

ROUTLEDGE TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES
ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism

Critical Imaginaries for a Global Age

Edited by
Aparajita Nanda



Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism

“Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism provides new perspectives on how contemporary ethnic writers, filmmakers and visual artists animate in original, distinctive, and creative ways the transnational spaces they encounter in the present and recover from the past. These discussions of hybrid texts infused by hybrid cultures—of counterfactual histories and alternative futures; of refugees and migrants; of forgotten artists and erased civilizations; of nomads, cautious cosmopolites, and citizens of the world—all help us think in fresh ways about transnational communities, global mobility, trauma, loss, and the complex flow of cultures across borders.”

—Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Joseph S. Atha Professor of Humanities, Professor of English and Director of American Studies, Stanford University

“This rich anthology does not merely transnationalize ethnic studies but also ethnicizes transnationalism. A novel foray into new frontiers of ethnic studies within and beyond the United States, it makes an important contribution to studies of ethnicity, diaspora, transnationalism, postcoloniality, and multiculturalism. Highly recommended.”

—Shu-mei Shih, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California–Los Angeles, and the University of Hong Kong

“A thought-provoking collection which addresses the current transnational turn in the USA as it impinges on ethnic literatures, reframing them in relation to the cross-currents of world literature and the tensions between global forces and ethnic subcultures.”

—Janet Wilson, Department of English, University of Northampton, UK

“These essays seek variously to de-provincialize US American studies by setting to work the ‘transnationalist turn.’ Returning the United States to its postcolonial as well as superpower trajectory, the collection reveals how ethnic and postcolonial studies, no less than diaspora studies, must be at the heart of any broaching of transnationalism within a neo-liberal globalizing frame.

Spanning contemporary London, Oklahoma, Ethiopia, and Beijing, as well as the British Commonwealth, this wide-ranging book evidences richly the utopian potential of transnational literature for, in Bill Ashcroft's phrase, envisaging a less border-burdened world. Those seeking a Benjaminian interruption in the stream of time, a breaching of an otherwise ceaseless 'repetition of unfulfilled expectations,' to quote Jonathan Flatley on W. E. B. Du Bois, will find much of compelling interest here."

—Donna Landry, Professor, FRAS, School of English, Rutherford College, University of Kent, UK

As new comparative perspectives on race and ethnicity open up, scholars are identifying and exploring fresh topics and questions in an effort to reconceptualize ethnic studies and draw attention to nation-based approaches that may have previously been ignored. This volume, by recognizing the complexity of cultural production in both its diasporic and national contexts, seeks a nuanced critical approach in order to look ahead to the future of transnational literary studies.

The majority of the chapters, written by literary and ethnic studies scholars, analyze ethnic literatures of the United States which, given the nation's history of slavery and immigration, form an integral part of mainstream American literature today. While the primary focus is literary, the chapters analyze their specific topics from perspectives drawn from several disciplines, including cultural studies and history. This book is an exciting and insightful resource for scholars with interests in transnationalism, American literature, and ethnic studies.

Aparajita Nanda, recipient of a Fulbright faculty teaching scholarship and a Visiting Associate Professorship to the departments of English and African American Studies, University of California–Berkeley, has taught at Jadavpur University, India, and now teaches both at University of California–Berkeley and Santa Clara University. Her most recent publications include *Romancing the Strange*, *Black California*, *The Strangled Cry*, and articles in *Ariel* and *Callaloo*.

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Critical Imaginaries for a Global Age
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To my Mother and my Father

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Preface

Rafael Perez-Torres

“We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us!” This nearly axiomatic phrase has helped shape the foundation and development of Chicana/o Studies for decades. The phrase, of course, refers to the ramifications for Mexicans living in the United States beginning with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and continuing up through the present. What the border represents changes with time and place, whether it be national, racial, sexual, or linguistic borders. Nevertheless, from the first, Chicana/o Studies has thought of itself in a transnational context, actively conceptualizing the experiences of individuals and collectives whose existence relies on a variety of national border crossings.

