfirm his authority” (36).

## **Ending: The Second(ary) Abjection**

### **Alliance – Service – Return to the abject**

Lee's journey is reformulated into a more specific mission about how Lee attempts and seems to succeed in restoring, or finding his masculinity, and more importantly, the *hegemonic American* masculinity that he wishes to achieve. At the beginning after his engagement with the national level of hegemonic masculinity, Lee's desire, after years of distance from it, is reignited. Yet, Lee's enthusiastic compassion for Hendley is fabricated and temporary, except that he is sincere in wanting to perform the American patriotic masculinity. The novel shows that Lee acknowledges the hegemonic authority and superiority of other masculine models – such as J.F. Kennedy – particularly on a higher level. Hierarchy is the main marker of masculinity for him and Choi. As the novel progresses, Lee's engagement with the investigation for the bomber becomes more significant. From the suspicious Asian spy, he finally becomes a part of the investigation contributing to its success. Lee once again rises to the role of the national hero in his support of the investigation as an important target leading to the discovery of the Brain Bomber. He builds a strong rapport with Agent Morrison, who leads the investigation, and by association becomes closer to the national hegemonic masculinity that he and his hard body represent. At the end of the novel, he seems to have won against Gaither and shaken off his ghosts from the past, as he realises that Gaither was not the bomber but Whitehead, who turns out to be short of hegemony after all. The novel reveals that Lee had idealised Whitehead's white, American masculinity while he was in truth an object of admiration and jealousy to Whitehead. This could be the moment that completes the triumphant return of the national abject and shows the novel's critique of the white hegemonic masculinity and its fictionality. In this way, Choi takes away

and reveals the fictionality and futurity of such contentions about “one hegemonic (American) masculinity.” Lee plays an important role in capturing the real terrorist, Whitehead, therefore becoming the hero that is recognised on the level of the national hegemony. Yet the novel does not end there at Lee’s glorious moment but insists that Lee steps away from the glorious return from his abject status, and voluntarily accept his second abjection, as Lee rejects public recognition in the case. It is the same choice that the protagonist of the film *Foreigner* makes at the end, to return to the position of a dissociated, quiet Asian(ness) rather than claiming national hegemony. As Lee shares his last meal with Agent Morrison, Lee shows a clear sign of reluctance to let go of the bonding with him, and therefore the national level of hegemonic masculinity, even as he tells him that it is his choice to stay away from the investigation’s fame. “I’m really not interested. I’d rather stay a short poppy, if you know what I mean,” the professor says, yet his voice momentarily cracks with reluctance as he expresses one more time his bonding and establishes their relationship as equal brothers: ““It’s been a pleasure to know you, Professor.” “Please, just Lee,” Lee reminded him, finding his voice, as they shook a last time” (*PI* 339-40). Morrison effectively embodies the ideal character of national hegemonic masculinity with positive qualities. His characterisation is also culturally diverse and therefore racially ambiguous – he is fluent in Japanese, familiar with Asian culture and suggests that he is racially non-biased toward Lee, making their rapport stronger. He is generous and fatherly to the nation’s racialised abject, Lee. While Lee’s choice is seemingly natural according to his will, Choi’s narration gestures at his reluctance, allowing the reader to interpret his reluctance as an abject who experiences a forced, second abjection to his place as “a short poppy,” as a shadow dissociated from the hegemonic masculinity that he wants to stay close to. Yet, it also means that his retreat is sanctioned, approved by the national hegemonic masculinity.

The novel seems at first to be a story of an Asian American man – the national abject – returning from his forced exile to the centre and claiming his position. But it ends with Lee finally cutting ties with national hegemonic masculinity and resorting to nurturing the future American son – because the American heir he brought to life for the nation is not enough to maintain the national hegemony, which should be white and masculine. It is also implied that the much-

desired repair of his relationship with Esther may have a better chance with him having found Mark and adding him to their family life. Seen through the framework of second(ary) abjection, the reader is able to discern the abjection that is disguised as a grand return of the national, racialised abject who seemed to have claimed the position of hegemonic masculinity. What is particular about the second abjection is that the text makes the choice as the abject's willing act, despite his clear attachment to the hegemonic masculinity.

The critical reception of *A Person of Interest* shows how the fundamental role that race plays has been misunderstood. For instance, Judie Newman finds that Wen Ho Lee, a Taiwanese American scientist who worked for the Los Alamos National Laboratories and who was falsely accused of passing nuclear secrets to the People's Republic of China in 1999, is a model for Lee. Newman insists that Choi's story differs from her source in that "in the novel relatively little is made of Lee's ethnicity" (42). Newman claims that "[t]he post-ethnic presentation is also a major deviation from Choi's historical source. In Choi's novel, only one incident suggests a racial motivation on the part of the FBI when Agent Morrison tells Lee that the polygraph test result is unreliable when it comes to suspects with Asian backgrounds" (43). Although it is understandably an unavoidable choice as Newman proposes to "underline how this case is employed (in somewhat altered form) to expand the frame of reference of the novel, away from ethnic issues, in order to focus on issues of socialisation and technologised emotion" (42), to claim that it is "not ethnic at all" (44) would be a far-flung argument to make about a novel charged so heavily with racial issues. Therefore, instead, I reiterate the importance of race in the novel here, which is the main source of Lee's insecurity about his position as a legitimate U.S. citizen irrespective of his legal status, as well as his masculinity. As Colleen Lye says, the novel "depict[s] a subject's becoming Asian American through being racialized as a national security threat" (251). And the victimisation that Lee undergoes becomes a convincing self-exile, retreat from the association with the national hegemonic masculinity that he had with the FBI investigation. The racialisation that he experiences from his involvement in the case and the national exposure bring Lee unwanted scrutiny, misunderstandings, and suspicions. Despite his significant participation in the investigation, and his apparent fondness for Agent Morrison, Lee chooses to cut his ties with the event and "stay a short poppy" as he wants to remain



anonymous in the report of the investigation (340). He'd rather *choose* not to claim the position close to national hegemony, which is characteristic of the framework of the second(ary) abjection that makes the second process a willing act of the abject. He chooses to return to his place of exile this time. His quiet life in the end is to reunite with his daughter, a family life that is commonly and stereotypically expected from an Asian American man as well, rather than as a national hero who helps to catch a terrorist. Chiu compares the physical spaces of Lee's limited small-town residence with Mark's who, as a white Christian, travels across the world throughout his life with ease. Idaho, where they find Whitehead, "visually convey his personal desolation and his national and community isolation. ... This landscape clearly solidifies Lee's insignificant position and difficult advancement in national territory against the larger landscape of the American majority, comfortably lodged in the vast wilderness" (Chiu 85-86). Once a hero outside his territory, Lee does not have a choice but to return to where he is a marked racial abject, the small-town to continue his efforts in staying unseen, assimilated.

### **Saving American Son**

The novel makes Lee complete his role as a good foreigner by assigning him a true American heir, all-white, native-born and male, instead of his own "half-breed" daughter. At the end of the novel, only by taking care of the legitimate future generation of American masculine/male hegemony, Lee can complete his duty as the returned and returning abject. Mark, Aileen and Gaither's son who were raised by Gaither and his new wife, comes to find Lee as he traces his birthmother. The novel suggests that Lee eventually becomes Mark's patron, and that it is his final dedication to the nation's continuation of white male hegemony. Coinciding at the perfect timing with Lee's much anticipated reunion with Esther, Mark completes the family as the missing male heir. What is particular in the novel, despite its progressive credentials and its satire of the idea of white hegemonic masculinity in the US, is the way it participates in the discourse of hegemonic masculinity through its portrayal of the Asian American protagonist as ultimately secondary. Playing with the principle of repetition, the novel reverses the process of abjection, so that it reconfirms the hegemonic masculinity of the twenty-first century US as still maintaining its racial privilege, validating the hegemony of white masculinity rather

than its Asian American protagonist's. Seemingly chronicling Lee's life and progressing both in time and representation of his self, the novel eventually does not run a straight track but is trapped in a circular motion. Lee's masculinity as the could-have-been national hero is replaced (again) by his fatherly masculinity, which fits into the stereotype of a good (Asian) immigrant and serves the general benefit of the nation as a whole, as a father to all, but especially to its native-born, male heir. It is undeniable that the reunion with Esther will bring Lee happiness, yet Mark is not a redundant addition but a necessary second child, perhaps the one that completes Lee's journey of finding masculinity. Since Lee is fundamentally unable to find his true "American" masculinity that is his ideal hegemonic masculinity, he might be able to find that piece from Mark. Despite its peaceful ending that closes with the protagonist's hope for his more fulfilling life, the novel ultimately falls back into the process of second(ary) abjection. Therefore, it complies with the continuation of the structure of hegemonic masculinity which places white hegemonic masculinity above the Asian protagonist as the ultimate hero and patron of the ethnically market, racialised counterpart, in the context of the national security where the exploitation and abjection of racial difference are still celebrated and moreover, presented as voluntary and natural courses of action.

## Chapter II. “The Remasculinisation of the Asian: *The Foreigner*”

*The Foreigner*, a 2017 action thriller film directed by Martin Campbell based on Stephen Leather’s novel *The Chinaman* (1992),<sup>15</sup> features the Hong Kong action star Jackie Chan (Chan Kong-sang) as the protagonist Ngoc Minh Quan, a Chinese Nùng immigrant who runs a humble restaurant in London leaving his troubled and violent past behind.<sup>16</sup> Featuring two of the most globally well-known cinematic personae – two “seasoned pros” (Giles) martial arts hero Jackie Chan, and ex-007 Pierce Brosnan as his opponent – and directed by the director of two James Bond movies, this adaptation of a British political thriller should be as familiar to US/Western/global audience as any British-Chinese co-production set in London/Belfast can be.<sup>17</sup> The film’s primary target audience is the US and Chinese markets, with a release through Netflix instead of cinemas in the UK market.<sup>18</sup> *The Foreigner*, in its representation of the (British) Asian protagonist’s masculinity, offers several points of comparison to *A Person of Interest* leading up to their markedly similar narrative endings in which the protagonists willingly retreat to their spheres of abjection after their seeming and temporary remasculinisation.<sup>19</sup> As the

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<sup>15</sup> The original novel features more heavily the complex history of conflicts among the British, Northern Irish and the Irish, as the film’s relatively short span and high focus on the protagonist Quan makes him more of a centre of attention for the viewers. This chapter focuses more on the film’s presentation of Quan’s masculinity compared to the national/British one to highlight the framework of the thesis. There are representations of the Irish (masculinity) as historically abject as well, yet the chapter’s main focus will be on Quan/Chan.

<sup>16</sup> In the film, Quan was born in Guangxi, China and emigrated to Vietnam, fighting in the Vietnam War on the American side before he escaped to Singapore and eventually moved to the UK.

<sup>17</sup> According to Forbes’s list, Jackie Chan is the world’s 5th highest earning actor and (\$45 million) in 2017 (\$49 million) and 2018 (\$45 million). (See Robehmed, “Full List” and “The World’s Highest-Paid”). “Certainly, Jackie Chan, thanks to careful marketing, has become such a global phenomenon since the crossover of his Hong Kong produced *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996) into the US market and his appearance in the Hollywood produced hits *Rush Hour* (1998), *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Rush Hour 2* (2001)” (Willis 4).

<sup>18</sup> *The Foreigner* was released in China on 30 September 2017, in the United States on 13 October 2017, distributed by STX films, and in the United Kingdom in December 2017 on Netflix. It grossed \$145 million worldwide. (\$34.4 million in the United States and Canada, and \$111 million in other countries for a worldwide total of \$145.4 million). It is worth noting that several articles mention the “Chinese money” behind the production. (See Debruge, Tsui, Brzeski, Mendelson, Clark; Box office Mojo; IMDB). There are also obvious Sinophone audience that the film has for another major target audience as Chan’s strong fanbase. The chapter’s analysis focuses on the reviews on the “Western” side, instead of Sinophone media (e.g., China and Singapore) where they seem to accept Chan in any type of action movies as an ordinary appearance. Yet I also suggest that the audience, and the target audience of the film is more globalised, as the production will be aiming at the broadest possible audience. I maintain also that the target audience of such popular genre films is, nowadays more so, not limited to a particular race, gender, nationality, or cultural backgrounds.

<sup>19</sup> The title “The Foreigner” (or “The Chinaman” for the original novel) insists that the audience/ reader identifies foreignness as the hero’s primary and fundamental defining characteristic,

film's geo-social background is set in the UK and not in the U.S., the film's ultimate protagonist of the project of remasculinisation is the British nation/government, unlike *A Person of Interest*. Yet, the film's narrative parallels that of *PI* in ways that show the process of second(ary) abjection of the Asian (British/American) male protagonist. The thesis uses the film as an example to argue and demonstrate that the framework of second(ary) abjection can be applied in locations other than the U.S., in Anglophone, "Western" countries where white hegemonic masculinity is the norm. *The Foreigner* is a fitting example not just because it features two actors who frequent the screens in Hollywood and therefore make the film feel more "global" than "British" even as the plot presents particularly British elements such as British-Irish conflicts and its geographical setting. What makes the film more interesting is the way the film uses the 'US' conceptualisation of masculinity in its representation of Quan's masculinity. Quan's past as a Vietnam vet, along with the battle scenes in the woods that pays homage to Rambo, grant him a recognised form of hegemonic masculinity that is familiar and acceptable to the British national hegemonic masculinity and yet not the same. This *imported* U.S. masculinity covers for Quan's "Asian" masculinity and turns that masculinity Western so that it is more suitable for the project of the nation's remasculinisation. Again, such representations also testify to the globalisation of popular representations of racial/gendered types of masculinity, transcending geographical boundaries. The film, additionally, presents a different dynamic of racialisation through its narrative of the British-Irish conflict. Sean, another Irish character who is also racialised in the film as opposed to British, is also exiled in the U.S., although trained in the UK. His army-trained masculinity is suitable for a battle with Quan, not simply because they both served in special forces as soldiers but also for the American element that it bears – his masculinity is guaranteed 'Western' again for his association with America, not Ireland. Moreover, his *racialised* masculinity, when necessary, can be made foreign and be expelled. Sean's narrative demonstrates another example of second(ary) abjection with different racial/ethnic identity which makes the film an effective case study for a more dynamic analysis of the framework of second(ary) abjection.

The film's portrayal of aged/ageing, as well as racialised masculinity, facilitates the discussions on the imbrications between race, age and masculinity as

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which is why I'm putting "British" in the brackets. Racial identity is foisted on the characters by others in the film, not only Quan but also Irish for example despite relative position of power.

the film captures the aged, struggling body of the Asian hero and the film's viewers focus on it. The chapter focuses on reviews from the Anglophone media, firstly because the thesis promises to focus on the representation primarily in the Anglophone west, but also because reviews from Asian countries such as China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, do not pay equal attention, if any, to Chan's masculinity. I suggest instead that this is an indication that to those audiences, Chan's masculinity is not in question or in doubt, and he is naturally accepted as a hero of a non-comical action thriller. On the other hand, several Anglophone reviews mention Chan's rather inadequate appearance as a hero, questioning his status of masculinity. With some reviews and responses to the film as a starting point to broader engagement with these topics, this chapter delineates and highlights ways in which the film's portrayal of masculinities, particularly Quan's, arrives at its conclusion *for* hegemonic masculinity at the expenses of other non-hegemonic masculinities. This chapter examines the film's project of remasculinisation in which the foreign/Asian hero's masculinity and other non-hegemonic masculinities are regulated and (re)constructed to fulfil the final goal of the reinforcement of the hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchal structure.

The title and the protagonist's name are not the biggest change in the film adaptation; while the novel spends more time on Nguyen's, the novel's protagonist, personal stories and his skills as a bombmaker, making it more about his military trained masculinity as a Viet Cong and giving Hennessy or any other characters less chance to express their masculinities, the film spends more on Quan's as well as his opponents' and allies' masculinities. The film brings more weight to the representations of those characters than the political backstory between the English, Northern Irish and Irish, and changes the characters to draw more contrast on the representation of masculinity and femininity which is much less present in the novel. In the novel, Nguyen dies quite unspectacularly in the end, and the national government fails to stop the bomb from the terrorists. Also, Nguyen does not punish Hennessy, who in the novel does not have an affair with a terrorist, while the film adds those stories. *The Foreigner* begins as "The foreigner/ Chinaman," Ngoc Mihn Quan's quiet life in the London restaurant is torn apart once more when he loses his teenage daughter Fan, his only surviving family, in an indiscriminate terror attack. Quan wants justice for her death. As a group calling itself the "Authentic IRA"

claims the bombing, Quan pursues revenge and looks for the identities of the bombers.<sup>20</sup> The film gives Chan/Quan plenty of opportunities throughout his mission to demonstrate and prove his masculinity as a bereaved father who swears retaliation – both to the audience and to the government authorities and his enemies who in the beginning underestimate the capability of the “foreigner.” First after the bombing that takes his daughter’s life away, Quan waits for the authorities to deliver justice like a good, ordinary citizen as he appears to be (and is) before he loses patience as well as faith and decides to take matters into his own hands, as time goes by with the self-claiming IRA terrorists carrying on further attacks throughout London. In his initial inquiries Quan is brushed aside because of his appearance as a common, unassuming “Chinaman,” only for the film to reveal that he is anything but an ordinary Chinaman.<sup>21</sup> He is not the kind that poses a threat. The commander of the Metropolitan Police, a young, strong-bodied black man, gravely warns Quan that “These are vicious men who take pride in their atrocities. Any attempt by you to contact them is likely to end very badly. This is our work, not yours” (*The Foreigner*). The warning assumes that Quan lacks a particular type of masculinity that is associated with violence and power that his enemies possess, of which Quan has to prove that he does possess as the hero of the movie. I argue that this specific kind of masculinity that exercises violence, is the one that the film calls for, to realise its generic convention as an action thriller, and its ideological function to regenerate the hegemonic masculinity that it upholds. And the type of masculinity that is not associated with Asian, or old. As the government seems unable to exercise this masculinity even as it attempts at an aggressive, hypermasculine form of response to the attacks from the assumed Northern Irish terrorists, Quan finds it necessary to revive his own violent masculinity to confront his enemies. Quan’s search compels him to revive his buried past self along with his troubling memories from the past. Later on, the film reveals Quan’s past that he had fought in the Vietnam War as a

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<sup>20</sup> The IRA, the Irish Republican Army was a paramilitary movement in Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century dedicated to the cause of Northern Irish independence from British rule and reunification for all of Ireland. The IRA was designated an unlawful terrorist organisation by the United Kingdom. The original IRA split into several organizations throughout the years, including the Provisional IRA (1969; it saw itself as the successor to the original IRA), which then had its own breakaways. The Provisional Irish Republican Army’s campaign, including terror attacks, continued throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the time of the original novel’s publication.

<sup>21</sup> Although the film’s title has changed from the original novel’s “The Chinaman,” Quan is often referred to by other characters as “the Chinaman” or “the Chinese man” in the film (and never “the foreigner”).

Special Operations Forces soldier, trained by and fighting for the US army; and that Quan is more than capable of and does not hesitate to exercise his combat skills in his pursuit of his enemies. Relentless in his quest, Quan does not hesitate to use force as well as intelligence to prove his resolve and determination. In other words, his mission necessitates and therefore gives authorisation and justification to the retrieval and reclamation of the type of masculinity that had been repressed, through the use of violence and demonstration of physicality. Quan the foreigner is called upon to retrieve a specific kind of violent and active masculinity that is necessary to resolve the crisis of the national body as well as his own. This masculinity which is invisible and unnoticed at the beginning of the film is allowed to surface on screen and gains visibility and becomes comprehensible through his execution of the mission. The film's narrative in this way authorises the recovery of Quan's masculinity corresponding to and therefore legible and valid within the context of the film. While not extravagant in featuring Quan's action scenes overall, the camerawork changes to reflect such changes in his masculinity surfacing as the action hero, from uncomplimentary exposure of his old and vulnerable feature at the beginning to the shifts in his position in the frame and the changes in his close-up shots. From long, distance shots emphasising his loneliness and weakness, Quan comes larger into the screen as his masculinity grows, emphasising the presence of his hard-edged masculinity.

The chapter's arguments draw on Susan Jeffords's studies of masculinity in U.S. popular culture. Jeffords's study of war and masculinity, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, offers an insight into ways in which the patriarchal, masculinist structure of gender is upheld through images represented in popular culture. Jeffords uses the representations of the Vietnam War as a case study for what she calls "the remasculinization of American culture." Jeffords suggests seeing remasculinisation as the primary mechanism for the "renegotiation and regeneration of the interests, values, and projects of patriarchy" and patriarchal relations (*Remasculinization* xi-xii). The study focuses on remasculinisation as "a revival of the images, abilities, and evaluations of men and masculinity in dominant U.S. culture" (*Remasculinization* xii). Jeffords emphasises that patriarchal relations are extended beyond men's dominance over women, to other social relations such as class and race; it is "the socialized domination of masculine over feminine, in which

the patterns of power relations established in the domination of men over women are employed to set systems of dominance over other groups as well” (*Remasculinization* xii). Jeffords reminds us that the division of gender, between the masculine and the feminine is symbolic, and insists that we see masculinity as an apparatus:

By emphasizing masculinity as a mechanism for the installation of patriarchal structure, it is possible to see the ways in which, through the structural relations of gender, men of color or of the working class or of other groups oppressed via defined categories of difference can be treated as women – “feminized” – and made subject to domination. (*Remasculinization* xii)

Understanding masculinity as a mechanism, rather than a simple representation of “maleness” is important in understanding its ideological function. *The Foreigner*’s narrative logic reflects a point of view that employs masculinity as a mechanism, through which it exalts, elevates the masculine over the feminine and defends the structure of hegemonic masculinity. The film’s narrative point of view is similar to what Susan Jeffords calls “the masculine point of view,” which she defines as “the disembodied voice of masculinity, that which no individual man or woman can realize yet which influences each individually. In this way, it is possible to identify the voice through which dominance is enacted in a narrative representation, though it may not consistently be spoken by any one character” (*Remasculinization* xiii). It is the viewpoint through which remasculinisation takes place. I emphasise that the “masculine” here, as Jeffords also indicates, should be specified as the *hegemonic* masculinity that distinguishes itself from and desires to dominate others, not just female-feminine but also other non-hegemonic masculinities. *The Foreigner*’s narrative, while narrating the foreign hero’s completion of revenge and remasculinisation, operates through such a viewpoint that ultimately glorifies and lionises the masculinity of the national hegemonic body and facilitates its remasculinisation.

The chapter delineates how Quan’s masculinity goes through the process of remasculinisation as the film reconstructs his body/masculinity throughout its



narrative, emphasising and modulating his differentiated race/ethnicity and agedness from that of the hegemonic national body. Whilst a British citizen by law, Quan is still designated as “The Foreigner” because of this differentiation, i.e., national abjection. Susan Jeffords’s concept of hard and soft bodies in her analysis of the Hollywood representation of hard-bodied heroes is particularly useful in the chapter’s analyses of bodies, whether marked as racialised and/or aged/ageing or constructed as normative and hegemonic. In *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Jeffords suggests that the ideology of the Reagan era, which geared to the control of the idea of body, divided bodies into two opposing categories of hard and soft. This division of bodies can be seen as the division of masculinities; the hard body that embodies hegemonic masculinity and the soft body that embodies all the other marginalised, *feminised* – in addition to female – masculinities. The ways in which the film present Quan’s masculinity illustrate the control and regulation of the Asian/foreign masculinity that is in danger of being categorised as soft due to racial/ethnic, age and class differences. His masculinity is reconstructed as the hard body that is temporarily representative of the national hegemonic body, in order for it to serve its purpose in the project of remasculinisation of the hegemonic body.

### **The Colour of the Nation**

Reading through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and abjection, the film’s representation of Quan’s masculinity and its project of remasculinisation exemplifies the ways in which the framework of second(ary) abjection works. The ways in which Quan’s masculinity is recalled, (re)framed and (re)negotiated as the abject masculinity reiterate my proposal of the framework of hegemonic masculinity and abjection that reinvents the abject masculinity into the hegemonic body and yet retains its liminal position and finally returning it to its previously designated place, enacting the second process of abjection. Quan, who has been living a life irrelevant to the national hegemonic masculinity is unexpectedly and unintentionally taken back to the centre of masculine contention. His personal quest conveniently assists the hegemonic British government’s interest and eventually he works as a vehicle of the government’s goals which aids the recovery of its hegemony. While the film’s primary premise is Quan’s revenge for his daughter, Quan’s personal quest is entangled in the larger body of political investigation and drama vis-à-vis

apprehension of the terrorists and around the peace treaty between the British and the Irish, and another sub-plot of Hennessy's wife's personal revenge to the British and her husband, each paralleling one another. The terrorist group is pursued largely by three different parties, two British governmental bodies and Quan. Depending on the perspective, Quan's mission can be central to the film's storyline but also interruptive. The immediate shared goal for the major three parties is the capture of the terrorists, which is initiated by the official investigative bodies. Official investigations are carried out by two divided sectors of the British government; firstly the central British government/police force in London, represented by the British MP, Cabinet Minister Katherine Davies (Lia Williams) and Commander Richard Bromley (Ray Fearon), head of the London's Metropolitan Police Service's Counter Terrorism Command (SO15); and then the Northern Irish government in Belfast, represented by the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland Liam Hennessy (Brosnan) who lies about his continuing association with the IRA that he cannot get away from, at the request for support from London.

I elaborate here that the narrative's ultimate end goal is to eliminate all threats to the hegemonic national body and complete its project of remasculinisation. The main threat to the national body is primarily represented by the threat of terrorism the terrorists pose, who embody a form of protest masculinity against hegemony<sup>22</sup>. This elucidation brings attention to the distinctions between the three parties who share the same target and clarifies how Quan's narrative is inevitably a part of the larger political plot and framework. What I mean by a political plot is not limited to the immediate political plot within the film but extends beyond to its politics of race and masculinity. By making the three parties eventual collaborators aiming towards the same goal and sharing the same target, but at the same time competitors with conflicting interests, the film allows room for multifaceted portrayals of masculinities through each party's engagement with the pursuit and with each other, creating complicated and ambiguous alliances and oppositions. As each party – Quan, the central British/London government and Hennessy/Northern Irish government (who operates on separate levels from each other) conduct their operation they come into conflict with one another. During his quest, Quan inevitably comes into conflict with government authorities, thus becoming a

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<sup>22</sup> See more on protest masculinity: Poynting et al., Broude, Walker.

potential threat to hegemony/hegemonic masculinities. From the perspective of the main government/national body, Quan's involvement is a disruption that is also to be contained, or at least cautioned against until it is verified to be benign.

It is in this way that Quan is an intervention to the film's plot. While the film, with its title and marketing – featuring Quan in the front cover of the film's poster and promoting itself as Quan's "revenge-fueled vendetta"<sup>23</sup> – claims Quan as its obvious hero, the narrative is framed by the political investigation and power games between political parties.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Quan's plot – and consequently Quan himself – seems to get "lost" behind the political one. Ranging from questions about its importance or relevance in the film, the majority of the reviews in Anglophone media comment on one aspect or another of the film's political plot about a fictional resurgence of (Northern) Irish paramilitary resistance to the British rule in the 2010s. Quan's performance as an action hero, and his masculinity, is in part shadowed by this more politically powerful and therefore more hegemonic masculine contention happening through the political plot. Quan's presence is relatively less strong as he is featured partly as an outsider. As the hero of the film, Quan is legitimately a part of the political plot, that is, the *national* narrative, at least to a degree that he serves his role as a hero and contributes to the successful completion of the film's project of remasculinisation. Yet, I argue that the film is designed to use Quan in the project, during and through the process of his second(ary) abjection, as an outsider of this national narrative of remasculinisation that is the eventual objective. Reading the film through the framework of abjection, Quan's revenge becomes secondary to the ultimate project of the film. Yet, Quan's absorption into this project is smooth. In the occasion of the nation's crisis as its own softness has reached its limit and the hardness put under question, that is, in its state of emergency, Quan's violent war-hero/warfare masculinity, constructed as hard-bodied, is recalled, and more important, granted to be reactivated. In other words, as Quan's seemingly personal mission of revenge overlaps with that of the British government's operation against terrorism, Quan's part can be interpreted as a representative of the nation rather than an opposition/disruption to it. Quan works on behalf of the British government, ultimately serving its intention. Building on Jurgen

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<sup>23</sup> STX Entertainment: "Never Push a Good Man Too Far." (<http://stxfilms.com/theforeigner/>)

<sup>24</sup> Some reviews focus more on the histo-political backstory and hence the character of Hennessy, for example; see Clarke.

Link's concept of a "collective symbol" and Jochen and Linda Schulte-Sasse's concept of "national pleasure,"<sup>25</sup> Jeffords argues that the images of the hard body came to symbolise the nation of the Reagan era: "the indefatigable, muscular, and invincible masculine body became the linchpin of the Reagan imaginary ... these hard bodies came to stand not only for a type of national character – heroic, aggressive, and determined – but for the nation itself" (*Hard Bodies* 25). The hard bodies as collective symbols were successfully linked to the national body and its ideologies and became the national identities that re-established the boundaries of the nation (*Hard Bodies* 25-27). Within the film's narrative, Quan and Quan's hardened body/masculinity comes to represent the national hegemonic body/masculinity as he seeks out to remove the threat to the nation's safety. Within the film's narrative, Quan's destiny parallels that of the nation, as a narrative device/tactic/strategy. His family, his own patriarchal unit, is ruined by foreign threats in multiple historical conflicts – the Japanese invasion of Singapore, pirates that he encountered during his escape as a boat person and then (Northern) Irish dissident terrorists despite his efforts at maintaining it in peace. The nation is under threat of terrorism after its presumed peace with its local state, and losing its citizens means that its patriarchy is undermined. Quan was waiting for justice to be served by the government authority/hegemony to which he had turned to for peace, a decision which had rendered his body and masculinity soft and vulnerable. The weakened/softened government (it is significant that it is firstly represented by a woman, in a deceitfully masculinised look to present the appearance of neutrality in the narrative of the endorsement of masculinity) asks for help from its local/subordinate government and is ready for negotiation, furthering its softness. The foreigner's masculinity is validated for, and *only for*, the service of the national hegemonic masculinity/body, to save it from crisis. However, the foreigner's corporeal and symbolic body cannot be a permanent representative of the national body. Susan Jeffords suggests that there is the collective pleasure that can be derived from imaging and narrating the hard bodies, and the Hollywood film, as "one of the most visible locations for the 'collective symbol' of hard bodies" offered viewers "the viewing of which the pleasure of feeling a part of a national unity could be achieved ... through the narration and movement of hard bodies themselves – their

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<sup>25</sup> See Link and Shulte-Sasse (1991).

confrontations, actions, decisions, and victories” (*Hard Bodies* 27). Quan’s victory, which in the end corresponds to the national body’s victory, in this sense should and does give viewers the sense of pleasure and empowerment on the national level. Yet, in order for Quan’s *foreign and aged/ageing* body to be convincingly representative of the nation, it has to be regulated, controlled, modified, reconstructed physically (racially, bodily, age-wise) and symbolically (nationally, culturally). The film addresses this problem of racialised and aged/ageing body through various strategies. The film then addresses another anxiety created by the alliance, that now the foreigner’s masculinity, racialised and aged/ageing, *can* represent the hegemonic masculinity/national body – an unacceptable proposition – through taking it back from him. As his body/masculinity still cannot represent the nation permanently, it is returned to its previous abject position, the marginalised masculinity at the end of the film, after it completes its service. It is a reassurance to a happy ending for everyone including the viewers who identify with the film’s framing and narrating. The foreign hero’s use of his own body is approved only when he “lends” his body/masculinity to the national body in need. It is in these ways that the foreigner/hero’s body and masculinity are used, regulated, and controlled.

The film employs a variety of strategies in its project of remasculinisation to fulfil the hero’s characterisation to the realisation of his masculinity in ways that (re-)marginalises Quan’s masculinity recovered as hard-bodied and revalidates the hegemonic masculinity at the uppermost of the hierarchy – that of the (British) nation. The strategies include uses of a political plot to anchor the narrative, the step-by-step release of Quan’s past, the enemy’s acknowledgement of the hero’s masculine qualities, the narrative of male/masculine bonding/fraternity, the regeneration and glorification of the soldier/veteran and warfare masculinity, the use of images and language of warfare, the comparison between soft-hard bodies, the congruity between the foreigner’s and the nation’s destiny/fate, the Asian/foreign hero’s embodiment of canonical white/Western heroes, the characters’ fulfilment of traditional gender roles and the exclusion of bad femininity followed by the recuperation of good femininity. All of these devices work to validate the regeneration of the hero’s masculinity, yet some in the end work to ensure the hero’s return to the previous status as an abject. His fraternity with non-hegemonic masculinities that seem to validate and enhance his masculinity is possible for

example due to their shared status as racialised objects; likewise, returning him to the good femininity the ending of the film makes sure that his masculinity remains local and different from the war masculinity that he regained, and places him back to his racialised, liminal space.

## **1. Born Soft but Die Hard: Development of Quan's masculinity**

### **Beginning**

The film's narrative offers a timed release of Quan's masculinity, its transformation from the perceived soft bodied (Asian) to the hard bodied (Western), through the development of his "power" both physical and figurative.<sup>26</sup> Quan, although deviating and distinguished from the idealised "Western" masculinity with his marked foreignness/Asianness and age, reaches toward the normalised ideal in various ways through the film's technical, aesthetic and narrative strategies. The film presents him first as a powerless victim, a grief-stricken father who can barely hold his own body. The film highlights Quan's vulnerability through its shots, dwelling on and close upon his worn-out look, empty and disheartened eyes. After his daughter's death, the camera captures him in his daughter's room from behind, emphasising his hunched back. The camera's high angle makes him look smaller than he is for a greater effect. The shots with their angle and positioning emphasise Quan's emotional and psychological shock through his bodily weakness; the camera techniques as well as Quan's movements convey his powerless state. In these scenes, Quan is an old man struck with such grief that he hardly has any strength left to hold a teddy bear, which at one point he drops and picks up in slow motion, with tremendous effort and his back hunched even lower. This certainly is an exhibition of the opposite of the type of masculinity expected of a hero in an action thriller, prompting one critic to announce that "Chan looks sadder than we've ever seen him, his eyes droopy and wet with tears. He shuffles as he walks, half-paralyzed with grief ... and one wonders whether the character he's playing could so much as block a punch, much less take on a room full of terrorists" (Debruge); "Chan lets us see the pain course through the face and body of this broken father who knows revenge won't bring[sic] back his daughter" (Travers). The review ties Quan's display of

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<sup>26</sup> Still, Jackie Chan's transformation is anticipated, especially in the Sinosphere in which the major market for his action films is, where his masculinity is well known and familiar.

emotional vulnerability to the vulnerability and weakness of his body, and psychological pain is transferred to his body that it is also “broken.” Quan’s body in these scenes is indisputably a soft body, wounded, weakened, and made smaller in addition to already being foreign, and therefore an embodiment of his soft and wounded masculinity which, if he is to be approved of as the hero, would have to develop into a hard one. Sadness and empathy at daughter’s death captured in his daughter’s inevitably feminine space place him more towards the feminine realm away from the otherwise could be masculine, fatherly emotional expression of anger. Following are long close-up shots of his tearful face covered in cuts, reemphasising his vulnerability through signs of his external wound from the terrorist bombs that had taken his daughter’s life. His wounds are therefore a reminder of the violence that emphasises his victimhood and presents him firstly as a victim of violence, rather than a perpetrator. Quan’s soft and vulnerable body places him within the same category as that of his daughter, the soft and vulnerable feminine. At the beginning of the film, he has been living a life of a refugee/exile, from his violent past as well as the realm of masculinity associated with violence and warfare and Quan, whilst a patriarch, is feminised by association with victimhood and dissociation with his masculine past by this setting and the mise-en-scene. In addition to his perceivable signs of softness/*femininity* including age, physical and psychological vulnerability/ weakness and race, he is also feminised as a refugee and the victim. He had fled from his past, and therefore his war veteran masculinity and have chosen a different kind of masculinity that is more associated with femininity and relegated to the realm of the feminine, especially according to the criteria for the (e)valuation of masculinity within the film’s context.

