

Navigating the Grey Zone: East Asian South African Selves in Three Auto/Biographical Texts

by
Daniella Nasya Neville



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Supervisor: Prof. Tina Steiner

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Declaration

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Abstract

The East Asian presence in South Africa finds its root in the 17th century, but only gained academic attention in the late 20th century. As such, literary texts written by East Asian South African selves remain for the most part invisibilised within the field of literature in South Africa. This reflects the nebulous position historically occupied by East Asian South Africans within socio-political conceptualisations of South African belonging. In response to this, the following study undertakes an analysis of the narrative self-positioning in three East Asian South African auto/biographies. These texts, namely Darryl Accone's *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004), Ufrieda Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing Up Chinese in South Africa* (2011) and Ming-Cheau Lin's *Yellow and Confused: Born in Taiwan, raised in South Africa, and making sense of it all* (2019), function as literary navigations of the manifold ascribed and asserted identities of the autobiographical selves. Together, they reconstruct individual and familial histories, tracing migratory trajectories and their resulting entanglements, staking varying claims to rootedness in the post-apartheid moment. This study aims to not only position the literary output of East Asian South African selves within the broader historiography and literary archive of South Africa, but also to unravel the complexities of diasporic identities within multiple spaces of (un)belonging and thus chronicle the narrative construction of novel formulations of self within the three selected auto/biographies.

Opsomming

Die Oos-Asiatiese bevolking is reeds vanaf die 17de eeu in Suid-Afrika teenwoordig, maar is eers vanaf die laat 20ste eeu akademies bestudeer. As gevolg hiervan is literêre tekste wat deur Oos-Asiatiese Suid-Afrikaners geskryf is hoofsaaklik onsigbaar op die gebied van Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur. Dit weerspeel die onduidelike historiese posisie van die Oos-Asiatiese Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking, binne die sosio-politiese raamwerk van Suid-Afrikaans wees. In antwoord hierop onderneem hierdie studie die analise van die narratiewe self-positionering in drie Oos-Asiatiese Suid-Afrikaanse outo/biografiese werke. Hierdie tekste, namens Darryl Accone se *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004), Ufrieda Ho se *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing Up Chinese in South Africa* (2011) en Ming-Cheau Lin se *Yellow and Confused: Born in Taiwan, raised in South Africa, and making sense of it all* (2019), funksioneer as literêre navigators van die menigvuldige toegeskrewe en beweerde identiteite van die outobiografiese outeurs. Saam rekonstrueer hulle individuele en familiale geskiedenis wat migrasietrajekte naspoor en die gevolglike verwikkelings wat die uiteenlopende aansprake op geworteldheid in die post-apartheid werklikheid maak, op die spel plaas. Hierdie studie onderneem nie net om die literêre uitsette van die Oos-Asiatiese Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking binne die breër geskiedenis en literêre argief van Suid-Afrika te positioneer nie, maar ontrafel ook die kompleksiteite van diasporiese identiteite binne veelvoudige ruimtes waar hulle behoort/nie behoort nie en gee daarom die narratiewe konstruksie weer van innoverende formulerings van die persoon binne die drie gekose outo/biografiese werke.

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Introduction

This study endeavours to explore the literary self-positioning of East Asian selves within the South African context. The ongoing “tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” (@antonioguterres) since the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020 lends particular relevance to this endeavour. The subsequent global resurgence of anti-Asian sentiment has impacted East Asian immigrant communities in the form of both racist rhetoric and racially-motivated attacks (“Covid-19 Fueling”). Notably, the rise of sinophobic attitudes have raised concerns about the physical and mental health of impacted individuals (Gee et al. 954). From the verbal harassment of a New York City commuter with “You’re infected China boy, you need to get off the train” (Parnell & Parascandola) and the targeting of international students in Melbourne (Sakkal), to the attempted stabbing of members of an Asian-American family in Texas (Ramirez), East Asian communities have felt the brunt of this “second epidemic” of anti-Asian hate crimes (Gover et al. 648). This is excluding a host of racist attacks over social media, as the effects of COVID-19 have seen a rise in anti-Asian sentiment on popular platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Li & Galea 956). South Africa has not been immune to the onslaught. In the Western Cape, a Chinese-owned shop is reported to have been scorched (Tamkei), while a guest researcher at the University of Venda was harassed with chants of “Corona! Chinese!” (Dzaga). Anti-Asian sentiment in South Africa is by no means a new phenomenon, in that East Asian selves have been historically classified as “the ‘yellow peril’, the ‘*geel gevaar*’, and now the ‘Coronavirus bearer’” (Ho, “Now is not the time”). The following study is situated within this global climate, amid the rise of xenophobic and sinophobic attitudes abroad and in South Africa.

This thesis examines three auto/biographical texts written in the post-apartheid moment by East Asian South Africans. Darryl Accone’s *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004) is the first text to be discussed. This auto/biographical text, set in both pre-apartheid and apartheid South Africa, privileges transoceanic movements between sites of complicated rootedness. Ufrieda Ho’s *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing Up Chinese in South Africa* (2011) is primarily set in the apartheid era. As such, a central facet of Ho’s text is the navigation of the apartheid city by East Asian immigrant selves, most notably the father of the autobiographical self, and the implications of these traversals. The final text is Ming-Cheau Lin’s *Yellow and Confused: Born in Taiwan, raised in South Africa, and making sense of it all*

(2019), a deeply personal text that chronicles the experiences of the autobiographical self in post-apartheid South Africa. These texts involve a narrative exploration of the complex position held by East Asian selves in contemporary conceptualisations of nationhood, accomplished through the narrative foregrounding of the lived experiences of such individuals. The aim of this study is threefold: to draw attention to an often-overlooked body of work, to position these texts within the field of diaspora studies within South Africa and within the South African literary archive, and to position these texts as literary assertions of a plurality of identity, a both/and position of a multiplicity of ascribed and experienced (un)belongings. As auto/biographies, the three selected texts are intrinsically involved in the project of narrativising the experiences and identities of diasporic selves.

As narratives of arrivals, acclimatisations and assertions of (un)belonging, these auto/biographies trace specific familial histories of East Asian immigrant selves in South Africa. The following approach to auto/biographies is particularly salient for this thesis:

All autobiographies or 'life stories' are or contain family portraits and community stories; they exhibit the socially embedded nature of the author's life. Family, friends, enemies and officials feature alongside the author. Individual lives and events are shown to be profoundly affected by, and often parallel to, national histories. The autobiography is never only the author's story. (Gagiano 261)

I employ the term 'auto/biography' because the texts do not merely narrate the experiences of the autobiographical self, but also incorporate the stories of grandparents, parents, siblings and friends, weaving these narratives together to position the autobiographical self in relation to the South African context. As Annie Gagiano tentatively posits: "South African autobiographers may be especially preoccupied with their 'South Africanness' because an inclusive national identity and citizenship were usurped for so long by – or at least, in the name of – an oppressive minority" (Gagiano 261). This auto/biographical drive towards the South African self-(re)presentation of a marginalised minority group allows for an understanding of the three selected texts as both insertions into South African historiography and assertions of South Africanness. In the context of black South African auto/biographical writing, Jane Watts argues that "[w]riting becomes a request for reassurance that they in fact *have* an identity, that they have rescued the fragments and shards of a personality from the systematic official attempt to eradicate it" (Watts 115). While the selected texts were written in the post-apartheid context

by individuals who enjoyed relative privilege under the National Party government, it is the interplay between diasporic experiences of displacement and the official displacement of East Asian selves within the pervasive apartheid-era structures of racial classification that forge this need to (re)construct a South African identity in the post-apartheid moment, to insert East Asian selves into the narrative of contemporary South Africa. In this way, this thesis enters into conversation with and necessarily expands upon May Joseph's ubiquitous question: "How do immigrants, migrants, and nomads imagine, perform, and invent themselves anew or insert themselves into the unfamiliar politics of place and arrival?" (Joseph 12). How do diasporic selves narratively insert themselves into an unwelcoming hostland? How do they textually perform a belonging within this space?

Rooting Routedness: Theoretical Foundations

The auto/biographical texts discussed in this thesis become narrative performances of complicated rootedness and various lived experiences of routedness. Locating the three selected texts within the field of South African diaspora studies necessarily involves an initial discussion on the symbiosis of roots and routes, a useful tool for the study of the movements and entanglements in the texts. Roots have long held metaphorical significance in the Western world, solidifying the nationalistic attachment of identity to place (Gustafson 670, Malkki 26). Following this metaphorical tradition, roots involve "intimate linkages between people and place" (Malkki 24), referring to "the local anchorage of peoples and cultures" (Gustafson 670). It has, however, since been expanded to include "notions of local community, shared culture, and so forth" (Gustafson 670). Central to this chapter is Dick Hebdige's assertion that "roots themselves are in a state of constant flux and change" (Hebdige xi). In these texts, both the country of origin and South Africa are not portrayed as static sites of belonging. Instead, the texts foreground the changing socio-political landscapes of both sites of rootedness and the changing diplomatic relationship between these sites.

The selected texts involve movements and interactions between East Asia and South Africa, between two sites of rootedness, and are characterised by the routedness of their figures. A routed identity is developed through an "experience of leaving roots" (Friedman 154) and is forged in these interstices between roots, moulded by experiences in each site of rootedness. Furthermore, routes, instead of merely referring to unilateral movements between roots, point towards the "mobility [of individuals], their movements, encounters, exchanges, and mixtures"

(Gustafson 670). It is thus in these routes that a hybrid space is formed, a space which echoes Edward Said's "new alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences" (Said, *Culture* xxiv-xxv). In this way, routes are not the antitheses of roots, and vice versa. Rather, sites of rootedness require movement to other sites in order to become clearly defined. Similarly, routes require roots, anchorage in a specific community or culture, in order to become spaces of movement. It is this interplay between roots and routes, in which each is necessary for the experience of the other, that is central to the formation and negotiation of identity. According to Susan Stanford Friedman,

[i]dentity often requires some form of displacement – literal or figurative – to come to consciousness. Leaving home brings into being the idea of 'home', the perception of its identity as distinct from elsewhere. (Friedman 151)

The analysis of the three selected texts takes shape against this background of the interaction between roots and routes, their reliance on one another in processes of identity construction.

Friedman further posits that "[r]oots, routes, and intercultural encounter depend upon narrative for embodiment" (Friedman 151). It is here that the significance of narrative to this root/route symbiosis becomes apparent – it is through the narratives told, whether spoken, written or other, that these roots, routes and the interplay between them gather significance for idiosyncratic and communal selves. To the literary scholar, the interest of diasporic texts "lies in the ways in which the different stories of dislocation and relocation are narrativised in the individual and group memory and how a diasporic personhood and cultural identity are shaped between worlds and across frontiers" (Jacobs 25). The experiences of routedness narrated in diasporic texts and the narrative handling of sites of rootedness thus become worthwhile areas of study. The three selected texts all presuppose voyages across the Indian Ocean, positioning it as the body of water separating two sites of rootedness in which experiences of routedness first arise. The Indian Ocean traversals of the first-generation immigrants in *All Under Heaven* and *Paper Sons and Daughters*, most notably in the former, function as foundational moments for the autobiographical self, even though these traversals occurred in another generation. The Indian Ocean is not narratively foregrounded in *Yellow and Confused*, yet the implications of Indian Ocean crossings and the more figurative traversals between the two sites of rootedness are central to the text. The Indian Ocean thus functions as a framing device in these texts, a space that speaks to the interchanges between sites of rootedness that itself becomes a site of

change and exchange, where identity is forged and (re)negotiated. It is, therefore, worthwhile to examine the narrative handling of roots and routes in the selected texts, particularly with regards to the positioning of selves within the crisscrossing networks of the Indian Ocean and the implications of these networks.

An interest in the Indian Ocean world, as a distinct space in which a multitude of traders, languages, cultures, religions and empires have interacted, has arisen in academia as a result of an expanding anglophone historical archive (Hofmeyr, “The Black Atlantic” 6). This oceanic space became a meeting point between Western, predominantly European, cultures and identities and the heterogenous, centuries-old net of relations and trade in the Indian Ocean (Hofmeyr, “The Black Atlantic” 6). Unlike the emphasis on “north-south modes of transnationalism” within Gilroy’s black Atlantic paradigm (Hofmeyr, “The Black Atlantic” 3), which entrenches the seemingly dichotomous relationship between the Global North and the Global South, studies into the Indian Ocean world also emphasise the “transnationalism within the south itself” (Hofmeyr, “The Black Atlantic” 3). As Isabel Hofmeyr notes, “[a]t every turn the Indian Ocean complicates binaries, moving us away from the simplicities of the resistant local and the dominating global and toward a historically deep archive of competing universalisms” (Hofmeyr, “Universalizing” 722). This “skein of networks” (Ho, “Empire” 216) in the Indian Ocean world is thus a rich space in which a complex history of interactions, characterised by countless cross-cultural exchanges and transoceanic crossings, becomes apparent.

By narratively situating South Africa within the Indian Ocean paradigm, multiple connections and confluences can be observed. As Meg Samuelson succinctly remarks:

In this present, casting one’s gaze back across the ocean raises pertinent questions about home, belonging, and Africanness that help to move us beyond the bankrupt policies of autochthony and gesture towards ways of imagining the nation anew: no longer in terms of the ‘closed doors’ that the metaphor of the national home encapsulates, but rather as a ship coming to port in a diverse range of harbours bordering the fluid territory of the Indian Ocean world. (Samuelson, “Making Home” 298-299)

The sea becomes a “connective tissue” (Samuelson, “Sea Changes” 16), connecting South Africa to the history of movement and forced or voluntary relocation along the coasts of Africa,

across the Indian Ocean. As such, South Africa can “[n]o longer [be] conceptualized as a state of exception and a land apart, nor simply as an extension of the Atlantic economy” (Samuelson, “Sea Changes” 12). Due to the fact that “[t]he sea looms large in narrative negotiations of this new [post-apartheid] state” (Samuelson, “Sea Changes” 12), literary conceptualisations of South Africa that draw on the routes of the Indian Ocean world and position the state within this paradigm are worth noting. Significantly, the literary texts that retrace or remember these Indian Ocean routes are in the process of “[c]onjugating local and global” (Samuelson, “Sea Changes” 16), thus positioning the South African socio-political moment in relation to larger, global interactions and (ex)changes in the Indian Ocean world. In this way, the isolation of South Africa during apartheid is undermined by repositioning South Africa within a larger sphere of transoceanic travel and entanglements, not simply within routes from Europe to Africa, but also within the crisscrossing routes of the Indian Ocean. This, in turn, creates space for an analysis of the narrative self-positioning of South African diasporic identities against the backdrop of Indian Ocean routedness.

The East Asian Diaspora in South Africa

The existence of diasporic communities in South Africa is not a new phenomenon. Due to the centuries of diasporic movement to and within the Southern African region, a broad understanding of the term ‘diaspora’ in the South African context involves a medley of migratory movements, including exile, in- and out-migration, remigration, asylum seeking and internal displacement. Roy Sommer understands contemporary delineations of ‘diaspora’ as follows:

the term has been applied to all expatriate groups who chose, or were forced, to leave their native countries for a variety of reasons including indentured labour and the slave trade. In their new countries, these diasporic subjects form ethnic or cultural minorities while still retaining strong affiliations with their – and more often, their ancestors’ – homelands. (Sommer 159)

Even though the three selected texts are less concerned with the act of leaving home than with the home-making processes of diasporic selves, the interaction between the homeland and the hostland in the experiences and psyche of the diasporic self is particularly significant. Ien Ang

asserts that, for diasporic selves, “notions of identity and belonging are radically unsettled” (Ang 233). In this way, the question of “[w]here is home?” (Sarup 94) and those questions that accompany it, those that delve into the realms of genealogical origins, subjective experiences and national belongings, are particularly notable in the literary production of diasporic selves. If the diasporic subject is understood as the most recognisable figure in contemporary South African literature (Jacobs 1), then the histories of the relocations, movements and entanglements of East Asian South African selves becomes a necessary starting point for this thesis.

An exploration of the East Asian diasporic subject in southern Africa necessarily first involves an unravelling of what is meant by the term ‘East Asia’ and in which context this term gains salience. ‘East Asia’ refers to the states of Japan, the People’s Republic of China (China), Hong Kong, Macau, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Mongolia and the Republic of China (Taiwan). While a number of these states are contested territories, they nevertheless fall under the broad category of ‘East Asia’. This thesis will, however, focus on the Taiwanese and Chinese communities in South Africa, as these are the two nationalities represented by the selected texts. This study makes use of the terms ‘East Asian’, ‘Taiwanese’ and ‘Chinese’. When referred to collectively, the term ‘East Asian’ is used as, even though the Taiwanese and Chinese diasporic groups are both predominantly ethnically Han Chinese, the histories of these groups both in the country of origin and within the South African context differ significantly. Furthermore, I use ‘East Asian South African’ instead of ‘Asian South African’ as the latter term is “largely and locally defined as Indian” (Lin, “Has the rainbow nation”). Indian presence in southern Africa can be traced to the arrival of indentured labourers from India in 1860 (Vahed & Desai 1), a history of arrival which is notably distinct from that of East Asian, predominantly Chinese, selves. Because of this, as well as the different literary trajectory of Indian South African selves, this thesis restricts itself to the descriptor ‘East Asian’.

Before East Asian diasporic movements to and within South Africa are discussed, a brief exposition on the notion of ‘overseas Chinese’ is worthwhile. This term is used to refer to individuals who reside in a space other than the Chinese mainland, Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Poston & Wong 349). The conceptualisation of overseas Chinese asserts a unity,

foregrounding the belief in the Yellow Emperor¹ as “the progenitor of all who recognize themselves as Chinese in race, culture, language and lore regardless of local variations and passports” (McCormack 144). This nullifies national belongings and classifications, asserting a common identity on the basis of Chineseness and ancestry. According to David Yen-ho Wu, however, “[t]he Chinese people and Chinese culture have been constantly amalgamating, restructuring, reinventing, and reinterpreting themselves” (Wu 162). This constant reassigning of meaning to Chineseness means that “China, or Chinese culture, has never been a static structure but a dynamic, constantly changing landscape” (Tu 4), thereby undermining notions of a unified Chinese identity. This is supported by Ang’s assertion that

[b]eing Chinese ... varies from place to place, moulded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living. There are, in this paradigm, many different Chinese identities, not one. (Ang 225)

The significance of this paradigm lies in its unsettling of the very conceptual construct of ‘China’ as “an immensely complex yet ontologically stable object of study” (Ang 224). Instead, the national conceptualisation of China is placed in relation to its diverse diasporic network; a process is invoked by which the centre is de-centred and essentialist notions of Chineseness are unsettled (Ang 225, 228). The notion of a unified overseas Chinese identity thus ultimately fractures under the weight of diasporic transformations. However, it remains a useful epistemological consideration due to its historical salience in Chinese South African conceptualisations of self, as will be discussed in a later paragraph. Furthermore, this notion of overseas Chinese individuals as occupying unique forms of Chineseness and the inherent diversity within the signifier ‘Chinese’ are significant points of departure when discussing the Chinese diasporic communities in South Africa.

¹ The mytho-historical figure of the Yellow Emperor, also referred to as Huangdi, is central to the notion of an “ancient consanguinity” among the diverse population of China (Leibold 192). The Yellow Emperor is regarded as the “single, ancient founding father” of China (Leibold 193). This myth of descent formed part of the narrative of Chinese racial unity that was developed in the early 20th century. Shao Yuanchong, a prominent Chinese political figure during this period, emphasised the belief that “if ... the various peoples of China understood their direct racial and historical relationship with the Yellow Emperor, they would naturally unite into a single, indivisible body politic” (Leibold 192).

The Chinese community forms the largest East Asian population in South Africa but is itself not a unified entity. It comprises a wide spectrum of individuals, some of whom have ancestors who arrived in South Africa as early as the 1870s to work in the Johannesburg gold mines, while others arrived in South Africa within the last decade (Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations” 154).² It must be noted that there are two distinct national Chinese communities in South Africa, namely the local or South African-born Chinese (SABCs) and the more recent immigrants from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The diversity within and between these groups corroborate Accone’s assertion that “[g]iven the vast heterogeneity of China – race, ethnicity, language and culture being areas of ceaseless contestation – it is extremely difficult to define the Chinese Self” (Accone, “Ghost people” 257). South Africa’s local Chinese population is rooted in the phase of Chinese migration to South Africa that primarily spanned the 1870s to the 1940s. During this time, Cantonese-speaking Chinese individuals, hailing from a southern province of China now known as Guangdong, arrived in South Africa as free immigrants, drawn by rumours of gold and wealth-creation (Accone & Harris 190; Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 203). Despite a generational rootedness in South Africa, South Africa’s local Chinese community maintains a strong Chinese South African identity, in part constructed as a response to the oppressions of the apartheid-era (Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations” 157). As Darryl Accone and Karen L. Harris describe it, “[h]ome is here, at the tip of Africa, but also across the sea, as it was for their immigrant ancestors” (Accone & Harris 203).

The next wave of Chinese immigration involves a steady and diverse stream of legal and illegal immigrants from the PRC, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing until today (Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations” 155). This is primarily a result of South Africa’s decision to favour diplomatic relations with the PRC during this period. A relatively large and recent

² While Chinese presence in South Africa dates back to the 17th century, this presence was minimal and most individuals either repatriated or were incorporated into South Africa’s steadily growing mixed race population (Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations” 154). For a more detailed account of the history of Chinese selves in South Africa, I recommend Darryl Accone and Karen L. Harris’ article “A Century of Not Belonging – the Chinese in South Africa”, published in *At Home in the Chinese Diaspora: Memories, Identities and Belongings* (2008), edited by Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng and Andrew P. Davidson. Further significant texts in this regard are: Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man’s *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (1996), Yoon Jung Park’s articles entitled “Sojourners to Settlers: Early Constructions of Chinese Identity in South Africa, 1879–1949” (2006) and “Recent Chinese Migrations to South Africa: New Intersections of Race, Class and Ethnicity” (2009), and Accone’s “‘Ghost people’: Localising the Chinese self in an African context” (2006). A useful text regarding the othering of East Asian selves in colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa is Harris’ “The Construction of ‘Otherness’: A History of the Chinese Migrants in South Africa” (2018).

immigration phenomenon involves the arrival of Chinese individuals from the province of Fujian – these individuals speak very little English, often remain an isolated community and retain a sojourner mentality (Park, “Recent Chinese Migrations” 158). Accone draws attention to the lack of inter-community connections between these two groups of Chinese selves, noting that language is a significant barrier in this regard (Accone, “Ghost people” 267). The newer immigrants speak primarily Mandarin, described by Accone as “the language of the north, of Beijing and government and stifling regulations on the maverick south” (Accone, “Ghost people” 267).³ In comparison, the South African-born Chinese population traditionally speak Cantonese (Accone, “Ghost people” 267). A further divisive factor between these two groups is the role that newer immigrants from China have played in forging the perception of Chinese identities in South Africa – illicit activities by Chinese immigrants from the PRC have been widely covered in South African media (Accone, “Ghost people” 267), which has in turn influenced South African attitudes towards Chinese selves in general. Harris notes that

[i]n South Africa, regardless of the fact that each wave of Chinese that arrived on its shores came from different regions and arrived in different contexts and for different reasons, a general obliviousness and lack of knowledge about the Chinese and their past by sections of the South African public at large, has led to the inculcation of a perceived monolith and reprehensible stereotyping evident in ... recent social media attacks. (Harris, “Untangling Centuries” 267)

This is a notion central to this thesis. Despite the heterogeneity of South Africa’s Chinese population, these communities are united by the marginalising discriminative attitudes and official structures of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa (Accone, “Ghost people” 257).

While I cannot hope to accurately portray the extensive and confusing web of legislation regarding the Chinese in South Africa, it is necessary to discuss the manner in which East Asian South African identities echo Madan Sarup’s assertion that “identities are not free-floating,

³ For a more detailed account of the linguistic particularities and strategies of South Africa’s more recent Chinese diaspora, I would recommend Ana Deumert and Nkululeko Mabandla’s socio-linguistic studies of Chinese shop owners in rural South Africa, namely “‘Every day a new shop pops up’ – South Africa’s ‘New’ Chinese Diaspora and the Multilingual Transformation of Rural Towns” (2013) and “Globalization Off the Beaten Track – Chinese Migration to South Africa’s Rural Towns” (2016). Notable is the assertion that these individuals display a “deep embeddedness in the local context, an embeddedness which is a linguistic and economic survival strategy in frontier contexts” (Deumert & Mabandla, “Every day” 51).

they are limited by borders and boundaries” (Sarup 95). Legislative forms of discrimination have constrained East Asian identities in South Africa since the late 19th century (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 21), which thus “circumscribed the identity choices available to early immigrant Chinese” (Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 202). This pre-apartheid circumscription of identity was exacerbated during apartheid, during which time Chinese selves were generally classified as Coloured (Park, “White, Honorary White” 123). However, the apartheid paradigm could not easily situate this population group within their system of racial classification. As Yoon Jung Park succinctly expresses:

According to the Department of Community Development, Chinese were classified as Asian. The Group Areas Act states that Chinese fell under the general heading of colored. Proclamation 73 of 1951 classified the Chinese as a separate group. (Park, “White, Honorary White” 124)

The inconsistencies of apartheid-era legislation were thus highlighted. However, the implementation of this confusing and sometimes conflicting legislation resulted in a reinforcement of the in-between, uncertain position of East Asian selves in South Africa. For example, Chinese selves were legally disadvantaged yet were an increasingly accepted presence in so-called white areas (Park, “White, Honorary White” 126). Significantly, while the relative privileges afforded to Chinese South Africans, in the form of concessions and permits, made day-to-day life easier, Chinese selves remained devoid of any legal rights until apartheid came to an end (Park, “White, Honorary White” 127). In this way, and despite the ultimate fallibility of the myth of the great, unified China, the sense of belonging to a fixed, superior homeland and ethnic group functioned as a mechanism of identity self-defence, a way of asserting an identity and belonging in the face of a system that unhomed and othered Chinese selves (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 71). This enabled Chinese South Africans to “survive apartheid with their heads held high” (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 7). It must, however, be noted that East Asian selves continue to feel unhomed within the racial policies of post-apartheid South Africa, a notion further expounded upon in the following chapters.⁴

⁴ The position of East Asian selves in post-apartheid South Africa’s policies of affirmative action is particularly telling. For further information in this regard, I would recommend Harris’ article entitled “BEE-ing Chinese in South Africa: a legal historic perspective” (2017).