More recently, scholars invested in Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies have helped generate the push to situate American Studies within broader international and hemispheric contexts. The focus on border studies that has been central to the development of Chicana/o Studies helped form a theoretical framework by which the study of US culture and literature should be considered as part of a complex and fruitful process of transnational circulation. Indeed, Chicana/o Studies has long proposed that understanding American culture (writ small) is impossible if not within a hemispheric framework of the Americas. The liminal, marginal, border zones of US culture represent key areas where the nature of what comprises US national identity is laid bare. In a complimentary move, critics working in a Black Studies context such as Paul Gilroy have long considered the transnational condition of literary and cultural modernism. So movements across oceans and borders are not a new move in areas of study devoted to understanding communities that, in the words of George Lipsitz, are historically aggrieved.

Work over the last decade or so in Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies—by José David Saldívar, Josefina Portillo-Saldaña, George Yudice, Sandra Soto, Walter Mignolo, Maylei Blackwell, and many others—considers the globalized conditions by which Latina/o experiences and identities generate new and dynamic modes of bringing into being transnational modes of consciousness. Indeed, the push for a decolonizing consciousness is premised upon the need to understand not just how nations are formed, but how

national identity is made up and undone through the continued movement of peoples, cultures, objects, goods, and thoughts across national borders in a complex and generative exchange.

Additionally, an interest and investment in transnationalism can be found in most every field in Ethnic Studies. One can, for example, take up the issue of Pan-Africanism that has been since the early twentieth century part and parcel of African-American critical life. Similarly, the role of migration and immigration in Asian-American Studies is inherent to the composition of the very field. One cannot begin to conceptualize Puerto Rican Studies without taking into account the issues of imperialism and self-determination that have preoccupied its critics, writers, and thinkers for well over a century. Dominican Studies is imbued with the repercussions of migration and exile, most especially the implications of the US-backed Trujillo dictatorship that has so marked the history of its citizenry. Cuban-American Studies is steeped in the vexed history of the United States and its response to the revolutionary fervor that generated the modern Cuban state. The vast influx of Central American people and culture into the United States can only be understood in its national and transnational context. And Native American Studies has long considered the rights of indigenous peoples globally, taking on and taking into account a globalized history of aggression and colonization. A transnational perspective has always been constitutive of US Ethnic Studies.

So this book adds to scholarship on ethnic literature in a vein that is well established. At the same time, it represents a welcome addition by offering a fresh theoretical perspective on this trend toward transnationality when considering the study of ethnic literatures. Most of the essays here offered derive from a postcolonial theoretical position, and consider the issue of transnationalism in Ethnic Studies from a perspective that opens once again the significance of migration and movement in a global frame.

So this book engages theories and practices of transnationalism with a difference. That is, the sense of increased globalization and hemispheric meandering has only grown since the formal establishment of academic Ethnic Studies programs in the United States. Thus this book represents a long (though not dismissive) walk from, say, Américo Paredes's ground-breaking book on Mexico-Tejano border culture, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958). That book considered the socio-cultural repercussions of modernization on the border region, a region at the crossroads of transnational exchange with a sharp awareness of the asymmetrical power relationships generated by where one was situated in relation to the mutable national border. The imperial history of US expansionism was (and is) a lived reality for those inhabitants of the border region. The present book takes up the issue of borders, of course, seeking both to affirm the significance and relevance of national borders, yet also considering the many types of borders that are evoked, considered, crossed, affirmed, and undone in ethnic literature. The essays in this book look forward, too, to a greater exchange of ideas

and conversations between ethnic literary studies and studies of nations and cultures in a more greatly globalized context. As such, this book looks forward toward a broader conversation across disciplinary as well as national borders, adding valuable and much-needed voices to an already productive and active discussion. This book moves us into exciting cultural and critical territories, and it contributes to a vital field of US intellectual activity.

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Acknowledgments

Aparajita Nanda

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as Relational Figure,” was published as “Contrapuntalism and Rupture: Suheir Hammad’s *breaking poems* and the Refugee as Relational Figure” in Robert Myers (ed.), *Connections and Ruptures* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2011), 159–171.