Not only has the terrorist attack left physical and psychological wounds to Quan, but it has also symbolically wounded and damaged Quan’s patriarchal masculinity which perceives his daughter’s death as a failure of his patriarchal duty. The film suggests that he had failed as a patriarch, as he blames himself that he had let down his family (*The Foreigner*). In this way, the film associates the loss of his daughter and his family to his *incompetence* and failure of fatherhood/patriarchal masculinity.<sup>27</sup> Yet the daughter’s death (female sacrifice) releases him (albeit

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<sup>27</sup> This *personalisation* of his tragedy and revenge also allows the film to deflect the blame from real perpetrators of violence on a broader scale (institutions and states/nations), displacing the responsibility for justice to the individual level/realm.

unasked for and unwanted) from the familial duties that had been the reason for his renunciation of his previous masculine identity, and thus enables him to recover his masculine characteristics that the film endorses and prioritises for its purposes. He is the one who survives from the failing family structure, who is left with the responsibility and power to save it. The loss of his own patriarchal unit becomes a reason for him to return to his repressed violent masculinity to resolve the crisis. It is a particular kind of masculinity that is legitimised and necessitated under a specific condition/circumstance – that of the crisis of patriarchy. As Quan tries to bury his past and live in the time and place of peace, he also had buried his warfare/war veteran masculinity and dissociated himself from the realm of hard bodied masculinity. Only when he decides to raise his own war against the terrorists, and his action is justified through the vocabulary of warfare, does he become a legitimate enforcer of violence again. He survives to reinstate his masculinity and serve his (masculinity's) purpose.

The film's manifold plot surrounding Quan's mission creates a multiplicity of levels and dimensions in its alliances and oppositions, and therefore leaves plenty of room for several contestations as well as fraternisations between different levels of non-hegemonic and hegemonic masculinities. In this way, the film offers multifarious configurations of masculinities alongside the development and reconfiguration of Quan's masculinity. In his first encounters with his allies and/or opponents Quan occupies a lower (powerless) position both physically, visually, and figuratively on screen. During the police's first visit to Quan's humble residence as a victim of the terrorist attack, Quan is seen sitting down in a chair still weak from sorrow, while the police officers are standing, the camera shooting him again from above, showing his face looking up at the law enforcers as he breaks into tears and pleads to them that "You must catch these men" (*The Foreigner*). In contrast, the next scene features Hennessy stepping out of a luxury sedan, impeccably dressed in a black suit, into a towering government building on a phone call with the British Cabinet Minister Katherine Davies who is pleading for his support: "We are depending on you. Anything you can provide, anything at all would be a tremendous help" (*The Foreigner*). The scene immediately establishes Hennessy as a man in power, in contrast to Quan exposed in his state of utmost emotional and physical helplessness in the previous scene. This is where Hennessy makes his attempt to



arrange political pardons in exchange for his support in the investigation – and he is confident and insistent in his demand, with his solemn and determined face filling the screen. In this way, the two men are presented as contrasting counterparts, alluding to their antagonistic relationship and uneven dynamics of power that they develop and negotiate within the narrative. Visually, narratively, Hennessy's character is established as the one embodying the familiar model of hegemonic masculinity as opposed to Quan's invisible and absent masculinity.

On a local level, the film's narrative highlights the conflict between the two men Quan and Hennessy, one conspicuously racialised and non-hegemonic, and one seemingly powerful and hegemonic. Quan's search to find the terrorists leads him to Hennessy, in the belief that his current position as the Northern Irish Deputy First Minister and his past associations with the IRA makes him the man who holds the clues to the identities of the terrorist group.<sup>28</sup> Hennessy thus becomes an incidental target in Quan's mission, and Quan's targeting establishes an antagonistic relationship between the two men, a necessary measure to present their masculinities as oppositions to each other's. Quan demands that Hennessy use his connections and power to find out and hand him the names and location of the bombers, and he shows that he is more than willing to use violence to put pressure on Hennessy. The film makes visible/legible Quan's masculinity through the demonstration of his capacity to employ violence and force. In his first inquiry to Hennessy asking for the identities of the bombers, Quan's phone call to Hennessy is dismissed as it ends with Hennessy's warning. When Quan tells Hennessy that Hennessy and the terrorists are both different ends of the same snake, and it does not matter to him which end he grabs – thereby strengthening the division between himself and other dissident masculinities, denoting Hennessy's ambiguous position – Hennessy belligerently replies that it matters because "one end will bite" – hinting at his power and possibility of violence (*The Foreigner*). In their conversation Quan acknowledges Hennessy's power – "You are very powerful man," dutifully in his thick Chinese accent that highlights his foreignness. After the failed attempt, Quan decides to up the ante, and the film shows his initial declaration of war through his determined face following Hennessy's angry face from the previous scene. The screen shows Quan's family photos, and Quan burning newspaper articles containing Quan's tragic

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<sup>28</sup> "Former leader of Sinn Féin and a member of the IRA" (*The Foreigner*).

past of losing his family to Thai pirates in his refugee journey, visualising and literalising his past. The film reminds the audience once again that Quan's turn to violence, and violent masculinity, is fuelled by his personal, and honourable sense of justice deriving from his love and loyalty for his family, distinguishing him and his masculinity from other politically and personally motivated adversaries/dissident masculinities and justifying his violence/violent masculinity. Yet, it also distances him from the "true" hegemonic masculinity that has more political and military power relating to the political realm, excluding Quan's as *foreign*.

Quan visits Hennessy's office in Northern Ireland to meet him in person. Hennessy's bodyguards stop Quan as he tries to force his way into Hennessy's office. As they check him, they discover, inside his innocent bag of "just some groceries" a Swiss Army type folding knife (*The Foreigner*). It momentarily raises tension, but Quan's small knife is soon dismissed as harmless as Quan is deemed to be. On the one hand, the knife is a proof and symbol of his masculinity that is yet overlooked, hitherto without intelligible symbolic value; it is a symbol of his *inactivated* masculinity. On the other hand, the knife is also a decoy, a source of distraction from the real weapon, the true source of threat/Quan's violent masculinity, which is the inconspicuous daily items in the grocery bag that are later revealed to be ingredients for a bomb. This is indicative of Quan's intentional concealment of his masculinity and disclosure of it that follows. Quan's ability to produce the true weapon with his knowledge and skills, and not depend on the immediate piece of dissatisfactory weaponry, suggests that the source of his power is within himself and consequently his body, that is now beginning to be proven as a hard one instead of a soft one that it was considered to be. His skills also indicate that he is clever and trained to be observant, another weapon for his combat with his enemies. In this scene Hennessy fails to see or take seriously Quan's threat and his masculinity. He is confident of Quan's harmlessness/powerlessness when he orders his bodyguards to let go of Quan: "Jesus how much damage can he do with you two around? Let him be" (*The Foreigner*). As Quan appeals to Hennessy to "please find out who they are," Quan is seen again sitting, looking up at Hennessy while Hennessy is yet to sit down for a talk, looking down at Quan's face. Quan leaves Hennessy's office still with a hunched back, but with a warning that "So, I've chosen you, Mr Hennessy"; "You will change your mind" (*The Foreigner*). The assertiveness in the tone of his voice

signals the change that will follow contrasting with Hennessy's weakness that will be revealed. Shortly after, Quan instigates his first real threat as he blasts Hennessy's office with an improvised bomb, declaring his transformation – that is, the recovery/revelation of his hero masculinity in a recognizable and legible form and language in the film's domain, those of violence. Quan's makeshift bomb is made of ordinary items from his "just some groceries" bag, again allegorising his *hidden/uncovered* masculinity turning into a recognisable figure of threat and violence, in comparison to the bodyguard's immediately visible yet ultimately false power.

The explosion is the declaration of Quan's war against Hennessy and ultimately the terrorists, and that of the recovery/revelation/disclosure of Quan's masculinity. What follows is a dramatic change in the tone and temperature of the two men's relationship, as Hennessy explodes in anger "Change my mind, are you out of your fuckin' tree?" swearing "Fuckin' Chinaman" to himself while Quan now seems more determined, confident, and collected (*The Foreigner*). Quan is now the man in control. In the following sequences Quan threatens Hennessy with a series of bombs, following closely, and always a step ahead of, Hennessy's every move. His knowledge and skills enable him to outwit Hennessy and his team and handle younger men in combats. While outsmarting Hennessy and his men with his knowledge and skills in his use of explosives and intelligence, he also outruns Hennessy's men in physical confrontations, proving that he is also capable of physical action. While the film emphasises Quan's knowledge and resourcefulness as a source of his power, for example featuring him in his more serious arrangement for making bombs, the film, with its fast soundtrack and fast-paced shots of chases, also supports Quan's physical transformation into the hard bodied hero. *The Foreigner* as a low-key action-thriller departs from the exaggerated representation of violence and therefore the exaggerated and excessive masculinity Mark Gallagher describes that "extend[s] beyond narrative requirements and beyond the limits of realist convention" (*Action Figures* 65). These are absent in *The Foreigner* as the film tends toward realism rather than exaggeration with understated displays of violence. Overall, his moves in the combat scenes are controlled and efficient, and flamboyant and excessive displays of action commonly expected of action adventure are absent. Nor are there exaggerated types of super villains, featuring instead ambiguously

positioned competitors within its narrative and their relatively ordinary and unremarkable manpower. The film is not overstuffed with awe-inspiring and unbelievable set pieces overwhelmed by flying bullets and large-scale explosions – all of those elements are relatively in moderation. Instead, this is a movie with low-key set pieces; in the film’s relatively less spectacular, less dramatic, more realistic, and short action set pieces, Quan achieves a great deal with few means, including his aged/ageing body. Quan is able to employ tactics to compensate for overpowering physical prowess and reduces the need for direct confrontations when avoidable. Yet in his fights, Quan unveils his combat skills and deftness – giving the audience a pleasure of the actor’s characteristic martial-arts moves – alongside his exhibition of physical limitations as an old man. Reviews acknowledge Quan’s “incredible dexterity during the fights [that] might be at odds with the slow and shuffling figure he cuts at the beginning of the film”; “He infuses all these scenes with ample grit and power, every blow and thus amplified by the film’s sound design” (Tsui); “his stealth tactics are a pleasure to watch ... Campbell keeps the action cooking and the suspense on a high burner” (Travers). Quan’s actions are not those of a young man’s, realistic (against some audiences’ unrealistic expectations) given his age and the fact that he must have not been in action for at least a few decades. He struggles and is injured in each confrontation, but still manages to outrun his hunters and make an escape. His near-miss escapes (in which he does get hit many times) are not the most glorious triumphs, but yet proof of his physical capability and a reason for a different assessment of his body as a hard body that is able to demonstrate the *right* kind of masculinity, instead of a soft one that had put his masculinity under question earlier in the film.

As a result of Quan’s display of the valid action hero/hard body masculinity, there is a dramatic change in Hennessy and his team’s assessment of Quan’s capability – to the point that their opinion of him changes from “How much damage can he do with you two around” to “An ol’ man making fools out of the lot of you and he’s still running around out there. For God’s sake, you are four men. Four” (*The Foreigner*). Hennessy, this time in all his seriousness questions his men again: “How much damage can he do?” to which he gets an answer that [Quan] “Knows what he’s doing. I’ve half the city looking for him” (*The Foreigner*). Later, it turns into one of Hennessy’s men telling Hennessy that “We need more men. ... We need a hundred

more men, at least” to track Quan down (*The Foreigner*). Between Hennessy’s two identical questions, the first “how much damage can he do” and the second “How much damage can he do?” is a significant difference. Hennessy’s self-assurance in his first rhetorical question had changed into bewilderment at and an inquisition into Quan’s capability, communicating his anxiety and fear about the enemy’s unknown/unexpected (masculine) power. Finally, after another defeat in the battle in the woods, Hennessy reiterates his question, wondering out loud “One ol’ man running circles around the lot of us. Why is it so hard?” The answer is soon to come.<sup>29</sup> This enemy acknowledgement of his power and competence is the film’s another device to confirm and validate Quan’s masculine identity. Yet it is not without reminders of his racial identity. Hennessy’s man reports that Quan “jumped off the roof and slid down like some fuckin’ monkey”; Quan is dubbed “that bloody Chinaman” (*The Foreigner*). I argue that the film’s demonstration of Quan’s transformation accompanies and exploits traits that signify his foreignness, an indication of its racialization of his masculinity. However clearly and laboriously Quan demonstrates his masculinity, Quan’s masculinity is grounded in his race and age, elements which create doubts and suspicions, disrupt boundaries, soften, and blur the edges of his masculinity, render his masculinity soft and abject. The film also features the Irish and the Northern Irish as stereotypically racialised, as yet another racial abject, but Quan’s is the most pronounced.<sup>30</sup>

### **Fight in the Woods: Homage to Rambo – Embodying the Hard-Body/Nation**

As the pursuit between Hennessy and Quan in Northern Ireland continues, Quan hides in the woods near Hennessy’s safehouse and takes the battle to his familiar ground. The setting is important in several points. The woods are the place in which Quan’s masculinity is reinforced, immediately reminding of the battle scenes in the jungle in the Vietnam War films. At the same time, I argue that it is also where the film demonstrates the ways in which it shapes Quan’s masculinity to a specific kind of masculinity that the narrative requires. It is the site of the

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<sup>29</sup> Hennessy receives an answer to his question literalised in a form of documents detailing Quan’s past as a Special Operation soldier, the explanation to Quan’s exceptional performance.

<sup>30</sup> There is a continuous comparative backward and stereotypical racist portrayal of the Irish/Northern in the film due to the original novel’s main narrative of the long and complex historical British and Irish conflict. The Asian foreigner is in this sense accepted relatively more respectfully and positively as it serves the interest of the British better than the Irish/Northern Irish.

(re)construction and containment of Quan's masculine identity, a liminal space that prepares Quan's masculinity to be adequate to be released back to the normative space – within the national hegemonic body. Quan's masculinity is racialised in a dualistic process within the space. His masculinity associated with specific racial/ethnic traits are emphasised in the scenes, and yet it is turned into a(n) American/Western/universal/normative one through associations to masculine institutions and models that signify American/Western norms – in other words, Americanisation/Westernisation/universalisation/normativisation of his racialised, Asian masculinity. Quan's race and ethnicity are both accentuated and attenuated in the film's following sequences happen in and around the woods, to racialise and simultaneously moderate and reshape his racialised masculinity into *the right kind* of masculinity, to give explanation and legitimacy to his masculinity. The sequences serve multiple purposes for the (re)construction of Quan's masculinity. Throughout the sequences, the film offers explanation and justification for Quan's hitherto enigmatic, inexplicable, and moreover unacceptable masculinity – power – to his opponents and the audience, why and how he is in possession of, and more importantly rights to, these skills and qualities. Further to this, the film offers validation, on top of explanation, for his skills and abilities, why and how his skills are valid. The film builds its narrative up towards the assurance that Quan's is the *right* kind of masculinity throughout these scenes. In other words, the abjectness of his racialised Asian masculinity is mitigated and assuaged through the process. In other words, the sequences are where the film offers its apologia for Quan's masculinity and an amendment. The film present Quan's masculinity as racially/ethnically specified through several means – including visualisation of his body and references to his past that emphasises his ethnic origin – and Westernise/Americanise, in other words, normalise/universalise it, through his associations with the US army, and the film's generic reference to, and Chan/Quan's embodiment of Rambo. However, while endorsing Quan's masculinity as the right kind of masculinity and displaying it here, the woods is a safe place that is distanced from the national hegemonic masculinity, the one which keeps him and his opponents away from the centre. In a sense, it foreshadows the turn and return of the racialised, non-hegemonic masculinity, the second(ary) abjection that happens later

in the end, separating his masculinity ultimately from the national hegemonic masculinity, removing Quan from the centre.

The film makes Quan's masculinity legible and legitimate through its use of generic references. One way the film achieves this is through its references to the action cinema in the past, and the alignment of the hero's character to the established, iconic, and hegemonic model of the Hollywood action-heroes. *The Foreigner* aligns Chan/Quan's masculinity to the American/Western masculinity through its use of references to that of John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone). The physicality of the hero is an important element in the action cinema, as Barry Keith Grant highlights: "the criterion for action stars seems to be more on musculature than Method acting"; "Hypermasculine stars ... offer their impressive bodies for visual display and as the site of ordeals they must undergo in order to defeat the villains" (83). Chan/Quan's Asian, and aged/ageing body in *The Foreigner* then can be a source of disappointment to the audience who expect to see "impressive, hypermasculine" bodies offered by typical Western action stars. In his analysis highlighting and differentiating Jackie Chan's comedic action roles, Gallagher argues that Chan's success in the U.S. comes from his comic persona, which distinguishes him from other action stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone offering in his action performance "a progressive version of masculinity that combines skillful but playful physical dexterity with comic self-effacement" ("Rumble" 166; 160). This is not the case with *The Foreigner*, as the reference/ homage to one of Stallone's best-known star persona is used to reconfigure Quan's masculinity towards not so progressive hybridity. With the images of the hard bodied heroes, Jeffords argues that the viewers identify with the strong male body in two ways, *as* that body and a *part of* the body. On an individual level, viewers desire the body's physical strength; on a national level, viewers, as a part of the nation, vicariously experience national power (*Hard Bodies* 27-28). The action cinema's cinematic narrative offers the viewers a "pleasurable collective experience" that enables them to gain a "feeling of mastery" which extends beyond the hero's individual success. Viewers gain the sense of mastery through identification with the hard bodied hero who masters his surroundings, and experience personal and national power as the hero defeats both personal and national enemies through violent physical action (*Hard Bodies* 27-28). Quan, through his performance of action during the course of

his pursuit, demonstrates hardness. And one way the film amends the inappropriateness of the foreigner's aged/ageing body is through his display of the hard body in association with Rambo's body.

There are several references to the Rambo series in *The Foreigner*, from Quan's characterization as the Vietnam War veteran to its more obvious references in his guerrilla style combat scenes in the woods. Jeffords presents Rambo [*First Blood* (1982), *Rambo: First Blood, 2* (1985), *Rambo III* (1988)] as one of the most popular icons of the Reagan era. John Rambo, the iconic Vietnam War veteran is an example of Jeffords's "hardbody" heroes that expressed nationalist pride through images of male strength, "images that perform ideological work of recuperation in American cultural life" (Tasker 142). *The Foreigner's* combat scenes in the woods are reminiscent of Rambo, with clear visual references including Quan's use of booby traps and the exposure of his half-naked body. Although met by mixed reviews – calling him a "senior-citizen Rambo in the woods" (Kenny); "a lot of monotonous, uninspired John Rambo/Bronson in "The Mechanic"-style booby-traps" (Abrams) – the toned-down yet clear references to Rambo serve multiple purposes successfully in the film. Hidden behind trees and beneath the leaves, Quan effectively disarms and incapacitates Hennessy's men, showing mastery of his environment as well as his body in his use of guerrilla combat tactics. Several scenes replicate the images of Rambo in *First Blood*, and the audience is able to see the visualised sameness and difference at the same moment, as Chan/Quan's different body embodies, performs and recreates the same/familiar Stallone/Rambo's. Such references are appropriate in reinstating and restoring his masculinity aligned specifically to American/Western masculinity. While his presentation of the guerrilla style combat skills reminds the audience of his past in Vietnam and his foreign origin, it also ties him to the US military, thereby reducing his foreignness and giving a sense of familiarity. It is simultaneously an exoticisation and a familiarisation. Elleke Boehmer writes on the postcolonial that it reshapes the dominant meanings of the colonial relationship, and while marked by the imagery of colonisation it critically and subversively scrutinises the imageries (3). While resembling colonial expressions, postcolonial expressions in this sense disrupt and reinterpret those imageries. Quan's similarity and familiarity in this regard have less



power of subversion, as they reproduce and validate Quan's masculinity as a similar version of pre-existing white, US masculinity rather than his own.

Quan's embodiment of Rambo masculinity is also an example of the *exceptionality* of his retrieved masculinity; while his racial/ethnic difference is erased through the association, it remains an exception, therefore not unsettling the notions of what East Asian men are like. While the film shows Quan's physical limitation through his body's failings, he manages to overcome his body's limit. The exhibition of his vulnerability dissipates. It does not debunk the myth of Hollywood action films but only temporarily creates an illusion of a critique. It repeats the tradition of the films that creates this kind of an illusion and masks its conservatism. Similar to Rambo's first appearance in *First Blood*, Quan is narratively produced as a victim. He had been captured in the war (later revealed), and lost his family to pirates, and his last remaining family, his daughter, to a senseless terrorist attack. And the government authority, which he had been seeking refuge from violence – fails to prevent violence or bring justice afterwards. Then what happens in *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* happens in the film – remasculinisation of the hero. Rambo turns from a victimised misfit to a determined hero, “an alteration in which the image of the victimised soldier/veteran/American male has been regenerated into an image of strength and revived masculinity” (*Remasculinization* 130). Quan turns from a victimised Chinaman to a determined hero who now shares the nation's pursuit of justice and the project of remasculinisation. When Quan is seen sitting hiding, half-naked, exhausted, and wounded after his first battle in the woods, Quan's half-naked body is not as strong and glorious as that of Rambo.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, stimulating musical score keeps suspense, and as he passes out from the self-inflicted pain, treating his gunshot wound with a heated knife, the scenes are indicative of his resolution and hard bodied masculinity. The half-naked Quan revealing his scars also reminds the scarred body of Rambo in *First Blood*.<sup>32</sup> The similarity is heightened by, and dissimilarity remedied, his demonstration of the ability to endure pain and repair himself. As Quan is sitting half-naked revealing his bare torso covered in scars, the hero's maimed body is the site of violence, but at the same time a sign of his endurance and resilience. Quan's body covered in scars is different from the “soft”

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<sup>31</sup> Also, Rambo's body in *First Blood*, from which *The Foreigner's* battle scenes take most of its references, is unlike his fully developed hard body in the later Rambo series.

<sup>32</sup> For a different analysis of Rambo's tortured body, see Jeffords *Remasculinization*, chapter I.

body that indicated his state of victimhood and vulnerability, represented by his face covered in cuts from the terrorist attack at the beginning of the movie. The scars on his body are the bodily evidence of his masculine past continuing to the present (now made “visible”) and the symbol of his warfare masculinity. The fresh wounds he tends to with a heated knife also demonstrates that he is capable of inflicting and enduring pain on himself, his resilience and his readiness to recover himself for the next battle.

Yet, unlike Rambo, there is a limit to what Quan’s racialised and aged/ageing masculinity can do. Rambo’s body/masculinity, as a result of his development through the series, is unambiguous and indisputable:

When Rambo enters a room, heads turn. Nor is there any ambivalence about the status of his body. In the first film, it was unclear whether his body was clean or dirty, lawful or unlawful, strong or weak: by 1985 Rambo’s body-strength is indisputable. ... The camera is not ambivalent about and needs no narrative justification to display his physical prowess.” (*Hard Bodies* 32).

Quan’s foreign body, racialised and aged/ageing, does not achieve this and requires justification to display his physical prowess. Quan’s body, the vehicle through which the film and the audience seek the sense of unity and empowerment is ambiguous due to his race and age, and not unquestionably hard or soft. His identity is malleable, and the nation’s should not be, although it is in danger of being so. Which is why it is uncomfortable for the viewers that Quan’s body is not as hard as it should be – he functions not only as the hero of the film but also as the symbol of the nation(nal body). In other words, the hero’s body is not just his own but should be everyone else’s. The reviewers’ anxiety therefore is an anxiety of the Western/white male/native-born citizen, as well as anyone who identify as a legitimate citizen/viewer as opposed to the identity as/of the “foreigner” (which perhaps is the only thing that is not ambiguous about Quan’s identity) and therefore cannot fully identify with the film’s hero.<sup>33</sup> Quan’s softness due to his race, age and *foreignness*

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<sup>33</sup> I argue that this position/point of view need not correspond to the viewer’s real-life identification with race or gender, à la “the masculine point of view” (Jeffords) – it is rather an identification with, or adoption of the narrative viewpoint of the film.

give viewers *displeasure* instead of “collective pleasure” that they seek – as the film invites them to – from the film’s national plot/narrative.<sup>34</sup> In her analysis of the first two films of the Rambo series, *First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood, Part II*, Jeffords contends that Rambo’s “pervasive, powerful, and inexhaustible” masculinity is what the nation’s ideology sought to incarnate:

These are, of course, the characteristics that ideology wishes to present itself as possessing. The spectacle of the body/technology figures the thematics of the film’s ideological position in relation to the patriotic, militaristic, individualistic, racial, and economic. The body is the point of intersection of these devices and is constructed to speak its messages, depict its images, and to present them as the holistic gestalt of a functioning efficiency. The body’s fluid performance reassures us that these positions work together, are all truly one. (*Remasculinization* 13)

Unlike Rambo’s body, Quan’s body is not of course constructed as “a fighting machine,” nor does it display “godlike qualities” of a war machine that Jeffords speaks of (*Remasculinization* 12; 13). It is why the visual and performative display/disclosure of Quan’s faltering, racialised and aged body is disturbing and disappointing to some viewers – it demarcates weakness and imperfection. Quan demonstrates elements of the hard bodied masculinity, but only through the validation from the Western authorities (US, UK) – his masculinity is partly made by, and validated by the West. His natural, racialised and ageing self is softer, alien/foreign, and ambiguous. It indicates the possibility of masculinity that can be broken and defeated; and that such a body can be representative of the nation is a discomfoting, if not unacceptable, idea. This echoes the anxieties about the crisis of mastery in the US/West. If the sentiment of Rambo’s and the film’s original novel *The Chinaman*’s echoed the 1990s US/UK crisis of mastery which saw national security or the patriarchal authority of the nation as under threat, a similar sentiment

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<sup>34</sup> This may be expected more for a white male viewer as the major audience for English language action thrillers. Yet the more diverse, global audience for action films in general, as well as particularly Jackie Chan’s movie as well as the audience for Pierce Brosnan or the 007 series, or Netflix as its distribution base, it is still expected that the general viewing pleasure of sympathizing with the protagonist will be present.

has been making its repetitive returns in form of growing anxiety about threats of terrorism as the post-9/11 US government struggles to be successful in its “War on Terror” that is extending to the broader West.<sup>35</sup> Nationalistic discourses about external/internal threat and the need to “harden” the boundaries of the (Western) nations have returned and become prevalent in *The Foreigner*’s 2017. Jasbir Puar’s connections made in *Terrorist Assemblages*, between contemporary gay rights discourse and the integration of gay population into consumerism, white hegemony, US imperialism and the war on terrorism have an uncanny similarity to the contemporary moment of the film as well as the chapter’s narrative of racialisation. Puar argues that heteronormative ideologies now find accompaniment from “homonormative” ideologies reproducing the same hierarchical ideals for the preservation and reinforcement of hegemony related to race, class, gender, and nation-state, what she calls “homonationalism.” A resurgence of nationalism in the US draws its power from unexpected and unsuspected groups, progressive agendas that result in pervasive, reformed racism. Homonormativity serves to rehabilitate national citizenship, and in European countries as well as the US multiculturalism is replaced by racialised bordering and militarisation (Puar). Eventually, then, the masculinity of the racialised other, projected to be progressive, will be deployed to serve the interest of the white, hegemonic masculinity. Thankfully for those who are made uncomfortable and outraged by such a suggestion, the film’s ideology assures that Quan remains only a useful aide to the project of the remasculinisation of the nation but not the ultimate hero of its glory. The film addresses this anxiety by dissociating/detaching Quan from the national body again at the end. He can only temporarily represent the national body during his mission/service. Whilst John Rambo reacts against the weak government that he deems as a failure and takes matters into his own hands in the *Rambo* series, as does William Munny in *Unforgiven* (1992) and remain as heroes who save the day/nation, Quan’s is an abject, and is returned to its abject position/status after his purpose is served. The biggest difference between those heroes and Quan, while showing a similar process of

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<sup>35</sup> Special Forces have continued to carry out the U.S.’s international military interventions in the 21st century: “Special Forces have been a key element of the U.S. campaign against terrorism worldwide. The SF groups regularly rotate through Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines, as well as Africa and South America. In addition to these rotations, the traditional support to partner nations in Central and South America, the Far East, and other locations continues as SF units are deployed around the globe.” (Special Forces Association, “SF History” <http://www.specialforcesassociation.org/about/sf-history/>)

turning and returning of their masculinities that ends in some episodes as a returned abject, is racialisation. The process of the second(ary) abjection is not alien to non-racialised masculinities. There are many predecessors to these men, for example *The Deer Hunter* (1978). Yet, unlike those heroes whose masculinity embodies that of the nation more so than the films' national institutions and maintains their recovered masculinity, Quan's is specifically racialised as it goes through the second abjection. Quan retires to his previous role, is returned to *his* place, and remain anonymous once his purpose is served.

### **Embodying the Nation's Past**

The film exploits Quan's ethnic origin, i.e., his Chinese Nùng identity, to construct Quan's masculinity as a specifically racialised one – and one that could be trained and qualified by the (white) West. The references to Quan's past are significant in reading his racialised masculinity. As some suggested that it may seem irrelevant, as “a rather elaborate and entirely unnecessary backstory about how he acquired these skills and why he's so angry” (Debruge), the chapter argues in opposition and delineates that it is necessary that the backstory is elaborate. Quan's arguably necessary “backstory” provides answers to and explanations for the two elements that are essential for the construction and understanding of Quan's masculinity – the source of his masculine power (how he acquired these skills), and the nature of his violence (why he is so angry). These answers and explanations are delivered throughout the sequences in two visualised forms – documents and flashback images. Firstly, Quan's memories of his past showing how he lost his family come in flashbacks as he sits in the woods recuperating after his fight. Then, secondly as a supplement, the film provides in a documented form Quan's past as a Special Forces soldier in the Vietnam War, giving explanations in words to the origins and characteristics of his skills and abilities, and also to his visualised family tragedy in the previous flashbacks. The film gives Hennessy *literally* an answer to his question, “One ol' man running circles around the lot of us. Why is it so difficult?” in the form of a document. Katherine Davies sends Hennessy classified documents in an email, the US army military personnel records containing information on Quan's past. The documents tell Hennessy that Quan was a Chinese volunteer to “the Vietcong/NLF Sapper Battalion 1967.” The “Department of the US Army” document

that highlights “TOP SECRET” fills the full screen, and Quan’s profile and his past run through the screen in a written form detailing the history of his life during and after the war. The documents testify to Quan’s exceptional capacity as a soldier and provide explanations and pieces of evidence for his skills and masculinity that he had previously demonstrated. The documents reveal that Quan was the winner of the Meritorious Unit Award, presented to the “Specialist Ngoc Minh Quan of Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Division (Reinforced).” Quan was “one of the most deadly fighters” and “promoted to platoon leader.” As the film’s method of highlighting Quan’s qualification as the hero, the documents firstly mark his administrative and leadership skills. Yet, the documents have other implications. The documents not only emphasise Quan’s exceptional skills as individual merit but also as collective characteristics, and therefore mark Quan’s masculinity ethnically. The ethnic difference is administered and approved by the US (Western) authority, giving it assurance and legitimacy.

The Corps frequent displacement to engage the enemy and assume new missions was characterized by uncommon flexibility and readiness and the combat actions were distinguished by unusual efficiency and valor. ...

The outstanding courage, resourcefulness and aggressive fighting spirits of officers and men, most notably specialist Ngoc Minh Quan in battle against well equipped enemy reflected great credit upon them and uphold the highest traditions of the LRRP cop and the United States Army Service. (*The Foreigner*)

The language of difference that highlights “uncommon flexibility and readiness” or “unusual efficiency and valor” of the Nùng soldiers resonates with the US Special Forces Association’s records about their ethnic allies of the Vietnam War. The SF Association’s archives note how they have trained Vietnam’s ethnic tribesmen (of which the Nùngs are one) in the techniques of guerrilla warfare, “mold[ing] them into the 60,000 Civilian Irregular Defence Group, or CIDG. CIDG troops became the SF’s most valuable ally in battles fought in faraway corners of Vietnam, out of reach of conventional back-up forces”; “SF personnel were instrumental in the covert war

against North Vietnam” (“About SF”). The Special Forces Association also describes the Chinese Nùngs as “natural” fighters, as “The Nungs had a reputation as fierce fighters, and their presence was reassuring to those who fought with them. They served widely and in a variety of roles with the U.S. Army Special Forces once the American buildup began”; “They remained a tough, tenacious force, respected by their allies and feared by their adversaries” (“The Chinese Nungs”). The descriptions of Nùng soldiers’ ethnic characteristics, a clear example of ethnicisation/racialisation, resonate in the descriptions in the film’s documents. Yet, the documents also emphasise that Quan upholds “the highest *traditions* of the LRRP cop and *the United States Army Service*,” highlighting his allegiance and integration to the US. Quan’s past as Special Forces not only explains his masculine combat skills and highlights his capabilities by highlighting his exceptional and differentiated ethnicity, but also establishes his associations with the US at the same time. It fixes his place as an “ally” but not fully one of “us.” The simultaneous inclusion and exclusion allow Quan’s abject masculinity to be valorised, and by the legitimate authority/source.

The documents also make the US/West an agency of the confirmation of Quan’s masculinity. His masculinity, however *naturally (read, ethnically and racially)* gifted he is, is authorised and approved by the US/West, mitigating and regulating its foreignness to a recognizable, trustworthy ally. Quan’s past(s) comes in a sort of a quick, summarised *written* version, a literalisation of Quan’s visualised past and masculinity from the previous scenes. The documents are legible, official evidence of his masculine past and masculinity that is approved of by Western authority/institution and standard. The information is made visible and literally readable to the audience through graphic and literal means. The scenes demonstrate the ways in which the film makes Quan’s masculinity *decipherable* through the language of the West, through the Western institution and thus the national body. It also indicates how Quan is “represented” not through himself but through the lens of the US/British national body throughout. Quan’s past is now *literally legible* to Hennessy who was initially unable to *see/read* Quan’s masculinity and questioning its existence, sources, and nature. Audiences are also able to read it off the screen; Quan’s performance alone is not credible and legitimate enough to his audience, both within and outside the film, to explain his masculinity. Quan’s demonstration of masculinity through his body alone is a mystery, therefore the explanation has to

come through the legitimate source. Only then, through the official language of the Western institution (doubly, through the US official acknowledgement via the British government official), Hennessy and the audience can understand, perceive fully, and *accept* Quan's possession and demonstration of masculinity. It is important that Quan has fought for the US and not the Vietcong/NLF. Now it is understood that his masculinity is already proven by, and trained and regulated by, therefore *given* by the US army, therefore acceptable. In this way, Quan is the "good" Asian as opposed to Viet Cong/Communists, an ally to the West from the beginning. The documents thus function not only as a warning to Hennessy but also as guidance and assurance to Quan and his masculine power. Not only is Quan on the *right* side of the alliance regardless, or despite his race/ethnicity, Quan is politically *right* in a double sense, by supporting democracy and pursuing justice uncontaminated by political interests. He shows his resentment at meaningless violence and political corruption, particularly through his antagonism towards Hennessy. He condemns Hennessy for his ambiguous political position, potential corruption, participation in and associations with "terrorism" – in which innocent women and children die. By being the proxy and representative for the US military in Vietnam Quan's innocence purifies, make the U.S. involvement in the war innocent by association, erasing its violence against innocent civilians. In this way, the truth of the Vietnam War, the US abject history, is abject again in the film's reference. And just as he was an aid to the US military for its self-justified war against communism, this time he is a hidden aid to the British police force's operation against terrorism. His role as a good Asian foreigner/immigrant does not change no matter where he is, or how old he is. Once an ally to the US/West, now Quan *the foreigner* resumes his role to give assistance to the British/West. Hennessy, thanks to the documents' explanation, now knows the dangers of his opponent but also understands him. This understanding brings him a possibility that Quan is not *entirely* different from him but is part of an ally. When he sends Sean to stop Quan, he does not antagonise Quan to the fullest extent but tells Sean to hand Quan the names of the bombers if necessary.

