

Redressing Immigration:
Folklore, Cross-Dressing, and Un/Documented Immigration in Sui Sin Far's

Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

by

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the intersections between sexual/cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration from the point of view of folklore and immigration studies using Sui Sin Far's short story collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Tropic of Orange*. Using the lenses of folklore theory and cross-dressing highlights aspects of immigration (and its intersection with gender and race) that are otherwise missed; it is necessary to examine the evolving ways in which fictionalized cross-dressers re-craft and occupy the spaces from which they are barred in order to address and redress questions of immigration today. Incorporating anthropology, history, folkloristics, and gender studies, this project shows that historical forms of cross-dressing and immigration lead to the development of unstable identities and pressures to "re-dress" and return to one's original space. More recent studies about gender, however, reveal a historical change in how cross-dressers negotiate their identities and the space(s) they inhabit. Therefore, it is crucial to inspect cross-dressing and immigration as both historical and contemporary phenomena. While *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (published in 1912) represents more conventional ideas of cross-dressing and immigration, *Tropic of Orange* (published in 1997) offers alternative ways to navigate borders, immigration, and identity by using these concepts more playfully and self-consciously. Although sexual/cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration are not the same in every case, there are enough similarities between the two to warrant investigating whether some of the solutions reached by modern cross-dressers and gender-ambiguous people might not also help un/documented immigrants to re-negotiate their status, identities, and spaces in the midst of an unstable and at times hostile environment. In fact, an examination of

such intersections can address and redress immigration by changing the perceptions of how, and the contexts in which, people view immigration and borders. Thus, this project contends that it is the combination of folkloristics, gender and immigration studies, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, and *Tropic of Orange* together that precipitates such a reading.

DEDICATION

To my maternal grandmother who raised me. To my parents who let me have my way, even when I was wrong, so that I would learn. To all my friends who inspire me daily.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first came into contact with immigration and border studies as an undergraduate in Dr. Claudia Sadowski-Smith's course on Studies in the Literature and Culture of the Americas. Although I did not find immigration studies relevant to my own scholarship at the time, a seed of awareness was planted. Moreover, Dr. Sadowski-Smith's unshakable belief in my academic abilities, both perplexing and humbling, inspired me to continue on into graduate studies. When I took a graduate course with her on Comparative Literatures and Cultures of Immigration in 2012, I finally saw the connections between what I was reading and what I was experiencing, between immigration and borders and the boundaries in my own life as a naturalized US citizen. This project would not exist without Dr. Sadowski-Smith's support, and as my committee chair, she has read countless versions of the thesis, and I am particularly grateful for her feedback.

My passion for folklore and fairytales began from the cradle, but Dr. Joni Adamson showed me that folklore does not have to end there. While Arizona State University does not possess a folkloristics program, I have, under her independent tutelage, traversed the theoretical side of folklore, learned how to weave folkloristics into current scholarship, and discovered my appetite for tales all over again. Thanks for giving me the means to include folklore studies in my own scholarship.

My first graduate level course was with Dr. Elizabeth Horan, who pushed me to the brink of my intellectual capabilities. In fact, my final paper for her course became the writing sample for my graduate program application, after many insightful comments on her part and revisions on mine. Moreover, in expecting so much, she set a standard that I

subsequently tried to follow in all of my graduate courses. Dr. Horan's discerning critiques and unswerving motivation make her an invaluable mentor. Because of her, I always ask myself if there is more research I can do.

All of my Arizona State University professors have shaped my scholarship, especially Drs. Gregory Castle, Mark Lussier, Anthony Chambers, Bradley Ryner, Angelita Reyes, Edward Mallot, Young Oh, and Yu Zou. Thank you for all the keen observations and all the supportive meetings amidst busy schedules. Thank you for your generosity, guidance, and support.

This thesis is my own particular perspective on the intersections between folklore, cross-dressing, and un/documented immigration. I hope that my intrusion into these areas of studies will be welcomed, since I feel that such intersections should be explored.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 OTHER THAN CHINESE: SEXUAL/CULTURAL CROSS-DRESSING IN MRS. SPRING FRAGRANCE.....	14
3 LIFE AND DEATH, PT. 1: CULTURAL CROSS-DRESSING AND UN/DOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION IN TROPIC OF ORANGE.....	25
4 LIFE AND DEATH, PT. 2: THE TRICKSTER AND RECREATION IN TROPIC OF ORANGE.....	34
5 CONCLUSION: FOLKLORE AND IMMIGRATION TODAY.....	43
WORKS CITED.....	56

Chapter 1

Introduction

Perhaps the most well-known Chinese legend for Western audiences, the folktale of Mulan begins with a threat of invasion from outsider, hostile tribes. In fact, the only reason that Mulan cross-dresses as a male at all is because foreign clans are invading China and men across the empire are subsequently conscripted; Mulan takes her elderly father's place, as there is no other male in the family who can fight. Consequently, Mulan prepares for the journey, steals her father's armor, runs away from home, and joins the army. For years, she fights in various battles while keeping the secret of her female gender from even her closest comrades. In the end, the emperor of China himself praises Mulan and offers her an official court post for all of her wondrous deeds. Mulan, however, declines the position and asks to be allowed to return to her family. When she finally arrives home, she removes her armor, dons her old dress and makeup, and smoothly re-enters her old life.