Apart from Chinese selves, two other prominent East Asian national groupings in South Africa during apartheid were individuals from Japan and Taiwan. As both these groupings experienced relative privilege during apartheid, embodied by their status as ‘honourary white’, they complicated the categorisation of East Asian selves within the apartheid paradigm and, in turn, further emphasised the inconsistencies of apartheid legislation. As Park notes,

[t]he very essence of apartheid was challenged and ultimately compromised when economic benefits of continued trade relations with Japan necessitated the exemption of Japanese from certain aspects of apartheid legislation. Similar government decisions, taken later, with regard to Taiwan, again battered at the heart of apartheid's rationale. (Park, “White, Honorary White” 131)

For the sake of this study, the history of Taiwanese selves in apartheid South Africa must be discussed. The Taiwanese community in South Africa is smaller than the Chinese community and is relatively confined to individuals who were incentivised by the National Party government to move to South Africa with the aim of growing and developing the manufacturing industry. As Lin explains it, “Taiwan, where my family came from, was not recognised as a country by the UN and so, in order to improve its economy, it relied on building trade relations with other countries that were isolated from the international community – like South Africa” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 17). Furthermore, these immigrants formed part of the National Party government’s “larger plan to staunch the flow of black Africans from the ‘homelands’ into urban areas” (Park, “Recent Chinese Migration” 154). The Taiwanese community in South Africa are rooted in this migratory movement, beginning in the late 1970s and coming to an end in the 1990s, when the “cordiality between the Pretoria and Taipei governments” came to an end (Accone, “Ghost people” 264). South Africa’s diplomatic relations with Taiwan were broken off in 1997 in favour of relations with the PRC (Accone, “Ghost people” 260).

Despite the differing histories and origins of South Africa’s East Asian communities, these groups share the experience of historically occupying a grey zone of liminal belonging within the South African context. The term ‘grey zone’ exists in relation to the position of East Asian selves within racially polarised South Africa as “too white to be black, but too black to be white” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 112). As Accone and Harris state, “[t]he Chinese were and are ghost citizens inhabiting a grey zone; damned in the past to be classified non-white and seemingly

fated in the future to be regarded as not previously disadvantaged” (Accone & Harris 203). Joseph posits that “[t]he citizen and its vehicle, citizenship, are unstable sites that mutually interact to forge local, often changing (even transitory) notions of who the citizen is, and the kinds of citizenship possible at a given historical-political moment” (Joseph 3). Given the historically unstable notions of South African citizenship, primarily associated with racial classification and ethnic origin, yet changing in accordance with the socio-political moment, the position of East Asian selves in the South African context is one of “always inhabiting a liminal space between acceptance and rejection, privilege and discrimination” (Accone & Harris 203). Park corroborates this by noting that South African Chinese “have long occupied a nebulous, in-between position in South Africa – sometimes squeezed between coloured, Indian and white, more often excluded, forgotten or dismissed as insignificant” (Park, “Black, yellow” 119). This thesis seeks to explore the narrative navigation of this liminal position in South African constructions of national belonging, the negotiation of the grey zone by idiosyncratic and communal selves in the selected texts.

Locating East Asian South African Selves

East Asian South African communities and their literatures are glaringly underrepresented in studies on South African diasporic groups and the literary texts produced by such groups. This can be seen in *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction* (2016), for example, in which Johan U. Jacobs provides a thorough overview of the complex manifestations and traditions of diasporic (re)presentation in South African literary texts. The discussed diasporic identities include that of colonial diasporic selves predominantly of English, German and Dutch origins, Afrikaner identity, ‘coloured’ South African identity, black South African identity, English South African identity, Indian South African identity, diasporic African identity and the identities of the South African diaspora abroad. *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction* is a robust text, displaying an intricate understanding of the complexity of diaspora, migratory movement and exile. It is the omission of East Asian diasporic communities in this text that points to a larger issue – the relegation of the East Asian self to the position of ghost citizen in South Africa (Accone & Harris 203). Aija Poikāne-Daumke, in the context of Afro-German autobiographical output, emphasises “Afro-Germans’ need to write themselves into their very being” (Poikāne-Daumke 3). It is this need to write the self, to make the spectral self visible by

forging a specific identity, by inserting the self into a literary tradition, that I identify as the larger project of the three selected texts.

While this minority group remains under-represented in South African culture and diaspora studies, there have been a number of academics and authors whose texts are useful tools for understanding more of the complexity of these identities in the South African context. In general, the large global Chinese diaspora has been referred to as “latecomers to modern academic discourse” (Harris, “The South African Chinese” 316). Factors contributing to this lack of academic discourse include “their peripheral position and the small numbers of the Chinese within host societies, as well as the relative paucity and scattered nature of source material” (Harris, “The South African Chinese” 317). A further factor is the tendency of overseas Chinese communities to remain isolated and partially invisible due to “fear of possible discrimination or victimization within their adopted countries” (Harris, “The South African Chinese” 317). These factors have similarly contributed to the relative lack of both academic and non-academic discourse on East Asian communities in South Africa. Noteworthy contributors to this field, however, have been Linda Human, Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, Karen L. Harris and Yoon Jung Park. These will be briefly discussed below.

Human’s text entitled *The Chinese People of South Africa* (1984) is a predominantly descriptive exploration of the Chinese population of South Africa. While it provides a useful account of the South African Chinese community in the 1980s, it is no longer considered relevant due to its dated nature and use of sociological theories that have since been discredited (Park, “Shifting Chinese” 10). In addition to this, Human’s “conclusions are flawed, reflective of some of the sociological trends of the time” (Park, “Shifting Chinese” 8).

A further significant text in this field is Yap and Man’s *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (1996). This text chronicles the history of Chinese communities in South Africa, with the aim of documenting the past. *Colour, Confusion and Concessions* is described by the authors as a “somewhat introspective account of the Chinese people of South Africa” (Yap & Man xv). Numerous points of critique have been levied against *Colour, Confusion and Concessions* (Harris, “The South African Chinese” 321-322; Bhana 552). Despite the critique, however, the very title of the text highlights recurring themes in the three selected auto/biographies, namely the politics of racial classification and its impact on a people group who did not neatly fit into any of the prescribed apartheid-era racial categories,

the confusion caused by living in the in-between, and the positioning of East Asian South African experiences within the regulated and restraining environment of apartheid South Africa.

Harris is a prominent academic in the field of overseas Chinese studies within the South African context. As a historian and archivist, her texts centre on locating the Chinese communities in South Africa within the nation's broader historical context, such as the Witwatersrand Gold Rush ("Chinese Merchants on the Rand" 1995) and the Group Areas Act of 1950 ("Accepting the Group" 1999).

Park is a leading researcher in the field of China/Africa relations. Her focus is on the history and complex positionalities of the Chinese communities in South Africa. In addition to her numerous academic texts on this subject, Park authored *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (2008), in which she aims to "examine [the Chinese community's] shifting ethnic, racial and national identities over time" (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 8). This text offers an intricate examination of the processes of identity formation as utilised by South African Chinese communities, not simply presenting the reader with an academic approach to the topic, but also providing anecdotal elements and a careful approach to the intricacies of history.

None of the above scholars offer a sustained literary analysis of East Asian South African literature. While references to Accone's *All Under Heaven* and Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters* sporadically surface in the works of Harris and Park, very few of these studies are based in the field of literature, favouring a socio-historical approach instead. This is the gap that this thesis aims to address by analysing the selected East Asian South African auto/biographies through a literary lens. Furthermore, the voices of East Asian South Africans themselves are relatively absent in the academic and non-academic output regarding this diasporic community. While Park's approach is in part ethnographic, incorporating the anecdotes and interviewed responses of the East Asian South African selves she came into contact with, Park remains a community outsider. Yap and Man's *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* is an exception, yet it is less of a self-(re)presentation than a well-researched chronology of the Chinese presence in South Africa. The texts selected for this thesis go a step further – they are narrative self-positionings by East Asian South African selves. As auto/biographical literary texts, they are involved in the process of writing the idiosyncratic and communal self into being.

It must also be noted that there are two East Asian South African auto/biographies not included in this thesis. These texts, namely Lily Changfoot's *A Many-Coloured South African: the Diary of a Non-person* (1982) and Emma Chen's *Emperor can Wait: Memories and Recipes from Taiwan* (2009) are similar to the three selected texts, but fall outside of the criteria used to select texts for this thesis. Changfoot's *A Many-Coloured South African* is the earliest East Asian South African auto/biography, published in 1982, and is thus a significant early exploration of East Asian individuals in South African society, particularly within the context of apartheid. Changfoot's text, however, is omitted from the primary literature discussed in this thesis due to my focus on post-apartheid East Asian South African texts. However, Changfoot's foregrounding of the "in-betweenness of the Chinese South Africans" is worth mentioning (Park, "Shifting Chinese" 9), as it is a central thematic concern of this chapter. The second text, Chen's *Emperor can Wait*, chronicles the experiences of the autobiographical self from her childhood in Taiwan to her adulthood in South Africa. Chen immigrated to South Africa as a student in the early 1980s and, despite her eventual rootedness in South Africa, her text is orientated towards Taiwan and China, spaces from which the adult Chen derives comfort (Chen x). The text is an act of memory compilation, "a nostalgic trip" into the food culture of the homeland (Chen xiii). Each chapter of Chen's text is centred around one or multiple culinary experiences, involving recollections and reconstructions of Chen's experiences in Taiwan and concluding with a recipe. The Taiwanese culinary experiences of the autobiographical self are thus central to *Emperor can Wait*. Furthermore, Chen's experiences in South Africa are only narrated in relation to her culinary endeavours – how the autobiographical self attempted to recreate recipes from home with limited access to the necessary ingredients. It is because of Chen's preoccupation with her historical and culinary rootedness in China and Taiwan, with asking "[w]here was my home?" (Chen x), that *Emperor can Wait* is not included in this thesis. While it is a text written by an East Asian South African, it is not primarily concerned with the experiences of an East Asian self in the South African context. Even though such experiences frame the text, as evidenced in Chen's preface, South Africa itself remains on the periphery. As such, *Emperor can Wait* is not the subject of one of the chapters of this thesis. Despite this, it is interesting to note that the paratextual elements of *Emperor can Wait* are strikingly similar to that of the three selected texts – each text contains a photographic insert, spanning generations and the life of the autobiographical self, as well as a cover design that includes a photograph of a figure in the text.

A general consensus of the above-mentioned academic and non-academic texts is the liminal position occupied by East Asian selves in South Africa. East Asian South African selves are positioned “at the borderlands of two countries, two spaces, and two cultures” (Park, “Boundaries” 471), neither fully fitting into South African society nor into the culture or community of origin, all the while experiencing a sense of belonging to both or, sometimes, to neither. Furthermore, it is the narrative language of liminality that arises in the literature that characterises the position of East Asian selves within South Africa. Changfoot positions herself in the title of her text, for example, as a non-person, while Accone refers to Chinese South Africans as ghost people (Accone, “Ghost people” 257) and Park uses the term “borderlanders” (Park, “Boundaries” 475). Furthermore, Lee Jardine, a fourth-generation Chinese South African quoted in *Yellow and Confused*, “compare[s] ‘yellowness’ to being grey, because we sit in this grey area between blackness and whiteness and there really isn’t a platform for us to be heard” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 227). This language of liminality, characterised by metaphorical placements of the self in the in-between, in border spaces, as spectral, non-existent selves, highlights the need to narratively construct identities, to define and defend the subject position of the self.

In the literary production of South Africa, the voices of East Asian South Africans are minimal at best. Because of this, these narratives of personal experience in literary form function as “a sense-making *process* rather than as a finished product in which loose ends are knit together into a single storyline” (Ochs & Capps 15). This positions the literature of East Asian South African selves as narrative constructions of identities-in-progress, in which literature is consciously used to write the self. They thus form part of the process of identity construction. There is, however, another facet to the literary production of East Asian selves in South Africa. Lin, in the context of the South African literary sphere, notes that “Yellowness is under-represented” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 203). It is exactly this lack of representation, this invisibility, that the selected texts seek to alter. They function as textual attempts to navigate this liminal position, claiming narrative agency and thereby “transform[ing] the subject from an anonymous object of speculation into a known narrator of specific personal histories” (Harte 226). In this way, not only does the field of literature allow for textual attempts to define a liminal and hitherto overlooked subject position, but it furthermore allows the insertion of the idiosyncratic and communal selves in the texts, as well as their array of personal experiences, into the South African literary sphere.

Chapter Outline

The three selected texts work in tandem to chronicle the lived experiences of specific East Asian selves within the socio-political context of South Africa from 1911 to the present. Chapter I begins with a close analysis of Accone's *All Under Heaven* (2004). Central to this analysis are the three distinct spaces in the text, namely the Indian Ocean world, China and South Africa. These spaces, as well as the movements and interactions between and within them in both pre-apartheid and apartheid South Africa, structure the argument of this chapter. This text, while paratextually adhering to auto/biographical conventions, only reveals the autobiographical self at the end of the text. As such, *All Under Heaven* can be understood as an auto/biography that privileges the familial over the individual. Important theoretical approaches in this chapter include Amartya Sen's critique of solitarist understandings of identity, taken from *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2007), and Sarah Nuttall's conceptualisation of entanglement in *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (2009). Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters* (2011) positions itself as a memoir, foregrounding the lived experiences of the autobiographical self, yet is necessarily a text of reconstructions that explores the complex legacy of illegal immigration in the process of identity construction. Chapter II seeks to unpack the narrative processes of positioning the self and asserting belonging within the apartheid city that can be seen in *Paper Sons and Daughters*. This involves an analysis of the navigation of official urban structures in the text, drawing heavily on Michel de Certeau's conceptualisation of the city space in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) in conversation with AbdouMaliq Simone's approach to the African city in "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg" (2004). Lin's *Yellow and Confused* (2019), as discussed in Chapter III, takes a different approach to identity navigation, favouring both a self-reflective and didactic approach over the narrative portrayal of physical positioning. The didactic, polemical narration of *Yellow and Confused* sets it apart from the previous two texts and serves an assertive, confrontational function. The narrative strategies utilised by Lin in the emplacement of the autobiographical self involve the intentional textual incorporation of various theoretical frameworks, notably Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality, as first developed in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989). Each chapter of this thesis, therefore, involves a close examination of the narrative strategies of identity navigation within a specific text.

Chapter I

“An Inescapable Limbo”⁵: (Un)Homed Selves in Accone’s

All Under Heaven

Introduction

Darryl Accone’s *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004) offers the reader a fleshed-out account of family history, spanning from the arrival of Accone’s ancestors in South Africa in 1911 until their relocation to their house in Claremont, Pretoria, in 1969. The text navigates between the routes and roots of three generations of a particular Chinese family, functioning as a literary chronicle of their movements between and within a host of disparate spaces – China and South Africa, the Indian Ocean world, Johannesburg and Pretoria, white Johannesburg suburbia and Chinese or Chinese-occupied spaces in the city. Despite the brief mention of the 21st century in the epilogue, *All Under Heaven* predominantly deals with both the build-up towards apartheid, referring to the policies and practices of racial segregation prior to the ascension of the National Party, and the experiences of Chinese South African selves during apartheid. It is thus through the transoceanic voyages and movements within South Africa itself in the text that Accone constructs a narrative of multiple (un)belongings. This chapter argues for the entangled identities of Accone’s figures, their belonging to and inseparability from their sites of rootedness and the manifold (ex)changes of their routedness.

There is a confusing network of names, places and familial relationships in *All Under Heaven*. Tracing the relations of one set of characters to the next is an arduous task and one that is best left in the capable hands of the genealogy at the front of Accone’s text. In order to orientate the reader, however, I will endeavour to present a basic set of primary characters. Ah Kwok and Chok Foon Martin are the patriarchs in the text, the men who first left China for the shores of South Africa. Sha Kiu is Ah Kwok’s home village in China, while Peng Po is Chok Foon Martin’s. These home villages gain significance in the text as sites of original belonging. The relationship between these two men is as follows: Chok Foon Martin married Cornelia von Brandis, a white woman of Prussian heritage. One of their children, Gertie, married Ah Kwok,

⁵ Accone, *All Under Heaven* 168.

who had travelled to South Africa with his father, Langshi. Ah Kwok was a first-generation migrant who entered South Africa illegally as a paper son, a phenomenon of illegal Chinese immigration that will be discussed in the next chapter. Ah Leong was the name given to him upon his arrival in South Africa, forcing him to abandon the name of his childhood. Accone's text follows Gertie and Ah Leong's daughter, Hong Hgang, in her marriage to Fok Chong Kit. Familial tracing is complicated in the text as most figures are referred to by more than one name – the names I use in this chapter are those used within the specific segment of the text that I am referring to. Some noteworthy name changes are Ah Kwok to Ah Leong, Hong Hgang to Jewel and then Julie, and Fok Chong Kit to Kit Accone and then Giddy. Giddy and Julie are second-generation migrants in South Africa, holding both Chinese names and English names, of which the latter are names assumed by choice, with agency. This cacophony of names reflects the confusing layers of belonging and unbelonging, of home and of officialdom and legality in the text.

All Under Heaven reads like fiction and only definitively reveals its non-fictiveness on the second last page of the text, where the idiosyncratic 'I' makes its first appearance and Accone inserts his authorial self into the text by stating, "I know what Julie said to Ah Nung that day. And I know because I am Fok Boon Nung: in other words, Ah Nung" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 282). This narrative assertion of identity situates the self within the web of figures in the text. In *All Under Heaven*, Accone is in the process of writing the lives of others by recounting and (re)constructing familial narratives, rendering the text "part historical narrative, part autobiography, and part fiction" (Yen 106). This allows for an understanding of the text as an "auto/biographical 'novel'" (Yen 106). This almost novelistic auto/biography is not, however, an oddity in the genre of life writing; it is, in fact, characteristic of it. Ken Plummer remarks that "'acts of writing' help us see that lives are always 'composed' and that it may be the very act of composition itself which lies at the heart of the auto/biographical mode" (Plummer 88). Significantly, this "composed life" (Plummer 88) is shown to be true to historical records and memory through Accone's claims to authenticity. He notes in the acknowledgements of his text that Jewel Accone's personal recollections and newspaper clippings were invaluable resources in the process of developing the manuscript of *All Under Heaven*. Samuelson's understanding of Accone's text as a "family (auto)biography" is therefore apposite (Samuelson, "Making Home" 304). This is supported by Accone's dedication of his text to his ancestors. The emphasis placed on those who came before him is further apparent by the inclusion of a series of family photographs in the middle of the text, the

characteristically auto/biographical paratextual claim to authenticity from which Accone himself is curiously absent. One, therefore, gets the impression that *All Under Heaven* is a text with its narrative root going down generations, surpassing the experiences of the authorial, autobiographical self and thus becoming a chronicle of a family, supported by the remembrances and recollections of past generations.

The various figures in *All Under Heaven* are shown to occupy multiple identities, exhibiting shifting affiliations with these identities depending on their physical location and socio-political context. Sen argues for a recognition of the pluralities of human identity, that one occupies multiple identities which “cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division” (Sen xiv). Acknowledging plurality therefore allows for the navigation across and undermining of the solitarist approach to human identity. This approach posits that one’s necessarily singular identity exists in a dichotomous relationship with another singular identity (Sen xii), thereby dividing individuals into an ‘us’ and a ‘them’, two distinct and irreconcilable identities which fail to account for the manifold intersections of identities outside of this dichotomy. The apartheid state is emblematic of this solitarist approach to identity. It is the project of *All Under Heaven* to narratively undermine this approach, to assert a plurality of identities within each character as they navigate their Chineseness in relation to their claims to South Africanness and vice versa. As Sen remarks,

[e]ven when one is inescapably seen – by oneself as well as by others – as French, or Jewish, or Brazilian, or African-American, or (particularly in the context of the present turmoil) as an Arab or a Muslim, one still has to decide what exact importance to attach to that identity over the relevance of other categories to which one also belongs. (Sen 6)

The figures in the text attach varying degrees of importance to their specific identities at different times and in different spaces, strategically emphasising certain identities in specific moments. As will be discussed in this chapter, different figures in the text make different choices, such as Ah Leong’s continued association with China and Cornelia’s strategic emphasis on the European ancestry of her family. However, these choices are constrained by a host of factors, most notably the potential difficulty in persuading others to recognise such plural identities or different categories of the self (Sen 6).

Sarah Nuttall's conceptualisation of entanglement allows for a broader understanding of the complexities of identity assertions in *All Under Heaven*. Nuttall understands entanglement as

a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication. (Nuttall, *Entanglement* 1)

Through this definition of entanglement, one can understand Sen's plural identities as spaces of overlap and intersection. These multiple identities are irrevocably entangled and unescapable, yet a solitarist approach to identity requires that these identities be disentangled and simplified, and that from these multiple identities one is chosen as a single membership category. The identities in *All Under Heaven* exhibit this conundrum – they are unequivocally entangled yet forced to abide within their assigned otherness as Chinese selves in apartheid-era South Africa.

The three distinct spaces in *All Under Heaven*, namely the Indian Ocean world, China and South Africa, function as narrative assertions of plural identities and multiple belongings. This chapter, therefore, aims to examine how Accone narratively locates the Chinese South African selves in the text within their multiple roots and routes, particularly with regards to how these spaces and movements assert a Chineseness or a South Africanness, a sense of belonging. Situating *All Under Heaven* in the Indian Ocean world is by no means a new endeavour (Hofmeyr, "The Black Atlantic" 22; Samuelson, "Making Home" 304; Samuelson, "Sea Changes" 16). These analyses of the text, however, do not examine the interplay between Accone's narrative alignment of his figures within the Indian Ocean world and their firm rootedness in both the mythologised, nostalgic China of overseas Chinese communities and South Africa's 20th century history. I argue that it is exactly this complex rootedness of Chinese South African selves in the text that asserts the plural identities of Accone's figures. By consciously locating the figures in his text within these multiple identities, Accone thus claims an insider status in all these respective spaces. This chapter argues, however, that the entangled identities of Accone's figures are subjected to the realities of the identity politics within these

spaces and are thus caught within the limiting structures and projections of outsider status they encounter.

“South Africa’s other ocean”⁶: Indian Ocean Routes in *All Under Heaven*

Accone’s narrative undertakes a closer look at the routes, the “pathways between here and there, two points of rootedness” (Friedman 151), that link South Africa and China. The first half of *All Under Heaven* is in part comprised of voyages across the Indian Ocean. These passages from China to the port of Durban in South Africa, and vice versa, tie together these distant sites of rootedness. Notable voyages include the original journey of Langshi and Ah Kwok, later Ah Leong, from Canton to South Africa and the attempt at repatriation by first Andrew and Gertie and later the rest of the Martin family, and their subsequent return to South Africa. The journeys of Langshi and Ah Kwok, as well as that of Andrew and Gertie, are not simple traversals from one point to the other but include multiple disembarkations and both onboard and offboard interactions. Drawing on Per Gustafson’s understanding of routes as emphasising the “movements, encounters, exchanges, and mixtures” between sites of rootedness (Gustafson 670), this section aims to position Accone’s *All Under Heaven* within the Indian Ocean paradigm and thereby explore how the multiple voyages within the text assert a multiplicity of belongings and identities, and how identities are formed, broadened or renegotiated through these voyages.

The Indian Ocean crossings undertaken by the figures of Andrew and Gertie in 1923 involve a movement and navigation between their two sites of rootedness. Despite having been born in South Africa to Cornelia and Chok Foon Martin and never having been to their father’s homeland, they exhibit a sense of rootedness in China. Andrew and Gertie are taken further away from the home they know, from the familiar, towards their homeland. Their experiences during the long voyage on the *Daimaru* are reminiscent of Friedman’s assertion that “[l]eaving home brings into being the idea of ‘home’, the perception of its identity as distinct from elsewhere” (Friedman 151). The siblings oscillate between discussing their “new home and how comforting it would be when they were joined by Mother and Father and the others” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 54) and “long[ing] for home” in South Africa, yearning for the

⁶ Samuelson, “(Un)settled states” 272.

“comfortingly familiar” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 55). This ambiguity of ‘home’ highlights that the Indian Ocean functions as a means of transporting figures “to and from various imagined homelands and points of departure and disembarkation” (Samuelson, “Sea Changes” 16). During their Indian Ocean crossing, Andrew and Gertie are narratively homed in both China and South Africa, both the homeland and the hostland, which thereby complicates simplistic notions of home. This, in turn, implies a plurality of identity, in which Andrew and Gertie, as diasporic subjects, are involved in the active (re)negotiation of their identities depending on the ‘home’ in which they find themselves.

Accone positions the “fluid territory” (Samuelson, “Making Home” 299) of the Indian Ocean as a site of cross-cultural promise. The “new alignments” (Said, *Culture* xxiv-xxv), as made possible by routedness, can be seen in the emerging relationship between Ah Kwok and Yanagi, a Japanese boy, on board the *Yamato Princess*. The cultural and linguistic differences between the two boys initially leads to a series of unpleasant encounters. Yanagi’s mother, who chastises the boys for their violence and dislike of each other, addresses Ah Kwok as follows:

I am Chinese. I come from Canton. My husband is Japanese. So my son is half Chinese and half Japanese. You know that they say ‘All men are brothers’. Certainly we people from the East should always stand together, not against one another. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 77)

By emphasising Ah Kwok’s broader Asian identity over his Chinese one, Yanagi’s mother positions the two boys in a space of overlap, in which their Chinese and Japanese identities are secondary and their common Asian identities are foregrounded. After this speech and the mother’s assertion that “friendship between our races is possible” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 77), Ah Kwok and Yanagi develop a friendship. By narrating their “time [spent] spinning tops and working out the differences between the Chinese and the Japanese versions” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 78), Accone positions their friendship as a site of cross-cultural education and navigation made possible by the voyage. The *Yamato Princess*, the vessel with which the Indian Ocean is traversed, thus becomes a textual site in which both a plurality of identities and the possibility of cross-cultural reconciliation, notions which are at odds with the dominant ideological bend of both the hostland and the homeland at the time, are asserted.