As Quan sits in his makeshift shed hiding in the woods, previous to the scenes where Hennessy receives Davies's email, Quan past in which he loses his family to pirates while escaping from Vietnam is shown in flashbacks. The fleeting images then find a literal explanation in Hennessy's documents, some of which



contains detailed information about Quan's history including that of his family.<sup>36</sup> Jule Selbo recommends that the typical action hero, to be "real" and relatable to the audience, needs to have flaws as well as extraordinary skills: "The action hero is not, in many cases, the "everyman"; however, personality elements (neuroses, specific backstories) can draw the audience in and allow them to identify and care about the fate of the character" (236). Quan's backstories – his *repeated* losses of the family make him relatable as well as giving justification to the recovery of his masculine self and power. The ex-Special Operations soldier maintains his relatability and ordinariness through his fatherhood and his dedication to the defence of the traditional family value – the universal values that the nation wants to recover, to address its anxiety about the failing family structure – represented by Hennessy's case in which both of the couple have affairs (both of which lead to destructive ends) and Hennessy is therefore associated with two dangerous, wrong kind of femininity. Quan's family, in the meanwhile, are ruined (daughters believed to be kidnapped, raped, and murdered) by pirates. The film redirects audiences' attention from the violence of the war to the violence of *foreign* pirates. What ruins families, the film indicates, are not the wars that the national bodies participate in, but dissident, deviant masculinities and dangerous/bad femininities. The film forgoes the war crimes and the history of war violence and responsibilities of the national bodies and redirects the blame to internal and external disorders instead. From the perspective of the film, the British government's conflict with the Northern Irish is presented as a justifiable response for the nation's overall maintenance. The reference to the Vietnam War and its consequences is also a reference to America's *abject* memory of its commitment to war violence – another national abject – that needed to be forgotten and cast aside. This adds another dimension to Quan's abjectness. It becomes clearer in these scenes also that Quan wishes to leave behind his past, as the scene confirms that Quan had lied about his past (that he went to and worked in Vietnam after the war) to Bromley in the interrogation. This reconfirms that Quan's preferred choice is a quiet life of a family man, rather than a war veteran, indicating the later (re)denunciation of his war-hero masculinity.

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<sup>36</sup> The family tragedy was also hinted earlier in the film, in which Quan burns newspaper articles about his refugee trip in which he loses his daughters, but only very briefly. The documents give clearer explanation to the reference.

### Reverse Masculinities

The changes in Quan's masculinity and power dynamics between him and Hennessy as a result are presented through the changes in the positioning of the characters on screen. In his later visit to Hennessy, Quan confronts Hennessy in his own safehouse (to which Quan invites himself). When Hennessy finds his dog immobile, he senses that something is wrong and opens a drawer where he keeps a gun. However, Hennessy's doubt gives him a moment of hesitation before he reaches for the gun, and he fails to get it out of the drawer before Quan enters the door pointing a gun at him. Quan threatens him further that he is wearing a chain of bombs. In other words, Hennessy fails to be ready for the combat, in actuality and symbolically in their competition for masculinity. It highlights Quan's readiness and superiority, and showing that Quan's masculinity is hardened, whereas Hennessy's is softened. At this time of their confrontation, Hennessy is in his nightgown, unarmed and vulnerable, his body rendered *soft* in other words, in contrast to Quan who is in his full combat gear, armed with a gun and wearing a bomb vest, the explosives enclosing Quan in hard edges and making his body the *hard* body. It is a complete reversal of the sequences earlier in the film in which Hennessy stands tall dressed in his armour (suit) and debilitated Quan sunk in bed in his sweater. There is a clear inversion of hierarchy in the following scenes, in which Quan fiercely interrogates Hennessy, threatening him with the gun demanding to know the perpetrator's names. "You killed my dog?" – to the alarmed owner of the house and the animal, Quan gives an order to sit down, showing him who contrarily has the ownership of the situation: "Dog's fine, just sleeping. *Sit.*" (*The Foreigner*). Answering his shocked opponent's overreaction with the calm dismissal, Quan's usual short sentences that had underscored his alienness are here translated as poised terseness; he is the man in charge. With Hennessy sitting in his chair, shaken, and Quan standing tall pointing the pistol at Hennessy, the two men's positions are reversed from their first encounter in Hennessy's office. Quan holding his gun to Hennessy's face is shot from a low angle, featuring his grave face from Hennessy's eyes, whose terrified face is featured looking up at Quan. The camera alternates between the two men throughout the scenes from the angle while Hennessy pleads to Quan fearing for his life that "I'm doing everything I can" (*The Foreigner*).

The film ensures that Quan's masculinity is the *right* kind of masculinity here once again, this time a just, righteous, and legitimate one, by again using the reference to the war. When the desperate Hennessy tells Quan that he has a plan to find out the identities of the bombers, using Semtex-H, the film makes Quan mention his involvement in Vietnam explaining his familiarity with the ingredients, which Hennessy sees as an opportunity to create a bond between himself and Quan. This is after Hennessy receives the information on Quan's past; it has made Hennessy understand the danger of his antagonist but at the same time, to see him as a part of an ally rather than an entirely foreign enemy. Hennessy tries to appeal to Quan by making connections between their experience of violence: "I've read your history. We both know about wars. We've both tried to put it behind us. You and me, we're alike." However, Hennessy's strategy backfires. Quan knows about the war not only as a soldier but also because of all the Civilian damage it did during the Vietnam War – again contrasting his humaneness versus H's machinations and lust for power. This is where Quan truly explodes in their confrontation, and hits Hennessy's face with his pistol: "We are nothing alike. You're nothing! You kill women and Children! Names!" (*The Foreigner*). The film, through Quan, makes it a chance to distinguish Quan's masculinity from Hennessy's by differentiating their violence. "The hero protagonist is often "doing the right thing for the right reasons,"" writes Selbo, "[t]he protagonist (whether the hero or anti-hero) in the American action film usually has little patience with hypocritical behaviour, lies or excuses" (237). Quan's sense of justice and hatred of hypocrisy, lies or excuses are repeatedly expressed in the film, and is the film's explanation for Quan's otherwise exaggerated intensity of animosity against Hennessy. Quan's remark therefore establishes a difference between Hennessy's and his violence and sense of justice, making Hennessy's masculinity that of an anti-hero and highlighting, as a result, his own legitimacy. Not only Hennessy's violence unjustified, but also it is a cowardly violence against the weak and the innocent, making Hennessy's masculinity illegitimate and *soft* (with the holes in its excuses), Quan's legitimate, righteous and *hard* (well defended).

But Quan's statement disregards and hides the true violence of the Vietnam War that had indeed killed "women and children" and its problematic history, and the whole problem of the violence of war. Similarly, the violence of British colonialism is overlooked in the condemnation of the Northern Irish terrorists. The film makes it

Quan's personal limitation or ignorance, hiding its dismissal of the implications of Quan's differentiation. To Quan on a personal level, his involvement in the war was non-political whereas Hennessy's was politically motivated. To the national hegemonic body, Quan's violence, used in the war it has supported, is justifiable serving the just cause, whereas Hennessy's, used in the paramilitary resistance *against* the central government – internal war/civil war is equivalent to the act of terrorism. The film not only excuses war violence but also glorifies it through Quan, by highlighting and legitimising his sense of justice and honour in his use of violence. While the film highlights Quan's personal code of justice, which respects the innocent lives and condemns the war violence, against his enemies' violence, his personal story of revenge ultimately benefits and therefore his justice dilutes the violence of the British government. Quan's (and others') military-trained violence is presented as a superior and respectable source of his masculine power. Quan's masculinity functions, therefore, as a cover-up for the violence of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, by mentioning innocent victims – women and children – Quan's remark evokes his past ruined by the pirates (which was reminded just a scene ago), the association which makes Hennessy's violence even more of an illegitimate and unlawful crime that is also racialised (alien to the nation). The associated *colour* of violence also implies that it is against the legitimate "Western/democratic" code/criteria of honour and justice. Quan hits Hennessy with the gun, and the violence in the scene – although, justified – remains one-sided with the camera alternating between close-up shots of Hennessy's frightened and bleeding face and Quan standing tall in a low-angle shot from Hennessy's viewpoint, holding the gun to Hennessy's face. Quan threatens again, and terrified Hennessy shouts "To Almighty God, I don't know!" while the screen only shows Quan's gun and his hand (*The Foreigner*). In desperation Hennessy divulges his plan to Quan; he now accepts the possibility that he will have to give Quan the information if it is available and pleads in a tearful voice. Quan gives him an ultimatum in a cold voice and leaves the room, leaving shaken Hennessy uttering "Sweet Jesus" to himself. Not only does Quan's masculinity defend its justification in terms of justice in comparison to Hennessy's, but his masculinity complies with the Western/universal value. He is a model minority whose code of justice and honour excels that of the other dissident race/ethnic/masculinities. Eventually his masculinity, in this sense, is the one that

*resembles* the white hegemonic masculinity that is the ultimate beneficiary of the return and revival of the otherwise abject Asian masculinity.

While Quan's masculinity is being proven and enhancing, Hennessy's is being undermined and diminishing. The film presents this through the words from Hennessy's wife Mary (performed by Orla Brady), who expresses her dissatisfaction at Hennessy's ambiguous and compromised political position, and his, therefore, soft(ened) character. As they go into hiding after Quan's continuing threats, Mary tells Hennessy that "I remember a time when you would've dealt with this, properly, and other things, too. But those days are gone" (*The Foreigner*). In the scene Hennessy is featured sitting down drinking, while Mary looks down at him, and leaves the room to get into bed by herself. There is also a reference to his age, as she compares him with his past self. After Hennessy decides to get help from his nephew Sean as a tracker to pursue Quan, the film shows Sean at Mary's door in the following scene. In the scene, the femme-fatale aunt Mary betrays Hennessy in favour of the nephew, a younger and more soldierly masculinity. Hennessy is facing dissent and betrayal from his ranks within his political party, and from within his family; he has failed to control the crisis within his own structure/unit. He had given up his ideals for political power, making deals with the British authorities which he once fought against in his youth as a paramilitary himself. This is another reminder that his hegemony is not in fact genuine, and that not only other masculine powers but also femininity is threatening his position of power.

## **2. Friends or Foes?: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Asian Other**

As *The Foreigner*'s narrative sets the three parties/bodies – Quan, Hennessy and his Northern Irish government, and the central British government – eventual collaborators pursuing the same target despite their conflicts of interest and antagonisms, it creates ambiguous and complex dynamics between and within the bodies. The characters, representing each different body, offer multifaceted portrayals of masculinities in different categories through their complicated relationships. Their changing dynamics also show how the film's ideology, reflecting the masculine point of view, enacts the project of remasculinisation through characterisation.

## Hennessy

It is not a failure of the movie that Hennessy's narrative seems to overpower that of Quan. Hennessy's position and characterisation are important in understanding the construction of Quan's masculinity and Quan's positioning within the structure of hegemonic masculinity. While the plot heavily features the rivalry between two men, what seems to be of the Foreigner/Asian challenging the authority of the native-born, hegemonic masculinity, the movie unfolds Hennessy's character as in an ambiguous position, to the national body and within the structure of the national hegemonic masculinity. While Hennessy's masculinity is locally hegemonic, it is hegemonic only on the local level and subordinate to the national hegemonic body on the national level – eventually a non-hegemonic masculinity pitched against, and losing to, Quan's emerging and hegemony-sanctified masculinity.

As noted previously, the (Northern) Irish are racialised in the film as well. The dissent from Northern Ireland is a danger within, an internal problem which has been in existence, and had developed to an immediate and direct threat to hegemony. The political power game between Hennessy and the British government features Hennessy as a disruption to the higher level of hegemony/hegemonic masculinity, due to his ambiguous position within national politics, and due to his past and continuing association with the IRA/Northern Irish dissidents. Hennessy remains uncertainty as he is associated with the threat but claims loyalty to peace and unity, and therefore a source of anxiety and tension to the central government. Examining the construction of the masculine identity in popular culture, Antony Easthope explains that to the masculine self, its goal is “to master every threat. ... The castle of the ego is defined by its perimeter and the line drawn between what is inside and what outside. To maintain its identity it must not only repel external attack but also suppress treason within.” (qtd. in *Hard Bodies* 27). The Northern Irish remains as the potential “enemy within,” and Hennessy as the internal local hegemony that needs to be governed and controlled, taken with caution. Hennessy is featured as an implicit threat and opposition to the national hegemony, the central British government due to his ambiguous associations, although he ultimately maintains his loyalty. In his search for the terrorist group, Hennessy wants to “deal with this internally” without the intervention from the central government, in case his people are responsible or involved (*The Foreigner*). Hennessy's intention to keep the matter within Northern

Ireland is against the interest of the central government, and it makes him an opposition to the main national body. Internal conflicts within his own government become a test for his loyalty and positioning within the overall British national body. Although eventually, Hennessy, while dealing with it internally as he wished, chooses his own survival within the body rather than challenge it, proving his loyalty and subordination to the British/nation.

As Hennessy asks for support from Bromley for his pursuit of the terrorist group, Hennessy tells Sean that “You’re a decorated Ranger in the Royal Irish Regiment. Bromley will respect you as much as he’s capable of respecting any of us” (*The Foreigner*). The scene highlights Hennessy’s position caught between his own body and the national body. It is an attempt to remedy his ambiguous and problematic position within British politics, as well as within the structure of hegemonic masculinity. Hennessy is dependent on his nephew’s legitimate (government-sanctioned) war masculinity to appeal to Bromley. Sean is a more adequate representative for his side because he had fought for the British, whereas Hennessy’s war was against the national body and therefore illegitimate. The film again validates a specific kind of military/war violence, through Hennessy’s recognition of honour in his nephew’s role. It is revealed that Hennessy’s associates were indeed behind the terrorist group and planted a female member of the “Authentic IRA” (Maggie/Sara Mackay; performed by Charlie Murphy) to seduce Hennessy, as a safety measure to control Hennessy. As Hennessy confronts the rebel leader, his associate Hugh McGrath (Dermot Crowley), his remark, “You gave me up to the Brits?” illuminates the antagonistic relationship between the two government/national bodies (*The Foreigner*). Referring to the terrorist group as the “IRA’s loose end,” or a “rogue cell” of the IRA, Commander Bromley makes it clear in a dialogue with Sean Morrison that they are “your people nonetheless” and that the terms of this national matter will be that “We take them down, not you” (*The Foreigner*). In these ways (the Northern) Irish are antagonised against and differentiated from “us” British. The Northern Irish are also racialised in this sense, and made foreign within the national structure, although not as explicitly as Quan. Thus, Hennessy’s masculinity becomes non-hegemonic in terms of race/ethnicity as well.

Seen this way, Hennessy's racialisation gives his and Quan's masculinity a shared marginalised status in relation to the national hegemonic masculinity. Both are constructed as "foreign" in Britain, caught in the "vicious cycle of imperialist violence" (Holub).<sup>37</sup> Hennessy in this sense also is an insider who will never be fully assimilated or accepted. Yet, Quan as a "foreigner" is in an ambiguous position but in a different way to Hennessy's. The Asian is ambiguous due to its origin as an outsider. While he is now a part of the nation – as a factual lawful citizen/immigrant, Quan's/the Asian's masculinity is a newly introduced external one that may or may not be a threat/problem. The national body tests this within the film's narrative, watching and overseeing Quan's performance. The film repeatedly shows that Quan and Hennessy have different senses of justice, and Quan's antagonism towards Hennessy is explained as his hatred of misdirected politics which he sees as a reason behind terrorism and violence that deprived him of his loved ones and ruin innocent lives. They are in this way differentially racialised, and the non-hegemonic, racialised/marginalised masculinities are pitched against each other. Quan is placed on the side of the hegemony whose goal is not only to eliminate the immediate threat from "protest" masculinities but to have all non-hegemonic masculinities under control internally. Hennessy's hunt makes Quan both the hunter and the hunted in the film's narrative. The body which Quan is against and targeted by is officially a part of the British government, but it in effect is a subordinate, racialised (as Northern Irish) and therefore marginalised one; it also is potentially a rogue/protest masculinity and is distinguished from the hegemonic masculinity due to literal and figurative ageing that it seems to be unable to overcome/recuperate from. That the national body marginalises/alienates these two racialised men/masculinities from its territory on the narrative level is also found in the geographical setting of the film. Confrontations between Quan and Hennessy happen in Northern Ireland, where Hennessy is based, while the terrorist attacks and the location of the terrorists, and therefore the location of the operation to take them down, remain in London. Quan's

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<sup>37</sup> *Entertainment Weekly* review points out that these two "foreigners" share the experience of imperialist violence: "Their dynamic is a fascinating one, and it gives multiple meanings to the film's title. Quan is a "foreigner" in Britain, in that he was originally born in Vietnam and emigrated in the wake of the American war there, losing most of his family to horrific violence in the process. But as an Irishman, Liam is a foreigner in Britain too. Both have been trapped in the vicious cycle of imperialist violence and tried to fight against their oppressors. They thought they could put the guns down and live a peaceful life for their family's sake. They were wrong, and as soon as their fragile peace is disturbed, they're both back in the thick of it, fighting and plotting and killing all over again." (Holub)



place where he can truly exhibit his masculinity and be (re)constructed is alienated further away – in the woods in Northern Ireland. It happens not in the mainland or the streets of Belfast.

### Sean

Like the narrative of *A Person of Interest*, *The Foreigner* shows the protagonist's masculinity enhanced through fraternity/male-bonding, particularly with younger men through their mutual respect they develop during the course of their missions. In Lee's case, it is with the FBI agent Morrison who is in charge of Lee's investigation and FBI operation to find the bomber, representative of the hegemonic national body/state/masculinity. In Quan's case, it is through this moment of acknowledgement and comradery through recognition of the shared kind of masculinity between him and Sean Morrison, who is initially sent by Hennessy to match Quan. Sean appears to be an enemy representing Hennessy, but like Hennessy, Sean's positioning is more ambiguous and complicated. Hennessy sends his nephew, Sean the "tracker" who had served in the UK's Special Forces to stop Quan. As Hennessy finally receives information on the bombers, he hands the information both to the London Metropolitan Police/Scotland Yard and his nephew Sean. Hennessy's and Sean's handover of the information on the terrorists to Quan is a proof of their ambiguous and complicated relationship rather than simple enemies who if in different circumstances could have been allies. It suggests that there is a possibility of permutation and rearrangement, changes in constellations of masculinities within the structure of masculinity, when the internal male bonding/fraternity is stronger than temporary antagonisms among masculinities, to sharing a more important common cause – to uphold the structure of masculine hegemony itself against external threats. The film's use of Sean's character differs from the original novel, in ways that highlight a bonding between non-hegemonic masculinities, as the film removes a female tracker who leads the tracking and allows the two men time of bonding. Sean is in opposition but a counterpart to Quan in many ways. Firstly, they share experiences of participation in wars as Special Forces soldiers. Secondly, both are racialised as foreigners in relation to the national body, regardless of their actual status within. Thirdly both are subject to the process of the second(ary) abjection. Their encounter constitutes their similarities rather than differences. The film

highlights their shared simple sense of justice in their execution of violence, in opposition to the corrupt/ideologically motivated violence that Quan blames for his daughter's death. Through bonding with and alignment to Sean and his masculinity, Quan and his masculinity prove again that they are eligible to and capable of universalisation/normativisation.

In their fight in the woods, Quan handles the much younger opponent in a knife fight in which he captures Sean and finally gets hold of the names and the location of the bombers. While the battle is an elaborate set piece boasting the two trained warriors' controlled movements decorated with eye-catching dagger fights, it doesn't waste much time, and is rather a demonstration of their similarity than the opposition, preparing for the following scene of their moment of bonding/fraternity. Quan in this tight match manages to immobilise and capture Sean in the dramatic closure with his dagger. It is important that both men's warfare masculinity is similarly demonstrated, as the film reiterates its valuation of warfare/military masculinity in these sequences. At this moment, not only is Quan's masculinity revalidated through his overpowering of his opponent/enemy in the combat, but it also is reinforced/enhanced through both men's acknowledgement and validation of each other's. Male/masculine bonding is more important than fighting. In the next scenes where Quan has Sean tied in the woods, the woods have turned into something more like a camping site of a father and a son, with Quan making food, than the battleground which it previously had been. It is a site of male/masculine bonding rather than a site of violence/competition/war. The fire creates a soft atmosphere rather than a hostile one. Both men are sitting on the same ground as Quan sits down in front of Sean. There is no difference in the camera's angle as they speak with each other, and as Sean readily gives Quan the information on the bombers, Quan engages in a more personal conversation.

"You fought in the army."

"Iraq. Royal Irish Regiment. Two tours. Special Forces."

"You're Catholic, but you fought for British, why?"

"I fought for the regiment. Out there, religion didn't matter.

We were all the same. That's it." (*The Foreigner*)

Sean's answer is the right kind of answer for Quan and the film to approve Sean's masculinity and draw a parallel between the two men's masculinity. War narratives of masculine bond cross barriers of racial, ethnic, class, age, geographic, religious, or social differences to reestablish relations between men in society at large (*Remasculinization* xiii). In other words, it erases differences in Quan's masculinity and makes it (as well as Sean's) normalised/universalised. As Sean gives the right answers, proving his noninvolvement in (wrong) ideologies, and therefore his dissociation from the terrorists, he is confirmed as an ally to Quan, their masculinity the same kind. The film privilege not only the experience of war and acquisition of combat skills but also solidarity forged through the experience of war as "just(ified)" violence, not attached to corruption/impurity. It also highlights Quan's *noncommitment* to, dissociation from ideologies as Quan's *value*, which indicates his non-involvement in the competition for hegemony. This makes Quan's and Sean's masculinity honourable but unthreatening to hegemony – in other words, their masculinity is willingly complicit and subordinate. Bonding with Sean is acceptable because within the plot Sean is also an "outsider/foreigner" as well. Sean lives in America (New York), and at the end of the movie, he is sent back/expelled to the US. The film reveals that he had unwittingly betrayed Hennessy by leaking information to Mary who is involved with the Northern Irish dissidents. As a result of his mistake, he is sent back to the US. This is an indirect punishment and containment of the otherwise potential challenger to Hennessy's local hegemonic masculinity; he is not a threat to hegemony, either Hennessy or the British, as he is expelled from its territorial boundaries. Sean and his potent masculinity are safely back to the place he had been relegated to, outside the hegemonic national bodies, both Northern Ireland and the mainland. His temporarily heightened and highlighted masculinity is returned back to its usual state.

### **Bromley/Davies**

Commander Richard Bromley, as the head of the Metropolitan Police Service's Counter Terrorism Command, embodies the hegemonic masculinity that the film ultimately endorses. Overseeing the chief operation, he is representative of the Metropolitan Police (Scotland Yard), and by extension, the national hegemonic body. He is distinguished from MP Katherine Davies, his counterpart who also

represents the British government but a different side/aspect of it. They represent the dualistic sides of the hegemonic national body. Although both Davies and Bromley remain as authoritative figures representative of the national body, each represents different aspects and stages of the nation in need of reinforcement/remasculinisation, and their characterisation shows how the national body is remasculinised. Compromised by the element of crisis, and indicatively by her femaleness/femininity, Katherine Davies is involved in complicated backdoor/off-the-record political negotiations. In comparison, Bromley's position is uncomplicated – he is clean and politically straight by not being the one who makes compromises, while maintaining his power and authority (but not authoritarian). The hard bodies of the heroes, on a national level, gives the audience the sense of mastery and domination, “as in control of their environments (immediate or geopolitical), as dominating those around them (whether they be the soft bodies of other citizens or of enemies), and as able to resolve crisis successfully (whether domestic or international in scope). Such bodies assist in the confirmation of this mastery by themselves refusing to be “messy” or “confusing,” by having hard edges, determinate lines of action, and clear boundaries for their own decision-making” (*Hard Bodies* 26-27). Bromley's young and competent masculinity is the direct representative of the nation, instead of either female/feminine, or old, or explicitly white. Davies represents the nation's soft body, compromised and dependent side that needs amendment and empowerment: female/feminine and dependent/weak, in need of support. Bromley's embody a more idealistic and idealised version – the hard body. Davies's gesture at negotiation leaves room for corruption – making her edges soft. Her anxiousness and dependency on Hennessy make her vulnerable at the beginning. While Davies is first seen at the beginning of the film trying to negotiate with Hennessy asking for his support, Bromley maintains confidence and independence in his investigation. Bromley is exempt from political compromise; his role instead is to give orders and to make demands. He does not make friends with ambiguous internal parties/subordinates, he is independent. As opposed to Davies who is representative of the more traditional, old, white, government authority, Bromley is (politically) straight, polite, young, and black. He is a man of his words and integrity. He is committed to his job and proves his competence in the end. Bromley is dressed in his uniform, armed, and protected by hard edges of his armour and his body, and

displays a strong masculine presence on screen, his hard jawline protecting his always grave and determined face filling the screen. Whereas the film shifts its gaze for many of the characters to create changes in the representation of their power and masculinity, Bromley remains unchanging in front of the camera, occupying a steady, strong presence and integrity of his masculinity. It indicates that ultimately the national hegemony that he symbolises remains hegemonic against other changing masculinities, leaving Davis to represent the weakened state of the nation instead.

Therefore, the reinstatement of the national body's hegemonic masculinity, the project of its remasculinisation, is represented and fulfilled by Bromley who is characterised as wholesome and flawless. He had not been racialised or feminised, and furthermore he is not involved in political deals so that he remains politically straight. As the plot progresses, Davies's role is to make deals in the background while Bromley's role is foregrounded as he is in direct charge of the operation against the terrorists, commanding the police force. And the institution gains back legitimacy and proves its competence by finalising the operation. The weakened/feminised national body in this way is remasculinised into a younger, powerful, and uncompromising, which has the ability to write its own law, sovereignty. When Hennessy sends Sean to Bromley to ask for support and allegiance, appealing, with Sean's role in the British Special Forces operation, Bromley draws a line between the Northern Irish from the central government, telling Sean that once they receive information on the terrorists "We take them down, not you." This is also an example of Bromley/national body demanding his/its own law, and not taking orders from anyone, or making any compromises. Moving on from the compromised and incompetent position at the beginning of the film, the central government proves its competence through the successes in Bromley's operations. Bromley and his team are able to find important clues on the identity of the bombers that make a groundbreaking progress on the investigation. In the close-up shots of his confident face, he communicates in his low-tone voice authority, power, and confidence. Standing tall in his uniform Bromley reveals to Hennessy that one of his associates, McGrath, has betrayed Hennessy and met with the bombers. Therefore, Hennessy is the one who has to make compromises, not Bromley/the central government: "your cosy relationship with McGrath will sink your career. ... This time for good." "Or?" "Question McGrath your way and get what *I* need. Names and locations of everyone.

You can't save him but maybe you can save yourself' (*The Foreigner*; emphasis added).

The national body is supposedly *raceless* in the film, represented by both Bromley and Davies; yet, with the film's otherwise majority-white government, the nation's colourlessness is very much a bleached one. The national body *lacks* colour. Bromley is not racialised, or his race, rather, is made insignificant in relation to his *power*. Mediated through the more notably alienised Asian body in a position of political unimportance in this way, the film intends that the nation merges black and white into a grey area of racelessness. The national hegemonic body, represented by Bromley, becomes also abstract – represented through the images of Met Police forces – men shielded in uniform. Bromley is also suitable to represent a just, unbiased, and inclusive nation that is appropriate to the expectations of its race-sensitive contemporary milieu of the late 2010s. He does not (at least not intentionally) make inappropriate racial comments about Quan. From the beginning till the end, Bromley does not disrespect the foreigner, although fails to decipher his identity. To Quan, he/the nation proves to be fair and generous, whilst maintaining its watchful eye to protect itself. He has the power to grant Quan a peaceful retreat/expulsion; he is eventually the one who oversees both operations to eliminate the threat of terrorism and gives the much-discussed “pardon” to Quan (and not Hennessy). Katherine Davies's femaleness, which can seem stereotypical for women in the position of power, is remedied through her alliance to, and identification with the hegemonic masculine body – she is representative of the nation, although with limitation, again due to her femaleness. She is not sexualised, and her style is more masculine than Mary or Maggie/Sara who are often in semi-nudes – she is always impeccably dressed in her suits, with straight, short cut hair. She handles political deals, but she does not deceive other men, nor is she manipulative. Katherine Davies, as representative of the nation, also regains power and control over Hennessy by the end of the film, (re)building hard boundaries, while through Quan Hennessy's power is even more reduced. Still, Katherine Davies cannot be the one who delivers the pardons, because she carries the *emblem* of femininity, because of her femaleness if nothing else.

## Ending

### Terrorists

In the film's final set piece, the battle with the terrorists, Quan's last fight is quick and efficient, yet takes his performance to the next level. While he does disarm and "neutralise" the bombers with his hands/body in his one-on-one combat, he is also armed with a rifle, updating, and finalising his action-thriller-hero masculinity fitting to the film's genre expectation as well – now he is equipped not only with hand-made, tentative, and therefore not fully legitimised bombs, but with the unmistakable symbol of masculinity.<sup>38</sup> Unlike previous confrontations in which he had saved his enemies' lives, he is determined to kill in these scenes – all of which indicate that this is the peak of his performance of violent masculinity. Quan enters the terrorists' hiding place ahead of the Metropolitan Police, Bromley's team who have been watching and are almost ready to start the operation, disguised as a gas inspector, again using his harmless Chinaman's façade. This is when the Metropolitan Police recognises Quan's intervention, and Quan becomes momentarily an unidentified threat, a potential competitor to the police/national hegemonic body. Yet Quan's operation results in the police's intended goal, the elimination of the terrorists. More importantly, Quan's operation/service is *watched*, supervised in other words, by the police who has the apartment on a camera connected to the headquarter. Quan is seen through two lenses, the film's camera lens as well as the lens of the Metropolitan Police's surveillance camera. Then Quan demonstrates his masculinity to both the audience and the hegemonic national body/masculinity through both cameras – one through which the audience outside the screen is presented to and the one which the diegetic audience, the Metropolitan Police control room (national body) is watching.

Quan reveals a rifle he had smuggled to the apartment in a toolbag. Similar to the grocery bag in his first warning against Hennessy that contained the ingredients for bombs that declared the beginning of his retrieval of violent, hard bodied masculinity, the seemingly innocent toolbag symbolises Quan's capacity for violence hidden under an ordinary façade. This time it contains an activated symbol. Previously his bombs and pistol were used for threatening and warning rather than a

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<sup>38</sup> For a movie to be successful, it has to meet audiences' certain expectations about its genre – see Kuhn and Westwell, Chandler and Munday, Wyatt, for the notion of "high concept" in the cinema.

real weapon that takes the enemies' lives, but in the final battle Quan uses them to kill. It indicates Quan's intentional disclosure of his masculinity. His use of the rifle also proves his resourcefulness and superiority, as he had taken the weapon from one of Hennessy's gunmen in his earlier battle in the woods and modified it by adding an improvised suppressor for his use (Internet Movie Firearms Database). It denotes the handover of power from his enemy to him, as he gains control of the enemy's weapon in his own terms. Quan escapes after killing all members of the terrorist group except Maggie/Sara before the police enter the building and take over the scene. Again, Quan's violence is selective, keeping in line with the characterisation of his masculinity. His Asian masculinity does not kill, narrative-wise to preserve his principle of justice, but more importantly, without the approval/grant from the legitimate authority – he is allowed to kill only when it is *watched over* by, under the supervision of, the national hegemonic masculinity. The film also makes sure that Quan does not kill women or children or dogs – the innocent defined by the hegemonic masculinity. Conveniently, the police are able to interrogate Maggie/Sara for the information on the next terror attack and manage to detonate the bomb without casualties. Maggie/Sara is intentionally left alive; the film made her survive for the police to interrogate and kill (“neutralise”). It allows Quan to kill the bombers responsible for his daughter's death and fulfil his justice and revenge, whilst allowing the British police/national hegemonic body to still be the one who saves the nation/world, the ultimate hero of the day. Quan exits from the scene quietly, letting them know that he knows and remains in his place.

### **Hennessy**

Another unofficial service that Quan does for the national body/hegemonic masculinity in addition to the elimination of the Authentic IRA bombers is the containment of Hennessy, the ambiguously positioned local hegemonic masculinity. Subordinated and marginalised, he is a potential threat *within*, with his past associations as a former member of the IRA and continuing involvements with potential dissidents. Whereas earlier in the film Hennessy's masculinity seemed to and did have more power and legitimacy, as his challenger Quan seemed to be challenging hegemonic masculinity. However, the plot safely retreats from this possibility by revealing that Hennessy is only a local hegemony, one that is to be destroyed keeping its subordinate status returning from an implicated equal assistant



to the British government. Quan assists in the maintenance of hegemony and is satisfied to remain non-hegemonic, without causing any threat to the hegemonic body/masculinity. Hennessy's affair with Maggie (true character name Sara Mackay) who turns out to be an undercover Authentic IRA member, threatens his position as a politician. By the end of the movie, Katherine Davies has Hennessy under her thumb thanks to the information regarding his involvement with the female terrorist ("I say jump, you say where" (*The Foreigner*)). After he had fulfilled his revenge on the bombers, Quan confronts Hennessy for the last time. In his last encounter with Hennessy, Quan makes Hennessy release his photo kissing the terrorist on the Internet, to let the world know that he was associated with the terrorist group, which he is unwittingly and framed to be guilty of. It is significant that his final act of revenge does not end with the execution of the bombers but has to end with the punishment of Hennessy. Hennessy's ultimate crime therefore is his position as a local hegemon. Quan's "neutralisation" of Hennessy serves the interest of the central British governmental authorities, by reducing Hennessy's political power even further without facing any compromises or negotiations and potentially risking their political position. Quan in other words contains Hennessy on their behalf, and he consequently gets credit and reward for it from the main national body – namely the acknowledgement at the end of the film that grants him peace and allows him to return to, or rather restart, a peaceful life, without facing consequences/charges for his otherwise illegal activities.

### **The Good, the Bad, and the Feminised**

The structure of hegemonic masculinity is sustained both through the control of its internal constituents – men/masculinity, and through the control of the external subordinates – women/femininity. One of the strategies that the film employs in its project of remasculinisation is the containment of femininity, the elimination of dangerous femininity and the recruitment of good femininity with combined efforts amongst hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. *The Foreigner* divides femininity into a clear binary of good and bad, represented by its female characters. The film demonises and antagonises "bad" femininity to enable male/masculine bonding and strengthen the internal structure of masculinity and introduces "good" femininity to give assurance to the continuation of its patriarchy, through cooperation

and complicity of women/femininity. The fate and the portrayal of the female characters in *The Foreigner* echo Susan Jeffords's assertion that women suffer through their positioning as "emblem of the feminine" (*Remasculinization* xii). Quan's daughters and wife are dead to facilitate the film's project of remasculinization, their subjection to victimhood inaugurating Quan's return to his hard bodied masculinity. Two main female characters, Mary Hennessy and Maggie/Sara Mackay, who are characterised as sexualised and dangerous, meet with harsh death in the end. The film's excessively punitive treatment of female characters is acknowledged by viewers as well, an example of which finds that "The film's major downside is that the brunt of this resurgent violence falls on female characters" (Holub).

Hennessy's wife Mary and mistress Maggie/Sara represent dangerous femininity that threatens the hegemonic masculine structure, both Hennessy's local one and that of the national body. They need to be gotten rid of in order to maintain and protect hegemonic masculinity and its internal structure, fraternity within. The persecutions of two female characters reveal a particularly masculinist side of the movie in that it, in due process to preserve the masculine bond and reinstate patriarchal structure, it creates, blames, and punishes bad – dangerous and "impure" – femininity for the failings of masculinity. The film reveals that Hennessy's wife Mary, who resents the British for the killing of her brother, was involved with the terrorist organisation. Hennessy's mistress Maggie turns out to be an undercover member of the Authentic IRA that the group has planted, turning both women against Hennessy, the local hegemonic masculinity, as well as ultimately the national hegemonic masculinity. Hennessy eventually "takes care of" his wife, the deviant femininity, through the hands of his nephew Sean. This is also a significant divergence from *The Chinaman*, as Hennessy does not even consider punishing his wife. It highlights the film's antagonisation of femininity, as well as its emphasis on masculine bonding. It also gives Sean an opportunity to be useful to his local hegemonic masculinity before he returns, through his second abjection. Maggie/Sara is captured and killed by the Metropolitan Police. The film's characterisation of female sexuality as the source of danger and corruption reinforces the gendered divisions between masculine and feminine. Here again, the film's masculine point of view, the universalised, implicit normative point of view plays an important role to

make this happen. Mary and Maggie/Sara, the two “bad” femininity, are sexualised in the film both through the narrative and through the camera, and their sexuality is marked as dangerous. Mary is half naked in almost all her appearances, as is Maggie. Both use sex(uality) for political purposes and not for their own interests, nevertheless once their purposes are served, their dangerous and threatening sexuality is to be punished and eliminated. Their sex is used, on the surface according to their own will to participate in the plans. Mary uses her sexuality to gain information from Sean (and Hennessy). Maggie/Sara, the only female member of the terrorists, is sent out to carry out the missions using her sexuality as a key to her operations, to seduce and manipulate men for their missions. In order not to present the women as victims, the threat of sexual violence/rape is repressed in the film, as the women are portrayed as using their sex(uality) on their will. Yet, the film makes it that their sexuality is the only way they are granted permission in this otherwise men’s/masculine realm of political *war* not as victims but as participants.