The "earliest written account of Mulan" comes in the form of "an anonymous folk ballad, entitled 'Mulan shi'" (Dong 2), and was first transcribed at some point between "the fourth and sixth centuries" (1). In that same framework, "northern China was repeatedly attacked by foreign tribes" in the fourth century (53). While the original 'Mulan shi' does not identify the enemy that Mulan faces, subsequent authors from "later periods provide a variety of enemy troops," from "invading Turks," "Mongols," "Huns" (59) and the "Rouran" intruders (53), to "Tibetan" forces (Kwa and Idema xvi), "the Xiongnu" people, and "Manchu" (i.e. foreign) adversaries (xxiv). Whatever the

circumstances may be, the enemy in the Mulan tale is frequently portrayed as some sort of “encroaching barbarian outsider” (xii). I find it interesting, therefore, that one of the oldest Chinese folktales involving female-to-male cross-dressing begins with a case of unauthorized migration of external tribes forcing entry into China.

Leaping forward more than a thousand years and to the North American continent, the modern history of un/documented immigration dates from at least the 1880s, a “period of rampant sinophobia” (Ling and White-Parks 3). The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and succeeding Chinese exclusion laws in the United States barred “the immigration of Chinese laborers for over six decades” (Ryo 110). Moreover, there was the “Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 restricting the Japanese, the creation of the ‘Asiatic Barred Zone’ in 1917,” and the 1924 “Oriental Exclusion Act” that essentially prohibited all Asian immigration (Kwong 13). As a result of having been the first to be excluded from admission, Chinese immigrants were also the most “actively engaged in smuggling and illicit entry” (Ettinger 1-2) across US land borders with Canada and Mexico. During such race-conscious times, Edith Maude Eaton (under her penname Sui Sin Far) boldly addressed some of the unfair “national policies and social valuations” under which Chinese and Asian immigrants labored (Ling and White-Parks 6).

Edith Eaton was the daughter of a Chinese mother and English father, and the first Asian writer of North American fiction. Furthermore, her fictional works are credited as “the first expression of Chinese experience in the United States and Canada” (Ling and White-Parks 2). Eaton’s collection of short stories, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, was published in 1912. The volume documents the lives of Chinese, Eurasian, and Caucasian

characters in the United States and Canada, with a special focus on immigration, interracial relationships, transnational identity, and national borders. Over eighty years later in 1997, Karen Tei Yamashita published *Tropic of Orange*, a novel that operates in a more modern context and primarily positions itself in Los Angeles and Mexico (rather than in the United States and Canada), addressing ideas of race, immigration, borders, identity, and transnationalism, with regards to immigrants from East Asia or of East Asian ethnic background.

Immigration scholar Peter Kwong writes that although the United States is always presented as a country of immigrants, the “truth is that the American people have always been leery of immigrants; the older immigrants have always seen the newcomers as competition, and as a threat to continuity and homogeneity of American society” (4). This kind of wariness toward immigrants can, I believe, also be explained using anthropologist Mary Douglas’ idea of dirt and disorder, and historian Natalie Zemon Davis’ idea of sexual inversion; additionally, this particular interpretation of dirt and gender disorder can be found in various folktales and legends, such as the Chinese folktale of Mulan. Moreover, I consider such a combined, multi-disciplinary approach to be one that engenders new readings of immigration literature.

In her book, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas breaks down the obsession with purity in various cultures into terms of non/dirt and dis/order. She writes, “As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder (Douglas 2). Because “[d]irt offends against order,” the elimination of dirt “is not a negative movement, but a

positive effort to organize the environment” (2). Whatever dirt may be in different cultures, it always signifies a disruption in society. Therefore, people try to get rid of “dirt” (that is, disorder) by any means necessary. On the other hand, the very fact that “dirt” is arbitrary, the fact that there is no absolute dirt, means that dirt itself is not dirty; rather, it is the context, the background, the space, that makes dirt dirty.

Natalie Zemon Davis adds the idea of gender disorder by addressing “female unruliness” (148) and “female disorderliness”; that is, the situation when “the female” is “out of her place” (151). Davis uses the term “sexual inversion” to describe “the reversal involved” in “dressing and masking as a member of the opposite sex” and/or “the reversal involved” in “simply taking on certain roles or forms of behavior thought to be characteristic of the opposite sex” (152). Similar to Douglas’ stance on dirt, Davis comments that “[h]owever diverse the use of sexual inversion” may be, scholars “generally agree that these reversals, like other rites and ceremonies of reversal, are ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchical society” (153). Thus, the female’s “rule” (161), and her transgression into male territory, is only ever “temporary” (161).

Although Davis writes about sexual inversion in Early Modern Europe, her ideas – along with those of Mary Douglas – ring true in folktales and legends in other parts of the world. One famous tale of female sexual inversion is the Chinese folktale of Mulan. Like Douglas’ and Davis’ arguments, the Mulan tale illustrates that transgression in the form of cross-dressing is temporary: Mulan cross-dresses as male, and then re-dresses as female. In fact, “eliminating” dirt in the case of female cross-dressing means that such

women *must* eventually re-dress as females. They must return to their female space and thus re-establish the order of the world. If these women resist re-dressing, then they must be “eliminated” literally, such as by imprisonment or punishment. If we were to take these ideas into the realm of literature about immigration, here, “eliminating” dirt means that undocumented immigrants must eventually return to their original spaces (i.e. their home countries), or risk elimination through imprisonment or deportation.