This book is dedicated to my parents, the late Binapani and Dhiren Mukherjee. Everything I am today I owe to them and live to feel the painful vacuum of having lost them so early in life. With deep gratitude, I remember the academic contributions in my life of professors Kalidas Bose, former chair of English, Presidency College; Ashoke Nath Basu, former Vice Chancellor of Jadavpur University; and Rama Prasad De, formerly of the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India. I thank my husband, Sailesh, for his unfailing support down the years through so many projects of mine. And to my twins, Ananya and Shreesh, a very special “thank you” for bearing with me now and always. Finally, and most of all, to my grandson, Aditya—thank you for your smile; it lights up my life.

Introduction

Aparajita Nanda

The goal of *Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism: Critical Imaginaries for a Global Age* is to undertake a theoretically and conceptually rich analysis of the transnational turn in literary studies. Though the focus is primarily on literary works, literature here is defined in its broadest sense of being a documentation of culture (as indicated in the subtitle of the volume). Films, artwork, and even political or social rituals, when they become vehicles of chronicling and memorializing culture, are susceptible to literary analysis and share with literature certain generic affinities and particular concerns. The book addresses a curious vacuum of work on how Ethnic Studies influences theories and practices of transnationalism. Ethnic Studies as a field has sometimes remained suspicious of transnational approaches that risk universalizing “ethnicity” and obscuring the particularism of the many different kinds of ethnic affiliations covered by Ethnic Studies. This volume seeks to overcome the inherent U.S.-centric aspects of much scholarship in Ethnic Studies. As new comparative horizons of race and ethnicity open up, scholars such as those contributing to this collection are identifying and exploring new topics and questions in an effort to reconceptualize ethnic studies and draw attention to the variety of ways transnationalism is being mobilized by contemporary Ethnic Studies.

For decades now, the response has been to turn to diaspora and rethink race/ethnicity across national boundaries—for instance, Stuart Hall’s essay “New Ethnicities” and Brent Edwards’s notion of the Black diaspora via articulation, a unity in difference. Such efforts make it possible to see Ethnic Studies not only as serving individual communities (which it must and I think always will do), but also as reimagining the world. This volume, by recognizing the complexity of cultural production in both its diasporic and national contexts, seeks a nuanced critical approach and rejects a simple celebratory one in order to look ahead to the future of transnational studies. As an example of nuanced critical approaches that reject simple celebratory ones, minority cultures may be used to remap global modernism—the goal here being to use the transnational turn to counteract “ghettoization.”

However, the term “transnationalism” needs to be distinguished from analogs such as migration, global networks, world literatures, or transnational subcultures in order to bring it into conversation with ethnicity. Ato

Quayson and Girish Daswani point out that transnationalism and diaspora, terms they often use interchangeably, are keys to our understanding of nation. The concept of diaspora involves not only the moving population but also the recipient societies; transnationalism focuses primarily on “various flows and counter flows and the multi-striated connections they give rise to” (4): allegiance or identifications with class and sexuality among other things. Whereas area studies is about hemispheric and other demarcations, diaspora studies challenges this emphasis on borders. Interestingly, diaspora studies goes back to colonial rule and the deliberate creation of conditions that often resulted in migrant populations. These populations, in their dispersal, built “transnational social fields that cut across geographic, cultural, and political borders” (12), creating “hybrid” space inhabited by “hybrid” identities, the explication of which begged critique through varied lenses of interdisciplinarity.