The film allows hints of resistant voices from the two yet penalises them for it as it frames and punishes their defiance as the cause of the crises of (hegemonic) masculinity. Although the film shows Maggie complain to another member of the group that she is disgusted by her role using her body to lure in the victims, and that they should choose a gay man as the target next time, it remains a momentary comment on her side that is unanswered. In the end, it is she who suffers from torture before getting killed. Mary seems to resist Hennessy’s power over her by joining the dissident group but is eventually killed on his order. The film thus highlights the disobedient and castrating femininity through Mary’s comments about Hennessy’s incompetence, or Maggie’s complaint about having to use sex as strategy, not only as an ally to dissident masculinities but also as the ultimate threat and insult to hegemonic masculinity, rather than other non-hegemonic masculinities. The film leaves Maggie/Sara to be the last surviving member of the terrorists, the final enemy that faces the national body, making the representative body of the terrorist threat to be female. Separating the terrorists as male and female this way, Puar explains, that such a framework

Serve[s] to (1) resurrect feminist constructions of “patriarchy,” which homogenize and universalize heteronormative and nuclear familial

and sexual relations, inferring that heterosexuality is the same everywhere; (2) posit the causal foci of terrorism within either the individual or within an undifferentiated social; in both cases, the nonsecular victim or defect model prevails, evacuating and nullifying political critiques and insurgent nonstate forms of resistance; (3) foreclose a serious evaluation of female terrorists by positing a failed masculinity and an investment in patriarchy as compulsory for the growth of terrorism; women are posited as either victims of patriarchy or as emasculating forces vis-à-vis globalization, and sometimes both concomitantly; (89)

As the film shows the defiant Maggie/Sara deriding the police, the terrorist is characterised by the film as feminine, her sexuality unambiguous in this embodiment of the threat of terrorism as female. Her femininity and sexuality are underscored by the camera/film as her interrogation/torture starts with the order to “open her chest” and her body is exposed – the threat of torture substituting the threat of rape. After the interrogation men surround her body and shoot her to death. The camera lingers on her spent body sprawled on the floor, similar to that of Mary’s wrapped in her lingerie in the earlier scene of execution. Excluding Quan from Maggie’s torture saves Quan’s humanity and distinguishes him from the state violence, but underneath the film’s presentation of Quan’s respect for the innocent (women, children) there still is the masculinist idea that they are not equal to men.

As Hennessy discovers Sean’s and Mary’s betrayal, he orders Sean to kill Mary and leave the country: “Shut up!” “When that’s done, go back to New York, son.” (*The Foreigner*). The execution is a short scene featuring Sean showing no emotion or hesitation, without further explanation to his matter-of-fact duty. The narrative also shows fraternity and male bonding between him and Sean, as well as Sean’s complicity and subordination to the local hegemonic masculinity. By firstly forcing Sean to execute Mary, but at the same time *allowing* him to execute Mary as his redemption to his betrayal of the fraternal/masculine bond. The execution is therefore a sign of forgiveness as well as punishment. Again, even though the execution is short and emotionless, the shots make sure that Mary’s sexualised body, in her usual lingerie, is featured, lingering on her before Sean’s visit, reminding of

her role as the feminine against the masculine instead of her ambitious attempt at challenging Hennessy and the national hegemony. Although assassinating Mary is a form of punishment to Sean, it is Hennessy's decision to forgive his unwitting mistake and save him, overlooking his intentional betrayal in this affair, whereas his wife's intentional betrayal is unforgivable. Mary is portrayed as the bad influence that has come between the two masculinities (Sean and Hennessy) and challenges the hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the film suggests that it is the dangerous/bad femininity that is responsible for the potential internal threat to hegemony, even if it happens within the ranks of subordinate/dissident masculinities. By making Sean get rid of the threat of femininity on behalf of himself, Hennessy is able to maintain the structure of hegemonic masculinity on his level, saving it from the crisis that had been brought in by the external threat of bad/dangerous femininity. Internal relationship among masculinities is solidified through this shared act of violence towards, and the exclusion of, femininity. Subordinate/marginalised masculinities can be spared despite their conflicts with hegemonic masculinities since they are still internal to the structure as well as both choose to remain complicit. Mary and Maggie/Sara's femininity on the other hand, complicit to the *wrong* group of masculinity, is an unambiguously external element whose betrayal or deviance should be punished. The Metropolitan Police, embodying the national body, is the one that kills Maggie instead of Quan in order for Quan to maintain his sense of justice (not kill women children and dogs), but also to get rid of the dangerous feminine by its own hands thus claiming legitimacy and ownership. The elimination of bad femininity has to be performed by *domestic/internal* authorities and not by the foreigner. The foreigner's masculinity is excluded racially, from the domestic patriarchal handling of *their* women/femininity. However, when it comes to punishing other men/masculinity, the national body chooses to leave it in Quan's hands instead of killing its own men. The moment of this transaction is also the moment of the shift in the focus of remasculinisation in the project's ultimate goal, from Quan to the Metropolitan Police, signalling that Quan's is not the final representative of the hegemonic body/masculinity.

The film also ensures that the structure of the family is still intact, and it is another contribution from Quan to the maintenance of hegemony and hegemonic structure that is different from the original novel, in which Nguyen dies in the end.

Quan returns home to reunite with his partner Keyi Lam (Liu Tao), a trusted friend and co-owner of the restaurant who the film suggests now may become his partner for life as well. The way Quan's partner Lam kisses him on his return is a variation of the Hollywood action cinema's usual romantic, but sexualised union – it suggests not a fleeting, temporary sexual union but a more “familial” and lasting relationship based on trust and loyalty. Lam is an invention of the film, who I argue is created for the sake of not only a happy ending to please the audience but also to satisfy the national hegemonic masculinity's need for a good, quiet non-hegemonic masculinity that fits its idea of its good citizens. While Quan lost his family on his refugee journey to the UK and in the UK again, failing as a patriarch, the film shows the resilience of Quan's patriarchal masculinity once again through his possible building of a new familial relationship. Quan no longer has a daughter to look after, but it is implied that he may start a new family, that is, a new patriarchal unit. Quan, who had lost all his family at the beginning of the film, will possibly build another one, suggesting the reinforcement of the traditional family as well as the renunciation/surrendering of his renegotiated, re(dis)covered hard bodied, action/war hero masculinity and the redirection of his masculinity to the family-oriented patriarchal masculinity that he had shown at the beginning of the film. In this way, the film's narrative, the journey to (re)constructing Quan's masculinity, makes a full, renegotiated circle back to the beginning. Additionally, (re)union with Lam is Quan's another contribution to the hegemonic structure of masculinity in that it not only suggests a possibility of the reintroduction of the traditional heterosexual family unit, but a reintroduction of “good” femininity to the structure of hegemonic masculinity that had been shaken by “bad” femininity. For the successful maintenance of the structure, domination of but also complicity and cooperation from femininity is essential within the framework of hegemonic masculinity. Both Mary and Maggie's sexual power – interpreted as infidelity – is punished by death, while Quan brings back peace and order to the national body by uniting with innocent and harmless femininity. Their coupling suggests a birth of a proper heterosexual union at least, if not a traditionally heterosexual family, alleviating the loss of the traditional family caused by the bad femininities happened earlier in the film. In stark comparison to the other two *bad* women, Mary and Maggie/Sara, Lam, a humble Asian woman, shows loyalty and seemingly initiating a heterosexual union built on lasting trust and

love that only *good* femininity can offer. When the understanding partner embraces Quan back to his place where he belongs, the film concludes the action plot with a return to an ordinary, domestic life. Unarmed and back in his plain clothes in his Chinatown restaurant's kitchen, the ending shows a resignation/surrender of Quan's *Western* action hero masculinity. Quan back in his plain work clothes at the restaurant indicate that the place, and his new life, is incompatible with the life *outside* where he chooses to stay away from. The final scene locates the couple at the site of domesticity and confirms Quan's belonging to the domestic space instead of the masculine zone of war between men. Quan also remains sexually *pure* from the seductions of the dangerous femininity unlike other masculinities compromised and contaminated by female sexuality; his specifically racialised masculinity is instead that of a father/patriarch – appropriate enough to be a temporary representative of the father nation/hegemonic masculinity but remains on a personal/individual level/unit so that it is not a threat to hegemony. The film in this way again valorises the structure of hegemonic body/masculinity through the Asian/foreigner, through racialised bodies.

### **Conservative Politics of Action Cinema: Willing Dissociation from Hegemonic Masculinity**

Justin Wyatt suggests that the ritualised or formulaic quality, operating through high concept films, has been a defining characteristic of the 1980s and 90s American action cinema: “Unquestionably the high concept films, geared so specifically to the marketplace, reflect the American zeitgeist, embracing the return to the right-wing values and beliefs” (195). The ritualised quality of American films embodies an ideological agenda that offers reassurance; the ideological function of American film is to defuse the social threats, to patriarchal and bourgeois society (Wyatt 195). If this was the conservative politics of the action cinema in the 1980s-90s, *The Foreigner* seems to follow this tradition with the formulaic quality in its narrative viewpoint, and its ideological inclination towards conservative nationalism. Rather, the film exemplifies the continuation of the conservative ideology through the 2010s. While it may not be entirely coincidental that the original novel's publication is in 1992, masculinist and nationalist ideology is resurgent, widespread in the populist discourses in the 2010s, gaining popularity not limited to the

American/Western hemisphere but throughout the global political landscape. The film promotes a particular, limited kind of justice, and draws a link between masculinity and nationalism, replicating the arrangement through which British/American/Western nationalism maintains itself. Gallagher suggests that “[t]he action film’s significance for film and cultural-studies critics lies in the ways the genre articulates prevailing ideological positions” and “the utility of conservative, often anachronistic models of male agency is repeatedly reasserted through form and narrative” in action cinema, which “responded to pressures surrounding male cultural roles variously through violence, spectacle, exaggeration, and fantastic resolution of narrative conflicts linked to real social problems” (*Action Figures* 46; 161). In describing the character traits of the typical action hero, Gallagher identifies that action films through the late 1990s (both within the U.S. and abroad) feature the model of masculinity that has been normalised in Western institutions: “the action hero’s character traits largely accord with traditional Western definitions of idealized masculinity: physical size, strength, charisma, pronounced facial features, aggressive behavior, and the ability to generate action” (Gallagher, *Action Figures* 162). *The Foreigner* releases Quan’s action-hero masculinity gradually from its build-up to the full disclosure/recovery at the climax, namely Quan’s execution of the terrorists. In this way, Quan achieves success both in terms of the narrative resolution and in proving his masculinity. However, the film’s narrative ensures that the foreign/Asian hero’s masculinity does not qualify for the most normative, hegemonic masculinity within the film’s presumed hierarchy, which is reserved for the hegemonic national body. Unlike in the case of most action films, Quan the foreigner is not the ultimate hero of the film, which is why I identify Quan’s masculinity as the example of my hypothesis/framework of second(ary) abjection. I stress that masculinity represented and validated in the film adheres to the conventional signifiers of the normative heroic masculinity of the (Hollywood/Western) action-thriller. I lay emphasis on the film’s showcasing of conventional masculinity to draw attention to the conservative politics of the film and to argue that the film retains the function of the action genre that upholds conservative hegemonic masculinity.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Yet Gallagher, in accordance with many feminist critics such as Yvonne Tasker, seeks possibilities toward a progressive change in his investigations of masculinity in the action cinema. Gallagher observes that the political conservatism of the genre has met with challenges, noting a shift in cultural discourses since 1990s. More recent action films encourage viewers to “question rather than merely celebrate conservative masculinity” (Gallagher, *Action Figures* 79). Tasker argues for



From the cinematic representations of the hard bodies in the early 1990s, Jeffords identifies “a Hollywood narration of the conservative national model for 1992, policies that seem once again to be returning to masculine hard bodies as emblems of national identities, resources, and heroics.” (*Hard Bodies* 191). Much of Jeffords’s diagnosis of the 1980s-90s America resonates in the course of 2010s. Is Nixon’s 1990s’ “American idealism” still there/here in the second decade of the 21st century, in America’s continuing/growing presence in international politics/wars, its advocate of the economic and political wars against other countries, particularly the East? Or is it desire for power that we recognise today? We witness the Trump administration’s “masculinity” and the rise of populist strongmen politicians throughout the world in the mid-late 2010s as it is currently happening. It is worrying that such desire for power is presented *through* the bodies that are seen as apolitical, idealistic, and more personal, while, differentiating itself as *powerful* – but not by ambition but by nature; it does not *covet* power because it already is powerful. Jeffords argues that in the representation of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government is to be considered feminine because of their loss in the war and their inability to retrieve POWs from Vietnam, weak, indecisive, vulnerable in their negotiation, as opposed to the now strong, determined, decisive veteran (*Remasculinization* xiv; Chapter 5). Yet, unlike in *Rambo* series that exemplifies this narrative, the national body is not projected as weak in *The Foreigner*. It is never apologetic nor is it asked to be. The problem of the weakened/feminised nation is what the narrative remedy with/through “the foreigner/Asian” in the film (as well as in *A Person of Interest*). The masculinity that the narrative ultimately wants to reinstate/remasculinise as hegemonic is that of the national body and not those of the foreigners within, be it the Asian immigrants or other ethnic minorities. Indeed, at the end it is the Metropolitan Police, the representative of the central national body, the one who ultimately saves the day by stopping the terrorist attack, with the assistance of the Foreigner/Asian. In the meantime, its ambiguously positioned subordinate, the local hegemony and a potential internal challenger, is forced to surrender his power at the hands of the Foreigner/Asian, surrogate of the hegemonic body, despite his (however unwilling) loyalty to the nation/hegemony and eventual contribution to the nation’s

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“the action cinema’s importance as a space for the elaboration of new formations of masculinity” (59). The objective of Gallagher’s investigation also is to rethink and reestablish men’s privileged position in active space. I argue that *The Foreigner* does not serve such a function.

war on terror. The ultimate beneficiary of this capitulation is the central government who now is able to enjoy greater control over its subordinate local hegemony without direct confrontation – it now has the representative of the Northern Irish government “under their thumb.” There is a sense of the recovery of normality in the end. Justice is served, internal dangers of dissident masculinities and external dangers of deviant femininity are all eliminated and/or suppressed, and the ambiguous and suspicious internal/external masculinity has proven its (trust)worthiness and complicity, served its purposes well and returned to its place of liminality where it belongs as the foreigner within. In addition to the racial division/segregation, class divisions in the film are peacefully reinforced as well, through Quan’s return to his own daily job, the stereotypical Asian immigrant’s occupation, disconnected from the masculine world of politics.

In various ways of capitulation Quan returns to his place, corporeal, geographical, and figurative/symbolic following his remasculinisation, for the completion of the film’s ultimate project of remasculinisation. In the end, there can only be one successful hunter in the hunt for one shared target. While it seems that Quan is the successful hunter and the winner of the game, having fulfilled his revenge by killing those responsible for his daughter’s death, the film makes the national body the ultimate winner by allowing it to finalise the operation and claim the full credit whilst making Quan assist the elimination of the threat of terrorism, and restrain Hennessy’s political power without the central government’s need for direct confrontation with Hennessy. This is why the nation(al body/Bromley) feels that “we owe this chap something” and lets go of Quan without punishing his illegal activities (*The Foreigner*). Metropolitan Police watches over Quan’s intervention, firstly with an alarm and caution, and tracks him down after his escape, but they finally decide to leave Quan in peace in acknowledgement of and appreciation for his assistance/service in eliminating the threat to national security, real terrorists and threatening subordinates alike. After the completion of his mission, Quan eventually disappears into his humble Chinese restaurant, a liminal, racialised abject space to which he belongs. On a personal level, Quan has achieved his goal, fulfilled his revenge and justice for his daughter, successfully asserted his masculinity and returns a hero. On the national level, he has participated, if indirectly, in the operation to stop terrorist attacks, contributing to national security and protecting

innocent lives, fulfilling his sense of justice even to a further end. However, as he returns to his place, he is withdrawing from what he had (re)built throughout the film – his violent, hard bodied hero masculinity. The anxiety about the weakening of the patriarchal structure, shown through the betrayals from bad women and consequent failing of Hennessy's heterosexual family unit as well as his unruly political "family" that these women were also involved in, is addressed and remedied through Quan's surrender of his violence and power, and return to his place, both in terms of his positioning in the structure of hegemonic masculinity and his physical residence – the liminal space within the national borders/geography. Although Quan assumes and demonstrates the essential traits of the action-thriller hero, Quan is a foreigner within, and therefore his masculinity remains subordinate/marginalised. The chapter exemplifies the thesis's hypothesis through analyses of how Quan and his Asian (American/British) masculinity is positioned as the abject figure, demonstrating his masculinity that qualifies as the hero but also presenting limitations that confines him as non-hegemonic compared to the *fully* hegemonic masculinity of the national body within the context of the film. While not antithetical to the hegemonic masculinity, his racial/ethnic position as the "foreigner" and consequent lack of political power and legitimacy, disqualify Quan from being the ultimate embodiment of the hegemonic masculinity. In addition to exhibitions of physical criteria for conventional masculinity, as a political drama/thriller, there is an element of symbolic and political power to hegemony. This is what Quan lacks, due to his foreignness irrespective of his legal status that excludes him from the national politics to begin with, and due to his disavowal of politics, framed as a personal belief and choice, as well as his class limitation. He is portrayed as being content with his non-hegemonic position, which again appears as his personal choice rather than circumstantially inevitable. His detachment, his alienation enables him to be the one that saves hegemonic masculinity from the dangers of *wrong* elements of dissident masculinities – unjustified violence, disloyalty and more important, the ambition for hegemony.

Jeffords argues that remasculinisation involves the disavowal/rejection and rewriting of the law in its own terms, "along with the renegotiation of masculinity has come renegotiation and reempowerment of the state in such a way that war as a general social condition is used to heighten the ability of the state to proclaim itself

“the source of all rights” (*Remasculinization* 183). In the ending of *The Foreigner* Bromley/Metropolitan Police demonstrate this unlimited hegemonic power to interpret, manipulate and exercise its laws in its own terms. The hegemonic body/masculinity is the source of all rights – it can kill, it can control, it can supervise, it can grant sanctions, and it can make pardons. It can make the unlawful lawful, as it *is* the law. It makes exceptions for itself and others, but the discourse of warfare makes the exceptions *normative* and thus unexceptional but a norm. The state of exception makes the rest of the society accept the national body’s exception as normal. The audience accepts the intervention, supervision, violence (right to kill) and negotiations of the national body and the expulsion of the foreigner as the natural course of the narrative. The nation does not punish Quan’s otherwise unlawful actions, which are directed against the dissident government and terrorists. Without the government’s pardon/sanction, he is a plain citizen who attacks government officials and murders four men. He is in this sense granted the security of his citizenship once again by the national body’s approval, through political pardon. By taking over Quan’s mission and finalising the operation with their own hands, the national body indicates that it approves of Quan’s actions and shows the proof of their cooperation. In this way the national body and Quan’s body are finally united in the same project, implicated also in the return of Quan to London, the heart of the national body. However, as Quan hides further into the liminal/object space of the heart, and presumably will not make his way out of his place again until it is necessary, the incorporation of the foreign element (pharmakos) will not disrupt or harm the body. The specific kind of masculinity that is associated with violence returns to or replaced by the peace-seeking, family-oriented patriarchal one which he possessed and demonstrated at the beginning. This is the kind of masculinity that the national hegemonic body returns to as well, as shown in its generous pardoning of the loyal foreigner in the film’s ending as well as its triumphant success in saving its citizens and foreign visitors from the danger of the terrorist attack. Ultimately, the national hegemonic masculinity is not simply violent, unless in exceptional circumstances – a national crisis; the hegemonic body is generous and forgiving. The film’s narrative assures that the *foreign* threats the national body faces are not real/permanent threats, by showing that they are either to be eliminated or repressed or comply with the national interest and bring in labour that the nation needs and

remains in their assigned territory within its boundaries. He now returns to his other/original duty as a good, model minority immigrant in his Chinese restaurant, upholding traditional family values and offering necessary domestic labour to the nation, repressing/surrendering his exceptional masculinity yet again. The national body is content to grant him a peaceful existence in its liminal part of the body.

### Chapter III. “Post-Apocalyptic Narratives and Speculation of the Future: *The Walking Dead*”

In the last few decades and particularly since the turn of the twenty-first century, post-apocalyptic narratives have become a hugely successful genre, in popular culture and literature alike. Critics discuss the “tsunami” of interest in the apocalyptic in the new millennium, surpassing the previous wave of interest in the theme during the latter half of the twentieth century; America’s fascination with post-apocalyptic narratives have become even greater in the first decade and a half of the twentieth-first century, reflected in the abundance of productions in print and on screen (Clark et al. 6; Gurr 4-5).<sup>40</sup> Critics locate the genre’s popularity in its potential to reflect our contemporary desires and anxieties and to offer opportunities to reconsider the present and (re)imagine the future. Stephen Shapiro finds that modern subjects were compelled to turn to popular culture for such “socially framing narratives” that offer guidance to provide modern subjects with stable codes of life (the *nomos*)<sup>41</sup> with the failure of traditional forms of social institutions, such as religion, the nation-state, family units, or labour unions and governments (196-7). Generic popular culture has taken up such a role in providing the consumer with opportunities to experience and critically engage with the social changes and subsequent sense of crisis they faced; thus “genre television functions today as the ersatz *nomos*-making institution for Americans” (Shapiro 196; 202-4). Post-apocalyptic narratives have achieved global popularity in a variety of forms such as films, television series, comic series, novels, and video games. Considering not only the popularity and influence of the US-bound popular cultural products worldwide but also the inter- and transnational characteristics of production also often collaborative multi-nationally and distribution of cultural products in the twenty-first century where video streaming services (such as Netflix, Amazon Video or Hulu) make the global circulation of products ever easier, faster and simultaneous than before, it is not difficult to conclude that they reach far beyond the boundaries of the

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<sup>40</sup> Examples include the following: James Dashner’s *Maze Runner* series, Justin Cronin’s *The Passage*, and Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* series consistently make the New York Times bestseller list, while television and film offer us post-apocalyptic worlds ranging from the graphic violence of AMC’s *The Walking Dead* (2010–) and the CW’s *The 100* (2014–) to the comedic *Zombieland* (2009) and *This Is the End* (2013). Even Disney has entered the post-apocalypse with its relatively benign *Wall-E* (2008). (Gurr 5)

<sup>41</sup> See Durkheim (1951)

United States. Shapiro points out that resurgence of genre narratives in television in the last two decades means that they have reached the wider and more middle-class viewership with buying power that commercial, capital-intensive broadcasts require to be financially viable, “the more economically secure and ostensibly culturally ‘sophisticated’ consumer base” such as, primarily, the American middle class (205). While it is unmanageable to repudiate the diverse makeup of the “global audience,” global popular culture in various but consumable formats targets and addresses similarities of these modern consumers. There are a great number of examples of crises that concern the audience worldwide – issues such as climate change, declining world economy and market failure, failings of capitalism, doubts and criticisms about neoliberal governance, increasing political tensions inter- and intra-nationally, and anxieties about ongoing wars and terrorist attacks, refugees, and rapidly worsening international relations. These political and economic changes and instability highlight the issues of racial and national conflicts, and place authority and capability of current hegemonic leaderships under question. What kind of guidance would the global viewership seek from post-apocalyptic narratives when international relations are worsening both in terms of reactionary nationalism and exclusionist discourses, and West-East relationship – US antipathy against China, North (and South) Korea, and Russia on one side of the globe and continuing war and conflict in the Middle East and European migrant and refugee crises – and, what are the messages that popular culture produces in response? Among the big geopolitical changes that not only influence global world orders but also sociocultural dynamics in individual lives is the change in hegemonic masculinity. The geopolitical dynamics of gender and race are reflected in the post-apocalyptic narratives’ representations as global hegemony and international relations is inevitably bound by its gendered images and connotations. The popularity and prominence of the post-apocalyptic genre make it an effective site for the thematisation of racial and gender issues.

In a collection of essays that discuss the issues of race, gender and sexuality of the post-apocalypse, Barbara Gurr traces the increasing emergence and popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives in popular culture to the end of World War II and the development of nuclear weapons technology. The world after 1945 has changed physically, politically, economically, and also symbolically with the implications of

the unprecedented and terrifying power of mass destruction in the hands of humanity, wielded by the United States (Gurr 4). Yet, as the apparent hegemony waned, uncertainty and anxiety became heightened. Many scholars who examine the heightened interest in the apocalypse in the new millennium interpret apocalyptic fictions as metaphors for American anxieties over potential catastrophes (cf. Hamilton, Bishop). More specifically, critics find the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States to be a key historical moment that provoked an unprecedented level of uncertainty about and disillusionment with national security and prestige, and fear of the invasion from the Other. It came in the period of relative peace and calm following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union. It was a landmark moment in the history of the US and of the world, for political, economic and psychological consequences (Gurr 5; cf. Hanktke, Takacs). It was a time of reinvention and/or resurfacing of Cold War narratives of threat and instability. The difference was that now the West vs. the West paradigm of hegemonic competition has become the West vs. the East as the new superpowers such as China and a bigger threat from North Korea gained more significance. The post-apocalyptic texts in the twenty-first century thus constitute a cultural trend exacerbated by the “national need to deal collectively with the trauma of terrorism” among other things:

the horror of the 9/11 terrorist attacks rocked America, creating a sense of vulnerability beyond either the government’s or the media’s control. America’s diminishing prestige across the globe, the embittered arguments over climate change and species extinction, the real estate market’s collapse, sweeping corporate greed, the endless political impasse – all were part of a culture that seemed to expect apocalypse. (Clark et al. 6; 10-11)

Slavoj Žižek analyses that there is a paradox “in the very notion of a ‘war on terror,’ in which the enemy is criminalised if he defends himself and returns fire with fire” (Žižek). There is no longer the old sense of wars in the new global order; ethnic-religious conflicts between groups of *homo sacer* do not count as wars proper, or the ‘humanitarian pacifist’ intervention of the Western powers – they perceive themselves as a mediating agent of peace and global order. After 11 September,



American officials created the climate for a state of emergency, with the implication that we should limit our freedom in order to defend ourselves. The problem is that America is not in an actual state of war, but in a time when a state of peace is also a state of emergency. 9/11 filled the West's need to provide/construct a recognisable *image* of the invisible Enemy (a la Carl Schmitt) to replace the bygone figure of the Cold War Enemy, by providing the image of bin Laden, the Islamic fundamentalist, and al-Qaida, his 'invisible' network as the new Enemy. Since this entity has no positive legal status, the new configuration entails the end of international law as well (Žižek "Are We in a War?"). The trauma of terrorist attacks, particularly in the era of the worldwide war against terrorism, easily extends to a broader awareness of the threat of terrorism beyond the boundaries of the US, on both an individual national level and on a global scale. Since 9/11 there have been many more terrorist attacks all across the world into the second decade of the new millennium, and particularly with attacks happening in Western Europe it is now a global concern, or at least, the "global" consumers of a global popular culture feel it to be closer to home than before. If the imminent sense of crisis about our present society resonates in the theme of apocalypse, post-apocalyptic narratives in particular accommodate our interest in re-examination and re-evaluation of our present system through looking into the hypothetical future of the reconstruction of society after the apocalypse. Calling attention to the speculative function of such narratives that imagine the society after it is stripped down to pre- (or post-) civilisation, Gurr specifies post-apocalyptic narratives as "the post-apocalyptic speculative fiction." Speculative post-apocalyptic narratives ask us to consider the true meaning of being human, and our values, morals, and beliefs, and examining the politics of post-apocalypse can offer us opportunities both to theorise our current politics and that of the future (Gurr 1-3). The narratives "not only participate in cultural meaning-making, they also produce space within meaning can be (whether it actually is or not) contested and reformulated. The politics of this space – like the politics of the post-apocalypse – are open to interpretation" (Gurr 9). The narratives about the future crisis that reflects the present are useful in analysing hegemonic masculinity and its recuperation in a time of perceived threat, as the geopolitical threats are also de-masculinising ones. By introducing differently raced masculinities they also

represent an assertion of other supposed forms of masculinities such as “Muslim” or Chinese Communist, etc.

As well as frequent cases of justifying a retreat to, and valorising of conventional values in the survivors’ efforts to return to the pre-apocalypse, post-apocalyptic narratives also invite a critical re-examination of such values and ideologies of the past.<sup>42</sup> Post-apocalyptic narratives reflect the sense of crisis over the threat of terrorism and invasion in their visions of apocalypse and after, opening up discussions about inclusion and exclusion, citizenship, leadership, and ethnic, racial, religious, national conflicts. The narratives ask questions about who has the right or eligibility to survive and be included in the post-apocalypse, and who is going to save the world, who will assist, and what changes (or not) will be needed; these are questions of merits, values, leadership, and authority. These are questions also relevant to the searches for “alternatives” to hegemonic masculinity – which aspects should be reinstated, refashioned, or replaced? The narratives’ ultimate goal, humanity’s successful endurance and the re-establishment of human civilisation, depend on the survivors’ ability to be included or form a suitable group. Post-apocalyptic narratives offer a promising setting for contestation and restructuring of hegemony, as they prompt characters to negotiate social roles and leadership positions within and between such groups. A group’s survival requires good leadership, and within the framework of the apocalypse that reduces the demographic to a dramatic few; dynamics of the whole society can be compressed in dynamics of a group, or between groups that are usually bound to compete with one another. In other words, the post-apocalypse is a site for testing the cultural industry’s as well as the readers’/audiences’ ideas about citizenship – it propels a renegotiation of an individual’s membership in/citizenship to a group, and assesses each person for their value and suitability in a small group setting. Decisions as to who will be included in or excluded from the group, depend on differentiating assessment of “worthiness” of the citizen that exhibits different expectations for differently gendered, racialised, classed, aged, bodied beings. Melissa F. Lavin and Brian Lowe analyse how gender and race hierarchies are “reproduced in the

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<sup>42</sup> Post-apocalyptic narratives and the state of emergency (apocalypse) legitimises the narrative’s return to the “traditional” model of gender relations (i.e., pre-civilisation, pre-modernisation, pre-neoliberalism, pre-feminism) and the “natural state”: “the dogged return to conservative ideologies, structures, and institutions we see so frequently in the speculative future” (Gurr 11).

stratification of the survivor group” in the earlier seasons of *The Walking Dead* (2010-), AMC’s popular zombie TV series set in the post-apocalyptic US so that the political, social, cultural and economic arrangements that organise American life and its hegemonic values support America’s capitalist patriarchy are redeployed in and transmitted to the post-apocalyptic world (118). The authors acknowledge that the story relies on social stereotypes and “(imaginary) dispositional traits assigned according to demographic category” (118). The first two seasons of *The Walking Dead* feature overt struggles over group leadership primarily between two male characters, Rick Grimes and Shane Walsh. The two men “rise to candidacy because they embody hegemonic masculinity, which is an ideal-type masculinity that includes being strong, male, heterosexual, and white” (Lavin and Lowe 118). Other group members are initially restricted from the competition because

[n]otions of gender category, and (allegedly) associated attributes, inform leadership opportunities on the show, as other strong leaders (Andrea, Dale, and Glenn) are rendered second-tier contenders because they are not hegemonic white men; they are female, older, and racialized, respectively. (Lavin and Lowe 118)

In line with other critics such as Ho, Lavin and Lowe contend that as the show goes further into the post-apocalypse, previous social constructions continue to break down, and characters explore “more flexible social roles, relationships, demographic category and power dynamics”; the earlier seasons’ stringent adherence to norms of American cultural life dissipates as the catastrophe deepens (118-119). Nevertheless, I would like to draw more attention to the dynamics within the show’s earlier treatment of the reinscription of the conventional social structures, particularly by examining the show’s emphasis on a “colour-blind” ideology and its authority vested in Rick Grimes.<sup>43</sup> I argue that this ideology, which the show promotes as one of the most vital rules of the post-apocalyptic world of the show throughout its seasons, is nevertheless introduced in racialising ways that are complicit to the existing racial hierarchy. Through its use of the narrative plot and its way of using tropes and visual images of the Old West that has white hegemonic masculinity as a default, the show

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<sup>43</sup> For the concept of the colour-blind ideology, see Carr (1997).

naturalises white hegemonic masculinity and repeats it in the show despite its attempts at racial diversity. In this way the appearance of colour blindness inhibits and oppresses non-white identities, as well as female/feminine identities. Particularly in the realm of masculinity, the qualities of leadership which do not need to be racially or genderly restricted are again presented by default as white and male/masculine. While the show seems to promise racial and gender diversity through its casting, and its presentation of characters, through the representation of an Asian American character, Glenn, the chapter looks at the show's adherence to white hegemonic masculinity and its project of defending its hegemony, as the national hegemonic masculinity.

## **1. Racialisation of the Abject: The Zombie Text**

The increasing popularity of zombies has attracted interests from cultural critics, and many aspects of the figure of the zombie have been theorised. The highly commodified “zombie industry” generating upward of \$5 billion a year related to our fear of Others, insecurities over the possibilities of an apocalyptic event, over economic displacement and inequality, financial collapse, wars, climate change and technological revolutions (Balaji ix-xi). “The Zombie Renaissance” in the new millennium indicates that the social and cultural conditions of a post-9/11 world reproduce the uncertainty experienced by viewers during the civil unrest of the 1960s and '70s (Bishop 24). Shapiro reads that the swarming figures of the zombie are a marker of the presence of a signal crisis when tensions within a particular aspect of society become great enough to require a response (204). This crisis can be a crisis of financial hegemony, in which the failure of the business class prompts the professional-managerial class to seek new social arrangements much like the working class, who had been abandoned by the 1970s capitalism on its road to globalisation; the American middle class faces the declining of a collective class subjectivity – as the core of the capitalist-world system moves eastward to South and East Asia changing their class identity (Shapiro 222-24). The zombie narrative has generated many critical readings about its associations with capitalism and consumption. Race is another crucial element of the zombie narrative, due to the zombie's connection to slavery and its symbolisation as the figure of the Other (cf.

Balaji xii; Luckhurst). It is this sense of crisis and “[t]he possibility of wide-scale destruction and devastation which 9-11 brought once again into the communal consciousness found a ready narrative expression in the zombie apocalypses which over thirty years had honed images of desperation subsistence and amoral survivalism to a fine edge” (Dendle 54). As (post-)apocalyptic narratives, zombie narratives too offer an opportunity for viewers to re-evaluate our current social structures and relations, as the figure of the zombie disrupts and pose challenges to the notions of personhood and humanity, constructions and relations of race, gender, class, and power (Ho 59; cf. Baldwin and McCarthy 75; Balaji xi; Gurr 2). Claiming that monsters are “meaning machines” that can “represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body,” Judith Halberstam suggests that “[m]onsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these novels [the Gothic that creates them] make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (21-22). If we consider the figure of the zombie as a post-human monster, we can also read the zombie as a racial, gender, class, sexual Other of white hegemonic masculinity, a disruption and threat to its hegemony. While the sudden popularity of zombies indicates viewers’ sense of social uncertainty and transformation, the enduring presence of the discourse of a crisis of masculinity – more specifically that of white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity – in those zombie narratives can be understood as an indication of the viewers’ want of guidance and experimenting through popular cultural products. In this uncertain contemporary social condition of the post-national, global, not yet post-capitalist and allegedly post-racial, post-gender world in which boundaries are continuously being rebuilt and reinforced while popular and academic discourses conversely emphasise the need for boundary-breaking and authority-shaking, post-apocalyptic narratives reflect the viewers’ ambivalent relationship with the configuration of current hegemonic masculinity. The zombie is often noted for its potential to destabilise notions of gender, class, race, and normative power relations, and zombie films have been consistently hailed for progressive themes and representations, especially in issues of race and gender (Baldwin and McCarthy 75). The historical trauma of slavery underpins this terrible condition of being emptied out of the self, a woman without attachments left shuffling through a living death (cf. Hurston). *The Walking Dead*, too, carries the echo of this history. The series rarely makes much of the

setting, but the various knots of survivors are passing through Georgia, through abandoned landscapes that once housed huge slave plantations. To understand the history of the zombie is to understand the anxieties this figure still addresses in contemporary American culture, where race remains a matter of deadly serious importance in which the figure of the zombie is used to erase race and valorise racial hierarchy (cf. Luckhurst). Survivors in zombie narratives “serve as the embodiment of what counts as an ideal citizen” in “a narrative eerily similar to pre-feminist and pre-civil rights eras”; such narratives offer are set in “a space where characters of color presented as occupying positions of power are either doomed due to their inevitable transgressions or redeemed only through a heterosexual coupling with a white protagonist” (Baldwin and McCarthy 75).