Juxtaposing *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and *Tropic of Orange* prompts the reader to inquire if there has been any historical change, and what other outcomes may have developed for cross-dressing and immigration in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If Eaton’s collection from the beginning of the twentieth century primarily speaks out against the injustices of US immigration policies and prejudices against Chinese immigrants, might not Yamashita’s novel, published on the threshold of the twenty-first, offer solutions? I wish to examine the intersections between sexual/cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration from the point of view of folklore and immigration studies using *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and *Tropic of Orange* as case studies. I argue that using the lenses of folklore theory and cross-dressing highlights aspects of immigration (and its intersection with gender and race) that we otherwise would miss; we must examine the evolving ways in which fictionalized cross-dressers re-craft and occupy the spaces from which they are barred in order to address and redress immigration today.

While there is much literature on cross-dressing, and much literature on immigration, there is not a lot written about the intersections between these two notions. Incorporating anthropology, history, folkloristics, and gender studies, I will show that

historical forms of cross-dressing and immigration lead to the development of unstable identities and pressures to “re-dress” and return to one’s original space. More recent studies about gender (such as Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity*), however, reveal a historical change in how cross-dressers negotiate their identities and the space(s) they inhabit. Therefore, it is crucial to inspect cross-dressing and immigration as both historical and contemporary phenomena. While *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (published in 1912) represents more conventional ideas of cross-dressing and immigration, *Tropic of Orange* (published in 1997) offers alternative ways to navigate borders, immigration, and identity by using these concepts more playfully and self-consciously. For example, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* fictionalizes the crossings of Chinese characters across the Canada-US border, while *Tropic of Orange* fictionalizes the undocumented migration of a Chinese female character across the Mexico-US border, but the way and the means by which the latter character crosses (discussed more in chapter 2) is much more blatant and calculated. While sexual/cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration are not the same in every case, there are enough similarities between the two to warrant investigating whether some of the solutions reached by modern cross-dressers and gender-ambiguous people might not also help un/documented immigrants to re-negotiate their status, identities, and spaces in the midst of an unstable and at times hostile environment. In fact, an examination of such intersections can address and redress immigration by changing the perceptions of how, and the contexts in which, people view immigration and borders. Thus, I contend that it is the combination of folkloristics, gender and immigration studies, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, and *Tropic of Orange* together that precipitates such a reading.

As a matter of fact, I have a confession: although I immigrated to the United States from China at age four, I never really cared about immigration issues or policies in the contemporary United States. I callously believed in the English-Only Debate, disapproved of the DREAM Act, and wondered why new immigrants could not simply go about gaining US citizenship “the right way.” I was proud of the fact that my parents and I immigrated over to the United States with few funds, but managed, through years of hard work and persistence, to obtain great educations, find steady jobs, purchase homes, and become naturalized citizens. I was proud of the fact that we had achieved the American Dream in a comparatively short amount of time. If we could do it with relative ease, why could not others do the same? I was pleased to be a member of the “Model Minority.” Worse still, my mother worked for many years at a nonprofit organization that was a combination justice program, school, and safe shelter for undocumented immigrant children – but though I had accompanied my mother to work during Take Our Daughters to Work Day, I saw no similarities between myself and those children from Latin American countries, from Mexico, from China. They were not like me, and I was not like them. It was as simple as that.

I did not realize that my parents and I were very fortunate. I did not observe that my father was a skilled immigrant with a college degree, who came to the United States as an international student and eventually became a lawful, permanent resident. I also did not think to view my mother and myself as the spouse and still-minor-child, respectively, of my father, the lawful, permanent resident. I did not stop to consider that the amount of time it took to obtain citizenship status – from the day I arrived in the United States to the day we gained citizenship – which seemed so brief a period in my childhood memories,

was actually thirteen years. I did not reflect that nowadays it would take even longer for people to obtain citizenship, even under this privileged category.

Although I learned about the struggles of early nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese immigrants – and certainly read about the Chinese Exclusion Act – I thought of those events as moments in history, far removed from my own life and experiences. Much like the first wave of Feminism, or the Civil Rights movement, I regarded the Chinese exclusion laws as a period of the past, not something with contemporary applicability, to be read about in dusty textbooks, to be written about in adolescent research reports: not relevant to life in the United States today. Moreover, I read *Tropic of Orange* for the first time in 2007, but while I enjoyed the novel and noted the elements of assimilation and the Asian American dilemma as a model minority, I made very little connection between the novel and my own life. As a matter of fact, the character I most related to was Emi, arguably the “whitest” character in the entire novel. She is what I was trying to be at the time: perfectly assimilated into “American” culture and life.

Upon graduation in 2008, I traveled to Japan to work as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) of English. However, although I had majored in Japanese, my studies did little to prevent me from feeling overwhelmed; I had a difficult time adjusting and adapting to another country, another culture, and another language. For the first time as an adult, I gained a sense of what my parents – and other immigrants like my parents – must have encountered in migrating, working, and living abroad. Only partially-literate in Japan, I moved at a more moderate pace than Japanese society. I spoke slowly, sometimes haltingly, and often had to ask people to repeat their words. The majority of

the individuals I met in Japan were kind and friendly, but some concluded from my labored Japanese conversation that I was mentally disabled – since my East Asian features caused them to assume I was Japanese – and looked upon me with contempt. Others simply believed that because I spoke with an accent I also thought with an accent. I had grown up in the United States blindly believing that I was American, pure and simple, but my time in Japan shook me out of that notion. In Japan, I was not and never will be “American” – I was and always will be “Chinese” or “Asian” first. I walked into classrooms to loud exclamations of disbelief (“Eeeeeehhhh???”) from students who expected a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, made-in-the-USA, white American to teach them English. I clearly am none of those things.