Unlike Andrew and Gertie, who were born in South Africa and experience, as brought into focus by their repatriating voyage across the Indian Ocean, a sense of home and a rooting of identity in both sites of rootedness, Ah Kwok, later Ah Leong, experiences a lack of rootedness in his hostland. As a first-generation Chinese individual in South Africa, Ah Leong can be understood as a sojourner, an individual who remains only temporarily rooted, in a psychological sense, in the hostland (Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 212). This can be seen in the epilogue of *All Under Heaven*, which begins with Ah Leong looking across the Indian Ocean, towards China:

On holidays at the coast, Ah Leong would stand looking eastwards over the Indian Ocean, hands clasped behind his old but upright back: east towards China, towards the home he had left when not yet a teenager, certain in his youthful optimism he would return soon. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 281)

Ah Leong never returned to his homeland and lived a widely different future in South Africa than that which he had expected to live in China. Upon leaving Cantonese soil and beginning his Indian Ocean crossing, Ah Kwok sensed that he had committed some “irrevocable action” despite the economic promise that South Africa held (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 46). These two gazes, one from China to South Africa and the other from South Africa to China, meet in the Indian Ocean, the halfway house between these two nations, each with their own cultures and values. It appears as if Ah Leong, whose life was spent predominantly on South African soil yet who was categorised and characterised by the otherness of his Chinese identity, is caught between the two, still on the *Yamato Princess* with its promise of the potential of cross-cultural negotiation and reconciliation in the form of Yanagi (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 78). Ah Leong, despite his experiences of change and exchange during his Indian Ocean crossing, maintains a strongly rooted identity in the homeland. As one can see in the above quote from the text, Ah Leong’s gaze stretched across the Indian Ocean, towards China, thereby precluding the development of a rooted local identity. Accone thus narratively foregrounds the generational differences in experiences of belonging and unbelonging in the diasporic space.

Furthermore, it is in the various stops and subsequent implications of these Indian Ocean crossings that Accone’s figures are situated within the Indian Ocean world, as these moments of disembarkation, of interaction with the broader dynamics of the Indian Ocean, draw the identities of the figures into a space which has the power to challenge, contest or affirm them.

This can be seen in Accone's narrative handling of Langshi and Ah Kwok's brief sojourn in colonial Hong Kong, during which time Ah Kwok is first exposed to discrimination based on his Chineseness. When attempting to enter a public park, Langshi and Ah Kwok are directed to a signboard which stated, "No Dogs or Chinese Permitted" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 64). This encounter of restricted movement, of being barred access to a public space based on their racial identity, not only contests the worth of their Chinese identities, challenging the inherited anthropocentric understanding that Chinese selves are at the centre of existence (Wu 160), but also functions as narrative foreshadowing of their later experiences in South Africa. This signposting of belonging and unbelonging furthermore links Hong Kong and South Africa, two distant spaces with the length of the Indian Ocean spanning between them. In this way, Langshi and Ah Kwok's brief sojourn in Hong Kong troubles an inherited and uncontested identity, which prepares the figures for the racialised identity politics of South Africa.

Andrew and Gertie's journey to China, to their father's homeland, takes them via Mauritius and Singapore. As second-generation Chinese selves in South Africa, they had never encountered a social space in which they, as Chinese selves, were fully homed. It is during their stop in Singapore that they first experience sensations of belonging within the larger social dynamics of the space as, unlike in South Africa, "[t]hey were not stared at in the streets, no one threw insults at them and they appeared to be invisible in that no special notice was taken of them" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 56). They are thus given the freedom to embrace their Chineseness, as this significant identity had hitherto, despite its prescribed nature in the apartheid context, been a hindering identity, one which restricted their movements and their experiences. In Singapore, Andrew and Gertie's Chinese identity is affirmed as it instead becomes one which frees them, which asserts a belonging in the space. A further noteworthy element of their brief stay in Singapore is their perception of Singapore's Malaysian population, who "looked a little like the Coloureds in Namfeechow" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 56). By rooting the so-called Coloured population of South Africa within the larger Indian Ocean paradigm, Accone highlights the historical interplay between South Africa and the larger Indian Ocean world, thereby situating the Chinese South African figures in his text and their various 'homes' within this interplay. By positioning the figures in the text within the crisscrossing networks of the Indian Ocean world, Accone highlights the complexity inherent in their entangled identities and conceptualisations of home.

“East towards China”⁷: Nostalgia and the Homeland

The relationship between the diasporic selves and China, the ancestral homeland, in *All Under Heaven* is one bathed in nostalgia. Svetlana Boym conceptualises nostalgia as “a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure” (Boym 18). These varying understandings of nostalgia, embodying the multifaceted reality of nostalgia as both a result of displacement and a romance with remembered images (Boym 7), can be seen in *All Under Heaven*. The nostalgic reminiscences of some of Accone’s figures do not simply exhibit a longing for a place, but also a longing for a different time, a return to the China of their youths. Figures such as Ah Leong and Chok Foon Martin exhibit restorative nostalgia, which places emphasis on the notion of home and “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” (Boym 13), thereby including a rhetoric of tradition, homeland, family and truth (Boym 14). A distinction arises between restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia, in that the core of reflective nostalgia is the longing itself (Boym 13). It allows for the ambivalences of longing and belonging, exploring ways in which selves inhabit multiple spaces at once and imagine different, alternative time zones (Boym 3). Reflective nostalgia thus involves a “meditation on history and the passage of time” (Boym 15). Accone’s attempt to (re)construct the experiences and complex belongings of Chinese South African selves can be understood as a form of reflective nostalgia, thereby positioning his narrative project with regards to his portrayals of China as one of nostalgic retrieval. By recounting the experiences in the lost homeland and the mythologised images of the homeland that his ancestors held onto, Accone narratively constructs identities that are rooted in a specific China, in the China of their remembrances. This section, therefore, seeks to unpack the nostalgic orientation of the figures in *All Under Heaven*, and of the text itself, towards the ancestral homeland.

The Chinese identities in Accone’s text are metaphorically and physically rooted in the soil and traditions of rural China, yet the figures in the text become separated from this ancestral homeland through their transoceanic voyages. The sense of rootedness that is linked with China reflects the metaphorical concept of having roots, which uses “a metaphorical system (including the soil, the land, and so forth) linking people to place, identity to territory”

⁷ Accone, *All Under Heaven* 281.

(Gustafson 670). It is, therefore, significant that Accone's descriptions of China as a homeland are predominantly set in rural China, which "is portrayed in sometimes wonderfully poetic and evocative prose as naturally beautiful, steeped in ancient myth and culturally complex" (Yen 106). Accone's detailed description of the daily ritual of the three old women in Peng Po, who pay their respects at the temple to the gods and ancestors who watch over the village, and his description of the temple itself evoke a sense of established, unchanging tradition. Andrew and Gertie, however, during their sojourn in their father's home village, "find themselves often out of place in what should be 'home'" as they are unaware of the intricacies of custom (Samuelson, "Making Home" 305). For example, Andrew tampers with the statues at the temple, thereby causing uproar and worry in the village. He is described as "the mischievous boy from across the seas, the little half-white devil from Kum Saan" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 141), thereby precluding a sense of full belonging in the village. Andrew and Gertie occupy an identity which roots them in China, yet they are altered by their routedness and subsequent other identities. This points to the ultimate inability of a solitary Chinese identity to encapsulate the complexities of these Chinese selves in Accone's text – they become Samuelson's "new subject[s]" (Samuelson, "Sea Changes" 15), occupying a tenuous connection to China, one tinged in nostalgia and troubled by their routedness.

Restorative nostalgia positions itself as absolute truth (Boym 15), yet the moments of homecoming in *All Under Heaven*, the returns to China, highlight the differences between the remembered, nostalgic China and the China of reality. As Lisa Anteby-Yemini remarks in the context of Ethiopian Jews' experiences of homecoming to Jerusalem, "when the miracle of homecoming did happen, myth and reality confronted each other for the first time" (Anteby-Yemini 153). This can be seen in the difference between the image of China that Chok Foon Martin describes to Cornelia and their children and the reality which they encounter. Cornelia, who had been regaled with Martin's tales about China upon their first meeting in Johannesburg, had a particular image of China in her mind, one characterised by the "[f]lavours and hints of far-away places, halfway around the globe, [that] prickled her tongue and excited her imagination" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 90). Upon her arrival in Peng Po, however, Cornelia was "shocked by the difference between his gilded vision of home and the reality" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 154), specifically manifested in what she perceived as the "primitiveness" of the use of night-time ablutions as fertiliser (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 154). This points to the limits of restorative nostalgia, in that it disintegrates during moments of homecoming, when one is confronted with the reality of the homeland. Despite this, "the warmth and empathy from

the people” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 155) towards Cornelia stands in contrast to the rejection of her own family. Accone’s portrayal of the reality of China in the text is thus not negatively coded. It is instead narratively placed in contrast to Martin’s nostalgic images of China, drawing the myth of the homeland, the reality of the homeland and the reality of the hostland, as exemplified by the rejection of Cornelia’s family, into the same frame. This textual moment of homecoming thus challenges the restorative nostalgia of Accone’s Chinese South African figures.

This nostalgia, however, cannot be entirely disregarded as it becomes transformed into a tool by which the self is located and affirmed in the face of apartheid South Africa, which unhomed and othered Chinese selves. Figures such as Ah Leong draw on restorative nostalgia, its notions of unchanging tradition and truth, to maintain a sense of superiority and a sense of self. China, as the distant and mythologised homeland, thus serves as a counterpoint to the experiences in the hostland, becoming the “mythic elsewhere” for these figures (Anteby-Yemini 147). Significantly, despite conceding that “a sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence” (Sen 1), Sen acknowledges that this one particular identity, when given pre-eminence, can become a site of exclusion (Sen 2). When Jewel, the child of Ah Leong and Gertie, and thus the grandchild of Cornelia, gained entrance to the new Chinese school in Johannesburg, she was discriminated against for being “*sommer* a half” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 200). In the aftermath of Jewel’s sojourn at this school, however, Ah Leong reaffirms her Chineseness, reminding Jewel of the mythic elsewhere to which she belongs:

You are Chinese. Nothing, nothing can ever change that. You are Chinese and be proud that you belong to the most civilised and cultured race on earth. Never, never wish to be anyone else again. They are the barbarians. You are *T’ong yan*. Remember. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 201)

The phrase ‘*T’ong yan*’, which means “one of us, Chinese” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 1), functions as an assertion of superiority and belonging to the larger overseas Chinese community. In this way, the nostalgic affiliation of the figures with the myth of a great and superior China, despite being shown to be insufficient when encountering the reality of China, cannot simply be disregarded – the restorative nostalgia of Accone’s first-generation figures

becomes a way of asserting a sense of self and thereby resisting their ascribed identities in apartheid South Africa.

It must be remembered that Accone, a South African-born diasporic author, draws on familial histories and narrated recollections to (re)construct China in the text. The China in *All Under Heaven*, therefore, becomes an imaginary homeland vis-à-vis Salman Rushdie. According to Rushdie, the physical alienation of the diasporic author from the homeland “almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (Rushdie 10). These Indias of the mind, these imaginary homelands, are thus quintessentially fictitious. The diasporic author must use the “broken mirrors” of remembrance to reconstruct the homeland, of which some fragments are “irretrievably lost” (Rushdie 11). Jeffery Yen remarks that Accone’s narrative “seems intent on unearthing a true Chineseness” (Yen 107), thereby positioning *All Under Heaven* as a text embodying restorative nostalgia. However, it is through Accone’s inability to reconstruct the homeland, his necessary use of fragments and shards to (re)construct the homeland in his text, that Accone’s narrative can be understood as an example of reflective nostalgia. According to Boym, the “nostalgic narrative [of reflected nostalgia] is ironic, inconclusive, and fragmentary” (Boym 15), thereby aligning it with Rushdie’s “broken mirrors” (Rushdie 11). Accone’s China of the mind, his personal (re)construction of the homeland of his ancestors in *All Under Heaven*, is thus one of remembrances, glimpses and fragments.

It is here that the generational differences of belonging, identity affiliation and nostalgic orientation in *All Under Heaven* become even more apparent. The text comes to a close with Accone admittedly accepting that the China of Ah Leong’s reminiscences is a mythologised China, that for his grandfather “things were always bigger and better in China” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 283). Ah Leong’s restorative nostalgia is thus conceded to be “the substance of yearning dreams” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 283), ultimately unable to account for the reality of the homeland. Accone’s narrative thus becomes one of reflective nostalgia as, instead of approaching nostalgia as truth, it calls Ah Leong’s reminiscences into doubt without discounting their psychological currency (Boym 13). China is no longer the China of Ah Leong’s remembrances, but it is the China of these remembrances that nevertheless remains a significant root for Accone, who grew up listening to Ah Leong’s nostalgic narratives. Ah Leong, “who never set foot on Chinese soil again” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 281),

maintained vivid images of his boyhood in China. Significantly, this China is the China of Ah Leong's youth, an idealised space of childhood remembrances. According to Park, a trend in Asian diasporic literatures is the dissociation of images of home from the nation-state or government, and the tendency to associate home with a cherished ideal, which is typically primordial and a locus of innocence (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 56). This contributes to what Harris identifies as Accone's "inherited sense of Chineseness and [his] real and imagined affiliation to China" (Harris, "Confusion, Heaven and Honour" 120). Ah Leong's rootedness in his remembered China was inherited by Accone, yet Accone's approach to his ancestral homeland is one that allows for the passage of time, that acknowledges that Ah Leong's China of the mind is a "lost paradise, a land of abundance and a better world" (Anteby-Yemini 147).

By understanding *All Under Heaven* as a narrative exhibiting reflective nostalgia, despite the fact that the first-generation migrant selves within the text cling to a more restorative nostalgia, one is able to position the China in the text as Accone's personal China of the mind, admittedly at odds with reality yet maintaining a salience for the diasporic author. Accone's text reveals that the nostalgic rootedness in the China of Ah Leong and Martin, by placing the remembered China as the supreme, overarching identity and thereby positioning it as a space of unequivocal truth, provided these figures with a sense of security, yet prevented them from fully embracing their inescapably entangled, plural identities. In contrast, Boym asserts that reflective nostalgia undertakes an exploration of the ways in which an individual can inhabit multiple places at once (Boym 13). This approach to nostalgia allows for an appreciation of the plurality of identity, acknowledging that the self occupies manifold identities and can express belonging to multiple spaces.

"What a country!"⁸: Entanglements in the Hostland

Accone occupies a position which is "at once plural and partial" (Rushdie 15), living in the intersection between the homeland and the diasporic hostland and thereby at various times "straddl[ing] two cultures" and "fall[ing] between two stools" (Rushdie 15). Significant here is the existence of a space between the two cultures and identities, an in-between space in which the diasporic subject lives that echoes the "nebulous, in-between position" occupied by Chinese

⁸ Accone, *All Under Heaven* 262.

selves in South Africa (Park, “Black, yellow” 119). This space is characterised by the necessary entanglements between both sites of rootedness. In *All Under Heaven*, “Accone’s ‘China’ seems always already bound up with his own immersion in South African life” (Yen 107). It is because Accone’s China of the mind allows for the “ambivalences of human longing and belonging” (Boym 13) that the particular experiences of Chinese communities in South Africa can be said to have influenced it, thereby highlighting the entanglement between the hostland and the homeland for the diasporic subject. Yen’s critique of the depictions of Chineseness in the text as “an illusory Chineseness that is irrevocably distorted and altered by its South African context” (Yen 107) is telling – Accone’s China is inseparable from South Africa, his other site of rootedness. In this way, Accone destabilises the nostalgic orientation towards an unchanging, static China, instead positing a Chineseness that is not diluted or distorted by its South African context, but which has been “transformed into a unique ... configuration of cultural and ethnic identities” (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 108). This entanglement of South Africa and China, the image of roots from two distinct trees intertwining and becoming inseparable, is particularly evident in *All Under Heaven* with regards to entanglements of identity and entanglements of space.

Entanglements of Space

It is due to the politically charged nature of space in apartheid and pre-apartheid South Africa that a closer examination of Accone’s textual creation and depiction of Chinese or Chinese-occupied spaces is necessary.⁹ By narratively positioning his figures within the framework of pre-apartheid racial segregation, Accone asserts the imbrication of his Chinese South African figures with the long history of race politics in South Africa. Apartheid-era South Africa portrayed its socio-political make-up as clearly demarcated and contained. However, the spaces occupied by Chinese selves within South Africa and the narrative handling of spaces which fall outside of apartheid’s bounded world, such as the broader Indian Ocean world, reveal connections between people and entanglements of identities that directly contradict apartheid’s drive towards the strict separation of racial groups. As Samuelson succinctly expresses,

⁹ It is worth noting that space remains politicised in post-apartheid South Africa. As the politics of space in contemporary South Africa is primarily directly related to the reverberations of apartheid-era policies into our present moment and as *All Under Heaven* does not extend into the post-apartheid present, I will specifically refer to the politics of space in pre-apartheid and apartheid South Africa in this section.

both sites – Martin’s Chinese shop in Johannesburg and the ship crossing the Indian Ocean – speak to the connections and entanglements that present alternative realities to the stratified, bounded worlds that apartheid aimed to produce. (Samuelson, “Making Home” 305)

The entanglement and altering of the Chinese identity by the South African context, that which Yen conceptualises as negative, is understood by Samuelson as a form of probably unintentional resistance to the apartheid state. These spaces become narrative instances in which pluralities of identity intersect and interact, thereby blurring the sharp divisions between identities (Sen xiv), specifically the seemingly impenetrable division between racial groups in apartheid South Africa. Through the three Chinese or Chinese-occupied spaces in the text that will be discussed in this section, namely the Chinatown on Commissioner Street, Asiatic Bazaar in Pretoria and Sophiatown, Accone asserts a Chineseness or a South Africanness, but ultimately highlights the inseparable, entangled nature of these roots for Chinese South African selves. This section argues that Accone utilises these spaces in *All Under Heaven* to emphasise the manifold identities of his figures and their evolving experiences of rootedness in the homeland and hostland, thereby troubling a solitarist approach to identity.

Johannesburg’s “first Chinatown” (Harrison et al. 905) on Commissioner Street becomes a site of rootedness for the Chinese selves in *All Under Heaven*. Johannesburg has two Chinatowns, namely the Chinatown on Commissioner Street and the “second Chinatown” of Cyrildene (Harrison et al. 905), which is largely associated with the wave of Chinese immigrants from the PRC, a group which is distinct from the more established, South African-born Chinese population (Accone, “Ghost people” 266). Chinatowns become the “symbolic centres of overseas Chinese communities” (Christiansen 67), which implies that they are significant places in identity formation and negotiation processes in the hostland. In *All Under Heaven*, the original Chinatown on Commissioner Street serves a symbolic function in that it becomes a site of rootedness in lieu of the distant homeland – it is the space of original belonging in South Africa for Accone’s ancestors and thus for Accone himself. For example, the Cantonese Club in Chinatown becomes a place of major life events for Accone’s family, thus forming part of Accone’s heritage. It is at the Cantonese Club where Ah Shek’s “moment of triumph and revenge” separates Langshi and Ah Leong upon their arrival in South Africa (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 147). It is also where Ah Hing’s body is viewed after her death in 1969 (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 275). Ah Hing was Kit’s “redoubtable mother” (Accone, *All Under Heaven*

132), the grandmother of the autobiographical self. In this way, Accone positions the Chinatown on Commissioner Street and its various establishments as integral spaces of his own story, his own history.

The Chinatown on Commissioner Street, despite its performed Chineseness, is nevertheless a South African space. When first encountered by Cornelia and her cousin Frederik, it offered “things alien and yet so enticing” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 84), wholly distinct and distant from the Johannesburg they had hitherto known, yet nevertheless physically rooted within the Johannesburg landscape. Situated on the “western edges of the old Ferreira’s Camp, the oldest part of the city of gold” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 82) and near John Vorster Square, the infamous police station now known as Johannesburg Central Police Station, this Chinatown is firmly located within the spatial dynamics of both mining-era and apartheid-era Johannesburg. The Chinatown on Commissioner Street thus cannot be separated from the spatial historiography of Johannesburg. Furthermore, an understanding of this Chinatown as insulated and self-isolated is complicated by Accone’s portrayal of it as a space in which the West, embodied in the figure of Cornelia, a wealthy white South African woman with Prussian roots, and the East, the figure of Martin, can meet (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 114). In this way, this Chinese enclave in the inner city becomes both a site of rootedness and a space which narratively foreshadows the move away from a firm rootedness in China, towards the development of the dual designation of Chinese South African or South African-born Chinese. The narrative handling of the Chinatown on Commissioner Street, therefore, presents the reader with the burgeoning interconnectedness and entanglements of both Chinese spaces and selves in the South African context.

It is Pretoria’s Asiatic Bazaar that foregrounds the changing sense of belonging of Accone’s Chinese figures. Asiatic Bazaar was not just a Chinese enclave, but a Non-European enclave near the city centre. Chinese selves living in Asiatic Bazaar thus became part of a problematic group of people for the apartheid government – a culturally diverse, mixed-race community living in close proximity to the city centre of Pretoria, merely a distance of four blocks from Church Square and similarly close to the house of Paul Kruger, the “Boer patriarch” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 251). This area, presumably demarcated for minority groups, predominantly Malay and Indian individuals, in the early 20th century, along with multiple other Asiatic Bazaars (Mabin 408), was no longer desirable for the apartheid government. This precarious position led to Julie remarking that Asiatic Bazaar is “somewhere from which they would

certainly be moved” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 250). Significantly, Accone describes the move to Asiatic Bazaar as “something of a homecoming for Giddy” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 251), as he was able to revisit the places he had grown up in, thus exhibiting a rootedness in the diverse offerings of Asiatic Bazaar. It is in Asiatic Bazaar that the figures in *All Under Heaven* are described as part of the broader Asiatic or Non-White category. Their interactions with their neighbours and within the larger Asiatic Bazaar community portray the Chinese figures in Accone’s text not as an isolated group, but as part of a larger community. This Chinese-occupied space in the text thus highlights a rootedness in the South African context, emphasising the intertwined fate of Chinese selves with other non-white selves in apartheid South Africa.

The inclusion of Johannesburg’s Western Areas in *All Under Heaven* is a textual assertion of a sense of South Africanness. Drawing on Sen’s understanding that “we have to decide on the relative importance of our different associations and affiliations in any particular context” (Sen xiii), this locating can be seen as a narrative choice, a conscious attempt to assert a belonging in the South African context. The Western Areas, comprising of Sophiatown, Martindale, Newclare and Western Native Township, was a site of social and cultural resistance to the National Party’s policy of segregation due to the easy mixing of its varied inhabitants (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 175). Accone aligns his figures with the interracial hub of the Western Areas by situating them in the grey area of Sophiatown (Bohlin 169), a legendary space of cultural production and resistance, characterised by “diverse cultures and different colours” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 175) and thus exemplifying an alternative space to the strict segregation of apartheid. Grey areas, which “were not officially zoned for either exclusive white or black residence” and thus became sites of racial interaction (Peffer 184), are today regaled as creative, productive and promising spaces. An often-discussed facet of Sophiatown is its prominence as a symbol of African urbanity (Samuelson, “The urban palimpsest” 63). Particularly notable in this regard is Sophiatown’s creative output, partly embodied in the form of *Drum* magazine and its exploration of black urban selves. While much scholarly attention has rightly been placed on Sophiatown’s black urbanity, it is worthwhile noting in the context of *All Under Heaven* that Sophiatown and the Western Areas in general was home to a small Chinese community, to which Ah Leong and Gertie, Accone’s grandparents, belonged. The figures in the text are thus aligned with Sophiatown, this promising in-between space of precarious belonging in the apartheid context.

In *All Under Heaven*, Accone uses Ah Leong and Gertie's sojourn in Sophiatown to narratively claim an autobiographical insideness in the space. Autobiographical insideness involves maintaining a sense of belonging in a place "by remembering incidents, places, contributions and relations in their personal lives there" (Dixon & Durrheim 29). By narrating the relationship between the Leongs and Dr Alfred B. Xuma and his African American wife, Madie Hall Xuma (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 175), who Ulf Hannerz describes as "perhaps *the* local celebrity" (Hannerz 186), Accone positions his figures within the broader web of resistance to the racial segregation of the time. The Leong's sojourn in Sophiatown thus highlights the adoption of a South Africanness, an approach to Chineseness which differs from the insularity of the earlier Chinese community on Commissioner Street and thereby emphasises a plurality of identity. This is evidenced by Accone's narrative emphasis on Ah Leong and Gertie's ability to interact with their customers, who consisted of both Afrikaner Nationalists and anti-apartheid activists. Furthermore, Ah Leong and Gertie remained important members of the Chinese community during this period, as can be seen in Ah Leong's reputation as a lucky *wha que kong*, driver and escort, at Chinese weddings. In this way, the plural identities of Ah Leong and Gertie, their rootedness in their Chinese community and their South African context, is textually highlighted. However, by recounting the racism experienced at their store in Westdene, Accone reminds the reader that they are nevertheless perceived and treated as outsiders within the reality of South Africa at the time.

Even though the spaces discussed above emphasise Accone's narrative exploration of the entanglements of space in apartheid South Africa, it must be noted that the majority of South African selves at the time lived within the segregated structures of apartheid. The movement across clearly delineated racialised spaces in *All Under Heaven*, particularly with regards to Ah Hing's fahfee pull, highlights the ultimate fallibility of the segregationist policies of the time. Ah Hing decided to run fahfee, an illegal gambling game, to supplement her income after her husband's untimely death. Significant in a discussion of Chinese-occupied spaces in *All Under Heaven* is the movement between different spaces inherent in Ah Hing's fahfee pull:

At its height, it boasted a clientele of white, black, Coloured, Christian, Jew; the players were hawkers, lawyers, factory workers, doctors, maids, accountants, housewives, gardeners, teachers, street sweepers, firemen, manual labourers, nurses, soldiers and even policemen. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 194)

Jack, Ah Hing's head runner, moved between the racially segregated spaces implied in Accone's description – the black townships, the white suburbs and the spaces in-between. Despite the illegality of the game and the racial segregation of the time, the game of fahfee asserts the entanglement of apartheid-era South Africa despite the government's attempt to divide. An understanding of fahfee as “a tactic through which the subordinate were able to contest and negotiate the repressive strategies of the sociopolitical elite” thus gains relevance (Louw, “Chinese Immigrants” 50). It became an avenue through which the apartheid-era restrictions were often inadvertently contested and negotiated. In the above description of the gamblers of Ah Hing's fahfee pull, racial, religious and class differences are levelled out; these identities were no longer kept separate but became inextricably involved with one another. Accone thus narratively posits a sense of interconnectedness between the divisions of apartheid, in which a myriad of gamblers contribute to Ah Hing's livelihood, to the livelihood of an individual who is unhomed in the apartheid state. Fahfee is central to Ho's depiction of the positionalities of Chinese South African selves in *Paper Sons and Daughters* and will therefore be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

These entangled spaces in *All Under Heaven* reveal the complex and evolving interactions, exchanges and allegiances of these figures that arise due to their entanglements within the South African context. Both the physical location of the Chinatown on Commissioner Street and its narrative function as a site of cross-cultural meeting emphasise that this Chinese enclave is nevertheless a South African space. Furthermore, *Asiatic Bazaar* highlights the official alignment of Chinese selves during this period with other so-called non-white groups, thereby emphasising the precariousness of their spatial belonging in South Africa. Finally, by narrating the experiences of his figures in Sophiatown, Accone draws them into the one of the legendary spaces of Johannesburg and thereby firmly roots the Leong family within the South African context. In addition to this, Ah Hing's fahfee pull reveals the ultimate interconnectedness between the delineated spaces of apartheid. In this way, the spaces discussed in this section and the movement between them trouble apartheid's project of spatial separation along racial lines.