Although the racial conflict has been a deep-rooted theme in the zombie narrative, the ways in which the popular media approaches race have been reconfigured in the new millennium. Now it is common to see the multiracial casting of characters in the mainstream media, reflecting a racially diversified demographic both of performers and viewers, and consciously responding to the popular discourse of post-raciality. 9/11 terrorist attacks also altered and re-structured the race relations in the US, in a sense that it resulted in the justification of racial profiling, higher control of immigrants and its borderline, which continue through the rest of the new century in which the world sees heightening tension between the West and the East, between and against Islamic countries. With the ongoing war on terror, the understanding of the categorisation of already much-debated “Asian” in the US has changed, too – people of Middle Eastern and South Asian (MEASA) ethnic background has become hyper-visible, while East Asian ethnic groups continue to be normalised and rendered invisible through neoliberal privatization and marketization of identities that exploit the post-racial ideology.<sup>44</sup> AMC’s hugely successful zombie television series *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) as well as Robert Kirkman’s original comic series (2003-2019), has generated lively discussions amongst viewers and readers with its extensive popularity, especially for the TV adaptation.<sup>45</sup> When

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<sup>44</sup> In *The Walking Dead* TV Series, albeit its celebrated diverse casting, Glenn is the only Asian American, and there has been no character of (presumably) Muslim background until the seventh season (“Bury Me Here”), in which they introduced a new hijab-wearing character named Nabila (Nadine Marissa). See Stolworthy, Miller, A.

<sup>45</sup> Throughout the chapter, the discussion will focus on the television series, and specify otherwise when drawing comparisons between the original comics and the TV series.

*The Walking Dead* was adapted into a TV series in 2010, it became a greater phenomenon, “arguably King of the Zombie Fictions ... reached millions globally, and the franchise exploded,” demonstrating also a more general worldwide preoccupation with apocalypse and postapocalypse (Clark et al. 14; 17). Since its launch in 2010, the show gained more and more popularity, growing by 32 per cent in viewers in season 2 and continuing to remain at the top of cable shows in the US afterwards.<sup>46</sup> As viewers take the speculative fiction’s offer to examine various possibilities of restructuring of social relations in the post-apocalypse, many focus on the show’s constant battle to reinstate the previous hegemonic masculine authority on one side and its portrayal of alternative models of leadership on the other. Jessica Murray analyses the popularity of post-apocalyptic zombie fiction through a feminist lens for instances of social ruptures. Yet, Murray concludes that despite the alternative understandings that the texts suggest, they also reinscribe and reify traditional patriarchal and heteronormative binaries: “the most insidious threat is patriarchal constructions rather than the zombies that linger at the margins of the survivors’ world (15). Helen K. Ho in her analysis of masculinities in *The Walking Dead* explains that the show presents viewers with “the possibility to investigate and question the overarching influence of white patriarchy on racial and gendered identities” (59). As the seasons progress, the show opens up leadership opportunities for various characters, continuously challenging the authority of its white male protagonist Rick Grimes (performed by Andrew Lincoln), even though the show returns over and over again to its white straight male authority. The show opens up a stage for the competition for hegemonic leadership – more precisely, hegemonic masculine leadership, owing to the show’s presumption of male leadership and authority. The naturalisation of male leadership and unquestioning reproduction of gender hierarchy are problems, but they therefore make the show an interesting and promising case study for the study of hegemonic masculinity.

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<sup>46</sup> The 2013 premiere of *The Walking Dead* set a cable series record of 10.8 million viewers (Balaji ix). Its peak, season 5, averaged 7.4 ratings in adults 18-49 and 14.4 million viewers. Season 5 premier was the show’s highest-rated single episode with an 8.7 and 17.3 million viewers (live and same day figures). With three days of DVR and on-demand viewing, Season 6 of *The Walking Dead* averaged about 18 million viewers (Data published by Nielsen Company). *The Walking Dead* remains at the top for ratings and viewer records, and the show is continuing for an eighth season in 2017-18.

## 2. Claiming Post-Raciality: In/visibility of Race and Gender

The drive to erase sociohistorical conflicts is present in *TWD*. It struggles with its discourses on race, while it seemingly promotes diversity. Viewers over the world focus on its inclusion of the actor/actresses of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, many reviews welcome the show's casting choices.<sup>47</sup> However, on the narrative level, the show tends to downplay race and places its focus on the post-racial, universal human as one race against the Walkers instead. Whilst expanding in part Ho's argument that the show portrays the more nuanced development of Glenn's (Asian American) masculinity, the chapter intends to bring to attention the show's deployment of the discourse of racial in/visibility. Glenn's character indeed is offered as a model of masculinity that is different from Rick's, and as the seasons progress, his masculinity gains more legitimacy alongside other versions of non-hegemonic masculinities. And presenting Glenn as one of the main characters, and one who is likeable, allowed the show to be seen as promoting racial diversity and to gain support from the audience for that reason. Yet, Glenn's masculine performance operates through the notion of racial invisibility, and it remains secondary to the show's assertion of Rick's masculinity under Rick's patronisation, therefore keeping Glenn's status as the national (racial) abject intact. At the junction of race and masculinity, Glenn occupies dubious combinations of middle-grounds, not necessarily "against" anyone but performing as a mediator in many instances. He is positioned as the mediating generation between the old and the middle-aged, demonstrating loyalty that never ultimately betrays the dominant. The model minority type is ironically "whiter than white" sometimes, therefore racially vanishing under Rick's patronage. According to the new law that disregards racial division within humans, there are only useful (and gendered) labourers who will find their rightful places within the new order. Then, according to this logic, is Glenn's race eclipsed by his assertion of, or the show's emphasis on, his masculinity? From the early episodes of the show, there are instances indicating that his "Asian American" masculinity does not simply shine through the fissures and gaps and fractures of Rick's faltering masculinity – it does so only by submitting to the show's denial of race. In other words, Glenn's masculinity gains power through racial erasure.

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<sup>47</sup> See Takacs, Stolworthy, Miller, A.



Glenn's visibility and presence depend on his usefulness as a resource. He performs as a human bait. Another way of Glenn's gaining acceptance (from Rick and other men) is his liminal status as a boy rather than a man, so that he is not a threat to the group's white men while still a useful hand. This results in invisibility, I may argue, of his masculinity, since race eclipses his masculinity that safely allows him to perform his masculine roles. Entering the language of the dominant, hegemonic masculinity is how he gains full acceptance of the group as he turns white à la Fanon, and gains respect among the group and most significantly from Rick. His heterosexual relationship with Maggie is another proof of his masculinity, a key to his entrance into the realm of masculinity that other American men of the group "naturally" possess. Despite, or in conflict with his ultimate and inherent retreat to the white male leadership. Rick's argument that regardless of race within humans there is only one war between new divisions of race – the human race and the zombies – makes non-white races visible as the embodiment of the American law. This practice through which we constitute and manage relations is critical to articulating the tone of the show and offer questions about the most enduring themes and problems of the show. This is summarised in this human-zombie imaginary, the boundary between human and non-human, us and them, the rights to belong to a civil society. *The Walking Dead* makes a case that the most effective method of survival is rooted in a patriarchal rule where white hegemonic masculinity prevails. Nevertheless, what it actually does, whether knowingly or unintentionally, is that it eventually reverts to the stereotypes that it seems to want to defy and reproduces the racial hierarchy in its circle of second(ary) abjection. Characters, noticeably non-white and/or female ones, lose the status of hegemony that they come to be closer to during the show, against white masculine hegemony. In this sense it pretends to make a case against the old patriarchal rule while reinforcing it through the narratively designed ill-fates of other minority characters.

### **Sc1) Glenn's first appearance without the body; Rick's new definition of race**

Before I discuss Rick's (in)famous declaration of the new world order, I offer a reading of Glenn and Rick's first encounter as an example that foretells and anticipates the show's endorsement of the post-racial ideology. Glenn is *invisible* in his first appearance; he appears first as a voice talking to Rick over a radio. Glenn

becomes visible, emerges on screen in the next episode as he takes Rick to a safe place – this is where the episode exposes the colour of his masculinity and thus where his masculinity becomes racially legible.

#### *Sc1-1) The First Encounter*

Glenn makes his first appearance in the show in its first episode, curiously as a voice addressing Rick, who is trapped in a tank surrounded by zombies, eventually assisting in his escape in the next episode (“Days Gone Bye”; “Guts”). In the episode “Days Gone Bye,” Glenn’s voice coming from a radio stops Rick from almost shooting himself in despair. In the next episode “Guts” Glenn gives him directions for his escape through the radio before they meet in person after Rick’s escape. From the beginning of his appearance, the viewer is provided with an ambiguous and unknown identity – visually unseen and without a real body – and left to wonder about the identity of the person. Glenn’s role and authority as an advisor and Rick’s saviour directing orders for the escape are moderated by his bodilessness; as if to curiously prevent any “prejudice” from preventing Rick from taking the order from Glenn – a stranger – they develop a rapport through brief a conversation before physically meeting each other, although Glenn has already seen Rick. All Rick and the viewer can infer from the dialogue is that it is a man, presumably young, who has a good amount of knowledge, resolution, and quick understanding of the situation, as well as being “bodily” positioned in a superior place. In this way, the show plays with Glenn’s bodily superiority in the situation while – and only while – hiding his body from Rick’s and the viewer’s eyes. Their rapport is based on the imbalance between each other’s knowledge of the identity of each other – a truly “colour-blind” setting for Rick. The scene establishes the show’s basic argument that Rick and the programme are colour-blind. It may be worth adding that later when Rick is introduced to a very racially diverse group of survivors<sup>48</sup> – a black man, a Hispanic American man, a white man, a black woman, a white woman, and an Asian

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<sup>48</sup> Later in the show, the audience learns that this group of scouts are selected members of a bigger group of survivors. Therefore, the party members’ age range is relatively narrow. It is worth comparing the scouts’ gender choice given the nature of the mission. In the community women are given more domestic chores; the episode also reveals that Andrea, one of the women in the scouting group, does not know how to use a gun, and has to be taught by Rick. This comes in a form of Rick’s calm response to Andrea’s confrontation and accusation of his stupid and reckless conduct of shooting at zombies and attracting them to the building – he in one shot both counters Andrea’s accusation of irrationality (by revealing that his calmness and rational behind it (the gun wasn’t unlocked) and asserts his masculine superiority over Andrea’s unmistakably feminine ignorance.

American man – the two men who attack the zombies and rescue them into the department store building appear on screen wearing masks and gears that cover their entire body. The show's toying with racial ambiguity – the moment of suspension – is a precursor to the show's claim to both racial diversity and post-racial ideology. Glenn shows enough action and self-sacrifice from the first moment he appears, yet his action and determination are portrayed “against” Rick – therefore making it a “comparison” rather than a “parallel” even though they literally walk together, and even though it seems that the plot promotes comradeship and solidarity. There is a reverse “white saviour” plot in Glenn's first appearance and the other guys, legitimated by a colour-blind setting. Still, despite the more telling confirmation of Rick's authority through classic, generic white saviour scene on the roof, the sequences of reverse saviour plot add an interesting tension to the show's albeit unsuccessful representation of racial dynamics.

At the scene, Glenn occupies the gaze, although, it is not strictly surveillance. In the zombie apocalypse surveillance is an important part of survival against zombies. Men/humans are constantly on the lookout, in which case zombies are the object of surveillance, but at the same time, they have to “keep an eye on each other” to ensure each other's safety, as in the case of Rick's rescue scene. At this point, Glenn initially occupies the authority. The initial establishment of the relationship places Glenn in a higher position, authorizing him with the gaze and the power to command in the colour-blind setting. Despite its fundamentally conservative endorsement of white masculinity, the show consciously responds to the changes in masculine hierarchy, or gender hierarchy overall. There are moments when the challenges other characters pose to white masculine authorities are powerful enough, not necessarily to overthrow them but to destabilise them. Nevertheless, the authority given to Glenn is provisional and conditional; his racial invisibility is a source of his authority. As soon as the two meet, the dynamics begin to change.

*Sc1-2) Rick's assertion of the colour-blind ideology.*

From the beginning, *The Walking Dead* establishes one of the major rules of the show's post-apocalyptic world.<sup>49</sup> In the second episode of season one, Rick makes a much-quoted declaration of the colour-blind, or the "post-racial" new world order, after quelling Merle Dixon's racist outbreak: "Things are different now. There are no 'niggers' anymore; no dumb-ass-shit-inbred-white-trash-fools, neither. Only white meat and dark meat. There's us, and the dead" ("Guts"). This instance of the categorisation offers multiple points of consideration in highlighting the character of his racial regime. The most obvious aspect is the swiftness with which he reproduces a new version of racial division in the same statement where he denounces one racial division and in exactly the same category – white versus black. Rick's choice of the word "dark" so as not to use "black," is almost admirable; he at least managed not to say "African American meat."<sup>50</sup> Although he meant to say white meat and dark meat = us, and then, expand it to us vs. the dead, his simple syntax tricks one to confuse it... niggers vs. white-trash-fools; white meat vs. dark meat, us vs. the dead is easier than, niggers vs. white-trash, white meat AND dark meat on the same team, us vs. the dead. Reading zombies as a metaphor for the racial Other and therefore as reflecting the West's anxiety about the rise of non-Western powers is a widely held interpretation of zombie narratives. However, there can be some questions regarding the previous order of race the show attempts (or appear to attempt) to replace with a new law, against the racially charged interpretation of the zombie as the non-Western racial Other: How does the new division of race explain the show's evasion of race

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<sup>49</sup> Here, I am focusing more on the television series than the comic, as there is a difference between the degrees of emphasis on race, which I will return to in further analysis.

<sup>50</sup> *Saturday Night Live*, in a parody of *The Walking Dead* (03/02/2013 episode), clarifies the true meaning of white humans vs. dark zombies that it is a metaphor of race. In the episode, all-white crew of Rick (Taran Killam), Carl (Nasim Pedrad), Daryl and Maggie (Kate McKinnon) run into a black male survivor (played by Kevin Hart) who wants to join the group, and plays the race card to disguise the fact he had been bitten by a zombie. When Lau begins to show symptoms of turning into a zombie, the group repeats the show's colour-blind discourse: "You are one of them" – "this is so racist now!" "We're not racist, it just seemed like you were turning into a zombie" – I see how it is - so when someone comes from a different cultural background to you, they are automatically a zombie, that's what you're telling me?" – they accept him out of fear of being racists, and Lau takes advantage of it; even after he has eaten Maggie, when he asks "would you rather that I eat some fried chicken or some watermelon?" the group apologises and Rick feels that "we are terrible people"; When Hart starts displaying some decidedly zombie characteristics (walking with a bum leg, moaning), Rick charges Hart with being "one of them." "When someone comes from a different cultural background, they're automatically a zombie," Hart says, which prompts Rick and the rest of the group to apologise and insist they're not racists. Hart eventually bites and kills Maggie, and when the group protests, he says "Would you rather I eat some fried chicken or watermelon?" Again, they feel bad, until Carl ends Hart's zombie ways with a bullet and move on as if nothing has happened.

matters? That is, how does the show's erasure of race and reconstruction of racial category as human vs. non-human shape and reflect its landscape of racial and gender relations? As soon as Rick meets the group, despite their brief initial resistance,<sup>51</sup> the group naturally accepts his authority. Rick's quick establishment as a figure of legal justice, which is made visible by his uniform, is reinforced by his confrontation with Merle described earlier, which leads to Rick's declaration of the post-racial law. When Merle brutally knocks down T-Dog, a black guy, and threatens the whole group to submit to his rule, it is Rick who overpowers Merle and states *his* rule instead. Rick finalises his embodiment of the law and order by spectacularly handcuffing the unruly racist to the roof. Commenting on the scene, Ho identifies Rick's assertion of the authority vested in cowboy masculinity: "The show's narrative structure certainly places Rick at the center of attention as protector and progenitor. As an iconic representative of the state in his deputy sheriff's uniform, Rick finds other survivors turning to him for justice and punishment. It is up to him to (re)inforce norms and values ... As Rick clarifies for the viewers and the survivors witnessing this altercation, the postapocalypse is postracial" (62). The white male declaring the post-racial world in which ironically, "his rule" is still the rule. So, what has really changed?

Ho's reading of Glenn's masculinity accepts the show's claim to post-racial ideology, although not without ambivalence, that "Glenn's evolution into a valued male member within the survivor group is perhaps only possible on a television series that touts a postracial philosophy"; "Glenn's growth is a catch-22: *TWD* presents a groundbreaking portrayal of Asian-American identity on television, yet only within a postracial, fantastical postapocalyptic scenario can an Asian American break free of stereotypes. Yet, the apocalypse helps to highlight the untenable qualities and arbitrary hierarchies enforced by traditional, white cowboy masculinity" (61; 71). Yet, in addition to being only available in a hypothetical post-apocalyptic scenario, the ideology raises further doubts and becomes almost ironic when it has to be pronounced by the white man in his officer's uniform, an incarnation and representative of American law and judicial justice that naturalises white American

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<sup>51</sup> The group blames Rick for his careless gun-shooting that has attracted zombies to the building where the group is hiding. It is an interesting parallel that Merle, another white man from the group whom Rick will confront soon afterwards, is also thoughtlessly firing his gun at zombies on the roof.

hegemonic masculinity.<sup>52</sup> While not even the whole of the rest of the group, not to mention Glenn by himself, can stand up to Merle – a “bad” white with a gun in his hand – only the “good white” can come to the rescue and get things back in his order.<sup>53</sup> This is a common, persisting argument of post-civil rights, colour-blind/post-racial dismissal of systemic racism – that racism is a matter of individual attitude rather than a problem of the society as a whole, and that ultimately well-intended, liberal-minded, well-educated and beneficent whites can fix the problems by controlling the uneducated population and thereby saving non-whites. Yet the show tries to distinguish the good white from the bad white, to strengthen the authority of the good white. “Postracial” is thus an ostensible term that turns our eyes from the reality of racial framework. I argue that it is even less optimistic than Ho’s reading. The comment reveals the nature of the “postracial” colour-blind discourse: that it is not real; yet it is a powerful ideology that Rick, as the representative of the good liberal individual and benevolent, democratic authoritarian asserts – to erase race when it is necessary, to ensure the argument that neoliberal, individualistic meritocracy is best at work and most effective. What lies beneath the disappearance of race is that class has substituted race, so that it is irrelevant to talk about the colour of the skin. There is more than a simple, instinctive desire to avoid the problem of race within the U.S. The show actively and consciously seeks out to erase race in order to establish a simpler hierarchy in which the white male leadership is challenged throughout the show but is continuously saved. The challenges address both the anxiety of the group who identify with the challenged authority and would find solace in the likely narrative ending of the preservation of the leadership, but repetitive challenges to it allow non-identifying viewers to imagine various alternative situations and imagine one’s own responses to it. There is clear neglect of other aspects of social inequalities and parallels between the film’s narrative techniques around inequality and popular discourses highlighting certain

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<sup>52</sup> When Merle, handcuffed, asks Rick if he is a cop, Rick introduces himself as “officer friendly,” further emphasising his role. Of course, the fact remains that the legal and judicial institutions are already in ruins in the post-apocalypse and so is its – and by extension Rick’s – actual power, reverberating Glenn’s taunt at Rick’s [quasi]-cowboy entrance [to the area] and revealing Rick’s attachment to the earlier form of institutional authority, and the symbolic and material power he draws from it. Also note, that it is only the two white males who have access to guns, even though Andrea is also in possession of one.

<sup>53</sup> This is another classic example of the “white saviour plot,” although, it is necessary to acknowledge that even in reverse saviour plot in which the white (male) is the one being rescued, he is the one who is criticised for ultimately talking advantage of the non-white saviour in some ways – whether he rescues, or be rescued, he cannot avoid criticism in current academic discourse.

inequalities and marginalising others – the show fails to offer an intersectional understanding of inequality. Its heavy focus on class inequality to the exclusion of other oppressions mirrors popular reluctance to engage in dialogues around race and gender discrimination in the United States. The neglect of explicit racial narratives in this post-apocalyptic world is “in fact essential to the meta-narrative of white supremacy found in so many PASF narratives” (Gurr 10). Gurr discusses the anxiety and desire to bury the atrocities of the settler colonial past from the national memory to build a new myth and gain a fresh start. It is an active desire to erase the past and present racial conflict that is at the foundation of the nation-state and its existing, current social structure. The disparity within the show’s emphasis on postraciality resulted in removing all Negan’s “race” reference from the TV show and consequent downplay of racism.<sup>54</sup> Refusing to see race or acknowledge the existence of racial hierarchy in the show’s structure of power also make it difficult for the viewer to recognise the show’s second(ary) racial abjection of non-white characters: this chapter focuses on Glenn’s case as a distinctive example of this phenomenon, among others. Instead, the show’s refusal inexplicitly leads the audience to regard Glenn’s and Rick’s contributions to the group and their respective power dynamics as colourless and individually merited, whereas in fact their power dynamics are part of the show’s grand narrative. It is the narrative of the white hegemonic masculinity’s taken-for-granted continuation and rejuvenation served by the national/racial abject(s)’s continuing service on demand and situationally wilful retreat to their previous place of exile, or in the case of this show, often to the realm of the non-human, i.e., death, fitting the characters into Rick’s categorisation of the human vs. non-human, us vs. them.

Recent scholarship on masculinity studies, including but not limited to proponents of Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT), demonstrates the change in hegemonic masculinity that the defining traits of masculinity have changed; “That

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<sup>54</sup> Merle’s racist remarks referring to Glenn as “the Chinese kid” and Daryl answers that he is Korean (c.f. Blog reviews – Jenn (nerds of color) and Philip (Offend My Family)) shows, again, the show’s dedication to the notion of post-racial and post-racist world that pits racist vs. good people. The argument that “once you know them (insert, gay, lesbian, black, fat people, blind, white, Chinese, old...) they are just normal people like us” also reveals the show’s political correctness and in conjunction with the show’s endorsement of impossible, and ostensible, colour-blind and homogenising ideology, it ironically highlights the inherent discriminatory argument that disregards a larger structure responsible for the discrimination to begin with and reduces it to individual preference and education. Such argument positions the racists (usually white) at the other end of “normal” people and makes racism an attitudinal issue, rather than systemic or structural.

gender inequality remains is, for a large part, a structural issue rather than simply an attitudinal one” (Roberts 9). The IMT, focusing on its positive, inclusive “attitude” towards minorities and women, could overlook this “structural” inequality which is based on a long history of systemic, material, but also attitudinal and ideological inequality and oppression. As with the colour-blind approach, or with multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism, this new theory of masculinity results in the weakening of the ground for the criticism against masculinism by arguing that the majority’s “attitude” has changed and focusing instead on the individual than the social aspect of gender inequality. Roberts’s comment already acknowledges the difference between changes in individual attitude and social structure; yet, it is the line of argument that “men have changed” and therefore are not to be blamed. Although changing the attitude is a good and necessary direction towards gender equality, it has the potential to undermine the currency and power of longstanding, orthodox ideology that surrounds masculinity as the locus of power that the theory seems to undermine. It argues instead that the crisis statement or presence of toxic masculine behaviours are overstated.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, post-racial ideology can merely reflect or reproduce the problem of “colour-blind” racism by refusing to see race and thus existing structural inequality. It hides racial hierarchy and advocates the logic of neoliberal meritocracy under the name of equality and democracy. Rick’s argument that regardless of racial division within humans there is only one war between the new divisions of race, of the human race and the walkers/zombies, erases and denies race while simultaneously makes non-white races visible in the discourse of equal participation and contribution to the war. The zombies continue to constitute a racialised underclass, by embodying the non-human figure and relationally the history of discrimination that racial minorities, especially slaves, have been through in the United States. As the show progresses, it presents some characters treating zombies almost as human, using them as servants or keeping them as their family in acknowledgement of the humanity they had before the transformation. By showing some form of successful coexistence between the zombies and humans, the show blurs the boundaries between humans and zombies making the zombies more of a stand-in for the racialised human underclass. Rick’s

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<sup>55</sup> However, it also argues, rightly, that the crisis of masculinity discourse undermines the fact that women face the same issues such as job insecurity, low-paid routine labour as men (or more), posing employment crisis as “men’s” issue rather than young people’s or class issue.



use of the post-racial discourse turns the viewer's eyes from the obvious reality of racialised social hierarchy, and I argue that it is a powerful ideology that Rick, as a representative of the good democratic liberal individual, asserts, and the one which the show uses to erase race when it is necessary to ensure that neoliberal, individualistic meritocracy is best at work and most effective. The neoliberal meritocracy cannot accommodate race since it argues that race does not matter, that it is colour-blind for its efficiency. This is not to say that the post-racial ideology simply has bad implications – there is a virtue in the argument, which Ho's analysis in part captures. As in the first escape scene, it is this moment of racial ambiguity that allows the white masculinity to take orders from a young, Asian American male. The moment of suspension and erasure also allows the racial order, combined with many other things, such as age and class, to be overturned, however temporary that moment may be. But still, the moment is, as I argue, temporary; the scene, exemplifying the show's many moments of second(ary) abjection, takes back its reversion of racial order cancelling out the viewer's imagination for the new order of race and gender.

In the scene, Rick makes his entrance with the white saviour glamour only to lose his horse and seek protection and guidance from Glenn – the role which is quite often repeated in the show. Yet, while Glenn takes charge of the mission Rick compulsively pats Glenn's shoulder as though his permission was necessary even when it is Glenn who came up with the plans. Although set in the present/future day far from the old West, the show's use of colour – the abundance of sandy tones to remind the viewer of the deserts of the West frontier – and settings for the appearance of the old frontier highlights its semblance to the time in the US when whiteness was without question the norm. The historical reference inherently undermines Glenn's authority. The episode is an introduction to Glenn's character which instantly draws comparison and competition between the two masculinities, hegemonic/white and non-hegemonic/non-white. The show provides a ground for a test and trial of white hegemonic masculinity through the moments of competition, in which the show offers endless redemption for the hegemonic masculinity. With that said, the show's constant attempt at portraying diverse characters in terms of race and gender diminishes due to the continual reminder of how much it cherishes its white male hero, as the show is behind its representation of sexuality. The show is

invested in fair and diverse, so-called “rainbow” casting that is now popular in other shows and movies such as *3* or *The Magnificent 7*. This reflects the show’s awareness of its presumed and sought out viewership, the “diverse” audience who demands equal opportunity for racial and gender minorities. Rick’s argument that regardless of the racial divisions within humans there is only one war between the human race and the zombies on one hand is an assertion of colour-blindness which simultaneously erases and denies race. On the other hand, though, it also makes non-white races visible in the discourse and makes it seem as though he has the authority to “grant” participation of the (racial) Other. His approach does not really make possible the true erasure of racial or gender inequality. Rick’s patronising gesture as he pats Glenn’s shoulder even when he is taking orders from Glenn suggests that a more complex mixture of authorities is at work, already comparing the two. For example, Glenn explains and justifies his ordering, almost apologetically, while Rick simply dictates his orders. Three types of masculine leadership already appear early in the show, as the one that should be subject to criticism and the one that is the norm, and the one that is suggested as an alternative. Also worth noting is how this successful operation has to begin and end with Rick’s idea whereas Glenn’s scouting was more or less without much success. The show makes it explicit that he is the protagonist and the hero.

Gurr claims that in the post-apocalyptic world reminiscent of the Old West, hegemonic masculinity is inherently white (31).<sup>56</sup> Riding a horse in his uniform, Rick instantly reminds the audience of the Western frontier’s cowboy who takes granted for the service of the other men of colour for his adventures, now in the new, updated form of a post-racial world of mandatory racial diversity. Although Glenn has the chance to mock his old-fashioned entrance, gesturing at a moment of critical tension, the mocking rapidly turns into respect. When the viewers are reassured by the cowboy’s perseverance, there is little optimism that the narrative will provide an opportunity for a speculative revolution. Katherine Sugg suggests that the western’s liberal individual, or neoliberal model of agency, which reflect “questions of subjection in the late liberal/neoliberal moment,” is a masculine agency that was born out of liberal modernity and its gendered selfhood (803). Still, there are some tensions undermining narrative identification, which cause the audience’s ambivalent

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<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of masculinity in American popular culture see Michael Kimmel, “The Cult of Masculinity.”

identification with the show's white male protagonists. Rick's white male hero leadership, which seemingly is designed to evoke the audience's investment, is exposed as a problem as well, due to its violence and its destructive result that it presents to the group. Sugg points out that "[a] similar thwarting of identification and undermining of male heroism" are characteristic of the Hollywood western, particularly during the 1950-60s (803); "[t]he long history of the 'problem' of male heroism in classic westerns" (803) also appears in *TWD*'s reference to the genre of the Western and the history of settler colonialism. In addition to this, Cynthia J. Miller states that the inclusion of the undead in the classic Western "complicates what, in traditional Westerns, had been a simple moral equation, highlighting degrees of savagery in all characters – heroes and villains – while at the same time mitigating their moral differences through their shared opposition to the undead" (16). Introducing a revised, hybrid version of the Western which features undead monsters, "the undead Western," Miller tells us that "the revisionist tension introduced by the undead blurs boundaries and conflates categories, leaving few of the West's iconic figures unchanged" (4). If we take *The Walking Dead*'s tropes of the Western into consideration while we are aware of the looming presence of zombies, Miller's explanation helps us understand the tensions within the show:

undead Westerns play with the symbols, tropes, and icons of the traditional Western film in ways that are often simultaneously reinforcing and subversive, with the difference between heroes and villains often best measured in degrees of darkness. In this, their hybrid state carries with it varying degrees of revisionism, calling into question the genre's taken-for-granted notions about masculinity and heroism, justice, and the moral order. (Miller, C. 9)

Miller argues that the undead Western reveals "the illusions of order that form the fundamental basis of those understanding" that the Western harbours and states that "[m]asculinity, so central to the cinematic Western and its notions of heroism, is chief among these" (Miller, C. 10). While the classic Western provided a chance to study the types of masculinity that the genre introduces, the "negotiations – and renegotiations – of masculinity become even more complex in the presence of the

undead” (Miller, C. 10). Through the figure of the undead, i.e. the zombie in the case of *The Walking Dead*, the narratives “dislocate and reconfigure the Western genre’s taken-for-granted notions of the most fundamental building blocks of civilization: archetypes of heroism and villainy; values and ideals such as justice, transgression, redemption, and morality ... the most recent representatives of the genre’s revisionist urge, designed to address a new generation. (Miller 25).<sup>57</sup> In this way, *The Walking Dead* harbours conflicting desires about the hegemony of white (American) masculine leadership, which are shown throughout the show as its seasons progress. Yet, the show repeatedly undermines such possibilities of revision through its denial of subversion and desire for the restoration and redemption of the previous structure of hegemony, as in the examples provided in this chapter.

## **Sc2) Erasure and performance of race: 2 rituals of racial reconstruction**

In the second episode of season 1 of *The Walking Dead* (“Guts”), Rick proposes and performs his own version of “racial passing” – highlighting the line between “the human race” and “the zombie/walker race” and embodying his earlier declaration of the post- or new racial order on his and Glenn’s body. To assist the group’s escape from the building in the middle of a zombie-infested area, Rick comes up with an idea that he and Glenn pass through a horde of zombies by disguising themselves as one of them. The two men, covered in zombie body gore, manage to walk through the street with real zombies until the rain washes their camouflage off and turns them back into human beings, thereby exposing them to the threat of the Other race.

### *Sc2-1: Dismemberment of the zombie*

Before discussing the actual act of passing in detail, I would like to go back a few scenes before the act takes place, to the scene in which the preparation for the parade happens. In this episode, I identify two stages, or rituals, of the performance

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<sup>57</sup> James Hewitson also speaks of the revisionist possibility of the genre of the undead Western: “The Western-zombie hybrid can in this way be seen as the ultimate revisionism, from the ideal site of a new democratic community as shown in *Shane* to an inhuman world of half-dead citizens and debased consumption. The insertion of zombies into a genre as strongly tied to national self-definition as the Western necessarily makes American history itself monstrous. While classic Westerns celebrate that history and use it to inform and shape an understanding of the present, the zombie Western typically repudiates it, forcing an interrogation of the premises underlying America’s foundational myths.” (166)

of racial passing – the first ritual takes place inside the building before the main event in preparation for it, and the second ritual, the parade/masquerade, takes place on the street. Rick repeats his assertion of the new racial order in gradual phases, firstly to Mearle (individual) then to the group (bigger) and then, after the law is legitimised within the group (to “us” humans), he declares it to the enemy and to the rest of the world. If the success of this mission shows anything, it shows the precarious and deceivable/interchangeable nature of the racial divide Rick proposes. If racial passing is possible, then the difference is not so great, even as the instability of the masquerade is revealed as the rain washes off the disguise and the zombies sense their impostor. The exposure of the men’s humanity reminds the audience that the human and the zombie are not the same, as if the show were concerned that the real success of the strategy would undermine the distinction between the human and the non-human. Of the two rituals which are both initiated and led by Rick, the first is a pseudo-religious funeral for a zombie that the group has captured to use as materials for their second ritual, the humans’ impersonation of zombies. Rick acknowledges the humanity of the zombie by identifying the human name and the human history of the body lying before them, only to justify brutal mutilation of the now properly dignified corpse-turned-walker, and at the same time pronounces the death of the human being’s prior existence and its current non-existence. Rick’s recognition of the body’s prior humanity is at the same time rejection and formal disavowal of the zombie’s current humanity. The ritual also shows what the announcement of the new division of race implies – that the zombie as the Other race can justifiably be subjected to violence. The dynamics of racial repression is at play, as the white leader denounces the existence of race. Yet, as explicated later in this section, the show betrays this division of race and denouncement of the colour of humans by visualising Glenn and Rick’s racialised difference and hierarchy at the scene of dismemberment. The confirmation, or authorisation, of the new racial order, which is both the denial and celebration of race, marks Rick’s authority as the unification of the church and the state. He poses both as a legal authority and a spiritual leader, a pseudo-minister – almost a return of a theocratic power. The ritual draws a clearer line between the human and the non-human and therefore blurs the racial categorisation and hierarchy among humans. The ritual also takes place in the absence of the bad white racist, indicating that there is no place for the racist in the

sacred new world. It is justified by the first ritual as, ironically, the right kind of racism under the new racial order. Yet, his denouncement of the zombie's humanity, which corresponds to his declaration of the new racial order that divides the human and the zombie race, paradoxically reveals a racist justification of the violence to the Other race, and by implication the racist nature of the seemingly impartial racial order. The show also betrays Rick's erasure of racial and gender hierarchy by constantly paralleling Rick's and other group members' reaction to the ritual. With the exception of Rick, the rest of the group is clearly disgusted by the amputation of the dead body. While Rick resolutely carries out what he has to do, Glenn is particularly shocked by the scene, exposing his weakness in comparison to Rick's strength. Katherine Sugg argues that in the show, Glenn's "own, occasional, crises of masculinity in the first two seasons are presented as a counterpoint to Rick's capacities for action and self-sacrifice" (809). Paralleling Rick and Glenn's responses to the blood and guts, the show adheres to the stereotypical representation of *hard* hegemonic vs. *soft* racialised masculinity, upsetting its own claim to colour-blindness. Highlighting Glenn's reluctance at the dismemberment of the zombie's body the show makes Glenn's participation in the successful mission to save the group passive and secondary, possible only under the direction of the white male leader. It also reverses the dynamics between the two men in their first encounter in which the Asian man saves the white man and consequently seems to occupy a more heroic, manly position. This scene of the first ritual establishes that Glenn accepts and follows the leadership of Rick, therefore settling the hierarchy between Asian and white masculinity.

#### *Sc2-2) The parade/masquerade*

With the two men covered in zombie body gore to "camouflage their humanity" (Sugg 809), the subsequent scenes provide a spectacle of race and Rick's racial order in a form of a parade/masquerade. Sugg analyses this act of "passing" as an example of the ambivalence and extreme conditions of survival that exposes the human to the threat of defilement and violation of boundaries.

A generic set piece of zombie films, this "passing" in order to escape literalizes the ambivalence of survival and the precariousness of being

“human,” while foregrounding experiences of disgust and abjection. The requirement to overcome disgust in order to survive is shown here to involve overcoming the self’s natural responses to the threat of defilement, rupturing self-defenses against any boundary-protecting “line not to be crossed.” The scene also signals the new extremes of doing what must be done: the self-inflicted horror involved in their camouflage will expand into the world they now inhabit, where characters must become more and more like the undead and the savage other, even if that transformation is in a sense against their will, compelled by the conditions of survival (809-810).