Returning to the United States, however, I belatedly grasped that I am viewed and treated no differently by some people in this country: I still face discrimination and assumptions based on race and appearances, even though I am a naturalized US citizen. People ask me where I am from, if my name is actually my “real” name, and if I am adopted. People have complimented me on how well I speak English. I have certainly encountered racism and discrimination before, mainly in primary and secondary school, but I always somehow excused such incidents as isolated manifestations of juvenile bullying or ignorance. I did not pause to consider that there was a deeper legacy of anti-immigrant sentiments, and especially anti-Asian sentiments, behind the taunts and senseless comments. Just last year, however, someone, upon introduction, immediately said, “‘Ding Ding’? Haha, Ding Dong!” This person was neither a child nor uneducated, and I could only continue to smile and shake hands, speechless.

I have very slowly come to realize that simply because I see myself as “American” does not mean that others do, too. Simply because I have grown up in the United States for the majority of my life, attended school and university here, and have US citizenship, does not mean I am in some way spared from even the most visible, obvious anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviors. The full implications behind this realization, however, simmered for many years in my subconscious, and did not become apparent until I began to read more immigration literature.

Eventually, in my graduate study, I decided to pursue folkloristics as my concentration, and discerned that folklore creates links between ordinary people and the past. I originally wanted to explore the connections between fairytales, advertisements, and skin-whitening products in East Asia. That led me to consider studying Chinese folktales such as *Journey to the West*, *Mulan*, “The Butterfly Lovers,” and issues of transformation, personal identity construction, and aesthetics. The transformations fictionalized in *Mulan* and “The Butterfly Lovers” especially steered me into questions of sexual cross-dressing and gender studies. Reading the required *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in a graduate class in 2012, however, prompted me to delve into cultural cross-dressing and immigration, particularly with regards to Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then, returning to *Tropic of Orange* again after several years, I finally saw how compelling the novel is, charged and interwoven with so many of the things with which I was now fascinated. I subsequently noticed the completely obvious thread of immigration – of immigrants and their experiences – and their struggles with borders, national or otherwise. Now, after my experiences in Japan and my restored immigrant consciousness, I related to the immigrant characters – recent and old,

documented or not – in the novel, as a US citizen of immigrant background. With that, I felt compassion for the undocumented immigrants in the United States. I saw at last that I might have led a similar life as theirs, had fate been less kind. I was like them: someone who was not born on US soil, whose first language was not American English, and whose first experiences transpired in a different culture.

Only after researching folklore, gender, borders, and immigration academically, receiving a taste of life as an immigrant while working abroad, and getting jolted out of my Model Minority complacency, did I come to realize gradually that things from the past are never gone as long as we feel the reverberations today. Reading about the Chinese exclusion laws not in textbooks but in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, I caught a glimpse of the lived experience of Chinese immigrants in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In some ways, the fictional *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* gave me a better understanding of the tensions, fears, and struggles that Chinese immigrants faced than if I had merely read about them as historical incidents and attitudes; after all, as a short story collection, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* is not limited by recorded, *chronicled* reports of immigrant events, but can veer off in new directions and possibilities, and explore and examine to what and to where those possibilities may lead. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, as a fictional text, reached me by skillfully expressing the complexities of discrimination and the overwhelming impact it can have on an individual's life.

Observing US attitudes and regulations regarding un/documented immigrants from Mexico and Latin American countries today, both in academic writings and news

media, I realize that nothing has really changed in immigration except that policies, enforcements, and social valuations now target another particular group of people. Undocumented immigration in the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first century cannot be fully examined without returning to undocumented immigration in the nineteenth century. In fact, undocumented immigration in the nineteenth century was “so prevalent” that “attempts to stem” it “produced significant political passion and consumed the energies of federal authorities” (Ettinger 1), much like what occurs today. Similarly, Mexican undocumented immigration cannot be discussed without going back to the “Irish, Chinese, Italian, Greek, Japanese, Lebanese, English, and other” undocumented immigration of the past (11). The history of undocumented immigration in the United States “links the Mexican experience to those of other groups,” and “Mexican immigrants have acted very much like their European and Asian counterparts when confronting immigration restrictions” (10). What difference is there, truly, between Chinese immigrants and Mexican immigrants and how they were/are viewed and treated in the United States? If there is no true difference – if there has been, as Ettinger states, “little fundamental change” (3) – then what befalls one group of immigrants can (and does) transfer to other groups. The discrimination directed at undocumented immigrants is just as easily directed at documented ones, as well as those who are not immigrants at all. Immigration policies and concerns affect all of the people in a nation, not just immigrants.

Reading *Tropic of Orange* again – after my time abroad and subsequently awakened immigrant awareness, and after studying folklore, gender, borders, and immigration and reading *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* for the first time – at last changed my

views about national borders and US immigration policies, and caused me to learn to care about what occurs in my Arizonan community and my country.