The majority of this volume’s chapters analyze ethnic literatures of the United States which, given the nation’s history of slavery and immigration, form an integral part of mainstream American literature today. In the recent “transnational turn” in American studies, scholars have begun to study ethnic literature in a comparative mode—to put it in conversation with nations and cultures in a global context, bringing to the fore the desire to get beyond the inherent limitations of the nation-state, if simply to stay relevant in an ostensibly “postethnic” and “postnational” world. One could argue that Ethnic Studies has always been international or transnational: much recent research has been devoted to the Third Worldist orientations of many Ethnic Studies activists and scholars in the 1960s and ’70s. The claim here has been that the transnational turn might better be regarded as a return to roots. Internationalism, however, is a more grounded term than transnationalism in multiple senses. It connotes exchange between—rather than movement through—nations. So, for instance, internationalism points to concepts and entities like human rights, the United Nations, and the various Communist Internationals, the heyday of twentieth-century internationalism being the interwar and immediate post-war years, and certainly much research has interrogated race/ethnicity vis-à-vis socialist internationalism and Cold War-era international diplomacy. In contrast, I tend to associate transnationalism with the fluid movements of individuals, culture, and capital across national boundaries; and I think the heyday of transnationalism is right now, amid neoliberal globalization.

The book explores the changing dynamics of ethnic texts and how transnationalism has affected different ethnic groups and their writings (including films and artwork) in different ways. Are there any common traits or only divergent ones? What role does historical legacy and immigrant history play in these documents? How do ethnic literatures deal with externally imposed stereotypes, with issues that are unique to particular ethnic groups, and with common issues and themes that pertain to several groups across the various social and situational contexts? In trying to answer these questions, the

chapters examine the impact of global forces on cultural dimensions that affect aesthetic representations.

The impetus to study the effects of globalization and transnationalism on ethnic texts in the United States and other nations came from the rapid increase in the significance of ethnic issues in recent decades, the size and activities of different ethnic groups, and related political and social movements. These factors have led to a need for the discussion of transnationalism and ethnicity today, a discussion that is imperative in our post-9/11 world struggling to recognize the reality of globalization and the transcultural circulation of ideas and cultures.

While the primary focus is literary, the chapters analyze their specific topics from the perspectives of several disciplines, including cultural studies and history. Within this framework, the volume exhibits two levels of analysis. One is the popular level, which addresses the general political climate and ethnic disturbances, recognizing how lived reality plays into various documentations of culture. The academic appeal of the book, however, lies primarily in its second analytical orientation. As they work through their arguments, concepts, and evidence, the writers identify primary theorists in the field. How do scholars position themselves regarding the impact of transnationalism on US ethnic and other national literatures? Do they treat the impact conceptually or do they reify national, transnational and post-national issues?

There is a pressing need for such a collection, as a brief overview of the historical context of ethnic literary studies will show. The culture wars and the social turbulence of the 1960s led to the canon debate and reformation of the 1970s. The conservative backlash of the 1980s, however, made ethnic literature re-seek its place in canon formations and validate its staying power in the curriculum. Multicultural literature consolidated its position via a spate of new literatures that came in with women's writings, the advent of women and gender studies, and the rise of postcolonial studies. In the 2000s, multiethnic US literature seemed to rest on its laurels, enjoying the fruits of its labor, until a new wave of criticism surfaced.

Naomi Schaefer Riley in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 30, 2012) called dissertations by Black-Studies graduate students "left-wing victimization claptrap" to make a case for eliminating the discipline. Her words echo the sentiments of Arizona House Bill 2281, which was enacted in 2010 to prohibit teaching ethnic studies courses in public schools. The courses were said to "promote resentment toward a race or class of people" and to "promote the overthrow of the United States Government." In carrying out the law, the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction ordered the Mexican American Studies program in the Tucson Unified School District to suspend the "prohibited courses and classes." The connection between the political climate of the state and the school injunction reflects a larger base of intolerant views that is well established in pockets of the United States today. And this is a cause of deep concern that endangers the concept

of a reconciliatory embrace of the so-called others, the minorities of America, within mainstream culture. Professor Tom Biolsi, chair of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, in “Once Again: Does Ethnic Studies Unite Us or Divide Us?” reminds us that professors Ronald Takaki and Arthur M. Schlesinger were debating this issue back in 1997. To Schlesinger’s charges of ethnic studies “disuniting” America, Takaki responded that critical scholarship regarding racial discrimination would help people look at it objectively, weigh it with due concern, and in the process evolve their values; in fact, this was the “only chance that America might have to move toward real national unity.”