The scene, as Sugg suggests, places the human characters in the midst of the enemies (the Other), and their camouflage designates a threatening possibility of the transgression of boundaries. The masquerade is an intentional and necessary spectacle, a performance of racial in/visibility, remaking of race. While Rick is ready and calm, taking the moment as a stage to put forward his authority and superiority, and state his rules in a more ceremonial fashion. For the others, it is against their will, particularly for Glenn who is forced to participate in the ceremony by Rick. Sugg focuses on the role of the white male hero, whose agency is constrained by the logics of survival and self-interest through his subjection as a neoliberal survivor in an apocalyptic narrative. The hero is in the process of becoming a savage, the expelled, inhuman other, who by the logic of abjection in psychoanalytic theory is gendered exclusively as feminine. The loss of self threatened by abjection is a loss of agency and autonomy: “Therefore a long genealogy of a specific mode of capitalist abjection is figured in the anguish and ambivalence of the white masculinity portrayed in *The Walking Dead*” (Sugg 810). I pay close attention to the counterpart as the abject other, coerced to participate in the white subject’s ritual. Curiously emphasising the burden of the white male, such analysis undermines the degree of coercion that the white male hero requires from other characters – Glenn in particular in this instance.

The ritual is a form of a forced racial passing, initiated by Rick to Glenn’s disgust and his reluctant surrender. It contrasts the two characters’ masculinity as the two exhibit the most strongly opposite reaction to the ritual. Rick, proposing and leading and performing the ritual, with unemotional, unrelenting authority, Glenn,

clearly disgusted by the event and its preparation, coerced to participate as the main performer of the next core event, the moment of legitimation of his ideology to the group. The group accepts the justification and therefore further implication of the racial division. His obvious repulsion is overlooked for the better cause – to save the group – now individual or minority opinion is justifiably unimportant. It is a clear demonstration of hegemony that not everyone loves every aspect of it, but they comply because the dividend they get is greater than the cost they pay; they are categorised as the same race now. The erasure of race ensures their survival, or at least gives them a better chance. Gender divisions are less important in this reconfigured racial structure, and when the actual show begins Glenn doesn't seem so reluctant anymore, and he is seen committed to "acting" as he mimics the zombies' movements, providing comic relief. I suggest, however, that the scene also draws the viewer's attention to the temporariness and precariousness of the racial passing, which reveals perhaps self-contradictorily the improbability of the show's (and Rick's) effort to erase race. As much as Rick and Glenn try to pass as zombies with their convincingly spectacular display of blood and guts, the scene nevertheless emphasises the contrast between the human and non-human, with the almost comical masquerade as they mimic the zombies' movements, especially when Glenn imitates the zombies' noise. The zombies' suspicion of their identity and the eventual removal of the disguise caused by rain, underline the show's disbelief of the masquerade even as the success of their racial performance demonstrates the precariousness of race. Whereas the performance itself was prompted by the show's (and Rick's) desire to erase and remake race in order to comfortably transform and explain Glenn's masculinity in universal terms, the disguise is temporary. When the rain washes their racial makeup off, both men, walking side by side as disguised equals – both to each other and to the zombies – become once more exposed and differentiated. While hegemonic masculinity remains unmarked, Glenn's has to be marked even when it seems to claim equal access to postracial privilege. While Rick rescues the rest of the group, Glenn goes back to his youthful and non-hegemonic masculine role and assists Rick's rescue mission.

In the second episode of season two ("Bloodletting"), "T-Dog," one of the two only racial minority male characters left by the second season, raises a direct criticism of the survival group's conformation to the conventional masculine



hierarchy by expressing his concerns about his “precarious” situation being the only black guy in the group (“Bloodletting”; Ho 63-64). The survivor camp retains the racialised and gendered hierarchy in which the white, cowboy masculinity dominates and in turn reduces women and people of colour to subordinate positions: “As T-Dog laments on the side of the highway, *TWD* reiterates the centrality of white masculinity in its narrative, as well as the existing feelings of inequality that shape survivors’ social relations” (Ho 64). Even after the apocalypse, some things stay the same – “sometimes, the more things change, the more they stay the same” (Gurr 9-10). Still, T-Dog’s lament also demonstrates the show’s awareness of the uneven racial relations within the show itself. Then, when does the narrative abandon, or modify the centrality of white masculinity, claiming its self-critical awareness?

### 3. Asian American Masculinity: Looking for an Alternative?

Discussion of the representation of Asian American masculinity historically has been that of a dilemma and a quandary rooted in the history of racialisation in the United States and more broadly in Western ideology.<sup>58</sup> Enduring narratives about the history of feminisation, or “racial castration” following David L. Eng, of Asian/American men, continues to affect representation and interpretation of Asian/American men and masculinities; they reproduce gendered racial stereotypes both knowingly and unknowingly, sometimes in attempts to generate active resistance against it, perhaps not always with expected results. Either way, it is impossible to avoid the issue of race. The unresolved contradiction within the discussions of Asian/American masculinity is found in *The Walking Dead* as well, and the reviews and debates exemplify the difficult positions of racial minority representation in the alleged post-racial era. *The Walking Dead* offers a chance to extensively examine an Asian American lead character, a chance which is still relatively uncommon due to mostly minor roles given to Asian American characters. Glenn Rhee<sup>59</sup>, an Asian (Korean) American character performed by a Korean American actor Steven Yeun, has received positive responses from viewers as defying stereotypical on-screen

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<sup>58</sup> There have been various suggestions as to the use of the term “Asian American”; here I use a slash mark to indicate frequent conflation of “Asian” and “Asian American.”

<sup>59</sup> Even though Glenn’s last name is not mentioned in the original comics, it is confirmed as Rhee in the TV series (see AMC’s official *The Walking Dead* webpage (*The Walking Dead Universe*) for the character name – [www.amc.com/twdu/the-walking-dead/characters](http://www.amc.com/twdu/the-walking-dead/characters)).

representations of Asian American men.<sup>60</sup> Although the viewers and critics are aware of the show's focus on its lead character Rick Grimes and much of the critical attention is given to him, Glenn's strong presence in the show as one of the longest-surviving, most frequently featured characters,<sup>61</sup> allowing him a more complex character development compared to the majority of short-lived and flat minor character roles that Asian (American) actors are often associated with. While Glenn's character is praised as a positive contribution, an example of the diverse racial makeup of the show, the fact that the reviewers pay so much attention to Glenn's "Asianness" is a reminder of the weight of race in our reception of the character. C. Winter Han in a book chapter tellingly titled "Failing to Be Men in Every Way" identifies Glenn as an example of "using Asian men to define, highlight, and glorify white masculinity" (36). His boyish appearance, the role of "a gopher who sneaks into town to retrieve supplies while dodging zombies ... works to contrast the rugged white male masculinity with the failed masculinity of an Asian man. His presence as a smaller, thinner, much less rugged Asian man without any facial hair works to highlight the white men's masculinity by his absence of masculine characteristics" (Han 36). Glenn's action, or position in the group, does not achieve neither hegemonic masculinity portrayed by Rick nor any other alternatives; Han vehemently criticises that Glenn "fails to meet any type of masculinity" (39).<sup>62</sup> Needless to say, Glenn's characterization is more complicated than a simple stock character type, especially as his character develops throughout the later seasons of the show.<sup>63</sup> Helen K. Ho identifies him as another type, a "model minority" character. Ho compares the bimodal representations of Asian American men as either

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Fang (2013) and Phillip (2013) hale Glenn's characterisation in their online reviews.

<sup>61</sup> Glenn appears in 67 episodes (including two of season 7) until his death in season 7 of the TV series ("The Day Will Come When You Won't Be"). Glenn also appears in almost every form of *The Walking Dead* media, having appeared in the Comic Series, TV Series, Video Game, Assault Game, Social Game and the Novel. (See *The Walking Dead* fandom page: [walkingdead.wikia.com/wiki/Glenn\\_Rhee\\_\(TV\\_Series\)](http://walkingdead.wikia.com/wiki/Glenn_Rhee_(TV_Series)))

<sup>62</sup> "By presenting Glenn as the only member of the group who agrees with Dale, but who is too afraid to speak up to the group, the series not only portrays Glenn as having failed to achieve the hegemonic masculinity as portrayed by Rick but also an alternative, and quite possibly equally valued, masculinity as portrayed by Dale. Thus, it isn't just that Glenn fails to meet a certain type of masculinity—he fails to meet any type of masculinity" (Han 39).

<sup>63</sup> Han's analysis only covers earlier seasons of the show, which could explain the limitation of his argument. For example, although Han compares Glenn's difference from the majority of other white men, who "are presented as rugged and highly masculine in the way that we would expect men who have survived a zombie apocalypse to be" (36), Glenn (and the rest of long-surviving characters) indeed develop more rugged look (including the much-called-for facial hair) as the show progresses.

the unassimilable, perpetual foreigner in which case Asian American is often conflated with Asian (immigrant) or the well-assimilated yet subservient model minority, both of which are the product of America's racial framework that buttresses the dominance and superiority of white masculinity. In this sense, the model minority stereotype is a continuation of the racial framework which deprives Asian American men of manhood (60-61). Chong Chon-Smith identifies the concept as an example of comparative racialisation in the United States, in which Asian American is imagined as a custodian of traditional values and consolidating "the codes of acceptable citizenship including individualism, meritocratic values, and political silence" (23). Coined by William Peterson in the 1960s at the time of the civil rights movement, the term "model minority" was used to emphasise Japanese Americans as exhibiting values of "good citizenship" valuing family structure and hard work to overcome legacies of discrimination by their own effort; it was established against bad citizenship of protest and dissent from African American and other racial minorities, to promote conformity, order, and individualism for the diffusion of market democracy (Chon-Smith 19-21). In this way, the model minority stereotype creates divisions and antagonisms between races. It also reveals the desire to control racial minorities by downplaying existing racial inequality and placing emphasis on individual efforts instead, the same argument for meritocracy and diminishing importance of race popular in the US.

Yet, Ho suggests that Glenn's model minority characteristics allow him to survive within the group and enable him to illuminate limitations of white leadership and ultimately challenges the traditional white masculinity (58; 70-72). Glenn, who first appears as a young man, closer to a boy than to a man who has established his masculinity, later develops into a masculine figure who fills in the gap of Rick's faltering white masculine leadership with his differentiating model minority virtues (e.g., uncomplaining, diligence, devotion, loyalty, other-directedness and craftiness) (Ho 64-66; 69 and *passim*). Ho even suggests that *The Walking Dead* offers a "heroic vision" and "a unique performance of Asian-American masculinity rarely seen on network or cable television" by presenting Glenn as a "nonfeminized" and unconventional model minority figure (57; 61). Ho's effort to read "positive" and "subversive" possibilities in Glenn's character stands at the opposite end of Han's criticism, but both are driven by the necessity to assess his racialised masculinity

against the criteria of the white male hero. The conundrum of reading “Asian/American” masculinity surfaces: focusing on Glenn’s “Asian/Americanness” risks over-reading and imposing race on otherwise a “regular, ordinary” American guy; yet, reading Glenn as “just a guy” may undermine the existing racial hierarchy; reading Glenn’s masculinity as “rebellious, subversive, potentially better” against white masculinity risks being criticised for being naively optimistic, and also for imposing subversiveness to racial minority characters. Similarly, attention to race, and post-racial sentiment are simultaneously present in comic book writer and television series executive producer Robert Kirkman’s comment: “It’s important to me to try and accurately portray the world as it is, i.e., not all white, as some comics do. That said, I wanted Glenn to be resourceful and strong, a character Rick (played by Andrew Lincoln) could lean on when he needed to ... not ‘the Asian guy.’” (Saria, “Into the Deep End”).<sup>64</sup> Although Kirkman acknowledges the existence of races, he at the same time differentiates “the Asian guy” from the “resourceful and strong character” –in other words Glenn becomes a real character when his race is erased. Kirkman’s appeal to post-raciality, and Ho’s argument, lose strength when one considers the narrative structure of the show, whose generic narrative characteristics compel it to repeat challenging the protagonist in order to return to his authority and leadership. The show’s narrative structure continues to give weight to the preservation and defence, or salvation of (traditional) hegemonic white masculinity and white (hetero-)patriarchal gender system, particularly using the discourse of post-racial ideology.<sup>65</sup> If the repetition of this scenario in *The Walking Dead* offers its viewers experiences and experiments that will reinstate their “codes of life” in the perceived crisis of American masculinity, the show’s investment in post-racial ideology and its dissociation of race and masculinity in the narrative seem more problematic.

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<sup>64</sup> Compared to the TV series, the comics address the issue of more often, which makes the omission of some references to race in the television adaptation more telling of the post-racial premise of the show. One example is Negan’s killing of Glenn. Negan’s reference to Glenn’s race (Asian) in the original comics (issue #100) before and after beating him to death, is omitted in the show (season 7, episode 2).

<sup>65</sup> This is partly reminded by Glenn’s “inevitable” death in the first episode season 7 (“The Day Will Come When You Won’t Be”; October 23, 2016) which at Ho’s time of writing had not yet happened in the show. Glenn’s death happens in volume 17, issue 100 of the comics (July 11, 2012).

### **Model Minority, In/Visibility, Neoliberal subjectivity, or Objectivity**

Model Minority discourse is complicit to the in/visibility of race, post-racial discourse because it supports the fantasy of the majority for integration, assimilation, and the American Dream. It portrays the Asian race to be “like” white, as the middleman. The myth complies eventually to the minority’s given status, accommodating the stereotype which hides the reality of racial discrimination. It is a discourse that aims to silence dissent and rebellion by “allowing” a pseudo-hegemonic status to the group, by creating an illusion of erasure of race through the subject’s symbolic admission to the universal, post-racial – although white by implication – masculinity. Still, I argue that we have arrived at the point where it is impossible for the cultural industry to ignore the significant demographic shifts, as well as the size and power of Asian American and Asian viewership. These days movies and TV shows target a global audience, not just domestic, so the assumed viewers are not just generic, universalised “white” audiences but a wider variety of groups. There is a less or non-heroic and more “down-to-earth” and less stereotypical, or, borrowing from Ju Yon Kim’s *Racial Mundane*, “everyday” representation of Asianness. Chon-Smith assesses “the role of the state in shaping comparative racialization and the conditions required for Asian American citizenship that pivot upon white capitalist assimilation and antiblack politics” (6). He considers Asian American masculinity in the context of “uneven racial hierarchy and the workings of capitalism as defining features of U.S. identity politics ... attentive to the relational and statist conditions that produce minority masculinities in this era of globalization” (Chon-Smith 6-7). The chapter argues therefore that there is a continuing feminisation of Asian men over Western in popular media even in the 2010s, a demonstration of the power relationship and an expression of the desire to maintain the power dynamics. As white masculinity claims its hegemony, presenting themselves as the victim of the downfall of masculinity is a means to retain their racial as well as gender hegemony.

### **Conclusion: ‘Till the Death Pronounces You Redundant’**

Glenn’s death is in season 7 (“The Day Will Come When You Won’t Be”) shows his final “transformation” from an alternative to the conventional hegemonic

masculinity, which is now made redundant. Returning to the first season's status of the abject in his masquerade of a zombie, Glenn is beaten to death by the season's villain Negan. It is the part of the anxiety of Asian American men, in their quest for manhood that the scene addresses. Achieving the currently hegemonic model of masculinity is not only to lose some part of their racial identity but also works as a cue for his second abjection. Having completed the purpose of his return, that is, served as a temporary replacement and reinforcement for Rick's crisis, the abject Asian masculinity is returned to his abject status in which he becomes close to the zombies, loses his racial and gender status as he appeared first in the show. Glenn, who now is facing a prospect of being a father, who will be an American heir, seems to have built his status closer to the American hegemonic masculinity. The closeness is what makes Glenn's overachieving masculinity redundant, threatening and ambiguous, and what necessitates his safe return to his abject status, thus, his second abjection. The narrative development of the show makes the audience feel fortunate that Glenn's baby survives and will continue his legacy. But, in fact, by eliminating Glenn the show leaves only the baby's white mother and the white male leader as patrons to the baby who will continue the line of the group and America in the future, removing Asianness from it.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, as he leaves after delivering the future American heir, he becomes a vessel for the continuation of American hegemony highlighting his role as feminine rather than masculine. Also, the difference between the show and the comic is that Negan's mention of "racist" is completely removed from Glenn's death, demonstrating the show's desire for and dedication to colourblindness strengthened, or enacted in the TV show. Glenn's body, beaten by Negan to an almost pulp-like state, loses the human form that has made him on the side of the human in the division of the human/zombie "race" that has replaced the old white/nonwhite racial division, suspiciously resemble that of the zombie in the first season that Glenn and Rick used to disguise their identities. The show uses

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<sup>66</sup> After Glenn's death, Maggie leads the war with Rick and later becomes a new leader of Hilltop, a community the group found and joined. Rick disappears by the end of season 9 (he is presumed by others to be dead), and Maggie leaves the group with her baby and establishes herself in another group, so Rick does not continue his role as a patron to the baby. The baby is named Hershel Rhee, after his white grandfather (Hershel Greene) and his Asian father (Glenn Rhee). Glenn's name is mentioned after his death every now and then, but Maggie is Hershel's main parent. And although his friends presume that Rick has sacrificed himself in an explosion to save his loved ones, the narrative reveals that he is secretly rescued. Even as both men are remembered as good ones, they ultimately are different since one is dead, while the other is not. In this way, Rick even gains an acknowledgment as one of the dead, sharing Glenn's place within the memories of the characters.

images of Glenn's blood-clad face and body a lot and plays this game of disguise, and Glenn's close comebacks from near-deaths have made his return as the successfully returned abject. Yet, he cannot escape the fate of the second(ary) abjection. What united them under one racial category is removed again as Glenn now belongs again to the other race, this time even non-human. Adaptation to the more "mainstream" media outlet generates the plot to follow more conservative and populist liberal discourses such as colourblindness, meritocracy are inherent in apocalyptic narratives and enhanced by them. Neoliberal capitalism's influence in this discourse, and heterosexist, patriarchal, masculinist, "hetero-patriarchal" and also nationalistic, ideologies exist while invisibility of race that are still prevalent, reflecting the anxiety about the everyday threat that is now subtler but persistent in the post-9/11 generation's experiences. In *The Walking Dead*, everyone is infected by the virus so that it is a fine line between the human and the enemy – the enemy within that can turn to an enemy any time, and the fear of cannibalism is a thin guise for the racial tension induced by the threat. Even as the show highlights the shortcomings of this type of masculinity, it seems that the ultimate goal is not to denounce it so radically and overthrow it, but to prove its value still outruns its defects, and to fix it through injecting the abject Other's values. Ho argues that Glenn evolves as a hero as Rick declines as a leader, but I argue that Glenn's death is used to fuel hegemonic masculinity (59). Ultimately it is Rick who remains as the leader while Glenn's character is removed.

Gurr asks: "What does it mean for our speculative future if conservative ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality are not only mourned after the apocalypse, but passively allowed continuance, actively reconstituted, or briefly resisted only to be triumphantly embraced in the end?" (9). Conservative ideologies of race, gender and sexuality are allowed, accepted, reconstituted in the post-apocalyptic society. It is only tentatively resisted to return stronger in the end. Should we find some grim satisfaction in the revision of hegemony? Ho answers this question, borrowing from Brandon Kempner's analysis of existentialism in *The Walking Dead*. Kempner in his reading of *TWD* argues that Kirkman's (post-)apocalyptic world is "not pessimistic, but rather sternly optimistic. ... The characters of *The Walking Dead* are equally forced to make their own choices. ... Their absolute freedom puts humanity first" (154). Ho shares his optimism and applies the case to Glenn, saying:

If the model minority stereotype was created to uphold the virtues of white masculinity, the category of “model minority” itself must dissolve as the qualities of white masculinity become untenable in the post-apocalypse. As white masculinity struggles to define and maintain itself, its power to define and shape others falters as well. Without the overarching structure of white patriarchy, the Asian American as a model minority cannot exist. The Asian-American character, like others, is free to make his own choices as to who and what he can be (Kempner 145-46). (Ho 71)

Such optimistic views are true to the extent that the decline of power and a fissure created by the temporary failure allows a window of intervention. However, it is certainly what “could’ve been” than what is or could be, i.e., untenable, albeit desirable, within the narrative structure which is ultimately aligned with the preservation of white male leadership. Ho sees the zombie apocalypse as a narrative catalyst and framework that destroys the levels masculinities work internally according to its logic of racial hierarchy. Yet, as I argue, when we read the narrative through the framework of second(ary) abjection, Glenn (or other characters) does not have the “absolute freedom” to decide his future. Rather, he is characterised in a certain way to fulfil his role as a secondary character/masculinity. Even with Rick’s power somewhat diminished, the structure of white patriarchy in the series outlives Glenn and many other racial and/or gender minority characters.

Although the apocalypse framework seems to problematise hegemonic white masculinity, at least in *The Walking Dead* it unquestioningly accepts the resurgence of white male authority in the hypothetical time of crisis – it is surprising to see how little objection Rick faces from the moment he is naturally accepted as a leader. Ho argues that *The Walking Dead* “supports a new world order and social hierarchy,” or rather, presents one in which the old ones are invalidated, so that the new ones can arise (71). Ho adds that “[m]en traditionally protected by the social hierarchy – those embodying hegemonic ideals – find themselves on a leveled playing field of humanity” and the structuring frameworks of the white, patriarchal society disintegrates while Glenn’s role becomes more legitimised and valued (71). Rick’s



leadership does not fail; it does not accept the alternative.<sup>67</sup> Rather, the narrative convention dictates that the white male hero and the white male hero's authority survive. It is the narrative goal of the show. As we can find in the examples of the likes of "the sensitive guy films," it is a kind of a dialectic reconciliation, but nevertheless an endorsement, of white hegemonic masculinity – it is a journey of its reformulation. Glenn's death and the consequent failure of his Asian American masculinity indicate that whether the narrative structure of *The Walking Dead* ultimately supports the dismantling and undoing of the structure of white patriarchy is debatable.<sup>68</sup> Not only does the viability of post-racial discourses – "*TWD*'s postracial landscape" – not ultimately challenge the bootstrap mentality of perseverance and traditional masculinity, but the show's self-aprobation of the post-racial world is also questionable. Glenn's death is his final transformation from an alternative to a conventional hegemonic masculine figure and then to his status as a racial abject. Yet, Lavin and Lowe also acknowledge that the show raises the issue of race and class via representations of other men (122). The show's constant battle to reinstate the previous hegemonic masculine authority versus its introduction of alternative models is indefinite, and even if the show finally, and however triumphantly, celebrates the resurgence of the white straight male authority, the parallel narratives have already allowed the viewers to get a glimpse of what "could('ve) be(en)" – which in itself is a meaningful step toward a change. And with the active efforts to read what is there as well as not there, and with its mixed messages of crisis, it gives us a plentiful space for imagining a better future and the present.

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<sup>67</sup> This is the case until Glenn's death (in Season 7). As I mention in footnote 60, Rick's leadership goes through challenges and transformation as well later in the show. He even lets Maggie be the leader of Hilltop. Yet, it is more important to note that Rick survives, unlike many unfortunate others.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Kirkman's interview explaining that it was impossible to remove Glenn's death from the plot implies that his death is a narrative device: "It's just that there's a lot of material that comes from Glenn's death in the comics." See Kirkman's interview by Dalton Ross.

## Chapter IV. “On Such a Full Sea Are We Now Afloat”

More often than not, our ruminations of the future in speculative narratives confirm the future as a dystopia that accentuates failures of the present system. Speculative narratives and particularly post-apocalyptic speculative narratives register our current anxieties and place them in the future not only to make them more legible, but also to highlight their continuity. The chapter looks at Chang-rae Lee’s novel *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) to examine his critiques of destructive ramifications of global neoliberal capitalism, and of imbricated structures of hegemony of our time. Rather than conclude his visions of dystopia as a descriptive reflection of hegemonic realities, ideological “realisms,” the chapter proposes that the text’s response to multiple forms of crises that it identifies exhibit utopian cultural imagination for alternative futures. The future that the speculative fiction draws often resembles, perhaps too much, the reality we are in. Yet, the greatest strength of the framework of speculative fiction is that it therefore registers the problems of the present into our prediction, and more importantly, hope for the future as we are reminded of our current problems. What is successful in *On Such a Full Sea* is such a function. Yet, read through the framework of second(ary) gender and racial abjection, the novel does not ultimately escape from the exploitation of the abject and re-abjection of the national abject in its imaginations that is too close perhaps, at the moment, to our present that is taking its effect away. *Full Sea* examines structures of hegemony in a post-environmental-apocalyptic future in which neoliberal capitalist logic still reigns. Chang-rae Lee underscores a perpetuating structure of racial hierarchy and hegemony in his imagination of a dystopian future in *Full Sea*. Lee is not elusive in his critique of racial and class inequality in contemporary North America in his depictions of the dystopian future. The novel is set in a distant future in which a large part of the world is made uninhabitable by environmental destruction and communities are divided by class – residents of centrally governed factory cities produce food and other goods for the consumption of the rich elite of Charter villages. Those who do not belong in the safe confines of Charters or Charter-controlled factory cities of the producer-labourers must take their chances in the open counties to endure and survive in a harsh environment. The descriptions of the factory city B-Mor and Charter colony

Seneca reveal that class division between and within them is founded upon and reinforced by racial/ethnic segregation;<sup>69</sup> what is thinly disguised as class division is also a racialised stratification. The Charter government's control and domination over its colonies and neoliberal alignment with private companies, its endorsement of transnational pharmaceutical companies, loom over the world of *Full Sea*. While names such as B-Mor and the kind of racial/ethnic conflicts presented indicate that *Full Sea* is largely situated in the U.S., it is intended for a broader geo-social stage, as it intentionally uses the Charter as a 'global' hegemony rather than a 'national' one, transcending the geographical boundaries of the U.S. The novel still maintains, though, the racial/ethnic division of the West vs. East, white vs. non-white, in its characterisation and character dynamics. *Full Sea* exhibits American national abjection with its use of American stereotypes such as the model minority, yet it indicates that the framework of racial abjection can be extended globally, in the way that international relationships and power dynamics are formed. This possibility supports my argument that "America" as a nation can be representative of the broader West in a global rivalry between the West and the East.

In *Full Sea*, catastrophes have rendered the world dystopias and humanity is put into the situation in which Giorgio Agamben conceptualises as the perpetuated state of exception and the lives of the population comes to what he calls the "bare life." Under the normalised state of exception, dominated populations of *Full Sea* occupy vulnerable/object/liminal status and space. In other words, they have become the national/world's racialised object. In *Full Sea* the Charter government imposes biopolitical controls upon its populations, and everyone, even the Charter, is subject to precarious, "bare" life, and inevitable death by C-illness which affects all humans. While the category of exclusion/inclusion allows us to interrogate a set of dichotomous values – valuable/valueless, meaningful/meaningless, il/legible – that account for those subjugated under the conditions of the state of exception and abjection, uncertain conditions and conditioning of citizenship and the liminality they involve require further examination of *differential* treatment of populations that goes beyond dualisms.

To explain more varying and uneven degrees of protection, care, and citizenship-like rights that the sovereign power distributes to its population, Aihwa

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<sup>69</sup> While "ethnicity" has replaced "race" in the novel, the paper maintains that racial difference, not interchangeable with ethnic differences, remains a crucial element in its analysis.

Ong proposes the concept of “graduated” sovereignty and citizenship (among other names)<sup>70</sup>. Individuals’ access to citizenship-like rights is subject to the state’s evaluation of their human capital. Ong puts forward the notion of sovereignty that include non-juridical forms of power, and recognises that globalization and the challenges of global capital have changed [postdevelopmental] governments’ “ways of governing and valuing different categories of its subject population” (*Flexible* 216-17):

different kinds of biopolitical investments in different subject populations, privileging one gender over the other, and in certain kinds of human skills, talents, and ethnicities; it thus subjects different sectors of the population to different regimes of valuation and control. This unequal biopolitical investment in different categories of the population results in the uneven distribution of services, care, and protection; while some subjects are invested with rights and resources, others are neglected outright. Thus, globalization has induced a situation of graduated sovereignty, whereby even as the state maintains control over its territory, it is also willing in some cases to let corporate entities set the terms for constituting and regulating some domains. Sometimes, weaker and less-desirable groups are given over to the regulation of supranational entities. What results is a system of variegated citizenship in which populations subjected to different regimes of value enjoy different kinds of rights, discipline, caring, and security. (*Flexible* 217)

Capitalism’s impact on the ways of modern governance is not left unnoticed by many theorists, including Michel Foucault as he speaks of the sovereign power’s development within/under capitalism. Foucault highlights the connections between the rise of biopower and the biopolitical control/management of the population and capitalism:

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<sup>70</sup> Ong interchangeably uses the terms “graduated” and “variegated” and “differentiated/differential” in describing the sovereignty, citizenship and zones in his conceptualization (e.g., graduated sovereignty/citizenship, zones of graduated/variegated sovereignty, differentiated zones). See Ong *Flexible Citizenship and Neoliberalism as Exception*.

an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of “biopower.” ... This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. (Foucault 140-41)

As Foucault delineates, the exploitation of labour power and management of distribution and consumption in *Full Sea* exemplify how various technologies of biopower contributes to the employment of human (body) as capital within the capitalist system.

the class-and-commodity structure of capitalism is not just a phenomenon limited to the particular 'domain' of economy, but the structuring principle that overdetermines the social totality, from politics to art and religion. This global dimension of capitalism is suspended in today's multiculturalist progressive politics: its 'anti-capitalism' is reduced to the level of how today's capitalism breeds sexist/racist oppression, and so on. ... And the same goes for the postmodern political series class-gender-race (Butler, Laclau and Žižek 96)

Reminding us of Fredric Jameson's and Slavoj Žižek's diagnosis that capitalism is ingrained in and dominates our very unconscious, Mark Fisher employs the concept of capitalist realism to describe “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it” (2). Within contemporary Western imagination, “capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable” (Fisher 8). Fisher expounds that the pervasiveness of the capitalist system, which seemed to still hold revelatory value in the mid-late twentieth century, ceased to shock in the twenty-first,

in which it is an accepted, naturalised reality (8-9). This particular kind of “realism” that Fisher adopts to refers to the sense of inevitability and unendingness of the capitalist system is also pertinent to other arenas of hegemonic constructs. Or rather, the concept has taken cues from preceding instances of dominant, hegemonic ideologies – after all, it is unsurprising to see that naturalization and normalization are an essential part of any ideological construction. The capitalist system, in other words, as overarching as it may be, is not the only structure of hegemony that exists but is one of the systems of hegemony/oppression that are present in these dystopias and our present moment.

Different axes of race, sex and gender, nationality, class, etc., are intertwined and incorporated into the system of global neoliberal capitalism. While patriarchy preceded capitalism, capitalist modes of production and consumption have reworked and intensified patriarchy. Gendered labour division and sexism within the workplace, discriminatory working conditions for women and children could be distributed to the legacy of patriarchal hegemony; the history of racialization and racism is closely aligned with the history of capitalism and colonialism. The capitalist structure becomes a useful and overriding means with which to explain hierarchy, domination, and hegemony in the modern and contemporary era because it is most prominently developed as a means of accumulation through exploitation of human and natural resources.

In this chapter, I call attention to racialisation and racial hegemony as a condition of global capitalist modernity, throughout recent history and in the age of neoliberalism in particular. I look particularly at how the text addresses this through production, distribution, and consumption of resources, both material and human, and through their spatialisation. This is presented through the metaphors of consumption, through the representation of the part of the body even as it wants to dissociate itself from them, and through metaphors of space, through spatialisation of separate colonies and districts within the cities, inside housing complexes. Literal and metaphoric consumption of resources, food, and humans, registers specific anxieties – economic, political, racial, ecological – about our shared present and future. They illustrate the differentiated classification of peoples and uneven material relations of production and distribution in the dystopia. The metaphor of consumption and the relationship between (racial) abjection and consumption in the

text underlines mutual dependency between the subject, the sovereign power that which exercises abjection, and the abject, and the subject's dependency on the abject in maintaining and reinforcing its identity. Since the abject is also a part of the subject, who is *represented/imagined as* wanting to participate, its sense of inevitable complicity – workings of (capitalist) realism and hegemony – is perpetuated. Aihwa Ong conceptualises “the zones of graduated sovereignty” as spaces in which the state applies differential terms of citizenship, governing, social, juridical and biopolitical control (Ong *Flexible* 22, Ch.8, particularly 214-225; 239; *Neoliberalism* 91-2). Under global capitalism, state sovereignty is not undermined, but readjusted to “coding, eluding, and contesting the terms of citizenship” so that it produces and manages the territory that is outside the normal juridical order in which “[t]he social terms, codes, and norms that constitute zones of new sovereignty are the interface between the techniques of biopower and juridical rules” (*Flexible* 239). Ong's concept of graduated sovereignty and zones of graduated sovereignty explicates how the spaces are arranged in the texts. Segregated but nevertheless connected as “zones” the spaces, particularly those in the factory cities in *Full Sea* and the tale section of the train in *Snowpiercer* (which also significantly resembles concentration camps) epitomise the “exceptional” and/or “graduated/differentiated” aspects of spatialisation, as well as liminality that these theories, as well as Kristeva, speak of.

However, reading the text alongside and through the concept/lens of “realisms” in this fashion, as well as capitalist realism, allows us to interrogate other ideological frames that are intertwined, and exacerbated under global neoliberal capitalism. What I suggest is that *Full Sea* explores possibilities of challenging and disavowing these multiple forms of hegemony. If the imminent sense of crisis about our present society resonates in the theme of the apocalypse, post-apocalyptic narratives in particular accommodate our interest in re-examination and re-evaluation of our present system through looking into the hypothetical future of the reconstruction of society after the apocalypse. Calling attention to the speculative function of such narratives that imagine the society after it is stripped down to pre- (or post-) civilization, Barbara Gurr specifies post-apocalyptic narratives as “the post-apocalyptic speculative fiction.” Speculative post-apocalyptic narratives ask us to consider the true meaning of humanity, and our values, morals, and beliefs, and examining the politics of post-apocalypse can offer us opportunities both to theorise

our current politics and that of the future (Gurr 1-3). The narratives “not only participate in cultural meaning-making, they also produce space within meaning can be (whether it actually is or not) contested and reformulated. The politics of this space – like the politics of the post-apocalypse – are open to interpretation” (Gurr 9). Post-apocalyptic narratives invite a critical re-examination of conventional values and ideologies of the past. The post-apocalypse, thus, can be a site for contestation and restructuring of hegemony, as it prompts negotiation of social roles and leadership positions within and between the groups of survivors in their efforts to recover and rebuild the pre-apocalypse world, testing our ideas about citizenship – membership to the group/community is renegotiated in the post-apocalypse and value and acceptability of each individual is examined on a micro-level in the small group setting. Citizenship, inclusion and exclusion from the society depend on differentiating assessment of worthiness and value of the individual that exhibits different expectations for differently gendered, racialised, classed, aged, bodied beings.

Then now it is time to reimagine/reassess the reality. The dialectic between dystopian and utopian imaginations can constitute what could be a critique of anti-utopian, capitalist, and other realisms. I suggest that these texts ultimately seek ways to reject current hegemony and power, inviting the reader/audience to imagine alternative futures beyond existing modes of social structure that we consider to be inevitable. Beyond revealing and recording the reality, what they suggest is to reveal its *unreality*, the possibility of alternative choices that this does not have to be a reality, neither future nor the present. Fisher argues that an effective challenge to capitalist realism has to do more than revealing capitalism’s consequences because it only reinforces capitalist realism if it presents those as an inevitable part of reality. Capitalist realism can only be threatened when its very *realness* is challenged:

A moral critique of capitalism ... only reinforces capitalist realism. ... while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naïve utopianism. Capitalist realism can only be threatened if it is shown to be in some way inconsistent or untenable; if, that is to say, capitalism’s ostensible ‘realism’ turns out to be nothing of the sort. (Fisher 16)



*Full Sea* and, as I later show, *Snowpiercer*, perform the creative task that Fisher laments that dystopian films and novels in our recent times no longer exercise – acts of imagination for alternatives (2). The accusation of naïve utopianism against “realistic” representations of dystopia can be identified as anti-utopianism that normalises and justifies these ideological realisms. While recognising that dystopia, as a genre of crisis, has been imbued with catastrophism and reactionism (“Imagining 1”), Madeline Lane-McKinley proposes that rather than focusing on dystopia’s adherence to/propagating of reactionism, or hints of anti-utopianism, we use dystopia to locate radical difference, to transmit “signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia” (“Imagining 2”). Rather than reinforcing the conceptual opposition between dystopia and utopia, Lane-McKinley suggests that “[t]he dialectic of these concepts can be historicized in terms of narrative strategies for ideological critique” (“Imagining 1”). She prompts us to use the conception of dystopia as one of many ways to imagine the present, which will make imaginable different social conditions, the end of capitalism (“Imagining 1”). In a similar way that she reads *Snowpiercer* as a sustained critique of capitalist realism rather than an example of it, Lane-McKinley argues for the potential of the dystopia: “[t]he dystopian genre, as Peter Fitting suggests, offers a critique of contemporary society that “implies (or asserts) the need for change,” whereas anti-utopianism “explicitly or implicitly [defends] the status quo” (Fitting 137; “Imagining 2”). As Andrew Robinson reminds us, Agamben’s critique of the grim, perpetuating reality nevertheless ultimately calls for an ontological solution, “a rejection of the state’s way of being, and the establishment of a completely different way of being” (Robinson “The State”). Indeed, one can identify utopian impulses within the movements of *Full Sea*, that try to break away from the sense of entrapment, continuity, and unendingness of imagined reality.