Chapter 2

Other Than Chinese: Sexual/Cultural Cross-Dressing in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*

Chinese immigrants in the earlier 1800s arrived “intending to work” in the United States “for a short time and then return home” to China (E. Lee 1), and entry into the United States “was generally free and unrestricted” (2) because the US government wanted the cheap, available labor that such immigrants would provide. By the 1880s, however, new policies rigorously restricted Chinese immigration into the United States, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which “barred all Chinese laborers from entering the country for ten years and prohibited Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens” (2). During the sinophobic 1880s, Edith Eaton published “essays, short fiction, and journalistic articles” (Ling and White-Parks1), and bravely “spoke out on the interlaced issues of racism and state-sponsored violence against Chinese” (Sadowski-Smith 53).

Written under the name Sui Sin Far, Eaton’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* provides various ways – such as the use of sexual and cultural cross-dressing – in which Chinese immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century resolved issues or circumvented individual or collective boundaries. Sexual cross-dressing occurs in three (out of a total of twenty four) short stories from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*: “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” “A Chinese Boy-Girl,” and “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit.” In the “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” Tie Co is a “nice-looking young Chinaman” with a “small, delicate face” who hires the infamous smuggler Jack Fabien to take him into the United States from Canada (Far 106). To pass the time on their journey, Fabien asks Tie Co questions, but Tie Co’s answers make

Fabien wonder why this “Chinaman seem[s] to him so different from the others” (107). When he asks Tie Co whether he would rather be “back in China” (107), Tie Co responds “decidedly” that he would not (107). When Fabien asks if Tie Co has ““a nice little wife at home”” (107), Tie Co replies that he does not have a wife, and that he does not ““like woman, [he] like[s] man”” (107). ““I like you,”” Tie Co adds. ““I like you so much that I want to go to New York, so you make fifty dollars”” (107).

Later on Tie Co suspects they are being followed by US “[g]overnment officials (Far 108), and points out that if Fabian were caught with him (Tie Co), then Fabian would be in great trouble. As they come to a bridge, Tie Co says, “Man come for you, I not here, man no hurt you,” and jumps over the bridge into the river (108). Despite Fabian’s efforts, he cannot save Tie Co. The next day, Tie Co is found dead, and “the body found with Tie Co’s face and dressed in Tie Co’s clothes [is] the body of a girl – a woman” (108).

“The Smuggling of Tie Co” delineates the conventional tenet of cross-dressing: if one cross-dresses, one must also re-dress, or suffer the consequences. Tie Co dies because she cross-dresses, but does not re-dress; because she leaves the female domestic sphere but does not return to it; because she attempts an interracial relationship with a Caucasian man (i.e., Fabian); because she “breaks the law” by attempting to cross the US-Canada border undocumented; and because she “decidedly” refuses to return to her original space in China. For all those reasons, Tie Co must be eliminated so that social order is restored.

“A Chinese Boy-Girl” features male-to-female cross-dressing in the character of Ku Yum. Ku Yum’s father dresses him up as a girl in order to protect him from evil spirits that might want to steal Ku Yum away. Since evil spirits do not “want girl[s]” (Far 159), Ku Yum cross-dresses as “a little Chinese girl” (155). However, Ku Yum’s tomboyish behavior – full of “mischief,” skipping school (156), running “wild on the streets of Chinatown” and “shar[ing] the sports of boy children” (157) – and the father’s apparent neglect regarding Ku Yum’s rowdiness and “ignorance of all home duties” (157), prompts Ku Yum’s teacher Miss Mason to report the situation. Ku Yum is almost taken from his father and, “under the auspices of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children,” placed “into a home for Chinese girls in San Francisco” (158) before Ku Yum and his father reveal his male identity. Once Miss Mason understands that Ku Yum is actually a boy, she no longer feels any “distinct duty” (158) to “discipline” (157) or save him. Ku Yum, after all, is free to be a little hellion as long as he is a boy and fits in with established gender roles and behavior. In fact, Miss Mason even cautions Ku Yum that his cross-dressing “nearly took” him from his father (160). She implies that if Ku Yum no longer cross-dresses, he will no longer face excess scrutiny, receive punishment, or risk being taken away from his family by a different kind of “evil spirit” (160).

If one were to read this story of cross-dressing through the lens of un/documented immigration, then Miss Mason’s warnings become all the more foreboding. After all, if Ku Yum no longer crosses *national borders* without documentation, then he will also no longer face excess scrutiny, receive punishment, or risk being taken away from his family by the “evil spirit” of border officials. If Ku Yum stays where he belongs – in his original

male space and original homeland – then there will be no need for inspection or persecution.

In “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit,” Tian Shan is a Chinese man who constantly “crosses[s] the border” between the United States and Canada (Far 120-121), “eluding the vigilance” of US “customs officers” (119). Fin Fan, his sweetheart, encourages him to reside in one place and save up money; Tian Shan takes her advice, settling down in the United States with the intention of working there for a year (122). While Tian Shan is gone, however, another suitor, Wong Ling, courts Fin Fan in Canada. Although Fin Fan does not like Wong Ling, when Tian Shan finally visits again, Fin Fan cannot resist flirting with Wong Ling in Tian Shan’s presence (123). A quarrel erupts between the two suitors, only to suddenly end when Wong Ling tumbles, “strikes the iron foot of [a] stove,” and falls “unconscious” (123). Tian Shan flees the scene, and later discovers from Fin Fan that Wong Ling is not dead, but gravely ill (124). Alarmed that he is already “liable to arrest and imprisonment for years,” Tian Shan departs, only to be caught while “crossing the border” (124). Fin Fan learns about his capture in the newspaper, and about the United States’s decision to deport Tian Shan back to China (124).