Entanglements of Identity

Sen understands the navigation between one's plural identities as a matter of choice, in which one can decide which identity to prioritise at a given moment, yet he acknowledges that such choices are always made within a particular context and are thereby limited to varying extents

(Sen 5). It is, therefore, necessary to note that identities and identity claims constantly shift, in that the identity of an individual is strategically occupied. An exclusionary conceptualisation of identity thus ignores the complexity of identity politics, the tangled nature of social relationships and the strategic emphasising of one identity over another. This strategic manoeuvring of identity is evident in Accone's narrative handling of the Martin family and their descendants. Their multiracial heritage and subsequently entangled identities can be interpreted as a site of promise in the text, yet their arguably unsuccessful attempts to emphasise certain identities over others, for example, emphasise the reality of their lives within a system that privileges exclusive ideas of identity. This section, therefore, seeks to unravel the manifold identities asserted by Accone's use of space, emphasising how, despite their promise to work against the divisions of apartheid-era South Africa, these entangled identities are constrained by its racial politics.

The uninvited intimacy of entanglement in *All Under Heaven* is exemplified in the marriage of Cornelia von Brandis and Chok Foon Martin. As Accone acknowledges, "Cornelia and Martin knew that to take their love to its conclusion would strike at her family, his community and a score of taboos, not to mention the law" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 111). The interracial marriage in *All Under Heaven* is, therefore, not a hope-filled metaphor for racial harmony, but rather a depiction of the reality of an interracial relationship in a country "beset with racial hatreds of so many kinds" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 110). Furthermore, Accone emphasises this unwelcome intimacy between these two groups, these two sites of rootedness, by highlighting the interconnectedness between the interracial Martin family and the established von Brandis family. As Accone narrates, "it gave Jewel a frisson to think that the street had been named after Carl von Brandis, the first Commissioner of Mines in Transvaal, to whom she was related via Cornelia" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 236). By referring to the von Brandis family and their status as an old white settler family, as well as the superiority that their legacy in Johannesburg implies, Accone undermines the myth of racial purity, thereby asserting the entanglements of apartheid-era South Africa and furthermore rooting Jewel, a Chinese South African woman, in the hitherto white-dominated historical narrative of Johannesburg. This demonstrates the entanglement of which Nuttall speaks, which is characterised by a gaining of intimacy, even if this intimacy is unwelcome (Nuttall, *Entanglement* 1).

All Under Heaven highlights how officialdom struggled to accommodate the entangled identities of the Martin family within the already racially categorised world of pre-apartheid

South Africa. One narrative instance of this is Accone's strategic use of Albertus van Wyk's perspective to focalise the experience of the Martin family on the train between Johannesburg and Durban. When greeted with the sight of the interracial Martin family, Albertus, the ticket inspector, attempts to racially situate the figures in the carriage. He finds it particularly troublesome to place the children, resorting to racial stereotypes to attempt to define their identities:

Strange, these half-breed children – assuming these were the parents – did not look half Chinese, thought Van Wyk. They did not have half-flat noses and half-slitty eyes, their hair was a sort of auburn-black and their skin – well, there was not much yellow in the mix. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 80)

Significantly, Albertus' assertion that they “did not look half Chinese” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 80), thereby implying an appearance of so-called whiteness, highlights the government's ultimate inability to categorise selves who did not fall neatly into their classification system. By drawing on Nuttall's understanding of entanglement as a condition of being entwined and irrevocably interconnected (Nuttall, *Entanglement* 1), one can conclude that the racial identities of Cornelia and Martin have become entangled in their children, twisted together to the point of inseparability and thereby making visible the constructed nature of identity positions. The children of Cornelia and Martin, by being thus entwined with their two sites of rootedness, with European and Asian identities, thereby exemplify a multiplicity of belonging at odds with the dominant ideology of the state.

It is thus this entanglement of identity that allows for the textual subversion of apartheid's project of clearly defining and demarcating identities – the Martin family is able to move across the clearly defined and clearly delineated racial groupings of apartheid South Africa due to their racial entanglements. By “trying for White” and thus attempting to erase all vestiges of Chineseness in her family (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 205), Cornelia transgresses the overriding ideology of apartheid, which posited that racial groups were inherently distinct. Despite the image of whiteness portrayed, however, the entangled nature of the Martin family remained. Gertie, for example, married a Chinese man and could thus not easily associate with her ‘white’ family. Furthermore, her children were “not allowed to acknowledge their grandmother in public” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 206). Cornelia's attempt at disentanglement, however, proved futile as the Martin family were “[r]egarded as half-breeds

by both sides” and thus “stranded in an inescapable limbo” in the highly racialised context of South Africa (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 168). Accone’s emphasis on the inextricable entanglement of the Martin family within both sites of rootedness, both their South African and Chinese heritages, suggests an agency, an ability to cut across the strict divisions of apartheid. Accone’s narrative, however, highlights how they are nevertheless caught within the structures that they had hoped to challenge.

It is worthwhile noting that the Martin children are not only rejected by the white von Brandis family and primarily regarded as outsiders in China, but also face exclusion from the Chinese South African community. It is thus not only the apartheid structures which enforce an exclusionary conception of identity based on the idea of racial purity, but also the Chinese South African community itself. The purist exclusionary politics of this specific Chinese community is narratively foregrounded when Jewel gains entrance to the new Chinese school in Johannesburg, named Kuo Ting School. The old Chinese school refused to admit her due to her status as a “half-caste” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 197), yet Jewel was also discriminated against at the new Chinese school because of her Eurasian ancestry. As Accone remarks:

Going to Chinese school was a mistake. Jewel and her family were denied complete acceptance because they were considered ‘halves’ ... She made few friends, because even though there were boys and girls who wanted to be friends, the peer pressure from the ‘purists’, those who did not tolerate half-Chinese, was too strong. (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 200)

Jewel is rejected by her peers due to her mixed heritage, her multiple racial identities. Despite the alternative that the Martin family offers in the face of apartheid South Africa, these figures are ultimately shown to fall victim to the potentially ensnaring nature of their entangled identities.

In this way, entangled identities which confound the classifications of apartheid, such as the hybrid Martin family, despite the promise that the contemporary South African reader can read into them, are shown in *All Under Heaven* to be sites of struggle and interpersonal disconnection. Accone’s invocation of the multiple identities of the figures in his text, as well as the centrality of Cornelia, Martin and their descendants in the narrative, is at first glance seen to be an assertion of belonging, an act of rooting himself, as a descendent of this interracial

marriage, within the entanglement of South African and Chinese identities. However, Accone's narrative complicates this perhaps too positive understanding by highlighting the negative impacts that an exclusionary approach to identity has on the figures in his text.

Mielie pap and rice: Locating the Self

Sen draws a distinction between an individual's understanding of their own identities and other people's ascription of identity to that individual, remarking that "even when we are clear about how we want to see ourselves, we may still have difficulty in being able to persuade others to see us in just that way" (Sen 6). Accone's text functions as a narrative assertion of multiple identities, asserting a belonging in the South African context by referring to the history of his family in South Africa and their subsequent entanglements within this space. These claims of insiderness, however, exist in the text alongside projections of outsidership, primarily through the apartheid government's unhoming of Chinese South African selves but also through the exclusionary, solitarist approaches towards identities in the text. This section aims to locate the autobiographical self within these plural identities, highlighting how these assertions of multiple belongings are rendered insufficient.

Giddy and Julie's Claremont house becomes emblematic of the rootedness of the Accone family within South Africa. This house, with its view of the Magaliesberg and the rising sun, is an idyllic space of belonging in the natural environment of South Africa. The notion of rootedness to this space is corroborated by Accone's description of the trees on the property, such as how "[o]n the south side of the house, protecting it, was the poplar, its trunk many rings thick" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280). As Liisa Malkki notes, the image of a tree "reveals the territorialization of identity" (Malkki 38). The thickness of the poplar's rings, thus its established nature, emphasises the generational belonging of the Chinese selves in the text to South Africa. Accone's description of the Claremont house, however, reinforces the precarious situation of Chinese South African selves during this time, as it is described as a "haven in the midst of Nationalist territory, with Daspoort and Danville to the south-west, and Hercules, with its extreme conservative demagogue Jaap Marais, two minutes' drive away" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280). This house, with its "curiously appealing insularity" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 278), is thus described as an island in the seas of intolerance. By noting that "it was as if they were living all under heaven" after "a long journey" (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280),

Accone suggests that, after much hard work and striving, Giddy and Julie have reached a space in which they, as Chinese selves in the South African context, can be rooted and can consider themselves free. By invoking the phrase “all under heaven” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280), which was a “[p]opular synonym for China in the era of the Warring States” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 5), the Claremont house is positioned as a kind of China for Giddy and Julie, a tenuous haven of belonging. They are thus able to “re-imagine their South African house as being situated elsewhere, in an imaginary, hypothetical space that reminds them of China” (Genette 238-239).

Significant, however, is that “Julie and Giddy’s mobility writes itself over the text of the former residents’ poverty” (Genette 236). By describing the living conditions of the former residents, the “four families living [there], and sharing a kitchen” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 278), Accone narratively constructs a palimpsestic space, in which the “paradise” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280) of Giddy and Julie is haunted by the structures of apartheid and “the way Apartheid makes dominoes out of people” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 279). As Adriane Genette describes it, “their slice of ‘Heaven’ has its sacrificial underside in the forced, physical removal of other bodies from the very space that gives flight to their imagination” (Genette 239). In this way, the Claremont property, which is coded as a site of rootedness and belonging for the Chinese selves in *All Under Heaven*, is also a site in which the displacements of apartheid played out, thereby complicating this “patch of paradise” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 280). The Chinese South African figures in the text, therefore, occupy a space that is not simply a kind of China insulated from the outside world, but one which is also firmly rooted in the South African apartheid context.

Malkki asserts that “[t]o plot only ‘places of birth’ and nativeness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them” (Malkki 38). Through recounting the family narratives in the text, Accone subtly entangles South African and Chinese identities and customs and thereby asserts an insideness in the space, a sense of inextricable belonging. Notable is the narrative performance of culinary citizenship through which the figures in the second half of *All Under Heaven* embody this “multiplicity of attachments” that extends beyond ethnic origin (Malkki 38). Culinary citizenship, as “a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to food” (Mannur 13), enables Accone’s figures to “blur – or extend – the boundaries of what it means to be either ‘South

African’, or ‘Chinese’, or both” (Yen 108). By noting that Ah Hing’s children “were almost as used to pap as rice” (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 188), for example, Accone draws on images with cultural significance to imply a “hybridity ... in the way [the figures in *All Under Heaven*] live their lives and their modes of cultural consumption” (Yen 107). Furthermore, by recounting Ah Hing’s habit of making a “large pot of porridge” from maize meal (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 188), Accone implies a familiarity with local South African customs, thereby rooting the Chinese selves in his text in the South African context. This multiplicity “unsettle[s], even if only implicitly, an uncomplicated identification with ethnic origin” (Yen 107). According to Yen,

[a]fter years of integration and ‘acculturation’, Accone’s parents and grandparents are insinuated very profoundly into South African life: they live in places like Sophiatown, play the saxophone, speak Chinese and Zulu, dance to Rogers and Hammerstein and maskanda, and eat mielie pap as well as congee. (Yen 107)

The various figures in *All Under Heaven* perform certain identities, at times emphasising ties with the homeland and at times asserting a South Africanness. Accone’s text thus asserts an autobiographical insideness, a sense of belonging, forged by the cumulative experiences of individuals who have occupied these spaces (Liu 74). The text itself can thus be understood as a narrative performance of rootedness and an assertion of Accone’s various belongings, locating the autobiographical self within the plural identities of the Chinese South African figures in the text.

These figures, however, are shown to be unable to fully occupy this plurality of identity because of the restrictions placed on them by exclusive, purist ideas of identity that characterise the South African state and the Chinese community, narratively embodied by the Chinese schools, within the text. In this way, figures such as Gertie and Jewel are shown to fall between Rushdie’s two stools (Rushdie 15), relegated to a space in-between their multiple identities, unable to fully occupy either a Chinese or South African identity due to the exclusionary approaches of both sides. It is in this space between their identities, as well as their relegation to the “grey zone” between black and white (Accone & Harris 203), the dominant dichotomous discourse of South Africa, that Accone perhaps unwittingly locates the autobiographical self. The autobiographical self is shown to belong to multiple spaces, to both the homeland and the hostland. However, despite the multiplicity of the autobiographical self, the figures in the text

upon which Accone's familial rootedness is constructed are shown to exist in the in-between, the grey zone between black and white in South Africa and the grey zone between these aforementioned spaces of belonging. The autobiographical self is thus located in the intersections and ensnaring entanglements of these identities.

Before *All Under Heaven's* epilogue appears an epigraph from William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which asserts that "[t]he oldest hath borne most: we that are young/Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (qt. in Accone, *All Under Heaven* 281). This quote places the impetus on the younger generations of Chinese South Africans, those who are South African-born and embody the plural, entangled identities of later generations of migrants. Implied is their agency in comparison to those who came before them, presumably Ah Leong in the context of the epilogue. Accone, as an individual with a complex net of multiple identities and belongings, is thus located in a privileged position. Accone's narrative self-positioning within these plural identities can, however, be understood as insufficient. To the outside gaze, Accone is nevertheless a foreigner in South Africa, a recognisable other. In this way, despite the claims to insideness in the text, the positioning of the figures within the South African context, the entangled identities and the waning nostalgic orientation towards China, the self-positioning of the autobiographical self is at odds with the ascription of outsidership directed towards Chinese selves in South Africa in the text.

Conclusion

All Under Heaven presents the reader with two sites of rootedness and the necessary routedness between these two sites. It is through the Indian Ocean world, Accone's narrative emphasis on the routes across the Indian Ocean that his figures traverse and their experiences of such transoceanic travel, that Accone emphasises the "multiplicity of attachments" of diasporic selves (Malkki 38). Furthermore, by narratively highlighting sites of rootedness and belonging, Accone asserts an identity that is characterised by its South Africanness and Chineseness and is both homed and unhomed in China and South Africa. The ancestral homeland and first site of rootedness, China, is shown in the text to be a site of fond recollections, a China of the mind, for diasporic Chinese selves in South Africa. South Africa, the second site of rootedness, is shown to be a begrudging hostland, one which aimed to categorise and control Chinese selves. Furthermore, by rooting his figures within the racial politics of South Africa before and during

apartheid, Accone situates the figures in *All Under Heaven* within the broader South African historiography, thereby asserting an insideness in the South African context.

However, this insideness is shown to be insufficient due to the projected outsideness experienced by the figures in *All Under Heaven*. Their expressions of plural identities are constrained by the perceptions of others and the structures which enforce belonging to a single identity category. Accone thus explores how the multiple identities of Chinese South African selves are hindered from expression because of the structures of exclusion experienced both within the greater South Africa and their own Chinese community. Within the Chinese community, the hybrid Martin family is discriminated against due to their hybridity, their interracial entanglement, that marks them as other in the community. As Chinese selves in apartheid-era South Africa, they are relegated to a grey zone, a space of precarious belonging that entangles and aligns them with the history of South Africa. Ultimately, the figures in the text are shown to be constrained by their prescribed identities, having to define themselves in relation to the identity structures of apartheid. In the same way, the locating of the autobiographical self within the multiple belongings of Accone's familial narrative is found lacking in the face of the exclusionary identity politics to which the figures in the text are subjected.

Samuelson understands the Indian Ocean paradigm, a discourse in which Accone situates his Chinese South African figures, as part of the process of "rais[ing] pertinent questions about home, belonging, and Africanness that help to move us beyond the bankrupt policies of autochthony and gesture towards ways of imagining the nation anew" (Samuelson, "Making Home" 299). *All Under Heaven*, however, troubles this outlook. Even though Accone's text complicates apartheid's solitarist approach to identity, asserting a multiplicity and entanglement, the figures in the text are nevertheless caught within disempowering structures that fail to recognise their multiple identities and belongings. *All Under Heaven* stakes a barely perceptible claim to contemporary South Africanness – despite its assertion of belonging in the South African context through the embeddedness of Accone's family narrative within South Africa's history, the figures in the text remain unhomed and on the periphery, unable to fully occupy their South Africanness.

Chapter II

“Edges of Opportunity”¹⁰: Peripheral Selves in *Ho’s Paper Sons and Daughters*

Introduction

Ufrieda Ho’s *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing Up Chinese in South Africa* (2011) chronicles the lived experiences of the autobiographical self as a young Chinese individual in South Africa, from her childhood in the 1970s and 1980s until her experiences as a young working adult in the early 1990s. This text primarily takes place in Johannesburg, in recognisable settings such as the East Rand, the township spaces on the periphery and the inner city. It is through the narrative handling of these urban spaces, their connotations and weight in Johannesburg imaginaries, that the movements of Ho’s figures across them become significant, most notably the movements of the father figure, Ah Kee, who operates fahfee and traverses the manifold spaces of the city as a result. This chapter focuses on Ho’s depiction of these urban spaces in her text, the movements between and navigation of the demarcated spaces within the apartheid city, and the implications of these movements within the broader narrative project of positioning the autobiographical self.

In addition to chronicling her own experiences, Ho intersperses her narrative with descriptions of her family history, not in the novelistic fashion of Accone, but as a self-conscious addition to and framing of her own narrative. Ho’s foregrounding of the communal, her narrative exploration of the intricacies and ambiguities of her family’s history, complements her auto/biographical project – it is through understanding the history of her family that the reader can better understand the complexity of Ho’s subject position as a second-generation immigrant. It thus becomes necessary to orientate oneself with the various familial figures in the text. Ho’s maternal grandparents, as well as her mother and father, entered South Africa illegally. Ho’s grandfather, Fok Yat Gou or Ah Goung, was smuggled into the country in the late 1940s, while Ho’s grandmother, Ah Por, and her mother, referred to as Ah Yee in this chapter, underwent the same journey in the 1960s. The plan was for Ah Goung to reach a certain level of economic stability in South Africa before sending for his wife and child. The

¹⁰ Ho, *Paper Sons* 134.

hope of a speedy reunion was disappointed – this separation lasted eighteen years. Ah Por and Ah Yee relocated to Hong Kong during this time, seeking a respite from “the unforgiving life on the mainland” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 36). After having lived in Hong Kong for more than ten years, Ah Por and Ah Yee finally left the familiar for the unfamiliar, travelling to a new land, with new people and a father and husband who was a mere memory from eighteen years ago. They were smuggled onto a ship and confined to an unnoticed corner to avoid detection, having left their identity cards behind in Hong Kong in order to receive new identities upon their arrival. Ho’s father, Ho Sing Kee or Ah Kee, made a similar journey to South Africa, albeit in the 1950s. Ho and her siblings, namely Yolanda, Kelvin and Unisda, are “the branches on the family tree that were born under a South African sun” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 92), growing up as second-generation immigrants in apartheid-era South Africa. Despite the multiple names that these siblings, and Ho herself, occupy (Ho, *Paper Sons* 5-6), I will make use of those most commonly used in *Paper Sons and Daughters*, which are their English names. As in *All Under Heaven*, the plethora of names in this text is a by-product of officialdom and illegal entry.

The title of *Paper Sons and Daughters* refers to the precarious, illegal mode of migration historically utilised by many Chinese. This mode of migration involved the borrowing and buying of identities from more established individuals in the hostland and then the use of these identities to gain entry into the hostland (Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 211). The phenomenon of paper sons and paper daughters is said to have originated in San Francisco in 1906, when the fiery destruction of a records building gave Chinese migrants the opportunity to, upon re-registering themselves, claim to have sons that did not exist and thereby enable family or community members in the homeland to join them in the hostland (Ho, *Paper Sons* 40). Chinese individuals in South Africa used this practice to circumvent the strict laws regulating Chinese entry into the country at the time (Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 211).¹¹ Ah Leong in

¹¹ The regulation of Chinese entry into South Africa was the result of growing anti-Chinese sentiment and the perceived threat of the ‘yellow peril’, most notably following an outbreak of the bubonic plague in the Cape Colony in 1901 (Yap & Man 61-62). The introduced legislation included the Immigration Restriction Act of 1902 and the Cape Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904. The Immigration Restriction Act was concerned with the arrival of so-called Asiatics (Yap & Man 62), while the Chinese Exclusion Act is “the first and only specifically anti-Chinese legislation in South Africa” (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 14) in that it “prohibited Chinese from entering and residing in the Cape Colony” (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 22). Central to the above-mentioned legislation was the condition that a Chinese individual who wanted to enter South Africa had to prove either that they had resided in South Africa previously or that they were proficient in a European language (Park, “Sojourners to Settlers” 211). However, the Immigrants Regulation Amendment Act of 1953 brought immigration from Communist China to a halt (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 39, 43). Because of these restrictions, a number of Chinese individuals assumed the identities of either existing or fabricated Chinese residents in South Africa, effectively gaining entry to South Africa.

All Under Heaven was one such paper son, having illegally entered the country with papers bought from a Chinese couple in South Africa who had lost their son (Accone, *All Under Heaven* 106). This method of illegal entry was also used by women and children such as Ho's mother and grandmother. The complex civil position of those who enter a country through illegal means can be described as follows: "they are outside of the law of a country due to their status as illegal immigrants but are still regulated and constrained in legally-sanctioned, although extra-legal, ways" (Mosselson 644). The term 'illegal immigrants', however, simplistically positions the immigrant self in direct and intentional opposition to the state of entry, while the reality is often more complicated and nuanced (Valdez-Symonds). The relationship between the immigrant selves and the official structures of the state in Ho's text will be discussed in this chapter, particularly with regards to the navigation of these official structures by the fahfee man.

The game of fahfee has been described as the "[o]ne governing metaphor" of *Paper Sons and Daughters* (Hofmeyr, "Review" 961). However, in order to understand the metaphorical significance of fahfee in Ho's text, it is first necessary to possess a basic understanding of its operation and dynamics. The game of fahfee, as already encountered in *All Under Heaven*, has a particularly ubiquitous presence, being "an entrenched feature of everyday life for many South Africans" despite its status as an unregulated and informal gambling activity (Louw, "African Numbers Games" 111). Described as a "Chinese-run community-based lottery" (Louw, "Chinese Immigrants" 53), this illegal form of gambling is peculiarly South African, finding its roots in the context of the gold and diamond mines of the early 20th century (Louw, "Chinese Immigrants" 10). Fahfee's various role-players include the invariably Chinese operator, also known as the "fahfee man, the mm-china or ma-china of the townships, a so-called *ju fah goung*" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 1), the runners and the betters or punters. The operator chooses a number between one and thirty-six for a specific 'bank' before setting off on his routes. An operator has multiple 'banks' along their route and each bank is typically visited twice in one day (Louw, "African Numbers Games" 118). The individual players similarly choose a number between one and thirty-six. Fahfee is a game of chance, its numbers "conjured up [by both the operator and the players] from the fantastic possibility of dreams, symbols and personal interpretations of life's uncanny coincidences" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 126). The player puts the wagered monetary amount and a betting slip with this number on in a 'bag' or 'wallet' that is then handed to the runner, who is typically a local resident (Louw, "African Number Games" 117). The operator then arrives, the winning number is announced and the operator sorts

through the bets placed, filling winning ‘bags’ and emptying losing ones. There have been a number of ethnographic studies, notably by Stephen Louw (2017) and Detlev Krige (2011), that have sought to explore both the primacy of dreams and dream interpretation in fahfee and the entangled webs of relationships and reliance that bound the operator, runner and punter. The movement of the operator, the fahfee man, through the apartheid city is central to this chapter as this is the position occupied by Ah Kee, Ufrieda Ho’s father.

This chapter draws on Michel de Certeau’s conceptualisation of the city in the chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) entitled “Walking in the City”, particularly the distinction between the elevated position of the voyeur and the movements of the ordinary pedestrian. The position of the voyeur is one that is distant from the action, looking in from a position of power and agency and thereby rendering the urban space readable (de Certeau 92). It is through this panoptic view of the urban text that its official structures are visible. From this position, the urban space becomes a functional destination with “few surprises, few chances for unregulated encounters” (Simone 408). It is thus from the position of the voyeur god that the urban space can be clearly defined and delineated (de Certeau 92), thereby linking “[p]articular spaces ... to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties” (Simone 409). This is the position of the apartheid state. The second position posited by de Certeau is that of the pedestrian, the wanderer, who does not read the urban text from above, but who stakes a claim to the space through their movement within it. As de Certeau formulates it:

The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. (de Certeau 93)

Particularly notable with regards to *Paper Sons and Daughters* is the dual movements of these walkers – they follow the paths observed by the voyeur, the official structures that form the city, yet they simultaneously write an alternative city into being. Their movements “give their shape to spaces”, weaving the city together (de Certeau 97). This “process of appropriation of the topographical system” thus gives agency to the pedestrian (de Certeau 97), who employs movement in the urban space as a tactic through which to survive and subvert the official strategy of the space.

This chapter seeks to explore Ho's narrative handling of the movements of the figures in the text, most notably Ah Kee, by favouring the street-level practices within the urban space rather than the structures which seek to regulate these practices. The static city as seen from above is in part undermined by the very urbanity of the space. According to AbdouMaliq Simone, the African city is characterised by "incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used" (Simone 407). These urban interactions often stand in opposition to the built environment of the city, the official delineation of space. As Simone notes,

[s]tate administrations and civil institutions have lacked the political and economic power to assign the diversity of activities taking place within the city (buying, selling, residing, etc.) to bounded spaces of deployment, codes of articulation, or the purview of designated actors. (Simone 409)

Simone argues in the above quote that the official structures of the African city ultimately fail to restrict the use of the constructed city, to circumvent the tactics by which residents occupy the space. This failure is attributed to "the accelerated, extended, and intensified intersections of bodies, landscapes, objects, and technologies [that] defer [this] calcification" (Simone 408). This echoes the apartheid state's attempts to categorise and designate, a process undermined in the text by the movement of Ah Kee in the urban space and his interactions with other individuals that defy the official economic and social structures of the apartheid city.