## 1. Race and Consumption of the Object

Race often disappears into discourses of progress, diversity, multiculturalism, colour blindness “in a postracial world – that explained (away) the inequalities of a still-racialized capitalism” (Melamed 8). To better understand ways in which global

capitalism and neoliberalism are imbricated with racial hegemony, I turn to Jodi Melamed's conceptualisation of U.S. official antiracist discourses. Building on Howard Winant's argument that the "racial break,"<sup>71</sup> an accumulation of post-World War II worldwide antiracist movements that attempted to undo the old world racial system, was nevertheless incomplete, Melamed proposes that U.S.-led "new worldwide racial project" (3), "a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity articulated under conditions of U.S. global ascendancy ... a new and old role for race as a unifying discourse" (8) supplemented and displaced its overtly white supremacist predecessor (3-4)<sup>72</sup>. Portraying racial domination as a contradiction to modernity rather than one of its structuring conditions, the United States' official antiracist discourses<sup>73</sup> operated as modes of normative and rationalising power that disconnected racism from material conditions, extending racialisation procedures beyond colour lines (Melamed 3; 35): "successive regimes of official antiracism have organized and placed human beings within world-embracing systems of rule, accumulation, and rationality while naturalizing uneven distributions of power and resources as fair, temporary, or just" (Melamed 9). Melamed reworks Ong's concept of differentiated citizenship that ensures governments protect those who are valuable to capital and devalue and render vulnerable those who are not, regardless of their formal citizenship status, to highlight the links between neoliberal turn and racialisation in the neoliberal-multicultural era (Ong 89-92; Melamed 40, 138). Defining neoliberalism as "a world-historical configuration of economy, governance, and biological and social life", Melamed proposes that neoliberal multiculturalism, the third phase of this race-liberal hegemony, as a racial formation "helps to make the internalization/externalization procedures Ong describes appear fair by innovating new systems of ascribing privilege and stigma and laying these over previous racial logics" (147; 138). Melamed writes,

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<sup>71</sup> Howard Winant describes the post-World War II racial break as "a global accumulation of sociopolitical forces—demographic, experiential, institutional, and ideological—that combined to discredit and finally undo the old world racial system." (Winant 141; Melamed 5)

<sup>72</sup> Melamed proposes that rather than being incomplete and leading to an extended period of racial dualism, racial break has "given rise to a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity that revises, partners with, and exceeds the capacities of white supremacy without replacing or ending it" (7).

<sup>73</sup> Melamed identifies three phases of official antiracist discourses as racial liberalism (1940s-1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s-1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s).

Under the mask of multicultural reference, race and racism remain central to neoliberal arrangements. On the one hand, diversity is cast as the essence of neoliberal exchange ... and on the other hand, updated forms of racialized domination function within neoliberal contexts, from the catastrophic rates of African American male imprisonment in the postindustrial United States to free trade and export processing zones, sometimes called “new slave zones” for their brutal, lethal labor conditions and legal license to exploit workers of color. Race continues to permeate capitalism’s economic and social processes in neoliberalism as it organizes the hyperextraction of surplus value from racialized bodies and naturalizes a system of capital accumulation that grossly favors the global North over the global South. Yet a kind of multiculturalism portrays neoliberal policy as key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity. Neoliberal policy engenders new racial subjects as it creates and distinguishes between newly privileged and stigmatized collectivities, yet multiculturalism codes the benefits that accrue to those advantaged by neoliberalism as the just rewards of multicultural world citizens, while representing those neoliberalism dispossesses as handicapped by their own monoculturalism and other historico-cultural deficiencies. (145-6)

The dystopias depicted in *Full Sea* and *Snowpiercer* articulate the perpetuation of this phase of neoliberal capitalism and of (neo)liberal racisms, in which human beings are coded into regimes of social value and capitalist logic, and neoliberal calculations govern forms of humanity. In Lee’s dystopic vision, a more literal embodiment of Kristeva’s concept of the abject appears as clean and controlled food contributes to the body of the Charter. “Clean” and “sustainable” forms of food is dependent on a controlled artificial environment and exploitation of workers of colour in those farming complexes. B-Mor’s meticulously cultivated food products of the finest quality belong to the Charter, not to B-Mor residents. In *Snowpiercer* the first class passengers enjoy freshly made sushi while the lower classes survive on protein bars later revealed to be made from cockroaches – which is still an

improvement from cannibalism, as happened in the past among the tale section population. Consumption of food and the way it is connected to the consumption of ethnicity and racialised bodies, later escalates to the consumption of humans as resources – as labourers, using their talents and using them as “fuel” or “medicine.” *Full Sea* is reflective of the heightened dissatisfaction and disillusionment at the promise of racial harmony and equality in the post-Civil Rights United States. With minimal changes to the names, the novel does not avoid references to the U.S. and global history of migration and settlement, both domestic and international. In *Full Sea*, factory cities like B-Mor and D-Troy are populated by descendants of migrant workers under the plan and control of various governing bodies. B-Mor, where the novel’s protagonist Fan and the collective narrators come from, has a history of resettlement.<sup>74</sup> When the “originals” were forced to abandon their town (Xixu city) in New China due to irreversible environmental destruction (“so depleted a cityscape” (*FS* 18)), they were “husbanded” to rebuild then also nearly uninhabitable B-Mor which is said to have been abandoned by its “natives”:

Our predecessors had *the unique advantage of being husbanded* by one of the federated companies, rather than the revolving cast of governmental bodies that overreached in their efforts or were disastrously neglectful, all of them downright clueless. The originals were brought in en masse for a strict purpose but with their work- and family-centric culture intact, such that they would not only endure and *eventually profit the seed investors* but also prosper in a manner that would be perpetually regenerative. (19; emphases added)

In their recount of the history, obvious unfairness of this arrangement, of a dislocation – phrased as if a kind of rescue – of a migrant/refugee community in the service of the elite communities, is left unacknowledged by the narrators. Which and whose land is to be abandoned and which is worth salvaging is determined not by its

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<sup>74</sup> The narrating voice functions as an important narrative device in *Full Sea*. The first-person plural “us,” the narrators, appear at first glance as an objective collective voice that represent the whole B-Mor, with their constant invocation of the collective identity. However, the representativeness of the narrators comes under question. Throughout the course of the novel, they can be tracked down to certain young members of one B-Mor clan, a relatively younger generation of B-Mors who nevertheless present themselves – or presented so – as a neutral representative of B-Mor.

peoples but according to the interests and demands of external elite groups. Resources, both material and human, are directed to the land deemed more functional and beneficial – presumably due to its geographical or structural advantage – to the Charter. B-Mor, it turns out, was a kind of an experiment, a prototype of other factory cities, reconstructed before the Charter villages were officially organised, and of which other cities are patterned after. Much like the fish and vegetable that they grow for the Charter villages, the language of the narrators – again, rather proudly – presents the B-Mor residents as profitable products shipped in and nurtured for the consumption of the Charter population. The first-generation B-Mor settlers, who are Asian (American) migrants as well as environmental refugees, are evaluated in economic terms, their survival, relocation and citizenship rights conditioned by their commodity and labour value, which is assumed by their codified racial traits. B-Mor's existence is validated by its reproductive function, reiterating the "First" and the "Third World" relations of production; the Charter provides capital, technology, and knowledge in exchange for B-Mor's literal and metaphorical body.

However, what the narrators' ambiguous evasion do not explicitly acknowledge but the narrative clearly reveals as it continues is that much of the Charter privilege is inherited structurally on the contrary to its claim for meritocracy. Mister Leo, a Charter businessman whose success is, even by Charter standard, great, so as to guarantee generations of wealth, reveals the operation of Charter's hardwired hegemony in his commentary on "the worrisome trend of Charter youth, who despite all their advantages and test prep were scoring lower and lower, in raw terms, on the yearly Exams" (*FS* 178). More direct and palpable criticism appears later in/through B-Mor residents' explicit dissatisfaction at the low possibility and unfair conditions of "promotion," a copy of the practice of racial "promotion" in the contemporary US and globally, as found in examples of African sports players. Bodies are what refugees/migrants can – in many cases only initially and ultimately – offer to the receiving community for their rights to citizenship, and bodies of B-Mor residents contribute on many levels to the continuation of the Charter's hegemony. B-Mor children are given chances of "promotion" through demonstration of their merits, either through annual tests or in sports or arts practices – exceptional performances see them adopted into Charters' foster homes, leading them to a much-

desired Charter life, as in the case of Liwei who was selected for his high scores on the Exam. The novel's description of the policy reveals the structural inheritance of privilege, as well as the pervasive ideology of the dominant that portrays their system as just and inclusive.

No one seems to care because the results come out in percentiles! he said. But I've looked back at the historical numbers and performance is declining at every grade level. I will assure you the tests are not getting harder. In fact they're getting easier, is what I am told. So we must conclude that Charter children are not as bright as they used to be. Or else they are feeling less pressure to do well, being disincentivized by the wealth of their parents. Either way, it's an ominous sign. We're losing what makes a Charter a Charter, which is the tireless drive for excellence. The compulsion to build and to own. Meanwhile, the number of outsiders testing into our ranks is ever rising. *They* aren't in decline. This alarms some people, but I'm not so against it, actually, if it means we're getting top-notch young minds.

You believe in new blood, Miss Cathy mumbled.

Yes, I do, he replied, not acknowledging her weary tone. No truly intelligent person can be a bigot. We welcome all as long as they have drive and a capacity for hard work. (178-9; emphasis in original)

Within the system that both figuratively and literally *injects* the new blood of outstanding children from "outside," the current hegemony is not to be challenged but to be maintained and reinforced through the blood of the Other. Even though Leo seems to acknowledge the Charter youth's privilege, it is also clear that he has a belief, or rather, unassuming confidence in justice, fairness, and inclusiveness of the Charter's structure of hierarchy. It is also a perpetuation of faith in the popular (and popularly disputed) ideology of the American Dream that the model minority myth upholds – that America (Charter) is a land of opportunity and meritocracy.

In Leo's advocate for selective citizenship, there is the apparent unawareness at, or deliberate lack of acknowledgement of the problems of "the brain drain"; and

the false sense of “openness” of the Charter’s closed space, obscuring the borders between Charter villages and factory cities and also Open Counties, if we remember the narrators’ warning – the description of the Charter as a space/place open to anyone democratically open space/place when it is in fact a largely closed and exclusive/exclusionary domain. It directs the attention instead to the very slim, unproportionate possibility of opening. Leo’s acknowledgement that hard work is not unique to – and as Leo laments, probably more lacking in – the Charters, self-contradictorily exposes his words as a reiteration of merit-based racial/ethnic discrimination, legacy of Euro-Anglocentric ideological justification of both domestic and international domination over the East and racial/ethnic minority groups. In other parts of the novel, similarities between the narrators’ description of the virtues of B-Mor peoples and Leo’s characterisation of the Charter for its drive for excellence challenge Leo’s exclusive claim to the virtue as the Charter’s property, as well as his phrasing of B-Mor children as the Other “outsider” – they are potentially already by virtue, if it follows his logic, an abject insider. Melamed articulates that “multiculturalism has coded the wealth, mobility, and political power of neoliberalism’s beneficiaries as the just desserts of multicultural global citizens while representing those whom neoliberalism has dispossessed as handicapped by their own monoculturalism or other historico-cultural deficiencies” (42). Leo’s words that one can *transcend* race with merit reiterates the racialised privilege and stigma codified in the context of differentiated citizenship Leo advocates for.

The precondition for consumption in the framework of abjection is this repetition of inclusion and exclusion, refusal of, but also a constant reminder of the condition of inclusion/containment of the abject within the subject body. The novel’s description of the policy reveals the structural inheritance of privilege, as well as the pervasive ideology of the dominant that portrays their system as just and inclusive. In one of the many examples of their characteristic echoing of the Charter-induced/produced/born ideology and discourses, the narrators pass on to the reader the caution that the Charter privilege is not guaranteed, and “one must continually work and invest and have enough money to sustain a Charter lifestyle or else leave” (54) – which is the fate of some outcasts in the open counties. The narrators reveal that in the open counties, there are former Charters who cannot afford the Charter life anymore for various reasons. Implying that “leaving” is actually the right choice,

or the only choice for a change. This works as the technology of meritocracy that the Charter promotes as the justification of its privilege. Shimakawa, developing from Kristeva's theory of abjection, conceptualises "[t]he paradigm of abjection as a national/cultural identity-forming process," arguing that Asian Americanness is a "national abject" in relation to Americanness within dominant U.S. culture (3). "Not absolutely or permanently excluded from that latter identity and yet not quite representative of it," Shimakawa explains, Asian Americanness is characterised by "its constantly shifting relation to Americanness, a movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness, and domestication/assimilation; it is that *movement between* enacted by and on Asian Americans, I argue, that marks the boundaries of Asian American cultural (and sometimes legal) citizenship" (3). *Full Sea* similarly explores the processes and project of (national) boundary building through the positioning of racial/ethnic minority communities in relation to dominating culture. As the dystopic landscape of *Full Sea* mirrors and centres around the current U.S., its racial/ethnic relations replicate the pattern of exclusion and inclusion – a contradiction that Shimakawa identifies in the representation of Asian Americans: "at times embracing/ingesting them, at other times violently (if often symbolically) expelling/excluding /segregating them ... may be understood as a product of the continually collapsing project of abjection as a fundamental element of national identity formation" (17). From the narrators' representation, the model minority stereotype, or myth, operates within and dominates the entire B-mor community. The narrators' description is a typical characterisation of the model minority.

for all that time we have kept up the community, curbstone by curbstone, brick by brick, we have not let our windows get dingy or our brass knobs spot, we are always after our children to pick up after themselves in the playgrounds, we have not allowed anyone to shrink his or her duties or to become lazy and dependant. B-Mor works because we work, our sense of purpose driving us that extra measure, that extra hour, and then, of course, the knowledge of what's out in the counties and what it used to be like here before the originals landed refuelling us whenever we flag.



We know very well how it was because it's central to our schooling, a primary unit of our studies devoted to the history of B-Mor and the conditions that made it possible, and how B-Mor itself and other places patterned after it have in turn been stabilizing elements in this long-struggling land. (*FS* 14-15)

The narrators' description of the history of the rehabilitation of the city bears a sense of achievement and pride, at their contribution not only to the city itself but also – and perhaps even more importantly – to the Charter and its investors; the factory city's history and existence cannot be separated from those of the Charter. The narrators emphasise the mutual dependency between Charter colonies and factory cities. While Charter colonies depend on the factory cities for their existence, B-Mor's contribution to the Charter and the larger structure of the society forms its identity as a constituency that is both outside and inside. Shimakawa poses the model minority as an abject figure, focusing on their oxymoronic position as an idealised citizen-subject whose virtues are defined by their acceptance of the dominant ideology and grounding of those virtues as a perpetual outsider.

Praised and valued for their ability (and inclination) to *assimilate* into the "mainstream" (with an eye toward eventually disappearing in/as it) - indeed, to surpass even "normal" Americans (that is, whites) at being ideal manifestations of American success and self-determination at a particular historical moment (the early period of the civil rights movement), Asian Americans were singled out for their aptitude for conforming to dominant models of "proper" American citizenly values and practices (including subjection to the law, heteronormative and patriarchal "family values," and especially the pursuit of higher education), over and against what were seen as other, less tractable, more antihegemonic racialized minorities. (13; emphasis in original)

What the term signifies is the dependency between and conflation of deject and abject. B-Mor's existence is assimilated into Charters' life, yet they are

simultaneously detached from it, both by spatial segregation and ideological division. The state of inclusion/exclusion is apparent both in the relationship between the Charter and the factory cities, and the dynamics within Charter villages. Yet, the process of “injection” of Liwei’s blood into Charter Seneca shows that the process cannot simply be peaceful ingestion of the other’s blood from one side, reminding us of the inevitable --- of the process of abjection. When we read the making of Liwei’s myth as a process of abjection, in which his racial/ethnic origin is erased in order to become a Charter, preservation of the Charter’s racial/ethnic purity is impossible – because the Charter is dependent on the outsiders’ blood to sustain its identity. Therefore, Liwei’s realization of the model minority myth through his promotion poses a threat to the Charter’s identity. Although Liwei seems to have successfully assimilated into the Charter, parading his excellence as a specialist doctor in C-disease, Liwei’s presence in the Charter is also a disruption. His claim to the Charter hegemony becomes more precarious especially when he begins to reclaim his ethnic “origin” by recreating B-Mor style houses for his family. While he has contributed until then to the prosperity and sustenance of the Charter, as a selected one among racial abjects, he eventually fails, in his project of introducing B-Mor’s life, and faces an expel from the Charter, that is, his second(ary) abjection.

Human bodies particularly, over and above labour force as human capital, are referred to as sources of exploitation throughout *Full Sea*, as biological and medical resources. *Full Sea* delves into a more literal sense of the blood of racialised bodies being used to sustain, regenerate, and improve the Charter. B-Mor residents’ replaceability and disposability are depicted casually throughout the novel. In lengthy passages of how B-Mor residents are routinely tested and their blood panels collected and recorded to examine patterns of diseases, particularly the “C-illness” that affects all humans almost without exception regardless of their conditions of living, the narrators state the differential distribution of the benefits of resulting medical advancement as a matter of fact. The Charters – and only the Charters – will be able to afford expensive treatments and extend their lives ten or so years longer than B-Mor residents, “naturally,” ironically enduring, and dying from side effects of the treatment rather than the disease itself (*FS* 65). The novel engages with discourses of purity and contamination, mixedness and authenticity, racialisation through its metaphors of production and consumption.

[B-Mor goods] they are their goods, after all, of wholly their conception, from genesis onward. We have simply made their wishes real. For what could be more important? Other settlements near and far-flung provide their clothing and gadgets and furnishings and so on, but we sustain them fundamentally, we enable their children to thrive, while all along offering them full confidence that there are no compromising or exogenous elements, nothing but the fortifications exactly specified by them and them alone. (100)

Not unlike goods they produce, the residents of B-Mor as a whole, too, are the Charter's goods, of their conception. Whilst offering new blood to the Charter, for the seeming diversity that in reality increases the homogeneity of the Charter's makeup (race by merit), B-Mor residents also contribute towards the preservation of the purity of the Charter with their meticulous care for the quality of the products they consume: "no compromise, exogenous elements," "fortifications" that caters to their demand – against contamination from the outside world and from other races.

## **2. Race and Gendered Spatialisation**

The intersection of race/ethnicity and gender/sexuality predominates, I argue, in the process of abjection depicted in *Full Sea*, exemplifying how "[a] collapsing of nationality, race, ethnicity, and bodily identity" (Shimakawa 2) occurs in such process. In Lee's narratives Asian(American)-ness is a category both racialised and gendered/sexualised. Such collapsing of racial, ethnic/national, gender identities manifests in multiple levels of characterisation in *Full Sea* – through racialised and gendered men, women, communities, and spaces. Gendered spatialisation occurs between Charters and factory cities – hegemonic masculinity working on the level of the universal/global hegemony. More specifically, the factory city of B-Mor, a distinctively Asian/Chinese (American) settlement, is collectively gendered as feminine against (white) masculine Charters. Gendered association between the East and femininity and the West and masculinity is a categorical analogy that Asian (American) criticism and race studies have repeatedly problematised and protested. Much feminist theory has problematised a masculine presence in the officially

gender-neutral concept of reason. Particularly ecofeminist theories have brought more attention to the resemblance and connections between the sex/gender dichotomy and human's relationship with nature, highlighting parallels between patriarchal domination and anthropocentric approaches to nature. Val Plumwood, for example, proposes oppressions of gender, race, class, and *nature* as "four tectonic plates of [her] liberation theory," as a result of the dominant, western forms of reason, science and individuality (1). Plumwood perceives masculine domination as a characteristically Western phenomenon. As Plumwood points out, the category of nature in this case functions as "a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature" – adding conceptual strength to ideologies such as racism, colonialism, and sexism which relegates/construes sexual, racial, and ethnic differences to a sphere of inferiority, lacking the full measure of rationality or culture (4). Plumwood emphasises thus:

Not only [the labour of] women, but also (more importantly, I'd argue) colonised non-western, non-white people gets subsumed into the category of nature, result of both specific history and "a necessity inherent in the dynamic and logic of domination between self and other, reason and nature" (4).

Therefore,

[t]o be defined as 'nature' in this context is to be defined as passive, non-agent, non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert of entrepreneur) take place. defined as a *terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes. ... [Such is] The West's standard treatment of nature (that

of ‘natural’ domination) since at least the Enlightenment, are also normalised for marginalised human groups. (4-5).

Plumwood proposes the “cultural identity of the master” which “has framed the dominant concepts of western thoughts, especially those of reason and culture” (5). While allowing more weight to human’s exploitation of nature, Plumwood thus highlights dynamics among humans particularly in the western context. The chapter places more weight on the dualism’s impact on human relations, rather than between human and nature, or humans and other species.

Divisions of space in *Full Sea*, *Snowpiercer*, and *The Walking Dead* all exemplify this division between culture (cultural space) and nature (wilderness) within the dualistic model. The relationship between B-Mor and the Charter, the employment of racial minority migrant/refugees labour force in the agricultural and fishing industry, is an example of the gendered construction of nature versus reason/technology. While this is particularly evident in *Full Sea*, in which B-Mor’s (re)settlement is at once a human occupation of nature through technology but also an ethnocentric/nationalistic domination over a population. B-Mor settlers are a proxy of the Charter and not an active agent of domination of nature or of the space – they are allowed to reside there as far as they perform the labour for the dominant, on their behalf, as a vessel for the delivery of their reason and knowledge. Plumwood points out that the general association of women with nature and men with culture or reason provides “the basis of the cultural elaboration of women’s oppression *in the west*, of the particular form that it takes in the western context” (11). Plumwood also refers to “the arrogant ethnocentrism” characteristic of western world views (13). Such ethnocentrism shapes the racial/ethnic inequality resulting from uneven developments. The process and result of environmental damage have uneven consequences for different groups of people – for example, ecologically destructive high technology agriculture and forestry in the third world strengthen the control of elites and social inequality (Plumwood 13). Plumwood’s analysis describes with surprising precision the world Lee creates in *Full Sea*: people die of the destruction of nature in which natural resources become scarce or unfit for consumption, a process of which technological rationality serves the end of commodification and turn [the biospheric means for] a healthy life into the privilege of those who can

afford to pay for them; the losers are those without market power (13; 14). B-Mor, inhabited by Asian (American) peoples from what used to be New China, is collectively framed against Charters' white masculinist exploitation. Not only the spaces racially segregated and racialised, exemplified through visualisations of the structures of the town and between the cities, but the relationship between them also is gendered through the division of labour. Also significant in the characterisation of B-Mor is that the community exercises control over nature through technology, from their artificially controlled environment to agricultural technology to maintain; they exploit, in this sense, nature through reason at a first glance. However, their power of reason, technology/rationality – ultimately, humanness, is provided by, "borrowed" from the Charter. The technology does not belong to B-Mor, and what B-Mor provides in exchange is bodily labour. In other words, they are the reproductive vessels of the Charter's technology. While on the surface B-Mor is on the side of the conquerors of nature, it is the reproductive vessel for the Charter's technology. They are a part of the conquerors of nature, living in the safely controlled environment unlike the uncivilised, dangerous "natural" environment outside in the open Counties. There is a dualistic implication in their pride as a faithful producer of their controlled products, and as a commodity in themselves to be controlled and managed by the Charter customers. Along with their sense of control, there is a sense of powerlessness with regards to the extent of their control, due to the relationship to nature which depends on the Charter's scientific knowledge and laws. Again, gendered division plays a large part in the representation of this relationship.

Throughout the novel, I argue, that Asian (American) male characters and Asian (American) masculinity can be formulated as the abject. At this point, it is important to distinguish my use of the term from its use as a descriptive expression of the wretchedness of the abject masculinity, an adjective, as is the case in many studies and common usage. I use it as a referent, not a condition, to specifically refer to it as a frame and a product of abjection. In Lee's dystopic vision, a more literal embodiment of Kristeva's concept of the abject appears as clean and controlled food contributes to the body of the Charter. "Clean" and "sustainable" forms of food are dependent on a controlled artificial environment and exploitation of workers of colour in those farming complexes. B-Mor's meticulously cultivated food products of the finest quality belong to the Charter, not to B-Mor residents. Consumption of

food and the way it is connected to the consumption of ethnicity and consequently racialised, escalates later to the consumption of humans as resources – as labourers, using their talents and using them as “medical resources”: [B-Mor goods] they are their goods, after all, of wholly their conception, from genesis onward. We have simply made their wishes real. ... no compromising or exogenous elements, nothing but the fortifications exactly specified by them and them alone” (*FS* 100). It is one of the examples of the Charter’s fear of contamination, and obsession with the idea of purity, and their attempt at self-preservation through exclusion. There are other instances, such as constant reminders of the Charter villages’ ruthless abandonment of their residents, as examples of the expulsion of its excrements – waste population. They demonstrate that it operates through, builds and maintains itself, by abjection.

### 3. Search for Masculinity

In Lee’s oeuvre, there is an unending quest to find Asian (American) masculinity/masculine identity, revealing the author’s ambivalent yet indefinite belief in its existence as a fundamentally “authentic” entity. His 1995 novel *Native Speaker*’s search for an authentic Asian (American) masculinity and competitions for hegemonic masculinity continue in *On Such a Full Sea*. Henry Park, *Native Speaker*’s Asian American protagonist, looks for an ideal masculine model around him to establish his masculine self-identity. In *Full Sea*, Fan’s narrative in search of her boyfriend Reg and her brother Liwei also continues the journey of finding Asian (American) masculinity. On many occasions, especially his earlier works, his novels accept gender as a natural given and reproduce conventional and stereotypical gender relationships, particularly heterosexual, gendered role expectations. However, despite the enduring tendency to conform to gender norms, it also seems, at least on a conscious level, that Lee endeavours to defy gendered hierarchy – especially as a part of his resistance against the history of gendered racialisation. What is interesting about *Full Sea* and Lee’s novels in general is the duality in Lee’s position regarding politics of gender and race. As a writer of colour who wields a strong criticism against racism, Lee is fully aware of the western exclusion of non-white, non-western peoples from the realm of masculinity – inferiorisation, or feminisation, of races irrespective of biological sex. However, his representation of characters, while

he attempts to criticise them, cannot escape and in some cases reproduce westernised gendered and racialised identities. His representation allows the reader to see that western racism is also a gendered one, that applies particularly and differentially to different groups of gender. By recognising the element of gender insecurity in Lee's novels the reader is able to discern the aspects of gendered racialisation, or racial gendering, in the West.

I argue that it is precisely his awareness of racialised gendering of Asian (American) masculinity and concerns about Asian American male subjectivity that prevents him from participating in a truly progressive gender politics. Lee puts forward female characters and highlights male failure and (self-)victimhood in order to criticise and fix the failure of toxic hegemonic (white, old) masculinity. While his characters do not address the issues of gender equality or inequality directly, and while he includes powerful female characters, his gendered characterisations demonstrate a good degree of gender bias and stereotypes. Furthermore, his acute awareness of the abjected status of Asian (American) masculinity prevents him from presenting an alternative masculine character, and instead makes him narrate their continuing abjection. Lee's particular and uneven concern for male/masculine insecurity and anxiety are attributed mostly to Asian (American) male characters and thus indicates that race is the source of gender insecurity. On the other hand, his female characters and white male characters seem to be less affected by the sense of insecurity, to a degree that it may not be wholly regarded as the reflection of characters' importance rather than a failure to provide their complexity and depth.

There have been more writers and producers in publishing and entertainment industries overall, regardless of sex/gender, who are aware of and are incorporating feminist concerns in recent years – their works reflect changing definitions, more inclusive and fluid, of gender identities, and growing interest in gender and racial equality. Only that the attempts are not always successful, or in some cases genuine; some texts might unwittingly reveal their inherent and uncritical adherence to gender/racial biases; their resistance to the change, endeavour to protect, or reinvigorate, reproduce, maintain, and reinvent the existing gender and racial relations and dynamics. *Full Sea's* use of collective, therefore genderless narrators is a device that gives an effective example of the conscious effort to move towards creating a more gender-neutral, gender-inclusive/fluid characterisation of society in



the novel. Therefore, Lee is a selective, while useful, example of textual representations oscillating between conservatism and progressivism. Even more selectively, I propose that we read *Full Sea* not as a coming-of-age adventure of a flesh-and-blood 16-year-old girl, but as an allegory/parable of the quest for new masculinity/masculine subjectivity. In *Full Sea*, Henry's (self-)search for masculinity in *Native Speaker* is handed over to multiple agents and thus takes on more complicated dimensions. The primary search that drives the narrative is the heroine's search for her missing boyfriend Reg. Sought by almost everyone in the novel – Fan, Liwei and the Charter/Pharmaceutical industry and by extension the narrators and B-Mor – I argue that the search for Reg could be read as a continuation of the search for the possibility of an ideal Asian (American) masculinity. *Full Sea* opens with a sudden departure of Fan, a move that brings shock to peaceful B-Mor, a labour settlement where the 16-year-old heroine comes from. Exemplary among many factory cities that provide goods to rich Charter villages that employ and govern them, B-Mor specialises in fish and vegetables. Fan is a skilled tank diver and in charge of fish tanks. Her boyfriend Reg takes care of vegetable beds. When Reg abruptly goes missing, Fan, who is pregnant with his child, leaves B-Mor in search of him. Fan's search is directed at two opposing and contrasting characters, Liwei and Reg. Fan believes that finding Liwei, her blood brother who had left her family and community and been moved to a Charter village, is a key to finding the whereabouts of Reg.

Therefore, *Full Sea*'s main search, done by Fan, is split mainly into searches for two men, Liwei and Reg. Fan's search for masculinity continues, as it was for Henry in *Native Speaker*, to be in a form of a search for masculine role models (i.e. father figures); after all, Reg is a potential and literal "father" of their child.<sup>75</sup> The search for Father is a familiar narrative, of a boy looking for an absent father in search of his manhood. Its presence is prevalent in autobiographical literature; one example is Kevin Powell. The clue is in the title of his autobiography *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*. The book's description from the publisher introduces that struggling to overcome his life weighed down by poverty and violence and continue into his adulthood, "Powell embarks on a search for the father he never knew in a redemptive passage from abandonment to self-discovery."

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<sup>75</sup> Also, for further understanding of the importance and symbolism of the "father," see Somay and Kord and Krimmer (eds) Ch.3, for a discussion of fatherhood as a symbol of nationhood.

Powell confesses that after his father abandoned him and his mother, he struggled with his absence, which he calls “father absence” and “father hurt”:

As I got to my teenage years the father absence and hurt only intensified. No dad there to show me how to tie a tie as I prepared to graduate from grammar to high school, so my mother had to ask a male neighbor to show me. No dad to play catch with in spite of my great love of baseball. No dad to ask questions of as I passed through puberty ... I was completely clueless about what it was to be a man (“On Being a Father”)

He explains that he was confused about how to be and how to handle himself and longed for a father figure until he met a therapist who became the father figure for him. He later decides to assume the role himself, “that of a mentor and father figure to many people. ... I just have to be the man and the father I wanted him, my own biological dad, to be, but could not be. For the rest of my life”; he even comes to forgive his father to overcome his wounds (“On Being a Father”). But the prevalence of such narratives should not decide one’s (regardless of their sex/gender) completion as a gendered human being.<sup>76</sup> While his story is a touching articulation of a man finally overcoming the absence of his father and becoming (or endeavouring to be) the ideal father figure, the unwavering belief in the importance of the Father undermines his acknowledgement of his mother’s love and support presented in his writings. The assumption that finding the (unknown) Father will give an answer to one’s own identity, is as widespread as it is groundless. It even implies that without a father a man cannot find/complete masculinity – men either grow up to be their father or kill them and take their place.

Deciphering the meaning of Fan’s journey is not as simple as it appears – is the story Fan’s bildungsroman, or is she, as one can say about all of Lee’s women, a proxy, substitution for someone else, and the story ultimately a potentially failing coming-of-age narrative of Asian (American) masculine subjectivity? Reading *Full Sea* as an allegory risks a danger of undermining Fan’s potential as an agency, as

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<sup>76</sup> Powell in fact writes that he is a mentor to both men and women, however, also that he has “a particular soft spot in my heart for all the single mothers out there raising sons who’ve sought my counsel” (“On Being a Father”).

*New York Times* reviewer Kakutani grumbles: “because Fan remains more of a symbol than a fully fashioned character, we have a hard time caring what happens to her, one way or the other” (Kakutani). However, where Katakuni finds a mere hindrance to engagement, I find a narrative strategy that allows the reader to disengage for another reading of the text. What I suggest instead is to read the author’s use of symbolism and allegory as intentional; the characters are symbolic and symbolised by design rather than a failure of character representation. Fan, as well as other characters, as a representational character-type than a flesh-and-blood *being* is one of the strategies in the novel that allows me to explore the novel’s potential as a critique of the construction/constructedness of the notion of race and gender identities. The novel is made up of various myths; myths characterise B-Mor – Liwei, their history of settlement, Fan and Reg’s disappearance and resistance. These many myths show how our societies are dependent on them, and how they are created upon them. After the departure of Fan and the disappearance of Reg, the couple gains mythic status within B-Mor; their names and images appear on walls and fences of B-Mor, and “[i]n the wake of their disappearance, hints of unrest and disorder also begin to creep into the collective consciousness of the community. Fan becomes a symbol, at least to some, of daring, of a willingness to brave the unknown” (Kakutani). As Kakutani implies, Fan might be a disappointing and unsuccessful symbol, in that the novel does not allow her to deliver the hope other than carrying it. Looking for Reg, all characters in the novel – Fan, Liwei, the Charter/Pharmaceutical companies, and arguably the narrators – are after an impossibility, illusion, myth, even though they themselves are the narrators of the myth. Regardless of the actual possession of the Reg’s “physical being,” Reg also stands in as a symbol of hope, for a better, wholesome future on a personal level (to Fan), or a better collective future as a cure to a current problem to Charters, or, a cure to a personal problem of individual crisis of masculinity, for Liwei. And the resident’s lack of imagination, as they don’t ask questions and mostly accept everything as their fate/reality, Fan’s contribution to the community is her departure as a wake-up call, designating the lack of imagination and awareness at that condition. Fan’s departure, in other words, registers the beginning of a different redemption narrative, a diasporic journey that prioritises freedom over belonging. However, Fan’s journey is not fully realised as the birth of a transnational diasporic subject who transcends

her gender and race, because the outcome has ramifications within the national boundaries of the United States. Fan's journey is also filled with dangers of femininity that threatens fraternity and masculinity and eventually disrupts stability. Liwei's ambition fails him and returns him to his abject status. Reg is still missing. In the end, Fan realises again that she can't really complete her journey by proxy. Hegemonic masculinity, or the structure did not change – Fan has just tentatively left it, without knowing whether she would be able to find Reg.