That night, an apprehended Chinese “boy without a certificate” (Far 124) – i.e., someone without the papers required to legally cross the border – is placed in the same prison cell as Tian Shan; the guard informs Tian Shan that he and the boy will likely “take the trip to China together” (124). As the evening deepens, the boy intrudes on Tian Shan’s reverie: “‘What do you want?’ ask[s] Tian Shan not unkindly. ‘To go to China

with you and to be your wife,' [is] the softly surprising reply" (125). To Tian Shan's joy, the boy is actually Fin Fan in male disguise.

No one dies in "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit" because both Tian Shan and Fin Fan are deported back to China. While Fin Fan is still in boy's clothing at the conclusion of the story, she identifies herself as Fin Fan and further voices her intentions to be Tian Shan's "wife" (125); that is, she fully means to return to female space. Moreover, Fin Fan cross-dresses as a boy for the sole purpose of joining Tian Shan in his deportation to China. In this one case, cross-dressing is justified and acceptable because deporting undocumented Chinese immigrants will re-establish US social order far better than simply having Fin Fan re-dress. Moreover, because the romantic relationship between Tian Shan (an undocumented immigrant) and Fin Fan (a documented immigrant) is portrayed in such a way that it cannot exist on North American soil, it is better if both of them are eliminated – i.e., deported – altogether back to China. In this one instance, deportation is a "happy ending" for both the United States and Tian Shan and Fin Fan.

In addition to sexual cross-dressing, there are instances of cultural cross-dressing – understood as assimilation to US society or "Americanization" – in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. These stories display a conflict between a desire to blend in through cultural cross-dressing and a fear of becoming "too Americanized" (Far 57). Since many of the short stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* contain at least some element of cultural cross-dressing and/or assimilation, I will focus on three stories here.

In "The Wisdom of the New," a Chinese mother fights a losing battle to keep her young son, Yen, from too much American influence: she strikes his hand when he uses

“the white man’s language” (Far 48); she cries out that she is ““ashamed of”” him when Yen has his queue cut off like his father (50); lastly, on the night before Yen is to go to “American school” (59), the mother poisons him in order to ““sav[e]”” him ““from the Wisdom of the New”” (60). In this story, death is the price for not returning to one’s original country, and for retaining one’s culture, and way of thinking. Immigrants must, therefore, return to their original space, or become totally assimilated in order to “belong.”

“In the Land of the Free” describes how, after arriving by boat in San Francisco with his mother in order to meet his father, a child is taken by immigration officials because he is ““visiting America for the first time”” (Far 93) with ““no certificate entitling him to admission”” (94). His parents plead, cajole, but to no avail. The child is taken into custody. Days, weeks, months pass, until, “ten months” later (101), the parents are finally able to claim their son from the “missionary nursery school” (100) where he has been housed. When he is brought out in “blue cotton overalls and white-soled shoes” (101), however, the boy “shr[i]nk[s]” from his “mother and trie[s] to hide himself in the folds of the white woman’s skirt” (101). ““Go’way, go’way!”” he says to his mother (101). He has been separated from her for so long, and he has been Americanized so much, that he no longer remembers or recognizes his mother. On the one hand, this story delineates very real occurrences of immigrants being separated from their children. On the other hand, this story also appears to warn potential immigrants that such separations and estrangements can happen if they insist on immigrating to the United States.

“Its Wavering Image” is about Pan, a “half white, half Chinese girl” (Far 61). A young reporter, Mark Carson, flirts with her in order to gain access to Chinatown: because of Pan, Mark Carson is “received as a brother by the yellow-robed priest in the joss house,” and at the “Astrologer of Prospect Place” (62); the “Water Lily Club” bids him welcome, and the “Sublimely Pure Brother’s organization” dubs him an “honorary member,” letting him see and partake “in a ceremony in which no American ha[s] ever before participated” (62). At the same time, Mark Carson convinces Pan that she does not “belong” in Chinatown, and insists on reading her physical appearance in ways that foreground her white heritage, declaring that Pan is “white – white” (63). Mark Carson emphasizes that Pan “cannot be both” Chinese and white, and that she should choose to be white like him (63). They kiss.

The next day, Mark Carson starts his “special-feature article” (64), which exposes and “ruthlessly spread[s] before the ridiculing and uncomprehending foreigner” (i.e., anyone *not* Chinese) the history and secrets of Chinatown and its residents (65). Pan immediately realizes Mark Carson’s true purpose in meeting with her, and agonizes over the role she played helping him gain access to the insider knowledge of the Chinese community. When Mark Carson meets Pan again, she is no longer in “American dress,” but in “Chinese costume” (66). “But for her clear-cut features,” Mark Carson realizes, Pan “might [be] a Chinese girl” (66). When Mark Carson demands to know why she changed her dress, Pan replies that it is because she is ““a Chinese woman”” (66). When Mark Carson denies this, saying, ““You are a white woman – white. Did your kiss not promise me that?”” (66), Pan furiously counters, ““I would not be a white woman for all

the world. *You* are a white man. And *what* is a promise to a white man!” (66, original emphasis).

Of the three examples, “Its Wavering Image” has, perhaps, the most explicit occurrence of cultural cross-dressing. Pan’s quick costume change underscores that, much like clothing itself, race, ethnicity, and culture can also be cross-dressed and re-dressed – can be attired and then removed. In Pan’s case, her exploitation and subsequent betrayal by the “white” Mark Carson jolt her into re-dressing in Chinese apparel and returning to her Chinese heritage.