Though transnationalism has become a popular buzzword in the humanities today, the relevance of connecting it to literature and encouraging its study has been hotly contested. In *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 9, 2011), Karen J. Winkler cites Rita Felski, editor of *New Literary History*, to claim, on the one hand, that “literary studies has cut itself off from ‘the specter of our aesthetic attachments.’” On the other hand, she cites Harvard professor Stephen Greenblatt: “literature can encode the intensity of lived lives.” Greenblatt’s “intensity of lived lives” provides a critical lens that enables a temporal look at transnational studies. In other words, it recognizes the changes wrought by time to territorial boundaries and cultures of the world. This enriched critical appraisal of the global situation, which is reflected in literature, is essential; for as Gayatri Spivak puts it, “Everyone reads life and the world like a book [... for] [w]ithout the reading of the world as a book, there is no prediction, no planning, no taxes, no laws, no welfare, no war.” Given its connection to literature, this volume is a timely intervention that can help to reinstate the relevance of reading ethnic literatures and reveal how they move through transnational currents of intellectual stimulation.

Ethnic Literatures and Transnationalism, though unique, enters into an ongoing conversation among scholars about ethnic literatures and transnationalism. Perhaps the main strand of this critical discussion is devoted to putting multiethnic America in a larger framework that explores interconnections with the world and seeks answers beyond the narrow parameters of national boundaries. Way back in 1916, journalist and social critic Randolph S. Bourne, disturbed by the antagonistic attitude of native-born Americans towards ethnic pockets in the United States, suggested an antidote in a new ideal of mutual tolerance, a transnational tapestry “with the other lands of many threads of all sizes and colors” (5).

The need for international perspectives as a way to renovate American studies was reiterated in this century by Robert Gross and later expanded by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in her Presidential Address to the American Studies Association. The transnational angle as it tied into European imperialism has been the focus of Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease along with John Carlos Rowe. Interestingly, the growing concern with US studies abroad has led US-based scholars to evaluate American studies

from an internationalist angle. Anna Brickhouse and Penny von Eschen, for example, delve into international networks and influences that play important roles in the writings of American authors, activists, and intellectuals. Affording complex and rich evaluative criteria, transnational studies has led critics such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Pheng Cheah, David Damrosch, Paul Jay, Wai Chee Dimock, Franscoise Lionnet, Shu-mei Shih, and Peter Hitchcock to concepts of new cosmopolitanism and global citizenry. Several essay collections address related issues of transnationalism and globalization, such as the new Blackwell *Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, edited by Ato Quayson and Girish, or Basch, Schiller and Blanc edited *Nations Unbound*, or even Janet Wilson edited *Rerouting the Postcolonial*.

Meanwhile, the United States as a postcolonial nation has been variously argued by Lawrence Buell, Peter Hulme, Jon Stratton, C. Richard King, Malini Schueller, and Edward Watts. The dialogue between globalization and postcolonial literary studies has been variously dealt with by Edward Said, Ania Loomba, Neil Lazarus, Revathy Krishnaswamy, John Hawley, Ashley Dawson, and Sarah Brouillette. Though globalization and postcolonial studies are generally taken to be at odds, some shared terrains, like deterritorialization and hybridity, are pointed out by Krishnaswamy and Hawley. Dawson redefines the relationship between globalization and postcoloniality even as Brouillette looks at the “touristic conscience” of postcolonial writers as they interact with the global economy that circulates their writings and profits from them. A connection between postcolonial studies and transnationalism has been suggested by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt who, along with Gunter Lenz, Caroline Rody, Malini Schueller, and Edward Watts, propose a comparative and transnational cultural approach to reach a full understanding of US cultural history.