In this way, this chapter endeavours to move beyond the tendency to read the city of Johannesburg as "nothing but the spatial embodiment of unequal economic relations and coercive and segregationist policies" (Mbembe & Nuttall 353). Ho's narrative foregrounding of fahfee is central to this – it is because of the position of Chinese South African selves as "second-class citizens" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 112), situated in "no-man's-land for the apartheid government" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 112), that fahfee became a tool for survival, and it is because of fahfee that these figures can interact with a wide range of urban spaces within Johannesburg. By approaching the African city as "better understood in terms of its extracanonial leakages, its lines of flight, its borderlands and interfaces" (Mbembe & Nuttall 354), this chapter seeks to present the reader with the complex involvement of Chinese South African selves with and within the official structures of the apartheid city through a close analysis of the manifold delineated spaces in *Paper Sons and Daughters*, most notably the township spaces and the

urban space, and the predominantly fahfee-related traversals across these spaces. It first seeks to understand the text as a reconstructed auto/biography before focusing on the narrative centrality of both Ah Kee's geographical movements that disrupt the official structures of the urban space and the social movement of the Ho family, the upward economic mobility made possible by fahfee. Furthermore, the final section seeks to situate the post-apartheid autobiographical self within the violences of the urban space. This chapter argues that, by positioning her figures as occupying a subversive identity within the apartheid city and chronicling their movements across the supposedly impenetrable boundaries of the urban space, Ho narratively asserts a belonging in the post-apartheid city.

Paper Sons and Daughters as a Reconstructed Auto/Biography

Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall remark that “a city is not simply a string of infrastructures, technologies, and legal entities ... [i]t also comprises actual people, images and architectural forms, footprints and memories” (Mbembe & Nuttall 360). Ho's narrative handling of the urban space in *Paper Sons and Daughters* is a project of giving life to this space, emphasising the interconnectedness characteristic of it and asserting a historical belonging within it. In order to do this, it is necessary for the autobiographical self to narratively situate and manoeuvre herself both within the official histories of the city of Johannesburg and within the labyrinth of her own familial history. This section seeks to explore the implications of *Paper Sons and Daughters*' self-classification as memoir within the context of the interplay between the memoir, the autobiography and the auto/biography, highlighting the repercussions of the complex identities in the text that resulted from illegal entry to the process of reconstruction.

By positioning itself as a memoir, as evident on the cover of the text, *Paper Sons and Daughters* can be situated within a broader debate on the relationship between the autobiography and the memoir. According to Laura Marcus, the most common distinction made between these two text forms is that an autobiography is “the evocation of a life as a totality”, while a memoir is “only an anecdotal depiction of people and events” (Marcus 3). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson understand the memoir as a form of life writing in which more attention is placed on the lives and activities of others, rather than on the narrator (Smith & Watson 274), asserting that “[c]urrently, the term refers generally to life writing that takes a segment of a life, not its entirety, and focusing on interconnected experiences” (Smith & Watson 274). This

understanding of memoirs as chronicles of certain facets of a life, which draw on other figures in order to elaborate on these facets, is apposite when discussing Ho's auto/biography. The formulation of 'auto/biography', I believe, captures the interplay between the autobiographical self and the other figures in *Paper Sons and Daughters*. The memoir records the individual story by recording the story of the community, of others. As such, recollection and documentation, the use of personal memories and impersonal historical records, contribute to the memoir, which itself becomes a personal biography, a biography mediated through the experiences of the autobiographical self. Ho, who positions herself as a "custodian of stories" (Ho, *Paper Sons* vii), is implicated in the lives she narrates, as she narrates herself in them. *Paper Sons and Daughters*, by positioning itself as a memoir, does not claim to offer a full account of Ho's life or the lives of her ancestors. Rather, it undertakes the project of presenting the reader with the predicaments of Chinese selves in South Africa predominantly during apartheid, interspersing Ho's own story with anecdotes, remembrances and factual information of her family.

Paper Sons and Daughters is a constructed text in a similar vein to Accone's *All Under Heaven*. The constructed and assumed identities of paper sons and daughters have repercussions for Ho's auto/biographical project as the changing names, ages and familial relations that resulted from this migratory phenomenon troubles Ho's reconstruction of her familial past. She notes, for example, that the fake papers and new identities claimed by her mother and grandmother upon their arrival in South Africa "meant more paper and incorrect dates and information that have left me confused about my mother's (and my father's) actual birth dates and their true ages" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 55). In addition to the confusion caused by the fake papers and assumed identities, Ho also emphasises that many of the temporal details in her text are "estimates deduced from the overlap of stories" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 35), compounded by "the confusion of intersecting Chinese lunar calendars and Western calendars, illiteracy and foggy memories" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 35). As Ho describes this phenomenon,

[t]here is uncertainty and doubts of origin and belonging. There is confusion over history blended with stories that are handed down generation after generation. There is what is lost in translation and the mystery of context one simply cannot know. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 119)

These uncertainties can be seen in Ho's grappling with the stories about her father's sister. According to the stories, this sister was sold to a rich family in China during a time of economic hardship. Ah Kee's "few patchy memories" of his younger sister contradict another sister's assertions that this aunt did not exist (Ho, *Paper Sons* 65). Ho is left to ask: "Was she real or was she a corruption of stories and memories grown murky over time?" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 65). This points to Ho's ultimate inability to fully capture the history of her family in her text as, despite Hofmeyr's assertion that "absent ancestors are lovingly constructed via objects, photographs, or stories" (Hofmeyr, "Review" 961), there are nevertheless stories which have fallen victim to the very human desire to leave that which was painful behind, those stories that have been lost to the sands of time. In this way, Ho's memoir must be approached as a text of reconstructions, one which attempts to present the reader with a detailed account of the position of the autobiographical self and her family within South Africa.

"Toil on the periphery"¹²: Fahfee and Automobility in the Apartheid City

By daily traversing the dividing lines of the apartheid city, crossing the boundaries which define it in order to run fahfee in the township spaces, Ah Kee navigates the urban space in a way which differs from its official designation. He becomes one of de Certeau's so-called *Wandersmänner* – his traversals of Johannesburg follow the official structures and clearly defined paths in much the same way that de Certeau's wanderer follows the structures of the urban text (de Certeau 93). Ah Kee uses the official structures of the city, most notably its network of roads, to journey from Johannesburg's suburban areas to its townships. Unlike the wanderer, however, Ah Kee traverses the urban spaces in his car, not on foot, and it is his car that allows for his geographical movements between these spaces. This section draws on the conceptualisation of automobility as "the combination of autonomy, and mobility" that results from an individual's ability to manoeuvre themselves through a space using an automobile (Featherstone 1). In this way, the car becomes a sign of Ah Kee's automobility, allowing for "a new means of mapping, and interacting with, city space" (Putter 66). This section seeks to explore the narration of Ah Kee's subversive movements and economic exchanges within the township spaces of the apartheid city, emphasising the position held by the Chinese South

¹² Ho, *Paper Sons* 2.

African selves within *Paper Sons and Daughters* and Ho's narrative alignment of her figures with the recognisable structures of this urban space.

Johannesburg is described in *Paper Sons and Daughters* as a city of division and "a society full of cleavages" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 4). Ah Kee is shown to occupy two spaces within this city, namely the suburb of Judith's Paarl in which he resides with his family and the township spaces located on the fringes of the urban space in which he runs fahfee. In order to understand the significance of Ah Kee's interactions with the township spaces, it is first necessary to elaborate on the significance of these spaces. The township space, as envisaged by the apartheid government and as subsequently adopted into South African imaginaries, even to this day, as representative of black identity and culture (Ellapen 114), is a space that seeks to reproduce readings of Africa and the African as uncivilised. The image of the township space was constructed by the National Party government to position black identity and culture as pre-modern, "a space of 'otherness' characterized by underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment, decay and death" (Ellapen 114). The township space was furthermore "envisioned as a space of containment" (Ellapen 115), where black South Africans who were vital cogs in the apartheid machine could be housed. It was a "zone of otherness that reiterated the marginal position of blacks in South African society" (Ellapen 116).¹³ Significantly, the township spaces and the city were "inextricably linked under apartheid" (Mbembe et al. 499) as, despite the apartheid government's aim to keep these spaces separate, to contain black South Africans in spaces on the periphery of the city, both spaces required the existence of the other. The township existed as a result of the city space and its inhabitants relied, and still rely to a certain extent today, on the city space for economic survival (Mbembe & Nuttall 357), while the city relied heavily on the workforce of the township. Despite this, township spaces remained conceptually removed from the apartheid city, the "imbrication of city and township" ignored (Mbembe & Nuttall 357).

¹³ It must, however, be noted that township spaces in apartheid South Africa were not only reserved for those classified as black, as there were also township spaces dedicated specifically to South Africa's so-called Coloured and Indian populations. The Group Areas Act of 1950 saw, for example, the removal of Indian residents in Johannesburg to Lenasia, an Indian township on the fringes of the city (Parnell & Beavon 14). There were a number of these so-called Indian townships in what is now Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Those classified as Coloured by the apartheid government also endured forced removals and were confined to racially homogenous townships, most notably in the Cape Peninsula (Trotter 55). Former Coloured townships can also be found in the Eastern Cape, the Northern Cape, Gauteng and the Free State. In the same way that the township spaces described in *Paper Sons and Daughters* were constructed as spaces of otherness by the apartheid government, these Indian and Coloured township spaces were spatially removed from the hub of the urban space, relegating its inhabitants to the social and economic fringes of the apartheid city.

By understanding the drive of the apartheid state as that of institutionalising and reinforcing rigid boundaries (Vahed & Desai 3), it is then Ho's narrative handling of boundary crossings in *Paper Sons and Daughters* that positions her family and the autobiographical self as subversive role-players within the apartheid city. Jennifer Robinson questions apartheid spaces, asking:

Were those spaces so fixed, so divisive, so certain in their form? Our imaginations have lived for so long with the lines of apartheid space, with the blank spaces in between, the deadening images of power drawn on the ground ... In what sense was even the apartheid city – a city of division – a place of movement, of change, of crossings? (Robinson 163)

It is through the narrative emphasis Ho places on Ah Kee's automobility in Johannesburg that this apartheid city becomes a place of movement, of interchange and interconnectedness. The car becomes the tool through which the multiple, disparate places of the city are traversed and the boundaries between the racially delineated spaces, the supposedly impenetrable lines that characterise the apartheid city, are crossed and transcended. It is particularly the boundary between the city and the township, between the carefully constructed streets of the city space and the "streets with no names and no pavements" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 130), that is central to Ho's text. Ah Kee's movements weave together these disparate places in the text, thereby positing the apartheid city as a space of perpetual and economically necessary movement, which contradicts the official codification of segregation.

It is through Ho's narration of these movements, focalised through the eyes of a child yet interjected with more mature reflections on the physical and ideological structures of apartheid, that the reader is confronted with the subversive nature of Ah Kee's movements. According to Xavier Livermon,

the mobility rendered possible by the use of the car is paradoxical, if only because the car highlights the very segregated and divided nature of the urban metropolis. Yet it also reveals it to be a segregation or division that can be disturbed or shifted. (Livermon 275)

Ho's childhood remembrances of the rare occasions in which she would accompany her father on his fahfee rounds emphasise the divided apartheid city, yet these rounds are simultaneously acts of border crossings, subversive movements across the supposedly impenetrable boundaries of the apartheid city. Ho's narration of these moments is characterised by departures and arrivals, the transition from the suburb to the township in the late morning and the return from the township space in the early evening. As Ho describes it, the journey involved a movement away from the familiar suburbs with their walled-in gardens and kitsch garden accessories to the township space in which "Apollo lights, the towering street lights ... stood in for trees, and there was hardly a blade of grass anywhere" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 130). Anne Putter's assertion that "cars highlight divisions in the city space" (Putter 67) is thus corroborated by Ho's narrative handling of these border crossings and transitions. Ah Kee's automobility in the apartheid city links its various urban spaces that have been segregated by the delineations of the state, thus functioning as a disruption of the apartheid segregationist project and thereby confirming the potentially subversive nature of navigating the city by car. In this way, Ah Kee's movements within the urban space, due to his status as a paper son, his involvement in fahfee and the subversive nature of these movements, challenge the official structures of the state.

The economic interdependence of the various role-players in fahfee highlights that these individuals subvert the economic and social infrastructure of the apartheid city. Ah Kee, with his lack of formal education and enforced outsidership in the white-dominated economic structures of apartheid South Africa, turned to running fahfee in Johannesburg's township spaces as a "survivalist livelihood strategy" (Louw, "Chinese Immigrants" 62). Fahfee "is never a first choice to make an income" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 181), yet as Yap and Man assert, "those who had no formal Western education and were unable to read and write English, were restricted to such occupations" (Yap & Man 388). Fahfee in *Paper Sons and Daughters* becomes a means of creating opportunity on the fringes, a "mutual conspiracy against the apartheid system" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133). According to Ho, "[t]he ma-china and the poor black man of the townships were pushed towards the periphery; neither was part of what whirled in the tight inner circle: white wealth" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133). Both parties "existed on the edges of opportunity" and it was here where fahfee could thrive (Ho, *Paper Sons* 134). Fahfee therefore needed apartheid, the existence of "two groups on the edge of society, separate but bound together, to connect momentarily in the collusion of circumventing the ways of the economic mainstream" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133). As Ho notes,

[t]here was a competition and a game that made the fahfee man and the betters more like opponents. But they could not be too far apart either. They needed each other. Dad needed them to bet; the bigger the pool the greater the odds for him to make a profit. The betters needed dad as an opportunity, even in the form of a gamble, to add meat to that week's menu. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133)

This interdependency, the idea that the fahfee man and the better needed each other, is central to Ho's narrative. Ah Kee's betters were "not friends or colleagues and not even customers really" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133). Instead, they are positioned as individuals who are necessary for the fahfee man's survival in a similar way that the fahfee man forms a part of their day-to-day economic navigation, as both groups exist on the economic periphery of the apartheid city. In Ho's text, fahfee thus functions as a tactic through which marginalised selves can survive in the apartheid state. In this way, the fahfee man comes to resemble the urban hustler figure in the apartheid and post-apartheid Johannesburg imaginary. Both the fahfee man and the urban hustler are "masters of marginality" in the urban space (Peterson 198). As Bhekizizwe Peterson remarks, "[h]ustling ... is the institution of a 'defensive space' where defensive strategies can be adopted by the wretched of the earth" (Peterson 208). Ah Kee is therefore enmeshed in what Simone describes as social infrastructure that "emphasises economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life" (Simone 407). It is through fahfee, a game played on the margins of society, with role-players who exist on the fringes of the formal structures of the state, that these individuals could circumvent the disadvantageous economic systems of apartheid.

It is because of this interdependence that the moments of interaction between Ah Kee and his betters, as reconstructed by Ho, warrant further examination. Ho's narration of these moments include both memories of positive interactions between Ah Kee and his betters and moments in which the power dynamics inherent in fahfee are reinforced. One such moment of positive interaction is Ho's recollection of Ah Kee buying cooldrinks for his runner and his betters, in which the distinctions between them are dissipated as they "all drank in the fizzy, sweet coldness like it was not a day of work after all" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 134). In addition to this, Ho's fond recollections of arriving at banks with her father and receiving "all the nice exchanges and encouragement that people reserve for small children" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 130) from the fahfee players points to a comradeship between these two parties, textually emphasising the "humanness of connection" that existed in the interactions between Ah Kee and his betters (Ho,

Paper Sons 134). Ho concludes this recollection with a curt “and then it was back to business” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 130). This is significant in that the interaction between the fahfee man and the better was necessarily a transaction. As Ho concedes:

A fahfee man is not your polite local butcher or the plumber who calls his clients ‘ma’am’. Sometimes I thought my father was harder than he should have been with his betters, but as an adult I realised that even his attitude was part of the fahfee man’s life; it was not a business for pushovers. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 132)

Despite Louw’s conceptualisation of fahfee as “a medium through which individuals enter into relationships with each other” (Louw, “African Numbers Games” 129), it is necessary to understand that these relationships are nevertheless fraught with the drive for economic survival, that the “tally of losses” in Ah Kee’s head translated to an inability to provide fully for his family (Ho, *Paper Sons* 132). Ho’s narrative handling of Ah Kee’s interactions with the inhabitants of the township spaces highlight that these interactions, despite moments of connection and the economic interdependence of the role-players of fahfee, were not always moments of successful collaboration against the official economic structures of the apartheid state.

As one of de Certeau’s pedestrian walkers, Ah Kee’s movements weave the city together for the reader (de Certeau 97), writing an urban text that differs to the constructed urban text, the state-sanctioned understanding of the apartheid city as a city of division. In this way, Ah Kee becomes emblematic of those who defy the impenetrable structural divisions of the apartheid city due to necessity, who by traversing these structures create an alternative urban text. This alternative urban space involves the alternative use of official structures. Upon returning to the township space later in the day, Ah Kee and Ho “waited for runners in this orange haze of the [location] lights, the Apollos, outside someone’s small home, or parked inside the range of some fluorescent lights outside a spaza shop that had electricity” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 133). The Apollos, the steel streetlights that become emblematic of state surveillance (Mbembe et al. 503), are undermined by the fahfee man, who uses the light they provide in order to conduct his business. In this way, the official infrastructure of the state is shown to ultimately be unable to regulate the transactions within this space. Ho’s narrative approach to the journey back to the suburban space, the transition from “the dusty road and orange gloom of the Apollos ... to the tarred roads” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 135), points to a return to the official structure of the

apartheid city, a turn away from the subversion of apartheid structures in the township space towards a performance of navigating the urban spaces strictly within the confines of state infrastructure. That is, this movement into a space in which “working traffic lights commanded order” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 135) narratively posits a return to order, to a middle-class, suburban veneer.

It, therefore, becomes apparent that Ah Kee occupied the position of an outsider in the township space. Ah Kee’s racial classification precluded a belonging in this space, thus relegating him to the position of an outsider, an anomalous presence outside of his role as the fahfee man. He, however, knew the “unwritten codes, the hidden streets and secret places” of the township and formed “part of the township landscape” due the economic interdependence that exists between the different role-players of fahfee (Ho, *Paper Sons* 182). This points to the inherent ambivalences in the position of the fahfee man in the township space – he is part of the township landscape but inevitably an outsider, not part of the township community. This is emphasised by Ho’s description of the township space as “the world we slipped in and out of as the *ju fah gOUNG* and his daughter” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 135). Significant here is Ho’s admittance that the township space was a world that was entered and eventually left behind, thereby reminding the reader of the ultimate mobility of the Chinese selves in *Paper Sons and Daughters*. Even though they were restricted in many ways by the apartheid government, they possessed more freedoms than Ah Kee’s punters, including the ability to live in suburbs that, while still grey areas, allowed for easy access to the city itself. Ho narratively emphasises Ah Kee’s relegation to the position of an outsider in the township space despite his interactions with the inhabitants of that space and with individuals who occupy anomalous positions within it, with those who trouble the official delineation of “who fitted in where and when” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 135). In this way, the subversive nature of Ah Kee’s movements in the text, his ability to navigate the urban space in a way which differs from its official designation, must nevertheless conform to apartheid’s designations of who belongs where.

Unlike the “travelling incarceration” of train travel, in which the traveller lacks agency by being “pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car” (de Certeau 111), Ah Kee’s automobility implies an agency, an ability to navigate oneself through the margins and paragraph breaks of the urban text in ways which defy the imposed structure. It is significant, however, that Ah Kee’s subversive movements in the urban space follow the roads and highways of the apartheid city, the designated routes. In this way, Ah Kee’s automobility is

nevertheless constrained and must necessarily “follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’” (de Certeau 93), using the official structures of the city, most notably its network of roads, to journey from Johannesburg’s suburban areas to its townships. This notion can be expanded to signify that, despite the position *against* the law occupied by Ah Kee as an illegal immigrant (Klaaren & Ramji 40), Ah Kee and the other Chinese South African selves in *Paper Sons and Daughters* are nevertheless caught within the manifold structures of the apartheid city.

“The ladder to middle class”¹⁴: Upward Mobility and the Shadow of Fahfee

The suburban space in *Paper Sons and Daughters* is a site of domestic normalcy, where the climb to middle class and the struggle of immigrant survival in an unwelcoming hostland forms the backdrop to the world of school, teenagerhood and the gradual entanglement of China and South Africa within the home. It is in this domestic space, mostly separated from and ignorant of the prevailing structures of the apartheid city, that Ho positions her younger self. Central to this is the upward social movement of the Ho family, as evidenced by their move from a rented semi-detached house in Bertrams to a free-standing house in Judith’s Paarl, both grey areas in the apartheid city. The house in Judith’s Paarl in particular becomes a space in which the traditions of the homeland interact with the growing influence of the hostland. Furthermore, it is here that Ho troubles the separatist drive of the apartheid city – the upward mobility of the Ho family is only possible through the “economic muscle” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 178) of fahfee and the ambivalent relationship of Ho’s figures with fahfee, their necessary connection to the township space and the subsequent necessity of maintaining silence.

The move from Bertrams to Judith’s Paarl in the 1980s was an achievement for Ah Kee (Ho, *Paper Sons* 92). As Ho notes, it is through the “sweat and drudgery” of fahfee that the Ho family was able to pay for “school fees, treats at a roadhouse and eventually an assortment of second-hand cars as we climb[ed] the ladder to middle class” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 2). This house, while still modest, was bigger than their house in Bertrams and came with luxuries like wall-to-wall carpeting, built-in cupboards and a small wine cellar inherited from its previous owners, a Portuguese family who were amateur winemakers. Unlike the yard of the Bertrams house, with its “uneven surface [that] was filled with small, dark, coal-like flakes” (Ho, *Paper Sons*

¹⁴ Ho, *Paper Sons* 2.

13), the house in Judith's Paarl had "a backyard level enough to bounce a ball on and later also to set up a fold-away ping-pong table" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 93). It is described as a middle-class idyll. In the grey area of Judith's Paarl, white, Indian, Chinese and Coloured families resided side-by-side, with the first black family being introduced into the suburb in the early 1990s (Ho, *Paper Sons* 184). Given particular attention in Ho's text is the white woman on their street who worked for COSATU, a trade union federation that was involved in the fight against apartheid. This woman was a single mother who hosted lively parties attended by a "racially mixed group of people" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 183). Despite the relative diversity of their neighbours, however, the Judith's Paarl house gains particular significance in the text as the site of an "easy mingle" between China and South Africa (Ho, *Paper Sons* 15). Ho's frequent coughing fits, for example, were treated with both Vicks and "other potions and remedies of healing that were from far away" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 95). Ho further narrates the incorporation of Western traditions such as Christmas and Easter into the lives of her family, noting that it was during this period that they experienced "the merging of the world of the *lei see* packets in bright red with gold writing along with Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer at Christmas and chocolate Easter bunnies" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 99). It is, therefore, in the middle-class space of the house in Judith's Paarl that China and South Africa are able to coexist for the Ho family.

However, the relatively comfortable mingling of East and West into middle class suburbia is tainted by the presence of fahfee and its association with the township space. *Paper Sons and Daughters* is replete with descriptions of fahfee as shameful, a secret, carrying stigma and shrouded in silence as a result. Despite the necessity of fahfee for the economic survival and upward social movement of the Ho family and its central role in the structuring of familial activities in the text, it could never be spoken about openly, not even to community insiders, due to its illegality and its association with Johannesburg's townships. Ho succinctly expresses this situation as follows:

Fahfee had an overwhelming code of silence. Its stigma and secrecy grew formidable in the silence. This stigma and secrecy became a striking emblem of my parents' existence of working and more working, but still being excluded from an economic mainstream and being labelled socially unacceptable outside the Chinese community. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 165)

Ho narratively foregrounds the precarious position of Chinese selves in apartheid South Africa by comparing them to dragons in fairytales, noting that “[a]s long as we stayed in our lairs and did not breathe our fire, we were pretty much left alone” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 3). Openly acknowledging fahfee would be tantamount to breathing fire due to its reputation as “the dirty gambling of the townships” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 2). It was by not allowing their reputation to be ‘stained’ by their association with the township spaces of Johannesburg, by maintaining a veneer of separation, that Ho’s figures could “make their lives, make their money” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 182). Even though a large number of the Chinese individuals in the community were connected to fahfee, it was an open secret, never discussed (Ho, *Paper Sons* 4). Fahfee, while being an integral part of the daily routine in the Ho household, was therefore shrouded in silence. However, this silence was broken by the intrusion of phone calls from the police station when Ah Kee had been arrested during his fahfee rounds (Ho, *Paper Sons* 179). These phone calls served as reminders that fahfee involved playing a dangerous game with the law, thereby interrupting the domesticity of the Judith’s Paarl house and reminding the migrants in Ho’s text of their precarious belonging.

In addition to this, it is in the Judith’s Paarl house that the differences between first-generation immigrants, Ah Kee and Ah Yee in the text, and their children are played out. Remedies for ailments that were brought over from China were perceived as “increasingly foolish and backwards” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 95), while the “the perceived freedom of sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll; and Johnny Depp” became more appealing (Ho, *Paper Sons* 117). There is a distrust inherent in the parents’ perception of the West, as evidenced by Johnny Depp and River Phoenix’s position as “the white boys my parents feared” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 122), while there is a naivety in the attitudes of the children, a blindness to the underside of the West’s “seductive pleasure” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 117) and a lack of understanding as to their own socio-political context. To them, the world “seemed fine” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 111). This removal from the reality of South Africa at the time is further emphasised by the involvement of Yolanda and Kelvin, the two eldest Ho siblings, in Chinese politics while studying at the University of the Witwatersrand in the late 1980s. They joined protests in the call for democracy in China (Ho, *Paper Sons* 118). According to Ho,

[w]e identified more with this struggle far away without even knowing that there was a man called Nelson Mandela fighting for freedom ... we did not know what was happening in our own backyard ... we could see China burning and the Berlin Wall

falling but we were still bricked in by the lies and secrets of apartheid. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 118)

Ah Kee and Ah Yee were not so naïve. They were aware of the rising tensions in South Africa, evidenced by their distrust of the Zibi bins in the inner city (Ho, *Paper Sons* 113). The world of the children, the sense of domestic normalcy, was “carefully insulated at school and at home” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 113). Ah Kee, with his daily movements in and out of the township space, would no doubt have been aware of the unrest. His movement between the suburban space and the township, his existence outside the bounds of legality, nevertheless had to be maintained to ensure that his children could go to school and that his family could continue to climb the ladder to comfortable middle class.