Eaton’s short stories of sexual/cultural cross-dressing portray members of a stigmatized group who take on identities of a less stigmatized one. In both kinds of cross-dressing, there are pressures on the cross-dressers to re-dress, much like there was pressure on Chinese immigrants to stay only temporarily in the United States as cheap labor before returning to China. To simply draw similarities between sexual cross-dressing and cultural cross-dressing, or between cross-dressing and un/documented immigration, however, is not enough. Rather, I wish to point out that the spirit, intention, and logistics behind both anti-cross-dressing policies and anti-immigrant policies can be very much the same for this author.

Clare Sears explains how cross-dressing laws were passed in over “thirty-four cities in twenty-one states” in the United States between “1848 and 1900” (170). Violators could be arrested, fined, and face public exposure and even jail time. Moreover, “they risked psychiatric institutionalization or deportation *if they were not U.S. citizens*” (172, my emphasis). For example, “a male-bodied woman named Geraldine Portica was

arrested for violating San Francisco's cross-dressing law and subsequently *deported to Mexico*" (172, my emphasis). From Sears' research, then, it is clear that sexual cross-dressers in the nineteenth and twentieth century were treated very much the same as un/documented border crossers (or even worse, because they were threatened with psychiatric treatment). In fact, because cross-dressing laws were "specifically concerned with public gender displays" and "targeted cross-dressing in public places," some cross-dressers limited their "cross-dressing practices to private spaces" (172). Cross-dressers could not be who they were in public – they could not negotiate their daily public life as themselves, but as pretend others who fit in, who belonged and had no need to change the way things were. To this day, in fact, transgendered and LGBTQ immigrants are still exposed to additional discriminatory treatment.

Meghan G. McDowell and Nancy A. Wonders demonstrate how, even now, migration policies "criminalize and regulate the mobility of transnational migrants, typically by utilizing identity markers to engage in social sorting and exclusion" (54). McDowell and Wonders pinpoint "three global disciplinary strategies that operate to racialize and criminalize recent migrants: (1) anti-immigrant discourse; (2) immigration law and policy creation," and "(3) surveillance tactics and policing rituals directed at migrants and performed by federal and local law enforcement," also "known as *technologies of control*" (54, original emphasis). Such technologies of control are "designed to keep migrants 'in their place' by keeping them *out of public space*" (54, my emphasis). These strategies are designed, then, to keep migrants from participating in public discourse, from participating in conversations about immigration, about borders, about policies that affect them.

Historically speaking, at least, cross-dressing laws and anti-immigrant laws attempted to “minimize the public visibility of problem bodies” (Sears 176). Both cross-dressing laws and anti-immigrant legislation “constitut[e] a dense legal matrix that dictate[s] the types of bodies that [can] move freely through city space and the types of bodies that [can]not” (177). Cross-dressing laws in the United States “artificially narrow[ed the] range of gender identities” possible (173); and, of course, until the early twentieth century, the citizen was configured and imagined as male only, just as the immigrant up until the last century was “traditionally male” (Sassen 36). Likewise, immigration laws artificially narrow the range of immigrant and citizenship identities possible. Cross-dressing laws targeted the “sexually ambiguous” (Sears 179), just as anti-immigration laws target the legally ambiguous. Cross-dressers and un/documented immigrants are often criminalized, and pressured to return to their original space.

Cross-dressing, transgender identities, and LGBTQ individuals, however, have advanced and changed since those first anti-cross-dressing policies were passed in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, ways of adjusting and negotiating “original space” and other spaces have also developed.

In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam recognizes that “masculinity tends to manifest as natural gender itself” (4). Halberstam notes that “[p]recisely because virtually nobody fits the definitions of male and female, the categories gain power and currency from their impossibility” (27); that is, “the very flexibility and elasticity of the terms “man” and “woman” ensures their longevity” (27). By that same token, “American-ness” and national borders – as a definition and delimitation of ideas about nationhood and

national belonging – are also portrayed as naturally-occurring conceptions by those most invested in maintaining the status quo. Moreover, because it is nearly impossible for anyone to agree upon either notion, people cling all the more to these abstract ideas of “American-ness” and “borders.”

Halberstam adds that “far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (1). Likewise, I would argue that an analysis of the intersections between cross-dressing and immigration affords us a glimpse of how borders are constructed as borders. After all, if national borders are considered a natural condition, then anyone who disregards them and crosses undocumented is considered suspect and unnatural – alien. This type of situation only remains, however, as long as the border remains a natural state. What happens, though, if we redrew our policies and maps so that borders are no longer thought of as natural and permanent?; what were to happen if we were to realize that *borders* are the unnatural and alien things?; what were to happen if we were to view borders as the arbitrary and manmade lines that they are? I believe the answers to these hypothetical questions reside in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*.