The comparative approach that nurtures the transnational turn in American studies, according to Gayatri Spivak, spells the death of the traditional attitude towards comparative literature, as it now invites new readings of mainstream literature through the lens of world culture and literature. Rob Wilson cites Spivak as he explains how this transdisciplinary move has birthed a rich arena of “world-becoming,” a “bringing-near” of the world—its thoughts, concepts, idealisms, fallacies, and histories feed into each other and “resonate across discrepant global/local contexts so as to challenge First World/Third World modes of reading and transnational interconnection” (219). The present book seeks to extend Gayatri Spivak’s idea of transnationalism/the transdisciplinary, in its overturning of earlier concepts of comparative literature, to the field of ethnic studies. It challenges mainstream approaches by teaching Ethnic Studies as, for lack of a better term, world studies. And I think particularly in a present in which there are no alternatives, in which neoliberal globalization reigns supreme (despite its endless crises), ethnic literature syllabi can be constructed so as to imagine other worlds—however fraught or utopian.

The underlying humanistic ethos of the project, and the intention to identify new alignments between ethnic cultures and global movements by investigating/identifying the impact of transnationalism, is very pertinent to postcolonial studies. The United States, a colony that emerged as a super-power, exists on two apparently different paradigms—postcolonialism and globalization. Paul Jay in “Globalization and the Postcolonial Condition” negotiates a relationship between the two by recognizing a continuity that defines globalization as part of a long history of colonization, decolonization, and postcolonialism. Through this lens of continuity, he provides a critical context for studying transnational literature “not just in a postcolonial context defined narrowly, but in a postnational, global flow of deterritorialized cultural products appropriated, translated, and recirculated world-wide” (MLA 2000). By refiguring the United States as a place open to the complicated flow of transcultural influences instead of an imperialistic global power bent on propagating its ideas to the world, my proposed volume seeks to define, along with Pease, Wiegman, and Rowe, a postnational world.

Born of a conference of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS) and the United States chapter of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (USACLALS), this volume is a compilation of scholarly articles that analyze ideas emanating from this conversation of US ethnic texts with literatures of the Commonwealth. Most importantly, this transnational approach—by focusing on the social, political, and cultural networks that link the United States with the rest of the world—reveals the differences and similarities within world literature. The primary objective of this book is to highlight the transnational quality of literature that is beginning to minimize borders today and look ahead at a collaborative, multilingual future where ethnic and transnational literature enrich one another and stand in a symbiotic relationship.

Finally, in its exploration of the interface of leading academic scholarship and emerging trends in ethnic literatures and transnationalism, the proposed volume recognizes a double logic in these discourses wherein the promise of hegemonic unification carried by globalization and its globe-spanning network of communications, economics, and politics must somehow be reconciled with the fragmentation arising from the spread of transnational subcultures. In this global circulation of ideas and languages, cultures either ignore, adopt, transform, or resist outside influences. The impact on literature is manifold; whereas globalization suggests greater uniformity, certain aspects of transnationalism—such as hybridity and multi-rootedness—are increasingly present in texts as scholars witness new forms, interrogate existing canons, and explore the emergence of ethnic canons within diasporic contexts and subcultures of resistance in developing nations. This double logic moves through the four parts of this compilation: Identity Politics, Legacy/Trauma/Healing, Literary Crossings, and Established and Emerging Canons: Revisions and Re-Visions.

The four parts are organized around the primary issues generated by the transnational flow of culture and how it shapes ethnic texts. The first part examines the effect of diasporic movement on human identity as people move from one place to another, navigating and surviving new territory. The second part deals with the sense of loss that follows—loss of homeland, of legacy, and culture—and the trauma that emanates from this loss. The third part explores borders—both the geographical borders that people cross and the metaphorical borders that become a primary concern in literary renderings. The fourth part discusses how all this radical interdisciplinary experimentation in literature and art challenges established canons to admit new ethnic revisions and re-visions.

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Part I

Identity Politics

Part I is devoted to identity politics, a term that points to the activist roots of American ethnic literature (its emergence as a field in the 1960s and '70s), but also throws into question the relevance of this category in the “post-ethnic,” “post-identity” present. Several interventions have been staged via postcolonial studies to keep notions of race and ethnicity theoretically viable—most notably, Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” and Mohanty’s “postpositivist realism.” For transnational ethnic literature, though, perhaps the more relevant intervention was Stuart Hall’s theorization of “new ethnicities”—that is, his turn to diasporic ethnic formations.