In this way, the interplay between fahfee, the township space and the urban space is central to Ho’s portrayal of the precarious position occupied by the Chinese South African figures in *Paper Sons and Daughters*. They live in the multiracial grey areas of the urban space and experience a certain degree of privilege there, yet their rise to middle class is inextricably linked to township spaces and the illegal gambling of fahfee. Fahfee, despite its stigma and its prevailing silence, was a central feature of the daily activities of the family, yet it was in the moments in which the illegality of fahfee intruded into the domestic sphere that the Ho family were reminded of their precarious belonging in South Africa. The domestic, suburban space is depicted as a haven of belonging, where the Ho siblings were mostly shielded from the reality of South Africa. Furthermore, in the years leading up to the changes of the 1990s, the silence around fahfee and the distance between the second-generation Chinese selves and South Africa’s socio-political landscape becomes incrementally more fragile in *Paper Sons and Daughters*.

“Like a scar”¹⁵: Situating the Autobiographical Self in the Violences of the Urban Space

This distance between the Ho siblings and South Africa’s political landscape, as discussed in the previous section, changes in the early 1990s, when the violence of the transitional state

¹⁵ Ho, *Paper Sons* 64.

intrudes into the narrative through their interactions with the urban space. Ho understands her position as a Chinese South African self as an act of learning to “lay down differences, side by side, letting them be separated but joined like a scar that knits together split flesh but leaves behind a dividing line that does not fade” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 64). This visceral image of a scar, that which signifies the rejoining of split flesh yet which remains a dividing line, a reminder that the flesh was indeed split, becomes emblematic of Ho’s portrayal of post-apartheid South Africa in *Paper Sons and Daughters*. It is through the movements of Ho, the autobiographical self, in the post-apartheid urban space that this dividing line, the legacy of the apartheid-era structures, become apparent, most notably the legacy of apartheid’s strict racial segregation and discrimination. The 1990s in South Africa witnessed “the increasing volatility of the political situation” and a series of “violent confrontations at the grass-roots level” (Beavon 233). These confrontations often took place on the streets, places in which people could gather and which offered a kind of anonymity, in which one forms part of “the mass that carries [one] off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators” (de Certeau 92). Furthermore, the image of the street, the space constructed by the city planners, part of the official structure of the apartheid city, yet also a place of heterogeneous activity, where the structures are reworked by the “ordinary practitioners” of the city space (de Certeau 93), becomes central to Ho’s exploration of the post-apartheid city and its violences. This section functions as an insertion of the autobiographical self into the transitional and post-apartheid city. Ho’s narrative handling of the urban space in the 1990s, however, also shows that being situated in the transitional and post-apartheid city means that one is also subjected to its violence, its still-racialised present.

The domestic space is once again interrupted by “a ringing phone” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 204), this time to announce the murder of Ah Kee in April 1993, a year before South Africa’s first democratic elections. Ho’s father was shot in Boksburg in Johannesburg’s East Rand while nearing the end of one of his fahfee runs (Ho, *Paper Sons* 203-204). Ho highlights this intrusion of violence into their house through her narration, as the news of Ah Kee’s murder is described as “a storm [that] tore into my family home” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 204). This storm can be said to be the violence of the early 1990s, in which “[r]ocks and Molotov cocktails were flying everywhere” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 208). Ah Kee’s murder was a violent one, with a gunman firing one shot into his face, and thereby killing him instantly (Ho, *Paper Sons* 204). In the text, Ho presents the reader with the possible reasons for Ah Kee’s murder:

He may have been a soft crime target for the car or the cash they associated with the fahfee man. My dad's shooting may have been part of a revenge killing of some aggrieved gambler or maybe it was part of how violence was starting to become a way to settle things, that dark shadow that is a seductively convenient solution in South Africa. Those of us who loved him had no answers; we never will. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 204)

This quote is both a critique of the rising violence and an exploration of how Ah Kee's automobility, his involvement in fahfee, could potentially have led to his death. Ah Kee's murder reveals that his automobility did not give him full immunity from the violence of the urban space. His subversion of the structures of the apartheid city, his involvement with fahfee and his traversals across the clearly delineated spaces, was not enough for him to see the transition from apartheid state to democratic state, the supposed erasure of those boundaries that defined his movements. As Ho remarks, "[t]he paper son, ruled by pieces of paper all his life, was not to take ownership of a ballot sheet" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 213). While Ah Kee's ability to manoeuvre through the streets of the city enables him to provide for his family, it is precisely these streets that witness his murder. Ah Kee was able to attain a certain extent of empowerment, yet his act of subversively navigating the official structures of the city proved to be futile, in that it could have been this navigation of official physical and economic structures that lead to his death. He thus ultimately falls victim to the urban space which, in turn, disrupts the domestic normalcy that he had worked so hard to attain.

Ho, as a Chinese South African woman in the post-apartheid context, occupies a relation to the urban space that is nevertheless still influenced by the structures of apartheid and the repercussions of apartheid-era policy. When narrating her weekly movements from her home in Johannesburg to her university residence in Pretoria in the early 1990s, the all-too-fresh scar of apartheid on South African society despite the burgeoning change is revealed, as it is during these trips that the violence of the transition years, as well as Ho's position of relative privilege within them, becomes apparent. One instance narrated in *Paper Sons and Daughters* is the encounter between Ho, Ah Yee and Ah Kee and three members of the Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging (AWB) while stopped at a traffic light near Pretoria. The AWB is a far-right group who, according to Ho, believe that God ordained their worldview of white supremacy (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197). These three men were putting up posters on a streetlamp and, upon noticing the Chinese family in the car, one of the men "released a deep, venom-filled

‘Heyyyy!’” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197), drawing the attention of his peers. Ho and her parents were able to drive away, leaving the unspoken threat of the men behind. These men, fighting to protect their “lost cause” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197), are portrayed as relics of the apartheid era, a result of the white supremacist structure fighting to maintain it. This racially tinged anxiety and brutality were not limited to the streets but permeated other sites of movement. As Ho describes it, “[p]eople were being pushed off moving trains and carriages were being set alight, all in the angry uncertain days of the early 1990s” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197). Yet, because of Ho’s ability to travel in the marginally better first-class carriages, she was kept “immune from what could be happening at the tail of the train” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197). Ho’s text thus recognises the relative distance she occupied from the “throbbing labour pains” of South Africa during the transition years (Ho, *Paper Sons* 197), while simultaneously acknowledging that she was still caught up within the slowly changing structures, still influenced by them.

Ho’s narrated experiences as a young adult traversing the urban space during this volatile period reflect the complexity of her identity navigation in South Africa at the time. The post-apartheid city in Ho’s text maintains those apartheid-era divisions; the hurts and injustices of the past are still present despite the changing urban and socio-political landscape. This is narratively foregrounded in Ho’s description of her experiences on Sauer Street, now Pixley ka Isaka Seme Street, in Johannesburg’s inner city. On this street, Ah Yee and Ah Kee had run a canteen before Ah Kee became a fahfee man (Ho, *Paper Sons* 150). Years later, in the mid-1990s, Ho returned to Sauer Street as a young journalist working for *The Star* newspaper. The street had changed dramatically, to the point where Ho “could not make out exactly where the shop [her parents had run] would have been” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 154). It is in this urban space, familiar yet changed from the passing of time, that Ho is confronted with questions of her belonging in the post-apartheid urban space. When waiting for a bus near *The Star*, Ho

looked up to see a slim swathe of red moving along Market Street, growing like a steady bleed, then getting louder with chanting and with pounding feet. It was a group of hawkers in red union T-shirts making their way up the street in protest ... But the crowd did not move past me. They stopped and screamed directly at me: ‘Go back to China, go back to China’ ... They did not ask about whether I was paying tax to the current government or what my passport said about my nationality; all they could identify with was my skin colour. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 189)

These protesters, belonging to a union and protesting in the inner city, are emblematic of the positive changes within the post-apartheid state, in which individuals who were previously silenced can voice their grievances, can occupy the inner city. This image of post-apartheid South Africa, however, is shown to maintain the highly racialised generalisations of the apartheid state, an entrenched structure that can still be felt today. Ho then proceeds to ponder on the notion of ‘going back’. When in Hong Kong, Ho is described as a “bamboo child” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 189), highlighting that the space with which she is associated thus does not accept her multiple belongings – it does not understand her. Despite her exasperation at having to “present a CV of belonging before [she] can be considered South African, or African” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 217), Ho is nevertheless situated within the post-apartheid city. Furthermore, her descriptions of being racialised in this space emphasise the lingering structures of apartheid, the “involuntary impulse to separate, to categorise, to divide” that still persists (Ho, *Paper Sons* 2).

The question thus arises as to how Ho, an othered self in post-apartheid South Africa, narratively positions herself within the urban space and within the legacy of apartheid. In post-apartheid South Africa, Ho struggles to accept her ignorance of the anti-apartheid struggle, her complacency and the relative absence of Chinese South African selves in the anti-apartheid movement (Ho, *Paper Sons* 185). In the epistolary final chapter of the text, addressed to Ho’s late father, she describes the nation post-apartheid, something her father never got to see. She narrates the corruption, the hope, the growth of the economy and the Chinese community, and the grown family that Ah Kee never got to witness. What is particularly telling is Ho’s depiction of the roads and streets of post-apartheid South Africa. She notes,

when we are on the roads we are all so angry. Now they have a term for it. They call it road rage. It sounds all new, dad, but sometimes I think it is old anger. We are angry because we have all lost so much in this country and we cannot say it. (Ho, *Paper Sons* 226)

Significant here is Ho’s use of the word “we” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 226), her inclusion of herself in this anger that she attributes to South Africa’s turbulent past. Ho thus positions herself within the “culture of violence” that arose in the 1980s and continued into the post-apartheid state (Dirsuweit 4). While aligning herself with a more critical approach to the post-apartheid state (Ho, *Paper Sons* 215), she nevertheless reflects on the positive changes taking place in South

Africa (Ho, *Paper Sons* 227), exhibiting an emotional investment in the state and laying claim to it. This is particularly notable with regards to Kelvin's children, born into post-apartheid South Africa and "hold[ing] our hope" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 229), who "stand to attention for our national anthem with its meld of languages proving that we can mix and match, we can compromise and make room for more" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 229). Despite Ho's attention to the realities of the post-apartheid state, the legacies of apartheid that are still felt and the "racialised present" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 217), *Paper Sons and Daughters* narratively posits a rootedness in South Africa, drawing on linguistic signifiers such as 'we' and 'our' in order to do so. Furthermore, while still acknowledging the "phantom umbilical cord" connecting her with China (Ho, *Paper Sons* 119), Ho firmly roots herself primarily in South Africa throughout her text.

By depicting the post-apartheid urban space in *Paper Sons and Daughters*, with its violences and lingering apartheid-era discriminations and designations, Ho positions the autobiographical self in such a way that narratively asserts a belonging in the urban space while acknowledging the apartheid-era structures that still prevail. Drawing on Amartya Sen's assertion that "one still has to decide what exact importance to attach to that identity over the relevance of other categories to which one also belongs" (Sen 6), one can read *Paper Sons and Daughters* as an act of choosing to attach primary importance to Ho's South Africanness, to her belonging in a space that does not easily accept her claims to belonging (Ho, *Paper Sons* 217).

Conclusion

Central to this chapter is the traversal of Ho's figures within and between the various spaces of the apartheid city, most notably the township space and the suburban spaces in which the Ho family lived. It is through their geographical movements within these urban spaces, mainly in order to run fahfee, that the complex position of Chinese South African selves during apartheid and in the post-apartheid, transitional era is foregrounded. Fahfee, the illegal gambling game that is necessary for the economic survival of the Ho family, becomes symbolic of interactions on the peripheries of the apartheid city, the interconnectedness of individuals who were supposed to remain in their racially delineated spaces. However, this subversive interaction with the urban space is shown to ultimately prove futile as the figures in the text are necessarily

caught within the structures they attempted to circumvent. Like de Certeau's wanderer, their movements within the space and their subsequent agency are nevertheless constrained by the official structures, the entrenched violences of the urban space, as narratively embodied by Ah Kee's murder. In this way, Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters*, while narratively positioning its figures as subversive role-players in the urban spaces of the apartheid city, admits that these figures are rendered powerless due to the prevailing structures of the apartheid city. However, it is by the very existence of these figures and their movements that the official structures are shown to be fallible and fragile.

Conceptualising the post-apartheid period as one bearing witness to a search for roots and rootedness (Vahed & Desai 4) allows an understanding of Ho's auto/biography as a narrative unravelling of the autobiographical self's various belongings to and distance from the urban spaces of Johannesburg. The Chinese South African figures in *Paper Sons and Daughters* are situated not only within Johannesburg, the quintessential apartheid city, but also in the complexities of transitional and post-apartheid South Africa. It is through Ho's descriptions of her father's movements within the apartheid city and her narrative act of self-positioning within post-apartheid urban spaces that Ho posits a rootedness in South Africa despite the prevailing racialisation of this nation, the legacy of apartheid-era classifications and designations that is still felt today. Tu Huynh asserts that Ho's text "is not merely a personal project of remembering; it also continues to fill a lacuna in the South African historiography, as Darryl Accone's (2004) story in *All Under Heaven* had started to do" (Huynh). *Paper Sons and Daughters* can, therefore, be understood as an insertion into narratives of Johannesburg, highlighting the tactics used by an often-overlooked minority group in order to survive within the official, disempowering structures of the apartheid city. Furthermore, Ho's text becomes an assertion of belonging within this urban space despite the fraught relationship of these spaces with her as a Chinese South African self.

Chapter III

“The Balance of Being Both”¹⁶: The Intersectional Self in Lin’s *Yellow and Confused*

Introduction

Set in the South Africa of the 1990s until the present, Ming-Cheau Lin’s *Yellow and Confused: Born in Taiwan, raised in South Africa, and making sense of it all* (2019) narratively explores Lin’s childhood and teenage years in Bloemfontein, as well as her experiences as both a student and working adult in Cape Town. As a deeply personal text, Lin’s auto/biography is concerned with the interwoven identities and nuanced experiences of the autobiographical self in the post-apartheid context, functioning as a textual attempt to come to terms with the inherent complexity of a subject position that necessarily occupies multiple displacements. Jane Poyner observes a move inward in post-apartheid South African literary production, noting that “novelists and writers have been enabled to turn their gaze inwards to the private sphere, to reflection and self-questioning” (Poyner 103). This introspective gaze is central to Lin’s text as its impetus lies less in its positioning of the East Asian self within the historiography and physical landscape of the greater South Africa, and more in its narrative unpacking of the various personal experiences and processes of learning undergone by the autobiographical self. *Yellow and Confused* itself becomes an act of chronicling the questions and tentative conclusions reached by the autobiographical self regarding her own subject position, involving the confrontation and interaction with her manifold memories, experiences and displacements. Central to this is the understanding of intersectionality as “signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis (*sic*) of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix 76). It is through the introspection of the autobiographical self, her narrative exploration of her intersecting identities and resulting experiences, that Lin’s text simultaneously exhibits a turn outward. Lin expresses this turn outward as follows: “the path I have chosen, of intersection and feminism, has one goal in mind: to encourage and create conversations around unlearning and progression” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12). *Yellow and Confused*, in its very narration, thus becomes a direct didactic attempt at educating the reader,

¹⁶ Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 23-24.

not only through narrative detail but, notably, through overtly provocative, confrontational statements. As a result of the polemical narration of the text, Julian Richfield's assertion that *Yellow and Confused* "is not (and I suspect, neither was it intended to be) a comfortable read" is particularly salient (Richfield).

Lin was born in 1988 in Tainan, Taiwan, and moved to South Africa at the age of three. Her family were incentivised to relocate to South Africa in the early 1990s as part of the National Party government's "last-ditch attempt to diversify the manufacturing industry" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 17). Lin's only childhood memories "are of growing up in a small townhouse in Helicon Heights in Bloemfontein" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 37). She is thus firmly rooted in South Africa, as this is where she was raised, educated and where she eventually entered the working world. After working as a professional copywriter at various creative agencies in Cape Town for seven years, Lin decided to become a freelance copywriter (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 197). *Yellow and Confused* concludes with Lin occupying this role. Furthermore, the autobiographical self at the end of the text is committed to educating others, giving presentations at various institutions about the harms of stereotyping, misrepresentation and cultural appropriation in the media, specifically in advertising (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 204). Writing is positioned as the medium through which Lin aims to raise awareness for various issues and inspire social change (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 197). She is the author of *Just Add Rice – stories and recipes by a Taiwanese South African* (2018) and runs a food blog entitled Butterfingers. Unlike *All Under Heaven* and *Paper Sons and Daughters*, Lin does not delve significantly into the history of her family in her auto/biography, instead focusing on her individual lived experience. As a result, Lin's immediate family, her father, mother and siblings, Jasmine and Frank, as well as her extended family who reside in South Africa, remain on the periphery of the text. Kyle, Lin's white husband, is present in *Yellow and Confused*, most notably with regards to Lin's narrative exploration of racism, allyship and intersectionality.

Intersectionality becomes a strategy of emplacement in the text, a theoretical framework utilised by Lin to make sense of and position the autobiographical self. Lin refers to her chosen approach to identity as a "path ... of intersection and feminism" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12), thereby rendering intersectionality a significant framework through which one can analyse the narrative handling of identity, the rejection of a singular identity, in *Yellow and Confused*. Intersectionality recognises that experiences of race, gender and class intersect, that they "are

not distinct and isolated realms of experience” (Brah & Phoenix 80), in a similar vein to Sen’s assertion that no individual belongs to a singular identity or membership category (Sen 5). Instead, the various experiences of an individual are intertwined, in that the “different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands” (Brah & Phoenix 76). This speaks to the notion that “the intersection of ‘race’, gender and class is subjectively lived” (Brah & Phoenix 80-81). Lin thus necessarily inhabits a distinct position characterised by the intersection of the varying ascribed and adopted identities she occupies. Kimberlé Crenshaw, credited with the development of the concept of intersectionality, “contrast[ed] the multidimensionality of Black women’s experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences” within the legal paradigm (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 139). A significant aspect of intersectionality is the disempowering nature of common feminist and antiracist discourses, which “condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 140), thereby ignoring the plight of “multiply-burdened” selves within these discourses (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 140). Crenshaw emphasises that it is black women who “often ... experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 149). Women of colour, a category in which Lin positions the autobiographical self (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 161), are thus marginalised within discourses that respond only to one aspect of their intersectional identity (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1244). Relegating individuals to single membership categories, to one facet of their complex identity, thus becomes reductive and discriminatory.

It is the polemical nature of *Yellow and Confused* that, along with biographical factors such as Lin’s rootedness in Taiwan, sets the text apart from the two previous texts. The polemical narration of the text is emblematic of the memoirs of so-called ‘born frees’, the “generation onto which a fantasy of a colour-blind, post-race South Africa had been projected” (Twidle 185), who function on a “debunking, demystifying impulse” (Twidle 186), striving for a “total breach” with the immobilising Rainbow Nation discourse of the transition years (Twidle 187). In these contemporary non-fictions “runs a tension between the desire for an ‘upgrade’ of truth-telling and the limited or degraded vocabularies of social understanding that they must reckon with and operate within” (Twidle 188). *Yellow and Confused* is written in the post-apartheid moment by an individual who, while not immediately subsumed in the fraught category of ‘born free’, occupies a position outside of the oppressive, legalised structures of the apartheid

space; an outsider looking in who is nevertheless directly influenced by the vestiges of the aforementioned structures. Hedley Twidle understands narrative non-fiction in post-apartheid South Africa as “shot through with deep questions about the creation of knowledge: how it is produced, by whom and for whom” (Twidle 20). The narration of *Yellow and Confused* echoes this observation – Lin strives to tell the truth, to present the reader with her lived experience, yet necessarily operates within, and must first confront, the vocabularies and imaginaries of the past. The text must thus critically engage with the various forms of knowledge creation that have influenced and effected Lin’s experiences as an East Asian self in post-apartheid South Africa.

This narrative inward turn becomes an attempt to understand that which built up to the present moment, and thus come to terms with the position currently occupied by the autobiographical self. The text, therefore, becomes an act of unpacking the ‘now’. Nuttall conceptualises this theorising of the ‘now’ in the South African post-apartheid context as follows:

... one is undertaking the activity, as I see it, first, of working out what remains of the past, and how we relate to both the past and its remainders, or its traces in the present; and second, of working out our relationship to that which hasn’t happened yet, the world of aspirations, the fictions with which people fill the future. (Nuttall, “City forms” 732)

Through the process of coming to terms with her ‘now’, Lin must necessarily interact with both the past and the future. This interplay between the past, present and future is central to *Yellow and Confused*. Dinika Govender remarks that “what this atypically young memoir lacks in the specificity of stories told with the hindsight afforded by time and age, it gains in the broad messiness of documenting a life while still making sense of it” (Govender). It is precisely this ‘making sense of’ that characterises Lin’s narrative project. When concluding her text, Lin states: “I am grateful for the life lessons that allow me to see past my own bias and conditioning to become unapologetically yellow in a society that doesn’t see me” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 209). I wish to place emphasis on Lin’s use of the phrase “to become” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 209), as this points to an understanding of *Yellow and Confused* as a work in progress. In Lin’s inward turn, the act of delving into memories and perceptions in order to make sense of her present, the reader is reminded that Lin is still searching, looking ahead towards further personal growth, and encouraging the reader to do the same.

There are two interwoven processes in the text. Firstly, *Yellow and Confused* functions as a narrative unravelling of the intersecting identities of the autobiographical self. Central to this inward turn are the various narrative strategies of emplacement utilised by Lin, which often involve detours into the theoretical frameworks that are woven into both her understanding and narration of self. The text becomes a site “in which what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways” (Nuttall, *Entanglement* 11). The second process involves a turn outward, a didactic exposition with the aim “to encourage and create conversations around unlearning and progression” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12). The confrontational, didactic gaze of the text towards the reader is enabled by Lin’s introspective narrative approach, her turn inwards. Furthermore, as a result of Lin’s outward turn, the reader is encouraged to turn inwards, to confront and navigate their circumstantial development, their various biases and privileges. This chapter argues that it is through this interplay between these two processes, their mutual dependency, that the narrative project of *Yellow and Confused* is accomplished. *Yellow and Confused* is thereby rendered an uncomfortable read – the passive reader is challenged, is implicated, in Lin’s unapologetic narrative thrust.

“I call myself an Asian South African”¹⁷: Locating the Autobiographical Self

Instead of navigating the official structures of apartheid and the position of the East Asian self within these structures, Lin’s text emphasises a navigation of the ruins, the lingering remains of these structures that manifest in Lin’s experiences of (un)belonging and of complicated rootedness. In this “largely unfiltered journey” into the psyche of an individual occupying a nebulous position within her host-cum-homeland (Govender), the positioning of the autobiographical self is central. This is foregrounded through Lin’s textual locating of the autobiographical self in two distinct physical spaces, namely Taiwan and post-apartheid South Africa. This section seeks to explore Lin’s self-positioning within these spaces and the complex entanglement of these spaces within the position of the autobiographical self. It is through chronicling the complex, plural rootedness of the autobiographical self that *Yellow and Confused* draws attention to her intertwined displacements and self-conscious emplacements. The effects of the autobiographical self’s rootedness, her experiences of the “movements,

¹⁷ Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 37.

encounters, exchanges, and mixtures” (Gustafson 670) between her various sites of rootedness, are central to the text. In order to effectively unpack this, it is first necessary to explore Lin’s self-positioning within Taiwan, the apartheid framework and post-apartheid South Africa, as well as within the interactions between East Asia and the West, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China (China). The significance of these spaces of outward interaction lies in their function as the backdrop to Lin’s internal experiences.

Before examining the relation of the autobiographical self to the physical spaces of Taiwan and South Africa, it is first necessary to orientate *Yellow and Confused* within the history of epistemological interactions between East Asia and the West.¹⁸ In its very title, *Yellow and Confused* addresses the historical imposition of a singular identity, embodied in the racial classifier ‘yellow’, and the effects thereof. The derogatory signifier ‘yellow’, the association between so-called yellowness and East Asians in the Western imagination, finds its roots in European racial politics. ‘Yellow’ first appeared as a racial designation in the nineteenth century, becoming interchangeable with ‘Mongolian’ in taxonomical and anthropological texts (Keevak 1, 4). This “symbolically linked [the signifier ‘yellow’] to the cultural memory of a series of invasions from that part of the world” and thus, ultimately, associated ‘yellow’ with notions of exoticism and danger (Keevak 4). This, in turn, contributed to the perceived threat of the *geel gevaar* (yellow peril) in South Africa. As Lin remarks, “I hate that yellow became the race colour for Western society’s depictions of East Asians” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 11), noting that this classifier stands in contrast to the self-perception of East Asian selves (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 9). Lin, however, “choose[s] to reclaim ‘yellow’” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 13). She asserts that “this yellowness, the very yellowness I’d been fighting, is an indefinite part of my identity” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 138). The reclaiming of an oppressive categorisation is described by Crenshaw as follows:

Subordinated people can and do participate [in the process of naming], sometimes even subverting the naming process in empowering ways ... Clearly, there is unequal power, but there is nonetheless some degree of agency that people can and do exert in the politics of naming. (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1297)

¹⁸ In the very strictest sense and despite the colonial and apartheid drive towards the erasure of non-Western societies and cultures, South Africa’s inclusion in this category is incorrect. However, the prevailing modes of thought and discursive approaches imported from the West lend relevance to this exploration.

Lin's use of the signifier 'yellow' is thus an exertion of agency, a subversion of a form of categorisation. Her assertion that "unless you are 'yellow' too, don't call me that" highlights the necessary sensitivity that accompanies such a subversion, such an act of rejecting the negativity that has been associated with a specific term (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 13). By reclaiming this previously disempowering racial classifier, Lin positions her text within a discourse that extends beyond the South African context – that of the historical and often unbalanced binary between East and West.