### **Reg as a Symbol of an Alternative**

Suk Koo Rhee's commentaries on Lee's strategy of narrativization in his 1999 novel *A Gesture Life* offers an insight that is pertinent to understanding the narrativization of *Full Sea*. With its narrative transparency compromised, Lee's novel seems to hide as much as it reveals. Or one may as well state that it hides in the very act of uncovering. Although details about an event are provided, the rhetorical – often contradictory and elliptical – nature of the employed language distorts the reality of what it is supposed to disclose. It is this politics of style that must ultimately be understood in any attempt to provide a satisfactory response to the query concerning Lee's novel and its U.S. readership. (Rhee 94-95). Lee maintains this style in *Full Sea*, as he gradually releases information – Reg's uniqueness, B-Mor's dissatisfaction, illusionary quality of B-Mor's utopic depiction as the first-person plural narrators change words and contradict their earlier reports. Reg, Fan's missing boyfriend and a member of Lee's collection of "missing men/sons," is first introduced as "just anybody else" (*FS* 6), before the narrators disclose his uniqueness that he may be much more than that:

He was just anybody else, in most people's view, except perhaps that he was tall and had the most beautiful skin one might ever see. ... His skin was the color of a smooth river stone, though one that's lighter than those around it, a wheat-brown, buttery hue that seemed to glow warmer in the pale illumination of the grow facility. ... His long arms could easily reach the inner sections to plant and pollinate, prune and harvest, and it's a fetching image of the two of them ... both at labor for the good of our community like any responsible pair. (*FS* 6-7)

At this point, Reg and the reader are unaware of his uniqueness or value, his importance as a symbol for the possibility of resistance, and of salvation from C-disease, until the narrators withholding the information uncover it in pieces throughout the novel. From the introduction, although, Reg's bodily *difference* is implied to characterise him, alongside his *sameness*. The difference/sameness axis is already present here, although one may have to read further on to recognise fully that Reg is of mixed race.

To be sure, Reg was unaware of himself as anything but a keeper of Building Six vegetable beds F-8 through F-24, a fourth-generation member of the Xi-Jang household, and the first and only boyfriend of Fan.

Let's not forget he meant the world to her, and even if that speaks more to the limited extent of her experience than his personal qualities, we ought to remind ourselves of how fetching a young man he was in sum. Very tall, as noted, around 180 centimeters not counting the fluffy pad of his hair, which made him seem at least six or seven centimeters taller. We have, of course, described his amazing skin, its hue and hand. He was by nature filial to his household, bringing home whenever he could hard candies for the younger ones and sticky rice cakes for his elders, and then without exception (after maybe playing with Joseph et al.) taking out Fan on their free-days ...  
(FS 62)

Reg's racial mixedness is emphasised through the descriptions of his appearance, alongside his ethnic sameness. While the descriptions of his appearance highlight his racial mixedness/otherness from the point of view of B-Mor, even though he is likely to be racially much closer to Chinese/Asian than to African, the narrators assure the reader that Reg's *nature* is Chinese/Asian and therefore he belongs to the community. His racial difference is useful in carrying out his duties as an ethnic B-Mor. His long arms make him more successful in tending his vegetable beds. His height is emphasised throughout the novel, as opposed to Fan's/Liwei's, as the source of his clumsiness which nevertheless brings delight to others and thus becomes his strength.

It is important that he abides by, remains within the norm of the community, “for the good of our community like any responsible pair” (*FS* 7). In this passage, Reg’s sameness is emphasised as he remains ethnically Chinese/Asian without much reference to his African ancestry – B-Mor’s ethnic makeup remains predominantly homogenous.

The narrators’ telling of B-Mor’s past informs the reader that although Afro-Chinese descents are not too uncommon and have become a natural part of B-Mor residents – and with the narrators’ tendency to downplay their narration in mind, this should also be taken with a pinch of salt – they were subject to discrimination in the past and still are a minority in B-Mor. Reg’s (ethnic) belonging to B-Mor is supported by the narrativisation that places the descriptions of Reg’s social identity (“a keeper of Building Six vegetable beds F-8 through F-24, a fourth-generation member of the Xi-Jang household, and the first and only boyfriend of Fan”; “by nature filial”) to surround the description of his appearance so that his biological /racial traits are contained within his social/ethnic character. Also interesting is the way in which the concept of “nature” is used as a bridge between race and ethnicity – the recurring, smooth blending of physical characteristics indicative of his Africanness into his ethnic Chinese/Asianness. What gets inscribed on Reg’s body is aestheticism which privileges the idea of authenticity that conflates the biological materiality of the body with cultural characteristics of ethnicity through the common designation of “nature” – e.g., Reg’s “natural” makeup; his “nature” that is reflected in his appearance. Through his “naturally” filial character, he brings ethnically recognisable and therefore coded snacks to his family, and takes Fan out for more ethnically coded snacks, calling attention to his Asianness. He is Asian except for or despite of his biological mixedness/Africanness, a strategy of racial containment through specific ways of gendering. Reg is characterised as warm, harmless, generous, soft, and nurturing. There are numerous examples of Reg’s good “naturedness,” getting along well with children and helping them, caring for the family, being faithful, etc. There is no show of forceful or violent side to Reg’s character. Reg is therefore completely dissociated from toxic masculinity, or competitions for the hegemonic one. The prospect of him being a threat (object) to the Charter (national) body is mollified. In this sense, Reg is, it is implied, also exempt from another Charter-rampant malady of the mind – the competitiveness that

drives Charters to an eventual destruction/death even as it is said to be the source of their sustenance and prosperity. It is also suggested that his exemption from the diseases both of the body and the mind, comes from his racial mixedness. His mixed heritage is recognised within the text through numerous descriptions, and it is this simultaneous celebration and fear of miscegenation that drives Reg's characterisation. Reg's disappearance is not a cause of concern at first:

His family was unconcerned; Reg was known to wander, sometimes even beyond the walls. It's not that he was reckless or dim-witted, though it must be said that Reg was never going to ace the Exams, not in a millennium. In fact, he didn't even bother to take them. He was the sort of kindly, dreamy boy who is prevailed upon by whim and instinct, and if he sometimes found trouble, it was always the charming kind, such as when a dog gets his muzzle stuck in a jar of peanut butter. (FS 8)

Here, Reg's image is immediately drawn in opposition to Liwei, by the mention of the Exams. The two embody the contradictions – that of excess – in the construction of Asian American masculinity. As opposed to Liwei, whose competence and competitiveness led him to leave B-Mor's boundary and enter the Charter through the official channel, Reg simply “wanders” beyond the walls without evident purpose. While both men are sought by the Charter for consumption, their values and the circumstances and manners for their acceptance/consumption differ. While Liwei is *overassimilated* and has become too Charter-like to be considered interesting anymore (except when he later tries to reclaim his difference, which makes him then *too* different), Reg is still of interest because of unexplored promises that his difference still holds, puzzling yet inevitably attractive. It is also important that Reg is by association an “organic/natural” cure. He does not *act* or perform, and he is an authentic cure in contrast to the medicine Charter (and Liwei who is a C-disease specialist) produces. As opposed to Liwei's hyperconsciousness (self-consciousness) of himself that is a source of his success and dissatisfaction at the same time, Reg is depicted as carefree and unaware of himself and his values, characteristics similar to native-Charter-born Vik. Liwei learned to capitalise himself and his assets (or rather,

*creates/fabricates* them) whereas Reg (and Vik) seem to naturally possess/own them. This strategy of containment is reinforced by the pleasure at the possibility of consumption afforded by the codification of (Afro-)Asian bodies. Reg's body is sexualised and desexualised to fit it for a "natural" and racialised masculinity. Reg goes through double racialisation, as a B-Mor and then as an Afro-Chinese within B-Mor. His masculinity, though, is validated in B-Mor, as Reg's style becomes popular among B-Mor youths after his disappearance, gaining validation on the local level – levels of hegemonic masculinity. Interestingly although, while the Charter sees him as more or less of B-Mor ("Chinese"), his "Afro" element rather than his Chinese part (which is the current majority in B-Mor) becomes emphasised in his B-Mor popularity.

Reg's biological Africanness is what gives him value for consumption, yet it is his ethnicity as Chinese/Asian that makes him consumable. What is "legible" is his ethnicity, seen as Charters' examination of his "habits" of food consumption rather than, or put it more precisely, the narrators/novel chooses to give focus on ethnic traits than biological traits; however, it *implies* that of course, they also suspect that genetic/racial mixing may also be the explanation. His codification as an ethnic Chinese/Asian is undermined or supplemented by the description of his appearance as mixed/African. Yet, his "nature" is also ascribed to his Asianness – linking smoothly and inconspicuously nature to culture – by highlighting ethnicised food. The concept of nature/natural performs as a strategy of racial containment, naturalising and normalising what are social constructs at the same time it constructs a racialised subject. To dissociate Reg from this process of construction, Reg's "innocence," or naivety, is emphasised ("Reg was unaware of himself as anything but"). Only later in the novel that the narrator reveals that this seemingly naïve "unawareness" has a specific referent to his uniqueness with its slow and timed release of information – immunity from C-disease that affects everyone else in *Full Sea's* world; so he *is* exceptional and valuable, but the announcement of his further difference is suspended. While his primary usefulness and contribution lie in his potential for the biological immunity from, therefore resistance to, C-disease, when we read Reg as a symbol of a certain new breed of Asian (American) masculinity that is beneficial to the hegemonic masculinity/masculine subject, I contend that Lee is looking for a potential cure, or an alternative remedy to the pathological, toxic



(white hegemonic) masculinity represented by the Charter, to save and regenerate it from its own illness. In order for Reg to be adequately used as a “new,” better, or desirable model of Asian (American) masculine subject, his value requires, however, to be under careful study and regulation. The tests Charter doctors and scientists conduct to find out the secret to Reg’s immunity indicates that Reg’s value is likely to be genetically originated, his “contaminated” status as a mixed-blood proves a potential advantage to himself and more importantly to themselves. It is no coincidence that they discover a disruption, potential for the cure for the disease in Reg’s body. Reg is not an exception from the whole community of model minorities in B-Mor; “it wasn’t in his makeup” (65) to harbour ideas of dissent. That a non-threatening and non-competing boy embodies the racialised body as a useful resource is befitting to the core idea that sustains the model minority (the good immigrant) discourse – the introduction of “new blood” will, and more importantly *should* benefit the community. The narrators’ comments on Reg’s C-freeness, however, offer more complex accounts of the discourses of racial and cultural mixing that the novel explores.

Considered in the context of U.S. history of racial relations and dominant strategies of racialisation, Reg’s construction as a part-Chinese part-black character and attention to implications of racism within B-Mor instead of the Charter provides a safe opportunity to disclaim Chinese/Asian racism while diverting the reader’s attention away from white (Charter) racism. In its attempt to disavow and undermine the racial paradigm, the novel inadvertently reproduces the (white) American mainstream discourse of race. Similarly, it is the white mainstream (Charter) that benefits from the inter-ethnic transference of black prejudice in B-Mor’s postimmigration narrative. The dominant United States’ desire for racial containment – to mediate problematic race relations through the middlemen, the model minority, i.e., Asian American. In one way it is actualised through racial/ethnic mixing in the novel. Despite the narrators’ eventual casting off of their racial prejudice and the novel’s attempt at dissociation with racism, the novel ends up reinforcing the hegemonic narrative schema that potentially destabilises ethnic minority’s politics. Reg’s masculinity is tamed through Reg’s racialisation which is also gendered. His relationship to hegemonic masculinity differs from that of Liwei, even as both of their bodies are a somatic and cultural signifier which designates both the somatic

and the cultural symbolic collapsing of race and ethnicity. The description of Reg's body stands in contrast to the (self-)portrayal of Liwei's body, in which Liwei's "Asianness" is perceived as negative and disadvantageous, affecting somehow his non-bodily performances. Intellectual, linguistic, and also all of his former training, from language use to musical instruments and swimming, connects together bodily and intellectual practices. Nowhere in Liwei's examination of his body is the positive affirmation and tone that the narrators use to describe Reg albeit ethnic/racial coding. The double standard for the racialisation processes in the novel becomes obscured for the purpose of reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.

The descriptions of Reg's racialised body take on importance for the reader not because they deliver Reg as a real body but rather because of the epistemological challenge it poses. The reader is left suspended between interpretive possibilities about the ontological status of the referent, Reg, as a symbol of hope and rebellion (from B-Mor) or a symbol of both reinforcement and threat (from the Charter's point of view). Even as the novel itself, and therefore all of Fan's journey is mediated through the narrators' intervention, Reg's story is further arbitrated, enfolded as a part of Fan's story, accessed indirectly and referenced through Fan. Unlike Fan whose journey the narrators seem to witness and follow, Reg only indirectly appears through the narrators' retelling of his character and Fan's accounts, or through the narrators' and Fan's guesswork in their wondering about his whereabouts. As a result, Reg never fully appears in the novel as a bodily figure. In this way, the novel not only obscures but also transforms Reg into an item for symbolic inspection of masculinity. Reg's body vanishes, ceases to matter as it becomes a medium. At the centre of this mystification is Reg's erasure from the novel as an actual person. There are instances in which Reg cannot be "reproduced" properly, for either being too much (for Fan) or too less (for B-Mor's supporters/spectators) – so they were reduced, rendered manageable in her/their imagination, or idolised with added imagined quality. This is also an example of the mythicisation of Asian (American) masculinity, made palatable for the spectator's/audience's consumption. In a scene in which Fan tells the Girls about Reg, he is once more reproduced as an image:

This information unsettled them, with One almost unable to

comprehend the idea that he was not a story boy; she kept asking what happened to him next. Fan responded by asking Six to sketch him out.

[...] The Girls were instantly enamored of his cheery face, his puffy, imperfect Afro.

He is as cute as a play doll! one of the girls cried.

He is a play doll, but tall!

He looks so kind and sweet!

He *is* kind and sweet, Fan said, with enough pause in her voice that the Girls magnetically clustered about her, their warm breath slightly tangy from the dried fruits they constantly snacked on. (FS 224-25)

And Six cannot help but leave her painting of Reg unfinished:

Six did get them right, all the way down to Reg's spindly wrists, and the stubby nails of his long fingers, and the tender-fleshed pads at the base of his thumbs, so much so that Fan could almost feel a lifting to go along with the pangs. She was thankful that Six hadn't rendered the rest of him, the sensitive, gifted girl perhaps understanding that it would be too much for Fan if he loomed there fully on the wall. (FS 230)

Reg cannot be fully realised even as a painting in the novel; it seems like he cannot ever appear full, or real, in the novel in any form. He can only remain as an indirect, unfulfilled referent even within the already indirect narration of the narrators. It also seems as if Fan, even as she is looking for his *actual* being, is unable to face Reg's being, the novel denying Reg's reality/corporeality through her rejection. Reg is also caught in the epistemological problem of excess – while he is not present as a real form, when he has the chance to be accurately drawn, he is then too truthfully drawn, too real. More revealing instances of Reg's unreal/symbolic manifestation and allegorisation are the couple's portraits and graffiti appearing on the walls of B-Mor,

in which Lee if perhaps a bit unnecessarily explanatorily lays out the way in which the pair is made into a legend.

Now, from time to time, you'll see freshly painted portraits of Fan and Reg on a row house or fence, hastily done in the night and clearly by different hands, though the eyes of the pair are always rendered so as to look at you squarely, relentlessly, like Fan and Reg never would have in real life, for how shy they both were. Their eyes like beams. ... they keep popping up regularly enough such that you are almost guessing where one will appear next. And if one doesn't, maybe you begin to picture it yourself.

A legend can be made, it turns out, one crude stroke at a time.  
(*FS* 15)

What is significant about the passage or the making of the legend is the way in which Fan and Reg are painted as artworks of resistance, turned into symbolic figures that carry/deliver features different from their real characters, and therefore exemplify the impossibility of (re)producing the corporeality of Reg (and Fan). It highlights the nature of representation within the novel. Reg thus takes on a symbolic status, as representative of their resistance and desire for change. The narrators imagine Reg in the midst of their desires and expectations for change; "FREE REG" becomes a sign, slogan for B-Mor's call for resistance and social change appearing on the walls: "Maybe Reg could hear us, too, wherever he was. ... Maybe that inspired him to keep on, to endure" (*FS* 240; 241). Despite B-Mor's growing concerns for Reg's whereabouts and welfare – calls for official information, organised demonstrations, and "other Reg notations," revisions of the sign such as FREE ME, REG, I MISS REG, REG ♥ ME (and a popular eponymous song) – the narrators then admit that in all of these they were losing Reg (293; 294).

We end up losing Reg all the more. Hey, that's the point, some say, though it doesn't feel in the least convincing on that score. And although the majority of us are still fixed on Reg's happy images about the walls and streets, on the shapely simplicity of his name, on

the hope that he will return to us unchanged and whole, it seems some of us have already skipped a few beats forward with no wearing effects at all.

What stands beside is that there has been nothing of Reg. Nothing at all, if you don't count the wild rumors, which have him simultaneously manning a handscreen accessories kiosk in D-Troy, and gravely injured while attempting to escape from wherever the directorate was detaining him, and currently living among us after being cosmetically and mentally altered, which set off a brief period in which younger men of his build and height were regularly corralled by people absolutely sure it was he. (*FS* 294)

Evident again is only the uncertainty of Reg's whereabouts, and the unattainability of the discovery/recovery of Reg as a whole being. Reg lives only in his myths and rumours. Also worth noting is that Fan's act of resistance has added strength to perceived rebellious elements in Reg's disappearance, whereas he was involuntarily captured although imagined to be on the run. Reg, as a symbolic figure, is co-opted into the force of social transformation and activism that others are leading by the virtue of being a/the *man* – therefore he is not there but is being made.

Fan's journey may seem like just another version of Henry's search for Asian (American) masculinity/masculine role model, carrying too much resemblance to its predecessor. Neither of them comes to a conclusion nor offer a resolution. Liwei's failure and expulsion from the Charter too readily replicates Kwang's downfall. Mitt had been dead all along, and so might Reg be. Will Fan's/Lees search for masculinity ever end? Will she find Reg, alive? Although Fan is still carrying their baby and there might be resoluteness more subversive than Henry's false resignation in *Native Speaker* when she stands facing the sea in the end and states that perhaps it may be fine even if she doesn't find Reg, there is not much certainty about her future. If Fan is not a *real* symbol of hope (and one can always question the existence of *real* hope) and cannot guarantee her success, then at least the obvious symbolisation of Fan and other characters signals the constructedness and unattainability (despite the author's unrelenting gesture at it) of what they are after, be it an ideal Asian (American) masculinity/masculine subjectivity as my reading attempts to suggest, or racial

harmony, or the end of patriarchal hegemony. There already are hints of a failure of patriarchy in B-Mor; ill-treatment of an old man/uncle in a household, for example, is a sign that the family structure has become less hierarchical and less patriarchal. The significance of filial bond, or any blood, is weakened. The people of B-Mor, as well as the narrators, are strangely gender neutral and anonymous. It is left to those who interpret what to find in the sea Fan is facing, whether to see it as an open future or a dead end.

### **Liwei, the Model Minority Myth, and the Second(ary) Abjection**

The model minority is a quintessential myth in the U.S., reflecting also the ascendancy of East Asia on historically West-dominated international/global juncture from the perspective of the Western narrative. From this perspective, the East Asian model minority myth also operates on a broader scale, not just U.S. domestically but globally and internationally, as a global immigrant. In the previous chapter, Glenn, the model minority, functions as the returned abject that fulfils his role to enrich the group and disappears into his place of (in this case permanent) exile. Him as the new blood to the group as well as images of him bleeding, mixed with the show's use of the image of zombie blood unable to be distinguished with the Asian American man as the racial other, dominated the screen. The model and the minority are already contradictory and oxymoronic (Shimakawa 13; it is the perpetual outsider (within)). Yet, through the problems that arise throughout the injection of Liwei's blood into Charter Seneca, Lee emphasises that there cannot be a peaceful ingestion/absorption/incorporation of a human being, reminding us of the inevitability of the process of abjection. When we read the making/realisation of Liwei's myth as a process of abjection, in which his racial/ethnic origin is erased in order for him to become a Charter and also to enter a masculine domain, Liwei's abjection is that makes the preservation of the Charter's racial/ethnic purity is impossible – because the Charter is dependent on the outsiders' blood to sustain its identity. What makes a Charter a Charter, the blood of the outsider which is ironically closer to me than my own, in a sense that "their" drive for excellence outranks the Charter children's drive and capacity. Therefore, Liwei's realisation of the model minority myth through his promotion, his embodiment of the myth, poses a threat to the Charter's identity. As a model minority, he has overachieved and lost touch with his previous life, although

he was encouraged to, and praised and rewarded solely for it. At the centre of this mystification is Liwei's ascendance into the mythical figure that Fan seeks to find, as if to verify, and the threat that Liwei is posing as an abject. The novel proposes that Liwei's erasure from B-Mor as a real person is the final stop of this journey of transformation. Still, the novel also suggests that Liwei's place in the Charter also is *unreal*, and unstable. Although Liwei seems to have successfully assimilated into the Charter, parading his excellence as a doctor specialises in C-disease – the most Charter-like position, Liwei's presence in the Charter is also a disruption. Liwei is an example of the model minority's excess/overassimilation – he is *too white*. His claim to the Charter hegemony becomes more precarious especially when he begins to reclaim his “ethnic” origin by planning to recreate/replicate B-Mor for his family in Seneca. Liwei's new housing project is an example of his attempt to claim his race/ethnicity back. Liwei plans to build B-Mor style houses in Seneca to accommodate Fan, Reg and his other family in B-Mor, the racialisation of the Charter space. Yet, while Liwei tries to reclaim his race/ethnicity, *re-racialisation* after his *de-racialisation*, he conducts it in the characteristically Charter way – which suggests that reclamation, or *reparation* (cf. Eng), of his lost racial/ethnic identity is impossible. The novel's description shows that Liwei's previous house does not belong to, or live up to, the aesthetics of Seneca, and nor do his new houses. They seem out of place. The property embodies Liwei's inadequacy – he fails to fully qualify as a “property owning male” of the Charter, in contrast to the sleek residence of Vik.

The novel's representation also argues that Liwei's masculinity is inauthentic as well as incomplete. Liwei's masculinity is undermined by his comparison to and competition with Vik, his competitiveness itself presented as “unnatural” and “inauthentic,” *less valuable* than Vik's natural carefree charm. Liwei's own struggle to invent and establish himself in the Charter shows the performative character of his identity. As soon as his future seems to be secured, Liwei abandons his Charter name Oliver and claims his old name, indicating that his giving up of his racial/ethnic identity was an unwilling choice for survival. This points to a new discourse, a discourse of reparation of the previous misconceptions, as well as a registration of the changes in racial/ethnic hierarchies. Especially from the perspective of the West, racial/ethnic reparation, and the effort to make amends on its side are a part of the

hegemonic gesture of incorporation, as the just and benevolent rational, democratic, liberal, modern, progressive subject. However, this is not the case in *FS* as Liwei's desire for reparation is not supported by the Charter hegemony. Liwei/Oliver's breakthrough and change in his status within the Charter is precarious because it depends on Reg's value as a solution to C-illness and whether he can retrieve it/him. Liwei also accepts the Neo-eugenic idea of Reg's value as an alternative medicine to Charter medicine, like a bottle of exotic Chinese medicine. The racialising viewpoint to see the racial other as a means and an object rather than a human being is also clear in the descriptions of the biopolitical control of the B-Mor residents, which is highlighted when the pharmaceutical companies find out that Reg may be immune to C-illness. Reg is presented as something natural – authentic and “wondrous” if you like, while Liwei is eventually presented as a failed, inauthentic cure compared to the potentially “natural” cure that Reg may offer. The concept of the myth, as one can guess from the term itself, suggests that there is a suspicious, *inauthentic* character to Liwei's success, that is, the *immigrant* success. There is an expectation that immigrants are, against the “natural” native-born, “naturally” inferior, their disadvantageous position presumed from the starting point as “alien/foreign.” They “naturally” belong to the lower part of the social hierarchy, from which they are simultaneously expected to endeavour to climb up to the general betterment of themselves and the society which has so generously accepted them, but nevertheless to stay contained within the boundary to keep the hierarchy undisturbed. The discourses of in/authenticity of immigrant success and assimilation reveal anxieties about the arbitrariness of the concept of authenticity, and of nativism and essentialism in the construction of national identity and national borders. By extension, it reveals the weakness of the belief in the superiority of the West, as it tries to undermine the structural inequality and disadvantages imposed upon the non-native-borns. Even as Liwei successfully adapts into the Charter life, becomes a successful doctor and dreams of even more fortune than he'd previously owned, more Charter-like than a native Charter-born in his ambition, he ultimately faces removal from the Charter as he fails to find and secure Reg, a new, potential useful racial other for its continuation of hegemony, the one who will replace Liwei as an abject. Thus he faces a second(ary) abjection, the fate seemingly brought to him by his own choice but which in fact is also an inescapable one fostered by the structure



of hegemony, whilst possessing Reg, who is only a symbol, would be an impossible mission for him to achieve.

## **Coda: Imagining the Unimaginable - Hegemony and Alternative Futures**

What happens to America's masculine hegemony, when a father dies without leaving a white male heir and yet with no regrets? Is the future, as the saying goes, female? What is the colour of the nation, and more importantly, now we ask, does any of this matter in our present and future? What lies on the other side of the sea in our investigation for future gender and race relations?

The main chapters of the thesis, divided into parts I and II, examine the past and present landscape of relations within masculinity, and the future of hegemonic masculinity in the twenty-first century in which gender and racial fluidity have become an undeniable reality. Yet despite the changes that seem radical, these imaginations are still bound by and narratives still driven by white masculine hegemony as a default condition of the world. The coda finds the beginnings of the radical break with those conditions in Asian American and global literary and cultural products as an efficient gateway to such imaginations. While I have chosen to limit the scope of the investigation of the hegemonic and masculinist power mostly in Asian America, at the end of the thesis I would like to call for a globally expansive projection, one whose critical intervention and interrogation cannot be contained within a national project, for future investigation of hegemony. It will allow a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of our current world that are impossible to separate, as well as a more effective analysis and critique of our collective future. As such, while I have restricted my study mostly to the US, my limited scope does not intend to contain the argument and the theory of national abjection and reabjection to one geographical site. In the case of the United States, there is a large body of existing cultural and literary analyses of the nation's colonial and neocolonial roles that link Asian America to America. The thesis is organised not in order to privilege the American empire as the only site and example of racial hegemony but to highlight its geopolitical and thematic importance as the starting point and one example of the questioning and problematising of hegemony. The coda intends then to extend the thesis's investigation of hegemony to the other areas of the world as well as to the future.

For this, the thesis returns to *Snowpiercer*. The film, which shows a post-apocalyptic future that is similar to, but not limited to the U.S., provides an example of an Asian character who breaks from the Anglophone stereotype of the racialised hierarchy between masculinities and who also attempts to break the hierarchy itself. As a caution to the early hasty celebration of the more progressive present, the thesis reminds the reader to remember the continuous conservatism of the hegemonic masculinity at work in our popular literary and cultural imagination. In this coda, I link the U.S. present imperial mandate, the War on Terror, to its ambition and hope for its continuous role as the (white) saviour of the world. It is with the hope that the illumination of such links into what has been and what was in our history the thesis, with its critical tracing of the temporal, geographical, symbolic and material narrative ends of the empire reiterates the project of power and knowledge production, can gesture towards a broader interrogation of the genealogies that have produced our contemporary moment of neoliberal globalisation, imperial imperative, and enduring gendered and racialised regimes of domination. The thesis has worked to elaborate America's imperial ambitions of the past and presents by showing how literature and culture reproduce what was, has been and is, to look into the new imaginations for what would/could and eventually should be. The story of the breakage of not only circular, but also linear movements of power and history, Asian (American) literature and culture allow such imaginations to re/present racial and gender hegemony in its progressive form and articulate the death of the white empire. While the Asian American men in the main chapters are kept in the current structure of hegemony even as they claim their difference, and ultimately face a re-turn, the second(ary) abjection from their return, in *Snowpiercer* Namgoong Minsu presents a different, abject father who rebels against the white father as well as the structure of fathers, masculine hegemony itself. Minsu is a true founding father, maker of the train who has been relegated to the internal-external space of the train; he is the one who ends the circuit of the train as he is the beginning and the end of the circular and linear design and track that governed the old-world system.

Of the future we are looking towards, the thesis ends with a more positive outlook at the future and the present hinted and imagined more evidently in the latter part of the works that it discusses, which brings the coda back to *Snowpiercer* and *On Such a Full Sea*. The problem of the hegemonic framework and its inhabitants is

the inevitable need to stay within the destructive structure – and the inability to imagine a life outside of it. When Shimakawa persuasively proposes that Asian Americanness is a “national abject” within dominant U.S. culture that cannot be permanently excluded from it but cannot represent Americanness that contributes to exclusive and differentiating national/cultural identity formation (3), the contradiction addressed in Shimakawa’s conceptualisation still adheres to the idea that prefers assimilation and inclusion into the culture, rather than eradication of exclusive boundaries.<sup>77</sup> Both *Full Sea* and *Snowpiercer* show that complicity is a power that supports hegemony. Curtis’s revolt is a failure not just because of the complicity between Gilliam and Wilford, but also because of his inability to imagine a coherent alternative to the current dynamics of domination and oppression. Even if Curtis had succeeded, the endpoint of the revolt would be the same – Curtis’s takeover of *the* hegemony, his revolt, is a part of an unending, repetitive cycle like the movement of the train following its own tail. Instead of Curtis whose revolt against the train’s ruling class fails to overcome the structure of hegemony, Namgoong Minsu reveals his plan to blow an exit hatch to the outside world; he has seen signs of ice melting. While Wilford reminds Curtis of the grip of power, Namgoong Minsu attempts at a radical break from power, destruction, not redemption, of the system itself, therefore bringing a radical, heroic break to the circulating train and its repetitive chain of hegemony. The Korean engineer who had been locked after his work was done, i.e. (racially) abjected, and who was released to be used for the rebellion, shows that there can be a different way to rebel against hegemony other than *becoming*, and therefore continuing, the hegemony.

Minsu, who offers a radical alternative to Curtis’s revolution, is nonetheless addicted to a substance called Kronol, which reminds the audience of the recreative drug Soma in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* which is used to keep the population under control, and its repetitive continuation of time (chronos). Curtis buys Minsu’s help with the drug, just the same way Wilford controlled Minsu with it to work for him. Yet, Minsu’s need for the drug is not simply to satisfy his addiction as he has been pretending. He has other plans to use the drug – to end his ultimate dependence, from the cycle of the train. Minsu plans to use Kronol to make an

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<sup>77</sup> Asian(American)ness has been, and still to a large extent, is abject in the dominant U.S./Western cultural imagination. Yet, this relationship has changed – the repulsiveness of the abject, particularly emphasised by Kristeva, is alleviated, and negotiated.

explosion that will open the gate to the outside world from the train, making the system's weapon of control turn its head against itself. In other words, Minsu, the abject subject who has returned to the centre, plans for a radical break from the subject claiming his agency. Kronol's ambiguity is what makes Minsu different from others from the train who can only see it as the weapon of the system to manipulate people from the top down. Another example of Minsu's ambiguity and Bong's resistance to the typical Asian men in multinational films is his choice of language – he does not speak English for either the white male leader or the audience. Existing as a peculiar individual in the monotonous universe that everyone else communicates in a universal language, Minsu naturally stands in his own words without alienating himself. His “assistance” is not antagonistic but not submissive; he is not an anti-hero of the film and faces the same fate as the white male hero, but at the same time, it is Minsu who decides the fate of the great train and finalises the revolution to an unexpected end. *Snowpiercer* features two competing conceptions of revolution: the seizure or the destruction of the state. Throughout, the film explores this divergence through two characters, Curtis and Minsu, respectively. While Curtis takes a teleological orientation – moving from the back to the front of the train, toward the seizure of its engine – Namgoong Minsu, continues to plot against Curtis's revolt in order to escape from the train, eventually causing the destruction of the train and its hegemony. *Snowpiercer* can be considered as a sustained critique of capitalist realism – what Mark Fisher describes as the “widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it” (14). In its ultimate abandonment of Curtis's realism, *Snowpiercer* seeks ruptures from this rational expectation precisely in response to a crisis. While a meditation on the impossibility of a “coherent alternative,” as Fisher suggests, the film ultimately explodes from the containment of this opposition of the irrational and unrealistic in its final sequence. The abject that the hegemonic masculinity has brought back to its heart to rejuvenate and maintain its power, takes the control over in the end, suggesting a turn, not a return and re-turn, from (trans)national abject to an independent subject, reflecting the global changes in dynamics and perceptions of race and gender. His act of annihilation is the one that obliterates the existing system of hegemony and opens a door to a completely different world free from the past. In this sense, reopening of

the door of the train is not a reopening to the previous world, but an announcement of a new beginning that is made possible through the train's ending.

Despite the seeming ubiquity of old hegemony, some are able to imagine an exit from the system; one who imagines the world in which the train has stopped running; one who takes a step out of the safely controlled boundaries; one who fights for something other than hegemonic power. In other words, it allows the reader/audience to imagine the world that introduces a different structure of living, different relations among the population and nations. While other competitors compete for the power at the linear end of the line, some imagine not the "end" of the line but the world that looks completely different. In a sense, this is a world that hegemony does not exist, where differences exist on one line that truly lists its contents according to categories and not ranks. Drawing from Elias Canetti's (1973) take on power, Andrea Mubi Brighenti attempts to propose resistance as a transformative act: Resistance is "the movement towards the outside ... not part of a struggle for power, it is part of a movement of liberation from power. It implies the search for a way out: a movement of liberation from the grasp of the hand in all its different versions" (71-2). In *Full Sea*, Fan, the 16-year-old heroine, is continuously leaving – first B-Mor, and the counties, and even the Charter, which is arguably the closest to a utopia that is possible under the current circumstances. Such choices threaten not only the ruling classes but also the order and the future of the entire society. Fan's departure shocks and disrupts the peace of the model minority community leading to questions about the validity and sustainability of their current structure of life. Her departure eventually begins B-Mor's challenges against the Charter's hegemony, although her search for her missing boyfriend Reg is still unsuccessful at the end of the novel. Minsu's bomb derails the train and kills most of the passengers, including himself and Curtis, leaving only his daughter Yona, and little Timmy at the end of the film. Yet, disappearing with, not in service of, the current hegemony, Minsu's exit is different from the return of the Asian (American) men in the previous chapters as it ultimately rejects and destroys the hegemony; nor does it provide a nominal alternative that contributes to the reinforcement of the current hegemony despite its ambiguity. The texts instead invite the reader/audience to imagine the future that may be currently unimaginable. These radical exits address

the immanent current political question in the present day about the possibility of a radical alternative to the current capitalist, neoliberal regimes. They suggest that an active refusal of participation can be a form of resistance, transgression of different boundaries. Both endings are optimistic in their capacity: in *Full Sea* Fan's departure starts voices of dissent in B-Mor, and the narrators gradually become supportive of Fan's journey. In *Snowpiercer* Yona and Timmy emerge from the wreckage and see a polar bear in the distance, proof that life exists outside the train. With only two children, also children of the marginalised racial minorities (Inuit-Korean, African (American)) surviving, humanity breaks away from patriarchal, capitalistic hierarchy and repetition of history. As I already discussed in terms of imagining the end of capitalism, 'Post-Occupy' dystopian films look for alternative futures. *Snowpiercer* exemplifies the efforts to propose a future that is dissociated from the toxic structure of the past. There is not a place for either the word "hegemony" or "masculinity" in the description of this future that *Snowpiercer* imagines. The exits from, and derailing of, the linear, singular line of history opens up a way towards a new beginning. Predictable tracks are stopped, and we are invited to look at the future from an unknown and unpredictable point of departure.

In the final scene of *Full Sea*, Fan sets out to the open (such a full) "sea." Even though the space cannot be imagined with a concrete bodily presence yet, what is across the sea is left to our imagination. The novel's ending leaves the reader with questions about the untold future. Will she find Reg? Could there be a utopic third space? In other words, can there be a world in which the current form of hegemony loses its status? It is the foreword to *On Such a Full Sea*, taken from *Julius Caesar*, that responds to those questions. In this sense, I consider it more of a postscript. In any case, it indeed makes Lee's dystopic vision quite utopic. It is significant that Fan is a diver, not a "natural-born" but a trained diver; she thrives in water. And Yona is a daughter of an Inuit rebel, the leader of the Frozen Seven's revolution who bravely stepped out of the train when others could not see life outside of it. Departing from their fathers taking the future of the world into their hands, the children are neither white nor male. The ranked social structure that has been characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, divided communities and train sections, as well as top-bottom, linear systems of domination disappear in the open sea or the world outside of the train track they look towards to, indicating the future that the texts and the examinations

of such cultural products allow us to imagine and look forward to. Hence, from Shakespeare:

*We, at the height, are ready to decline.  
There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
**On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves  
Or lose our ventures.***

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* IV.ii.269-276



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