In this part, Wlad Godzich contends that ethnic identification can resist capitalist globalization through diversification and leads not to proportionalism or multicultural relativism but rather to complexity. This understanding of ethnicity is not derived from the traditional concept of identity formation as a process of recognition, inclusion, and exclusion, a concept that owes its origin to a line of philosophy that began with Fichte and was refined by Hegel and Taylor. Rather, it connects to another genealogy that runs through Descartes to Heidegger through Kant, where identity provides one with a course of action when one is afloat in the world without orienting landmarks and must rely on bearings taken from one’s built-in spatial intuition. Whereas Kant and Descartes focus on a preconstituted self seeking to orient itself in the external world, Heidegger speaks of a self embedded in a world subject to unexpected changes but nonetheless able to respond to these changes. If the familiar world changes, how does identity change with it? His paper addresses this issue through analysis of Pasolini’s 1966 film *The Hawks and the Sparrows* and asks if transnational identity is an erasure of the past, similar to the removal of the landmarks in the Descartes-Heidegger-Kant scenario, what then is the role of ethnicity? The answer to this question is that ethnic diversity results in variant approaches, some of which may be adaptive; for example, a plural ethnomathematics that interpellates the universal system of mathematics with calculations drawn from ethnic repositories. These repositories are the built-in capacities in one’s identity, bearers of one’s future bearings, navigating the complex reality of contemporary and future life.

In his contribution, Keith Feldman addresses the interface of comparative racialization and literary transnationalism. The first half engages the analytical horizon of comparativity, whose rhetorical parameters and analytical limits he reads as inadequate to the task of listening to the contrapuntal dissonances of Euro-American modernity. The second half argues that the recent literary and activist work of Palestinian-American writer Suheir Hammad—particularly her poetry collection *breaking poems* (2009) and her post-Hurricane Katrina organizing—provides a rich poetics of the “refugee” as marking a heterogeneous figure of relationality, one whose incommensurability to the juridical order poses a creative departure from the global imaginary of US liberal multiculturalism.

Esra Santesso’s essay examines Camilla Gibb’s portrayal of Islam in *Sweetness in the Belly*, both as an example of and challenge to transnational formations as it draws attention to the deeply complex connections between the local, national, and transnational structures. By foregrounding the protagonist’s relationship to the multicultural *ummah* in London, Gibb analyzes the ways in which a “transnational” form of Islam often denies or even bans regional rituals. This tension within the Muslim community causes the protagonist to experience alienation, not only as a displaced refugee, but also as a White Muslim struggling to bridge between regionalism and cosmopolitanism.

Aparajita Nanda’s paper looks at the changing field of postcolonial studies that has registered a shift from the macropolitics of state power and control to become concerned with the micropolitics of the domestic sphere. In hybrid identities, she finds a new arena to explore where sexual liaisons and affective relationships between the colonizer and the colonized make these everyday, personalized spaces highly political and in need of imperial intervention. Her paper looks at these anxieties of the empire as they play out in Lilith, a genetically mutated human, and her mutant son, Akin, in Octavia Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood*. In a science fictional, apocalyptic space that exists beyond nations, Butler’s narrative, born of the Cold War era, speaks of nuclear colonialism and tests different conceptions of social life and their repercussions as interventions into the regime of capitalism—“a new post-national stage in the history of the world”—even as it acknowledges the play of transnationality and hybridity in the identity formation of its primary protagonists.

Seulghee Lee discusses Amiri Baraka’s concept of social love in the context of his political turn from Black nationalism to transnational Marxism. Through a reading of *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, this paper shows that transnationalism allows Baraka an unprecedented, wide-sweeping concept of political love based on surplus pleasure. Contrary to other queer readings of Baraka, Lee argues that Baraka’s homoeroticism constitutes this surplus love. Lastly, Lee discusses how this intersection of transnationalism, racial essentialism, and Black queer love comprises a positive conception of “identity” the companion articles address in this section.

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