Despite having no memories of her early childhood in Taiwan (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 15), Lin is rooted in her homeland. There are two narrated instances of return to Taiwan in *Yellow and Confused*, the first being the repatriation of Lin's parents and their decision to move to the city of Taichung, Taiwan, in order to start over and pursue a new business venture (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 173). The second return to the homeland occurs when Kyle accompanies Lin to visit her recently immigrated parents in December 2015. The descriptions of this event in the text resemble the itinerary of a tourist, including trips to the food markets and visits to museums and other sites of interest. However, within these descriptions one can see a nuance that speaks of Lin's rootedness in Taiwan, her connection to the space and its history. For example, Lin and Kyle visit "an old friend and Buddhist master at Fo Guang Shan (the largest Buddhist monastery in Taiwan)" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 177). Furthermore, while in Taiwan they "find ways to support the aboriginal Taiwanese culture" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 177). It is interesting to note that Lin draws parallels between the ethnic Chinese presence in Taiwan and apartheid and colonial South Africa. As Lin notes, "Taiwan's history hasn't been fair to the native people as the mass of Han Chinese, which includes my ancestors, settled in such large numbers after being defeated by the PRC" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 29). While not colonisation, Lin acknowledges its "similarities [to colonisation] and [the] harmful effects of mass migration" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 29-30). For example, those who had originally resided on the island, Taiwan's indigenous population, were subjected to "harsh policies of forced assimilation" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 29). Linking this to South Africa, Lin remarks that the legacy of the discriminative, oppressive and hateful legislation of colonial and apartheid South Africa can still be seen in how people of colour are treated in contemporary South Africa (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 30). Lin thus joins these two spaces of rootedness through narratively exploring the histories of injustice present in both spaces.

Yellow and Confused is involved in “braid[ing] together personal and political histories” (Twidle 3), in that the autobiographical self interacts with the effects of both the political and social position of Taiwanese selves in South Africa and the relationship between China and Taiwan. As an ethnically Chinese self from Taiwan, which itself is a complicated subject position due to the complexity of the Cross-Strait relations¹⁹, Taiwanese immigrants occupied “a complicated position in South Africa’s unjust racial hierarchy” (Govender). Lin notes that “those of East Asian descent – or at least the ones that aren’t Chinese were offered some benefits over black and brown people under apartheid” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 16). This emphasises the layered nature of so-called yellowness in South Africa, in that Taiwanese individuals occupied a privileged position in relation to Chinese individuals during apartheid. However, despite their ‘honorary white’ status, Taiwanese selves encountered racism due to their foreignness, their otherness (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 16-18). Furthermore, the distinction drawn between Chinese and other East Asian selves during apartheid contributed to the complexity of Taiwanese association with China in South Africa, in that “[s]ome [individuals] identify strongly as Taiwanese, while others identify as Chinese” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 29). Lin’s self-positioning within this web of Taiwanese association with China is as follows: “I was raised to be proudly Taiwanese, while practising the ancient Chinese traditions my parents passed down to me” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 29). As a Taiwanese self in South Africa, Lin’s subject position is inescapably rooted in the politics of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, as well as in the complicated relationship between China and Taiwan.

Due to her rootedness in Taiwan, the autobiographical self experiences ascriptions of foreignness in her South African context. Lin asks, “[w]hy can’t your first impression of me be as a South African, and not a foreigner?” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 36). This notion is corroborated by Kayan Leung, an East Asian immigrant in South Africa quoted in *Yellow and Confused*: “there is an ingrained desire to prove my ‘Africanness’ because you are always automatically assumed to be foreign” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 220). Lin emphasises South Africa as a primary site of rootedness for the East Asian selves in *Yellow and Confused*, noting that “[m]any of us are citizens and call *this* our home” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 41). Unlike the backwards gaze of Accone’s Ah Leong towards China, Lin positions her generation as

¹⁹ This term refers to the complex political and economic relationship between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China (China). These two political entities are separated by the Taiwan Strait.

forward-facing, rooted in their South African context and not orientated towards the distant homeland. Lin remarks that, “as third culture kids, we feel a strong sense of entitlement to being South African, while our parents and older generations see themselves as East Asians who live in South Africa” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 131-132). There is thus a generational difference in tone between the three selected texts, in that unlike the tentative attempts to claim a national belonging through recounting familial history in both *All Under Heaven* and *Paper Sons and Daughters*, *Yellow and Confused* asserts a firm belonging in South Africa.

As this rootedness in South Africa is challenged by the multiple displacements experienced by East Asian South African selves, Lin’s linguistic performance of national belonging and the resulting narrative assertion of South Africanness gains particular salience. The autobiographical self is involved in the self-aware, intentional performance of identity, notably the strategic use of sociolinguistic traditions that locate the self in the South African context. If “we perform who we are by (amongst other things) using varieties of language” (Pennycook 528), then it is the intentional interspersions of typical South African colloquialisms within the text that performs and asserts a belonging in South Africa. This performative use of language can be seen, for example, in Lin and Kyle’s process of buying a house and the furniture needed for that endeavour. Lin notes that “Kyle was too skaam to even try” negotiate for lower prices (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 175). The use of the Afrikaans word ‘skaam’, meaning shyness, bashfulness or embarrassment, not only performs a knowledge of Afrikaans, but also a familiarity with the South African tendency towards code-switching. This, in turn, asserts a South Africanness. Other similar words used in *Yellow and Confused* are “tannie”, “soma” and “shame” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 130, 156, 176). It is through assuming the linguistic peculiarities of South African English that Lin locates the autobiographical self within South Africa, not as a foreigner but as an individual who belongs in the space.

However, the autobiographical self remains displaced within the official discourse of post-apartheid South Africa. In the same way that Ho reflects on the drive to categorise and classify that is still so prevalent in South African society (Ho, *Paper Sons* 2), Lin foregrounds both the official and the social impetus to do so that pervades post-apartheid South Africa. This phenomenon is corroborated by Anthony Christopher’s assertion that “the population groupings of the colonial and apartheid era still retain a powerful place in the national consciousness” (Christopher 406). Furthermore, this implies that the official use of historical racial classifications is involved in “the process of ‘locking in’ individuals to specific groups”

(Christopher 406), thereby entrenching these classifications. The prevailing apartheid-era structures of racial classification, the gross simplifications of the undeniable racial diversity and complexity of South Africa's population, are evident in the text. As Lin recounts,

[f]illing out government or work forms where the only tick-boxes available are 'African', 'Coloured', 'Indian' and 'White', we are told to tick the 'Coloured' box. Or we are included as another category – 'Other'. Literal 'othering'. We are not made to feel included in this delusion of a 'rainbow nation'. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 38)

This othering effectively denies the validity of the East Asian subject's national belonging and lived experiences in South Africa. It is worth noting that, by being told to tick the 'Coloured' box, the potential arises for East Asian South Africans to be aligned with the complex social, political and historical implications of this South African racial category.²⁰ This category allows for the assertion of a national belonging, a fundamental South Africanness derived from the history of Coloured individuals and thus an entanglement in the South African context. It is notable that "Chinese 'in general' were classified as 'coloured' but the rest of the East Asians were labelled 'honourary whites'" during apartheid (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 17). However, East Asian South Africans are in the main unable to assert Colouredness due to their histories in South Africa, their relative privilege and agency during apartheid and in the present. Despite this, these two options serve as a reminder of the anomalous position of East Asian South African selves within South African society, caught between occupying the position of an other and a category to which they cannot lay claim.²¹ It is, therefore, appropriate to conclude that the institutional displacement of East Asian South African selves, evidenced by their exclusion

²⁰ The common understanding of Coloured identity as denoting "a person of mixed racial ancestry" fails to take into account the heterogeneous, complex identities of individuals who have been classified as Coloured (Adhikari iix). These individuals historically occupied a "distinct, stigmatised social stratum" within the binary logic of European racist ideology (Adhikari ix). The Coloured identity in post-apartheid South Africa, while marked by interstitiality, the "sentiment of being trapped in a perpetual state of marginality" (Adhikari xvi), is inherently multifaceted and varied, an agentic site of identity negotiation and reconfiguration (Adhikari xviii). *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa* (2009), edited by Mohamed Adhikari, is a worthwhile read in this regard.

²¹ Significantly, this experience is also given narrative significance in *Paper Sons and Daughters*, in which Ho recounts that, in the 1991 census, "[t]here was no box for Chinese where it asked for race ... [f]or so many official documents, for years I have had to tick the 'other' box, whatever that means" (Ho, *Paper Sons* 215-216). Here the "literal 'othering'" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 38) of East Asian South African selves in official spaces can once again be seen. Unlike Lin's account from contemporary South Africa, there is no mention of ticking the 'Coloured' box in this instance of racial classification from the early 1990s. This could be indicative of evolving conceptualisations of the rigid apartheid-era classifications, a notion which requires further research.

from racial classifications in post-apartheid South Africa, effectively asserts an unbelonging in the national space, troubling the self-classification of such individuals as South African.

It is necessary to examine the manner in which Lin's text attempts to position the autobiographical self in relation to South Africa's highly race-conscious society, as discussed in the paragraph above. The racial self-positioning of the autobiographical self in the text is as follows: "My skin tone classifies me as 'Asian' and I call myself an Asian South African" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 37). For example, it is her Asian appearance, her racialisation as Asian, that leads to experiences of *displacement* when rooting herself in Bloemfontein. The question "where are you really from" is inevitable, because, as Lin sardonically notes, "of course I couldn't be from South Africa" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 46). Thus, despite the fact that Bloemfontein is Lin's childhood home, the space in which the autobiographical self is emplaced, Lin's claim to belonging is brought into question due to her classification as Asian. The more implicit racial positioning in the text enters into contested territory – Lin positions herself as an "immigrant of colour", a "person of colour" and a privileged "light-skinned individual in South Africa" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 58, 161, 157). This could be mistaken for a self-aware alignment with so-called Colouredness. However, this reception of Lin's self-positioning serves as an echo of what Christopher identifies as the 'locking in' of individuals into the apartheid-era racial classifications (Christopher 406). The question thus arises as to Lin's approach to racial classification and, I argue, it is here where the intersectionality of the autobiographical self comes into play. Lin consciously positions herself as a privileged woman of colour in South Africa, an individual who is sensitive to both the lingering oppressions and intersecting privileges she experiences, intentionally highlighting the privilege held by East Asian South African selves in relation to the majority of South Africans (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 121, 192). Lin thus emphasises the necessary intersectionality of the autobiographical self, in that she is both a woman of colour and an East Asian self in South Africa.

“Along the road”²²: Intertwining Experiences and Discourses

It is upon Lin’s move to Cape Town that the narration of *Yellow and Confused* embodies the turn inward that has become characteristic of post-apartheid South African writing (Poyner 103). Moving to Cape Town in 2007, upon matriculating from Eunice High School in 2006, meant that Lin could pursue a creative degree at Vega. As Gagiano understands it, “shifts in ‘place’ that occurred during autobiographers’ depicted lives must be seen to entail often and additionally moves into different social spaces” (Gagiano 262). Lin anticipated this opportunity to escape “the confinement of Bloemfontein, the community [she] was raised with, the strict parenting and a life bound by rules and conformity” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 121). Her transition to Cape Town facilitates the *Bildung* of the autobiographical self, her increasing self-awareness and self-reflection, her growth into an individual with a “thirst to learn and unlearn” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 24), as well as her introduction to social spaces different from those which she has hitherto known. Writing from Cape Town, the Bildungsroman-esque city in which the “real ‘education’” of the autobiographical self begins (Buckley 17), Lin unpacks key narrative events, which are positioned as “pre-eminent dialogical moments in the construction of identity” (Buitelaar 262) and thereby function as textual attempts to navigate the lived experience of the autobiographical self. The assumption that this inward turn privileges the personal over the political, that it somehow necessitates a turning away from the outward situation (Garrett 123), is challenged in Lin’s text as it is precisely through this inward turn, through her introspective considerations of her own position and prejudices upon moving to Cape Town, her ruminations on key events, that the polemical and didactic tone of the text is foregrounded.

Unlike *All Under Heaven* and *Paper Sons and Daughters*, in which physical spaces locate the autobiographical selves and emphasise certain belongings and identities, the autobiographical self in *Yellow and Confused* is instead primarily positioned within discourses, intangible spaces through which she can define and defend her subject position. In this process of intentionally weaving theory into her text, which includes directly quoting theorists such as Crenshaw, Lin orientates her lived experiences within established realms of study. Lin’s inward journey is thus facilitated and framed by the theoretical frameworks that are explicitly referred to in the

²² Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12.

text, notably third culture kids, orientalism, feminism and intersectionality. The conceptualisation of the auto/biography as a tool “to mediate, or perhaps to intertwine, theory and experience” (Marcus 275) is, therefore, central to Lin’s auto/biographical project. Furthermore, by explicitly drawing on both personal memory and an array of theoretical frameworks, *Yellow and Confused* accomplishes its educating drive, using the implications of these theoretical frameworks to confront the reader with the particularities of the autobiographical self’s manifold experiences. This, in turn, models the processes by which the autobiographical self seeks to make sense of her ‘now’, the traces of the past in the present and its fictions of the future (Nuttall, “City forms” 732). This section examines both Lin’s strategic weaving of theory into her text and her narration of key events which situate the autobiographical self within these discourses, all the while unpacking the emotional implications of these events to the autobiographical self and its didactic relevance to the reader.

Third Culture Kids: Incongruence and Liminality

Lin draws on the concept of third culture kids to make sense of her childhood experiences and the influence of these experiences on her adulthood, narrating a portion of her childhood experiences in a chapter entitled ‘Third culture kid’. She positions herself within this framework in her attempt to navigate the complex positionality she occupies as an “Asian woman in a non-Asian society” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 164), most notably how her experiences as a first-generation immigrant, growing up in a society in which she is othered, have shaped her own subject position. Simply put, third culture kids are “the children who accompany their parents into another society” (Useem & Cottrell 22). The original definition of a third culture kid is as follows:

A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (Pollock)

Notable facets of this definition in relation to *Yellow and Confused* are the discrepancy between the culture of the home and the culture of the environment, the sense of unbelonging in multiple spaces and the phenomenon of novel formulations of belonging. Adult third culture kids are

understood as “extremely complex people who are weaving together their memories in a rapidly changing present in anticipation of an uncertain future” (Useem & Cottrell 28). This encapsulates Lin’s narrative handling of self in *Yellow and Confused* – past experiences are intertwined with attempts to make sense of her current subject position, all striving to unravel the identities that contribute to her unique lived experience.

The autobiographical self makes use of the concept of third culture kids in order to explore her experiences growing up as an East Asian self in South Africa. Lin describes being a third culture kid as “when your foundation culture is different from the society around you” (Moosa, “Ming-Cheau Lin’s ‘Just Add Rice’”). Because a third culture kid is necessarily placed in a culture that differs from that which is familiar at home, or in the homeland, there is an interaction between the foundational culture and the surrounding culture that comes to play notably in the experiences and psyche of the third culture kid. Lin recalls that “[e]ven though we weren’t fully immersed in a Taiwanese society, filled with ancient Chinese traditions, our parents made sure to preserve the culture they brought with them when we moved to South Africa” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 73). This situates the young Lin within a home culture that seeks to reproduce the culture of the homeland. However, Lin notes that “at the same time as they brought the fun and food-filled festivities, they also brought the conditioned and dated mindsets of specific ways of doing things, of what’s right and what’s wrong” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 75). The home culture is thus not portrayed as an idyll of preserved tradition, but rather as a fraught attempt to preserve that which had been left behind. For example, when narrating her mother’s response to 18-year-old Lin getting a tattoo, Lin blithely remarks,

[s]he told me how in our culture if you harm your skin, you are disrespecting your parents and the skin they gave you. This didn’t make sense. What about pierced ears? Or eye surgeries changing mono-eyelids to double eyelids, which, along with breast implants, was a common surgery amongst East Asians. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 81)

Lin’s position as a third culture kid, both part of the culture around her and psychologically and emotionally tied to her homeland (Gilbert 94), highlights the inconsistencies of her home culture. For the young Lin, her parents’ attempts to fully preserve the home culture “didn’t seem fair” due to the particular environment, the particular culture, in which they found themselves, namely that of predominantly white Bloemfontein (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 76).

By drawing on the concept of third culture kids, Lin makes sense of the displacement she experienced in her childhood and into her adult years. This speaks to David C. Pollock's understanding of third culture kids as relating to multiple cultures, but not feeling a sense of full belonging, of ownership, to any (Pollock). This "sense of simultaneously belonging 'everywhere and nowhere'" (Pollock & Van Reken 23) echoes Rushdie's experience of identity as "at once plural and partial" (Rushdie 15) – the diasporic self, embodied in this instance as the third culture kid, despite occupying multiple cultural spaces, is nevertheless unable to claim full belonging in one because of the presence of the other. Instead, young Lin was involved in "juggling between two countries, two cultures and two ways of living" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 60). The third culture kid thus exists in a "perpetual liminal state" (Gilbert 94). It is this state that is central to Lin's recollections of her childhood, her experiences of being "someone who doesn't seem to belong in either the country of [her] birth or the one [she] was raised in" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12). This is narratively foregrounded in the following quote:

As a child I was told that I shouldn't talk back, that I was too opinionated, and klutzy, and that it was not desirable, especially for a lady, to be that way. It was very unusual (though not unheard of) for women in Taiwanese culture to be as I was, but with a childhood in South Africa and the exposure to a more liberal lifestyle, I felt confused. I didn't fit in with my parents' culture and I didn't fit in where I lived. There was no sense of belonging. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 39)

In *Yellow and Confused*, Lin attempts to understand the effects of this sense of displacement on her understanding of self. She recalls being "mocked and bullied from all sides" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 19). While still in school, Lin not only "got mocked for being yellow, for the food [she] ate, for [her] home religion" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 79), but also got classified as a banana, "yellow on the outside, white on the inside" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 97), by her Asian peers because of her vast English vocabulary. *Yellow and Confused* does, therefore, not glorify the lived experiences of a third culture kid, but rather confronts the reader with the potentially negative effects of this displacement on the individual.

Orientalism and the Sexualisation of East Asian Women

Edward Said's conceptualisation of orientalism is only briefly referred to in Lin's text, but the reality of orientalism, its "epistemology of power" (Dirlik 99), is present throughout. When introducing orientalism, Said outlines various possible understandings of the term, two of which are significant in relation to *Yellow and Confused*. First, understanding orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, *Orientalism* 2) relates to the creation of a distinction between Asian and South African, primarily white South African, in the text. This can be seen in Lin's encounters with distinct, homogeneous notions of Asia that are then ascribed to her, such as the infamous ascription of dog-eating to those of East Asian descent (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 55). The second understanding of orientalism is as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ... by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said, *Orientalism* 3). This refers to the historical constructivist power of the Occident over the Orient. Furthermore, Arif Dirlik posits that one of Said's "basic goals is to demonstrate how such representations of the orient have silenced the 'orientals,' and undercut their ability to represent themselves" (Dirlik 99). This understanding gains particular salience in *Yellow and Confused* as it is in this context of silencing that the term 'orientalism' appears in the text. Lin first encountered the concept of orientalism as a student, where she became "the obvious subject of anything 'Asian' related", noting that everyone looked at her when orientalism was covered in the syllabus (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 125). Significant here is how Lin's array of identities were silenced in this moment – she came to occupy a specific representative position in relation to the predominantly Western environment in which she found herself an other. Orientalism remains for the most part on the periphery of Lin's text, not outrightly mentioned but haunting Lin's interactions with others, who would see "an Asian first – a yellow woman – never an individual first" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 138).

In *Yellow and Confused*, Lin critically approaches the vestiges of orientalism, specifically the "emasculatation of yellow men and the fetishism of yellow women" (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 125). The reader is intentionally confronted with the pervasiveness of orientalism's drive of "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, *Orientalism* 3), particularly with regards to the hypersexualisation of East Asian women. The prevailing "one-dimensional, hypersexualized image of Asian women" finds its roots in a history of colonialism

and exploitation (Matsumoto 114); it is a racialised sexism birthed by orientalism, by the construction of the Orient as intrinsically and necessarily distinct from the Occident. Meyda Yegenoglu understands orientalism as simultaneously referring to “the production of a systematic knowledge and ... the site of the unconscious – desires and fantasies” (Yegenoglu 23). That is, Yegenoglu’s orientalism examines “how the ‘Orient’ is at once an object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire*” (Yegenoglu 23). The association of the Orient with fantasy and desire has been projected onto its women, in which Asian women are conceptualised as “empty vehicles for sexual desire” (Matsumoto 115). This hypersexualisation is perpetuated by the portrayals of Asian women in American-dominated entertainment media (Matsumoto 115). Lin, when exploring this hypersexualisation, refers to the oft-repeated phrases ‘me so horny’ and ‘I love you long time’ that were popularised by Stanley Kubrick’s 1987 war film, *Full Metal Jacket*, and which have accompanied her own experiences of sexual harassment (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 162). The context of these phrases is the attempted sexual solicitation of an American soldier by a desperate Vietnamese woman. The depiction of Vietnamese women in *Full Metal Jacket* form part of the litany of Asian women in American film history who have been “casually objectified ... as hypersexualised and meek” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 162), the helpless objects of lust.

It is precisely these hypersexualised portrayals of Asian women in entertainment media that gave rise to a significant event in Lin’s narrative, namely the Misohawni incident. In late 2017, a restaurant named Misohawni opened in Melville specialising in ramen, poke and Korean barbeque. This name, “a lewd double entendre for sex and food” (Magwood), comes from the above-mentioned phrase from Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*. Lin tweeted about the name of this restaurant in November 2017, noting that this so-called Asian restaurant, owned by non-Asians, was drawing on a sexualised, degrading and objectifying phrase for profit (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 159). The use of this name was thus an example of the commodification of sexualised Asian female bodies. Lin identified this as “racist misogyny disguised as a pun and joke” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 160). However, her response to the name of this restaurant garnered both solidarity and ruthless criticism. The backlash Lin received on social media was telling as “[t]he majority of trolls and downright rude comments came from white men, and then next white women” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 165), who invalidated her experiences by calling her fragile, sensitive and unable to take a joke (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 164). This response echoes Said’s understanding of orientalism as a dominating, authoritative and restructuring discourse (Said, *Orientalism* 3), in that Lin’s lived experiences as an intersectional self are

silenced, conveniently categorised as an over-reaction, and thus dominated and restructured by those emblematic of the West. Through narrating this event and the silencing experienced by Lin, *Yellow and Confused* aims to make the reader aware of the pervasiveness of orientalist discourse, exposing them to experiences that their subject position may otherwise have shielded them from.

Yellow and Confused includes a navigation of “the personal reverberation of Orientalism’s legacies” (Matsumoto 117). The hypersexualisation of East Asian women becomes personal in the text, in which the intersection of Lin’s East Asian appearance and her position as a woman in South Africa lead to various experiences of sexual harassment. It is Lin’s raw, uncomfortably detailed descriptions of her experiences of being sexually harassed as a result of her Asian appearance that carries the weight in her indictment against the entanglement of orientalism and the sexualisation of Asian women. As Lin remarks, “[i]t’s not a compliment to be lusted after just because you’re an Asian woman ... [i]t’s scary” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 162). On Facebook, for example, Lin regularly received sexualising messages due to her Asian appearance from individuals she had never met before, who Lin notes were all “white boys” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 126). Furthermore, Lin recounts an experience of sexual assault that was accompanied by the reverberations of orientalist hypersexualisation. While studying at Vega, Lin was sexually accosted by five men at a student bar in Cape Town. As Lin describes it, “[t]here were five boys, arms pushing me against a wall, preventing me from moving, while hands muffled my shouting” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 163). When narrating this experience, Lin remarks that “all the time they were saying these kinds of things, taunting me and enjoying my discomfort” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 163). There is a phrase in Lin’s narration of this moment that gains particular significance – “like the movies said” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 163). This is a reference to the sexualised orientalist discourse in the entertainment industry and how this discourse directly influences the lived experiences of Asian women. Her narration of these occasions of online and direct sexualisation functions as an act of making sense of the particular trauma she has undergone through situating these occurrences within the framework of orientalism and the subsequent objectification and sexualisation of Asian women. The reader is, in turn, directly confronted with the implications of the racist misogyny underlying media portrayals of Asian women and the damaging effects of the resulting hypersexualisation.

Feminism and Intersectionality

Feminism is another discourse upon which Lin intentionally draws in order to understand and narratively frame the experiences of the autobiographical self. In a section entitled ‘Early signs of feminism’, Lin expounds upon her gendered childhood experiences in her conservative Taiwanese community. Given the patriarchal nature of most East Asian cultures, “boys are often treated better than girls” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 65). This was a cultural norm that her parents did not strictly adhere to, but one which was enforced by the community and thus impacted the childhood experiences of the autobiographical self (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 66). The autobiographical self is portrayed as the antithesis of these norms, a girl who “hated the idea that [she] was supposed to like pink and that [she] needed to be ‘ladylike’” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 66). Lin was reprimanded for exhibiting characteristics deemed unacceptable for girls in her community, such as being “boyish, carefree, strong, and opinionated” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 65). As Lin describes it, “I hated that I was scolded for speaking up, for having an opinion or arguing when things seemed unfair to me” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 66). Lin’s displacement within her community due to her different approach to femininity corroborates Govender’s assertion that *Yellow and Confused* is in part a text about “embracing feminism even when it conflicted with cultural norms” (Govender).

Despite Lin’s narrative alignment with feminism, she critically approaches the manifold ways in which feminist discourse can overlook the inherent complexities of the lived experiences of others, which textually translates to a critique of white feminism. This challenges the reader to examine the privileged position they potentially occupy in such discourses. In the context of the Misohawni incident, Lin notes that “[s]ome white women agreed with the misogynistic part [of the name] but made a point to mention that this had nothing to do with race” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 165). This approach exhibits white feminism, a privileged feminism which often “overlooks the anomalies created by crosscurrents of racism and sexism” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 155), remaining ignorant of the fact that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1242). Lin asserts that “if you ignore the racial inequalities and injustices due to systematic racism and if you can’t understand that ‘white’ is a description, then your feminism is one-dimensional and carries an essence of privilege” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 165). White women occupy a privileged position in the Misohawni incident, as they can choose to remain ignorant of the racially motivated nature of this

sexualisation. Despite their good intentions, this response is an example of the exclusivity of white feminism, which “ignores the pain inflicted on an oppressed group” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 148-149). Lin thus seeks to narratively highlight “[h]ow ‘let’s be peaceful and not stir up race wars’ is a liberal method whiteness practises to excuse themselves (*sic*) for participating in a conversation of self-reflection” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 148-149). In this way, an unwillingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations is equated with evading self-reflection and self-confrontation. Thus, through recounting the role white feminism plays in suppressing and ignoring the experiences of women of colour, Lin narratively draws feminist discourse into question, reiterating the necessity of intersectionality.

Lin’s critique of white feminism is furthermore narratively foregrounded in the context of the roller derby start-up she joined as a young working adult. Despite the “amazing five-year experience” afforded to Lin by the roller derby league (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 141), her textual recollections of her interactions with the predominantly white members of the league reveal the one-dimensionality of their feminism, the distance between their lived experiences and those of Lin. This is particularly evident in the narrative handling of an altercation with a member of the league, a “queer white woman” who had organised for a photographer named Jamie to take photos of one of the bouts (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 143). Lin, who had not met this photographer at the event, thanked Jamie “for his time and beautiful photographs” on a Facebook post (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 144). Due to Lin’s use of ‘his’, the abovementioned member of the league accused Lin of ignorance, conformance to social standards and the perpetuation of heteronormativity (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 144). Lin’s response to this, while apologetic for her mistake, reminds the reader that “as terrible as heteronormativity is, [the white woman] wasn’t taking language and cultural barriers into account” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 144). Crenshaw notes that “[b]ecause women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms” (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1252). This is central to Lin’s experience of this event – the woman’s feminism was one-sided, ignoring the inherent complexity of navigating a situation that involves the intricacies of a language that, despite high levels of proficiency, is not one’s mother tongue (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 144).

The question thus arises as to how Lin positions the autobiographical self in relation to the need for intersectional feminism. Significantly, and in line with Lin’s tone throughout the text, she

is quick to admit to her own faults and prejudices, emphasising the need for introspection and deliberate learning. While noting the danger of white feminism positioning itself as the authoritative voice on women, when “*white* women speak for and as *women*” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 154) and thereby suppress and silence the voices of women who occupy minority positions (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1258), Lin acknowledges where her circumstantial development has made her complicit in silencing those voices. She acknowledges that her viewpoint “is often based on ignorance and privilege” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 145). Lin then proceeds to credit Nicole and Nadine Dirks, a sister pair that she befriended in 2014, for teaching her “to practise intersectionality with [her] feminism” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 146). In the same way that Nicole and Nadine encouraged Lin to learn and unlearn, teaching her to identify her own privilege and practice intersectionality, Lin prompts the reader to critically examine their own subject positions. As Lin describes her relationship with the sister pair: “We would discuss our feelings, find references to articles that put them in context and grew together” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 157). These intentional acts of educating the self are central to Lin’s narrative project of sparking conversation, challenging inherited discourses and prompting the reader towards introspection.

“To move forward”²³: Reclamation and Progression

It is, therefore, through the introspective gaze of the autobiographical self, the manifold ways in which the autobiographical self aims to make sense of her multiple identities and intersectional experiences, that the outward turn of the text, the didactic emphasis on learning and unlearning, on fostering conversation and moving forward, is facilitated. If Lin’s primary goal in the text is “to encourage and create conversations around unlearning and progression” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12), then it is the manner in which Lin enters into conversation around her own progression, her own development, that is significant. The theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous section function as signposts along Lin’s journey of self-reflection. As Lin notes, “I continued my journey to unlearn, using intersectional feminism as a guide” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 159). Lin’s personal development narratively involves a reclamation of facets of her identity and an assertion of the potential of productively occupying multiple identities simultaneously. True to the didactic nature of *Yellow and Confused*, these

²³ Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 40.

instances of personal growth in turn present the reader with examples of the processes necessary for forward movement, asserting that it is only by learning and unlearning, by embracing intersectionality and the fact that everyone occupies multiple positions, that forward movement is possible.

Lin acknowledges that she is complicit in the prejudices of a society that she condemns, that she has her own biases and conditioned racist and heteronormative behaviour (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 114, 166, 209). However, she is committed to “call[ing] out her own problematic behaviour” (Moosa, “Ming-Cheau Lin Makes Sense Of”), remarking that “I’m not embarrassed to admit when I am wrong. I’ve realised that a lot of our thinking isn’t our unique fault. But to choose ignorance over education when it presents itself to you is a problem” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 146). Present in this statement is Lin’s admission of her own shortcomings, her willingness to learn, but also an indictment to the reader, challenging them to take responsibility for their thought processes. It is here where the confrontational nature of *Yellow and Confused* is foregrounded, as the reader becomes implicated in the text, made to feel uncomfortable in their passivity and ignorance. This is central to Lin’s narrative project – *Yellow and Confused* does not only aim to explore the subject position of the autobiographical self, her own biases and privileges, through the introspective narration of her life, but also to model for the reader a critical examination of one’s own complicity in the perpetuation of the harmful behaviours that Lin identifies within South Africa, her community and herself.

By reclaiming her birth name, Lin rejects the drive towards assimilation that would erase a facet of her cultural identity. In much the same way that Lin reclaims the signifier ‘yellow’ in her text, the act of reclaiming her name becomes a strategic act of self-representation. Crenshaw refers to “the politics of naming” in reference to the assignment and appropriation of classifiers (Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1297), yet in the South African context naming, assuming a name or reclaiming a lost one, becomes an act of social and political significance. When first attending a South African school, an English teacher suggested the use of English names to ease the transition (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 43). Ming-Cheau Lin thus became Sandy Lin in the context of school (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 47). However, as Lin notes, “an assimilated name doesn’t necessarily make things easier when your facial features, skin tone and culture are all different to what others around you are used to” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 44). Lin’s sardonic “[o]f course an Anglicised name couldn’t be a yellow face’s real name” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 46) highlights the duplicity of her South African context – changing her name to

accommodate her hostland is in turn subjected to the intrusive “[b]ut what’s your real name?” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 46). Once Lin became more aware of how her English name influenced her self-perception, she “just didn’t feel comfortable with it” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 49). As Lin posits, “I just didn’t want to use Sandy when I started growing a stronger sense of identity” (Lin, “When you mispronounce”). Reclaiming Ming-Cheau involved a decision to fully occupy her identity as an East Asian South African self, while aware of the assumptions of foreignness that would result from this choice. In the introduction to *Yellow and Confused*, Lin remarks: “I embrace my culture and ethnicity, as well as the confusion of feeling displaced, as someone who doesn’t seem to belong in either the country of my birth or the one I was raised in” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 12). Lin thus narratively positions this act of reclaiming her given name and embracing its foreignness as an important step in the development of the autobiographical self into an individual who embraces the plurality of her identities.

A further act of reclamation in *Yellow and Confused* can be found in Lin’s food journey. It is by confronting the negative effects of what Lin refers to as “the lunch box moment” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 55) and reclaiming her food culture that she is able to eventually produce *Just Add Rice*. The lunch box moment, a key event in the life of the autobiographical self, is narratively positioned as follows:

It was 1995. Breaktime. I brought out my lunch box and as soon as I opened it, I was excited. I could smell the fishiness of the nori, the sharp acidity of the pickle and the sweetness of the pork floss. But I wasn’t the only one who could smell it. The (mostly white) kids sitting around me recoiled at the scent, then peered over my shoulder into my lunch box. This was followed by a chorus of ‘Eeeeuw’ and comments like ‘That looks gross’ and ‘Why does it smell?’ and ‘My dad told me you people eat dogs – is that dog?’ (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 55)

A lunch box full of homemade Taiwanese food thus served to emphasise Lin’s otherness. As Govender posits, this narrative event retraces “an early form of self-hate: shame for one’s culture not resembling a ham and cheese sandwich on white bread with the crusts cut off” (Govender). It is the “love-hate relationship” with her culture’s food (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 55), the effects of the shame that finds its source in the infamous lunch box moment, that Lin must navigate in order to fully occupy her multiple identities. Lin positions this situation as

follows: “This psychological see-saw led to my desire to reclaim the cultural identity for which society had shamed me” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 55). Drawing on Alastair Pennycook’s understanding of performing identity “as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than as the expression of a prior identity” (Pennycook 528), *Just Add Rice* serves as a performance of a Taiwanese cultural identity. As “South Africa’s first locally published East Asian cookbook by an East Asian South African” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 199), it is an act of de-exotifying immigrant food (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 201). Lin’s displacement, her food culture preserved in an unwelcoming space, thus served as motivation for the creation of *Just Add Rice*. The act of performing identities that had negatively impacted the autobiographical self becomes an act of reclaiming, a laying hold of the complex, vital and productive position that she occupies as a Taiwanese immigrant in South Africa.

This in turn emphasises the intersectionality of the autobiographical self – Lin’s various identities “cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands” (Brah & Phoenix 76), but are necessarily intertwined, all contributing to the manifold and intrinsically complex positions she holds within post-apartheid South Africa. *Just Add Rice*, as a Taiwanese cookbook written by an individual removed from the homeland, reflects the formation of a “‘new’ culture” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 40) that is “not diminished and diluted ... but transformed into a unique ‘Chinese South African’ [or ‘East Asian South African’] configuration of cultural and ethnic identities” (Park, *A Matter of Honour* 108). Lin describes the book as

a celebration of Taiwanese food culture from an immigrant’s perspective, traditional hearty dishes that our parents cooked for us, foods we eat on holidays that they tried to preserve in a space that didn’t recognise them, street food that we’d inhale if we were lucky enough to travel back ... ingredients that are locally accessible and insights into our cultural food practices. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 201)

This cements an understanding of the cookbook as a performance of both a Taiwanese culinary identity and a particular East Asian South African immigrant identity. In this way, Lin’s performance of Taiwanese identity in *Just Add Rice* in effect asserts Lin’s position as an individual occupying both sites of rootedness, both cultures. Occupying these multiple spaces and identities thus becomes a site of productivity, a site in which a new, hybrid culture is formed. The third culture occupied by the younger generation of East Asian South African selves, as an entanglement of South Africanness and so-called yellowness, is a space of

“cultural effervescence” (DiGiovanna 70), one that emphasises the intersectional identities of East Asian South African selves.

In order to move forward into fully occupying her position as a Taiwanese woman in South Africa, Lin textually posits that it is necessary to reject the relegation of East Asian communities to the position of the model minority and the silencing that accompanies it. Particularly relevant in the context of *Yellow and Confused* is Stacey J. Lee’s assertion that “the model minority stereotype is dangerous because it tells Asian Americans and other minorities how to behave” (Lee 125). Lin identifies that

the problem with growing up as an immigrant in South Africa is that we were taught to tolerate the discriminative behaviour; to be submissive, understanding and avoid unnecessary confrontation. It has left deep scars. It makes us an angry and bitter generation. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 39)

Attempting to be a so-called model minority is, therefore, not only a disempowering experience but one that leaves lasting effects. Lin refers to the uninvited effects of her manifold identities as “the emotional scars that stick around for years, sometimes for ever” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 53). For Lin, confronting these scars is a necessary prerequisite “if you want to move forward” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 53). A further problem that Lin identifies with performing and thus perpetuating the myth of the model minority is that the “voices [of East Asian South Africans] will continue to be muffled, even erased” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 203). It is by rejecting the model minority mindset and unpacking its negative effects that Lin can actively participate in the ongoing construction of her own subject position.

The above examples of reclamation, identity construction and unlearning in the text model the autobiographical self’s turn inward, her self-reflection and striving towards personal change. Lin posits that it is by turning inward, in much the same way that she had done, that the reader will in turn experience personal growth. This introspective turn involves gaining an understanding of one’s own subject position and the potential privileges and biases it allows, as expounded upon by Lin in the following quote: “Acknowledging your privilege requires deep self-reflection. No one can do this for you. You need to be willing to take a step back, realise it’s not personal and unpack it” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 208). In this way, Lin positions feeling uncomfortable and being willing to confront one’s own biases and privileges

as central to personal progression and change. In addition to this, Lin positions the recognition of the plurality of identity, of intersectionality, as vital for societal progression. For Lin,

[t]he only way to move forward is to be part of the movement to change mindsets that shouldn't have been tolerated in the first place. Everyone is different and being a minority, whether it's your race, gender or age that places you there, is not the only thing that defines you. Just because it's not your norm doesn't mean it isn't someone else's norm. (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 40-41)

In *Yellow and Confused*, the reader is confronted with the autobiographical self's experiences in confronting both the hurts of the past and the intolerant vestiges of apartheid and is then urged to confront their own biases and privileges. Lin thus didactically places the ability to move forward in relation to the recognition of intersectionality, that individuals cannot be reduced to a singular identity, but necessarily occupy unique, subjective positions within post-apartheid South Africa.

Conclusion

Yellow and Confused is concerned with the lived experiences of the autobiographical self and the attempts to internally navigate these lived experiences in such a way as to make sense of a particular subject position. Furthermore, the text functions as a narrative assertion of the plurality, intersectionality and entanglement of identities. These intertwined identities and the resulting particularity of experiences are central to this chapter – Lin's position as a Taiwanese-born South African woman contradicts the narrative that would reduce the autobiographical self to a single identity. According to Homi K. Bhabha, “[c]ounter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Bhabha 213). *Yellow and Confused* is thus involved in this process of deconstructing the totalizing borders of the past that still pervade the present, positioning the in-between position of the autobiographical self not as a position of lack, but as a position that gives access into multiple spaces and multiple identities. By asserting a rootedness both in Taiwan and South Africa, occupying and performing these identities simultaneously, the

autobiographical self emphasises that she is not simply East Asian, nor is she only South African, but that her identities are multiple, overlapping and irrevocably entangled.

It is not only “[t]he balance of being both Taiwanese and South African” that is noteworthy in Lin’s text (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 23-24). The autobiographical self’s narrative confrontations with apartheid’s lingering totalizing boundaries, its drive to assert a singular identity, is a significant aspect of *Yellow and Confused*. The “balance between conditioned ignorance and a thirst to unlearn” evident in these interactions (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 24), between accepting the ingrained discourses of the past and striving towards the future, is reminiscent of the inward turn that has been observed in South African literary production post-apartheid, the emphasis placed on self-questioning and reflection (Poyner 103). The autobiographical self models a critical inward gaze, unravelling her complex subject position through the braiding together of personal experiences and theoretical frameworks and discourses within the text in such a way that frames her nuanced, particular experiences in contemporary South Africa. Furthermore, it is through Lin’s unapologetic and sometimes uncomfortable narration that the reader is implicated in *Yellow and Confused*, challenged to confront their own biases. Lin models this process for her reader – it is only through turning inward, through the dedication to “see past my own bias and conditioning” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 209), that she is able “to become unapologetically yellow in a society that doesn’t see me” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 209). Only then is she able to inhabit her multiple identities narratively and forcefully in a space that would reduce her to a single membership category. It is as a result of this inward turn that Lin is able to orientate herself towards her reader, encouraging them towards introspection and progression. *Yellow and Confused* thus favours personal growth as the preeminent change agent – it is through the narrative emphasis on internal experience that the autobiographical self is shown to “move forward” (Lin, *Yellow and Confused* 40), and it is through the didactic, confrontational nature of the text that the reader is urged to undergo a similar process of self-reflection and self-confrontation.

Conclusion

April 1994, that legendary month in the history of South Africa, was a bittersweet month for Ufrieda Ho – it marked a year since her father’s untimely death. When summer fades and winter arrives, Ho is “taken back to the April night when things did fall apart, when the centre did not hold and Yeats’s blood-dimmed time was loosed upon my world” (Ho, *Paper Sons* 213). The political is overridden by the personal. William Butler Yeats’ poem holds a new, palimpsestic meaning, irrevocably entangled with Chinua Achebe and immortalised in the African literary archive. Ho’s conscious allusion to the “tripartite influence that undergirds her writing – Chinese, European and African” (Vasser 1010) is indicative of a larger process, namely that of articulating a new narrative, a new identity that can neither solely be rooted in one space nor the other.

At the centre of this study stands the configuration of ‘East Asian South African’, one which encapsulates a confluence of local and global migrant trajectories and questions about diasporic experience and citizenship in a racially stratified South Africa. This is where the threefold aim of this thesis comes into play. Firstly, by foregrounding the narratives of East Asian South African selves, I have sought to draw academic attention to this often-overlooked identity and subsequent body of literary work. While academic interest in this population group is visible, texts by East Asian South African selves remain for the most part invisibilised, the subjects of relatively little public and academic attention. Secondly, this study aims to position East Asian South African auto/biographies within the field of diaspora studies in South Africa and within the field of South African literature as a whole. It is as a result of the dual phenomenon of being silenced yet being the identifiable other that the auto/biographical drive to both assert the diasporic self and insert the actual experiences of the self into the South African historiography, into the greater South African dialogue, arises. The auto/biographical form is useful in this endeavour as, through narrative, it allows for the meaningful positioning of the communal and idiosyncratic self in relation to the dominant conceptions of belonging in the hostland-cum-homeland. The third aim is to analyse the processes of identity navigation, negotiation and construction in the three texts. Each studied text emphasises a plurality of identity, an inability to fully inhabit prescribed identities yet a nebulous experience of belonging to each; identity becomes a construction of interlocking facets, characterised by multiplicity and experiences of

(un)belonging. The narrative positioning of both the autobiographical self and the other East Asian South African figures in the texts are thus foregrounded in this analysis.

The conscious textual emplacement of the autobiographical self in Darryl Accone's *All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa* (2004), the subject of Chapter I, can only be seen in the final chapter of the text, in which the idiosyncratic self makes his first appearance. *All Under Heaven* privileges the biographical, recounting the experiences of generations of Accone's family in an almost novelistic fashion and situating the autobiographical self within this history. Chapter I not only positions the figures within the mythologised China of diasporic selves and the spatial politics of South Africa in the 20th century, but also within the crisscrossing networks of the Indian Ocean. It is in the experiences of routedness that the identities in the text are formed, broadened or (re)negotiated as routedness draws into question stable notions of identity and belonging. *All Under Heaven* narratively asserts a plurality of identity through the textual centrality of entanglements of space and identity. Accone's figures are notably spatially entangled in the South African context – the Chinese or Chinese-occupied spaces in the text highlight varying levels of interaction between Chinese selves and South Africa, varying conscious alignments and assertions of belonging. Similarly, the entangled identities of Accone's figures, significantly those of the mixed-race Martin family, assert a particular Chinese South Africanness. While initially appearing to undermine the solitarist conceptualisations of identity characteristic of the apartheid state, the text reveals that these entanglements remain defined and constrained by the racial policies of the hostland. Accone's figures are unhomed by their entanglement, relegated to an in-between existence in which full belonging in either site of rootedness appears unobtainable. The inextricable multiplicity of the autobiographical self is, therefore, shown to be insufficient as the autobiographical self is ensnared by the plurality of his identity, his claim to rootedness in both South Africa and in the distant homeland, China.

Chapter II undertakes a close examination of Ufrieda Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters: Growing up Chinese in South Africa* (2011), most notably the navigations of Johannesburg, the quintessential apartheid city, by the East Asian South African figures in the text. Ho's narrative is framed by her familial history. Unlike the wider scope of *All Under Heaven*, *Paper Sons and Daughters* focuses on narrating the experiences of two generations of the Ho family, recounting the childhood and young adulthood of the autobiographical self, as well as the economically necessary movements of Ah Kee, the father figure, within the bounded spaces of Johannesburg.

These spaces are traversed by Ah Kee in his role as a fahfee man – it is through this illegal mode of economic interaction that the upward mobility of the Ho family is made possible. The narrative handling of Ah Kee’s interactions within the township spaces on the periphery of the apartheid city reveal that he navigates the official structures of the city in a way that differs from its official designation. His agentic traversals of the boundaries between clearly delineated spaces, made possible by his automobility, enable him to subvert the official strategies of the space, disrupting apartheid’s segregationist project. However, like de Certeau’s wanderer, Ah Kee’s movements in the city are restrained by its structures, its infrastructure. Despite this, the very existence and movements of figures such as Ah Kee position the structures of the apartheid city as fallible. Furthermore, the violences of the post-apartheid city are foregrounded in Ho’s narrative approach to this space, in which the lingering structures of apartheid and the anger that simmers below the surface are acknowledged. It is through the preoccupation with the subversive movements of members of her family into the apartheid state and within the apartheid city that Ho narratively positions the autobiographical self and thus asserts a belonging within the post-apartheid moment.

Ming-Cheau Lin’s narrative navigation of self in *Yellow and Confused: Born in Taiwan, raised in South Africa, and making sense of it all* (2019) is explored in Chapter III. The previous two texts involve the navigation of physical spaces, which thus function as assertions of rootedness and insertions into the South African archive. *Yellow and Confused*, on the other hand, involves a navigation of the effects of the lingering structures of apartheid on the psyche and experiences of an East Asian South African self in post-apartheid South Africa. The interwoven identities of the autobiographical self stand at the centre of the text – *Yellow and Confused* privileges the individual, relegating other figures to marginal positions within the narrative. It approaches the autobiographical self in a manner that differs from the approaches of *All Under Heaven* and *Paper Sons and Daughters*. Instead of tracing the past and situating the autobiographical self in relation to familial history, *Yellow and Confused* seeks to unpack the ‘now’. This necessarily involves delving into the influences of the past on the present (Nuttall, “City forms” 732), yet nevertheless favours the autobiographical self’s present moment, emphasising the lived experiences that have shaped Lin’s conceptualisation of self. Lin acknowledges the complexity arising from her intersectional identities, from her position as an East Asian immigrant woman in post-apartheid South Africa, yet firmly roots the autobiographical self in the South African context. *Yellow and Confused* functions as both a narrative unravelling of the autobiographical self, an introspective analysis of self, and a didactic challenge to the reader. There are thus two

interacting processes in the text, a turn inward and a turn outward. The turn inward entails textual attempts to make sense of the lived experiences of the autobiographical self, such as through the positioning of the autobiographical self within the theoretical frameworks of third culture kids, orientalism and the resulting hypersexualisation of East Asian women, as well as feminism and the need for intersectionality. These frameworks, as well as Lin's experiences within both Bloemfontein and Cape Town, prompt the reader towards introspection. The text is thereby orientated outwards in an attempt to challenge unquestioned discourses, foster self-awareness and self-reflection in the reader and model processes by which learning and unlearning occur.

This thesis sought to examine the use of the auto/biographical form to navigate the lived experiences of East Asian selves in the grey zone of troubled (un)belonging in South Africa. The three selected East Asian South African auto/biographies attempt to render the lived, messy, complex experiences of these diasporic selves into narrative forms that themselves forge a unique body of work. Uchenna P. Vasser, when investigating the literary exploration of Afro-Sino relations in Ken N. Kamoche's *Black Ghosts* (2013), a novel about a Zimbabwean student in China, and Ho's *Paper Sons and Daughters* concludes that

[l]iterature will be written about the negotiations between indigeneity and alterity, about the cultural confluence, about the distant homelands and be written in Chinese, English or in some other language. New etymologies and categorisations to express the emergent world order will be made manifest. (Vasser 1011)

It is thus through a study of the literary output of a diasporic group such as East Asian South Africans that the emergence of novel, hybrid conceptualisations of self, the construction of "borderlands ... with their own blended foodways, languages, identities and even values" (Park, "Boundaries" 476), becomes apparent. It is in these literatures that notions of 'Chinese' or 'East Asian' and 'South African' meaningfully interact, which "divert[s] the thrust away from the age-old binary perception of South Africa in starkly black and white terms" (Harris, "Confusion, Heaven and Honour" 116). This creates a space that allows for the literary construction of new formulations of identity and belonging that exemplify Jacobs' understanding of South African selves as "constantly being stitched together, becoming entangled, being complicitous, becoming ever more complicated" (Jacobs 4).

I wish to draw attention to two avenues for further study that have presented themselves. The first possible area of study is the relationship between East Asian South African literatures and Indian South African literatures. Indian Ocean crossings are foregrounded in the literatures of Indian South Africans, South Africa's largest and most established so-called Asian population. As such, analysing the narrative embodiment and significance of the symbiosis of roots and routes in these literatures could potentially give insight into the interaction between Indian Ocean routes and the South African context in East Asian South African literatures. Samuelson's remark that "seachanges raise questions about where India and South Africa begin and end, while locating national imaginings in transoceanic travel" is particularly useful here (Samuelson, "Sea Changes" 15). Indian South African subjects occupy a position described as a "simultaneous schism and overlap between positionalities such as Indian and African, place and displacement, past and present, race and nation" (Frenkel 3). The literatures arising from such identities allow for "new ways of thinking about South African culture" (Frenkel 2) by "present[ing] South African culture as cut across and comprised by oceanic passages, particularly ones across the Indian Ocean" (Samuelson, "Walking through the door" 133). In this way, a comparison of Indian Ocean traversals and experiences of routedness in the literatures of East Asian and Indian South Africans could contribute to the study of South African diasporic literature and the influences of these groups on conceptualisations of South Africanness.

Another possible area of further study is the similarity between Ming-Cheau Lin's *Just Add Rice – stories and recipes by a Taiwanese South African* (2018) and Emma Chen's *Emperor can Wait: Memories and Recipes from Taiwan* (2009). Both texts are written by Taiwanese first-generation immigrant women in South Africa, drawing heavily on the food culture of Taiwan and, in varying degrees, interspersing recipes of Taiwanese food with auto/biographical elements. The act of writing a cookbook, of recording the so-called exotic food of an immigrant community and publishing this text in the hostland, along with memories, photographs and recollected impressions, could be an interesting addition to diaspora studies in South Africa, as well as a different angle on South African migration narratives. Anna Maria Tomczak, when analysing three cookbook-memoirs written by diasporic Indian women, posits that:

Maintaining cultural culinary customs in a foreign place may be additionally treated as a matter of upholding a bond with one's ancestral land, and passing down recipes from generation to generation a proof that cultural memory is kept alive through everyday

practice. The mere formula of a recipe entails an idea of reproduction and sharing. (Tomczak 86)

Written in diasporic spaces, *Yellow and Confused* and *Emperor can Wait* form part of this drive to “raise the issues outside the domain of the private and the personal” (Tomczak 85), thereby voicing experiences that had hitherto been relegated to the private domain. The significance of a study on East Asian South African cookbooks lies in the understanding of recipes as “reflect[ing] lifestyles, historical processes, identity formation and cultural values, proving that food may be a marker of cultural distinctiveness and of various interrelationships in social, economic and historical contexts” (Tomczak 93). These texts could thus be approached as asserting the existence of the othered self in the hostland. The gendered nature of such cookbook-memoirs could also be included in this analysis.

The three selected auto/biographies function as attempts to write the communal and idiosyncratic self into being. While East Asian South African literature is currently limited to non-fiction, highlighting the abundance of non-fictional narratives still to be told, I believe that the texts discussed in this thesis are only the foundation for further literary output. In response to the publication of *Colour, Confusion and Concessions* (1996), Harris remarked: “The South African Chinese community have indeed been recorded and revealed” (Harris, “The South African Chinese” 325). I argue, however, that due to the multiplicity of such identities, the act of recording and revealing the histories, experiences and identities of East Asian selves within the South African context cannot be said to have come to a satisfying end. Instead, I see this as only the beginning.

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