Chapter 3

Life and Death, Pt. 1: Cultural Cross-Dressing and Un/Documented Immigration in *Tropic of Orange*

While there may not be outright sexual cross-dressing in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, there is cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration. One main difference between *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and *Tropic of Orange* is that the latter includes descendants of immigrants who have been established in the United States for generations (such as in the case of Emi and Manzanar), and are often treated within theories of ethnicity in US scholarship (rather than migration). In truth, *Tropic of Orange* displays remarkable results, considering that Eaton observed – nearly a hundred years prior – merely the early development of Asian American communities in North America despite exclusion laws. Another difference between the two texts is that the dominant nationality of those coming undocumented to the United States in the twenty-first century has now changed, as those from Mexico and other Latin American nations make up the majority of “indocumentados.” Thus, some undocumented immigrants crossing into the United States can now be identified as OTMs or “other than Mexicans” (Rotella 1) by the Border Patrol, whereas undocumented immigrants might have previously been labeled as OTC, or “other than Chinese,” in the late nineteenth century when Chinese immigrants were the target of border enforcement.

This sort of migration is symbolized in the movement of oranges – and is also the title of Yamashita's novel. In *Tropic of Orange*, the oranges – which are seen as one of the most obvious metaphors for immigrants – go from “*spiked* orange alert” on the news

to “spiked orange *scare*” (Yamashita 138), to “*illegal* orange scare (139) to “*illegal alien* orange scare” (140), and finally, to “[*d*]eath oranges” (141). Officials decide they need to “[c]heck out the distribution patterns on oranges” (139), and now, “[e]verybody down South” is “being looked into” (141). From there, the “[o]ranges [go] underground. The word [is] emphatic: All oranges [are] suspect... County Ag Inspector Richard Iizuka said it loud and clear: See an orange? Call 911” (141).

The oranges start out as common, everyday fruit. After they are given a new label as “illegal alien[s]” (Yamashita 140) and as “[*d*]eath oranges” (141), however, people begin to view oranges as illegal, dangerous, or criminal. Suddenly, “[a]ll oranges” are “suspect” (141), just as all immigrants or members of a particular race or ethnic group can become suspect. People who are in fact documented immigrants – or even descendants of immigrants – can still be perceived as outsiders because national borders are portrayed as natural and notions of citizenship remain defined as white. After all, the racist nature of anti-immigrant targeting is that it is not just immigrants who are targeted. (By that token, Asian Americans and Asian immigrants continue to be defined as non-white while they are simultaneously viewed as members of a model minority.) If we recognized that the border and racialized constructs of national belonging are manmade and constructed rather than “natural,” then questions about documented versus undocumented status would become insignificant and useless.

In *Tropic of Orange*, Bobby Ngu and his brother (who are ethnically Chinese) and his little “cousin” (from mainland China) come closest to the nineteenth/early-twentieth-century cross-dressers in that they take on different cultural identities in order to cross

into the United States more easily. As children, Bobby and his brother take on the identities of Vietnamese refugees in order to emigrate from Singapore to the United States. Bobby's cousin cross-dresses as a US Asian American in order to cross the US-Mexico border unauthorized: Bobby takes his cousin to a "beauty shop" in order to "[g]et rid of the pigtails. Get rid of the Chinagirl look. Get a cut looking like Rafaela. That's it" (Yamashita 203). Bobby then "get[s] her a T-shirt and some jeans and some tennis shoes. Jeans say Levi's. Shoes say Nike. T-shirt says Malibu. That's it" (203). The little cousin's appearance is changed from that of a "Fresh off the Boat" Chinese to that of someone who looks as though she could have been born and raised in the United States as a member of the model minority, and also more specifically as Bobby's daughter. Moreover, Bobby's cousin's external assimilation signals her identity as a consumer of US/transnational brands. By outfitting her with the most stereotypical, observable displays of US "American-ness," however, Yamashita also calls into question what makes the United States what it is, and what makes US American culture, habits, and clothing, what they are.

The apparent dilemma of Bobby's cultural cross-dressing, however, is that he does not eventually return to his original space in Singapore. Although Bobby has become a US citizen by (falsely) claiming refugee status as a Vietnamese, he remains forever an outsider in the United States: after all, no one can identify him by ethnicity, he is considered non-white and speaks with an accent, and has assimilated elements of Latino/a culture, including Spanish, into his lifestyle. By turns, people guess that he is "Vietnamese" (Yamashita 14), "Japanese from Peru" (15), "Korean from Brazil" (15), "Chinamex" (15), "Indonesian," or "Malaysian" (15). Bobby is actually an ethnic

Chinese born in Singapore, “with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown” (15). However, in the end, no one can describe him as anything more specific than “Asian” (14), and, perhaps, no one *cares* who or what Bobby is as long as he gets the job done (159), that is, as long as Bobby assimilates into capitalism and consumerism. Bobby is exposed to the stereotype of the “perpetual foreigner” attached to people of Asian descent in the United States that dates back to the Chinese Exclusion Laws and the denial of the right of naturalization to Asians. Bobby appears as racially-ambiguous, and speaks Spanish, so others have trouble classifying him into established identity categories that make sharp distinctions between groups, such as Latino/as and Asian-Americans, rather than account for ethnic intermixing or other notions of ambiguity.

Bobby himself cannot even give a *name* to who or what he is, for he never uses it; “[r]eal name’s Li Kwan Yu... [b]ut don’t tell nobody” (15). Similar to nineteenth-century paper sons who came to the United States by using a fake identity (E. Lee 4), Bobby hides his Chinese name. Moreover, as an ethnic Chinese born in Singapore, he has no roots connecting him to his ancestral country of China and seems to have retained few connections to Singapore. “Chinese characters” he “can still read pretty well” (100), but his young cousin points out that Bobby “speak[s] a little strange” (230). “I don’t have to speak the language so much anymore,” Bobby explains, excusing himself. “That’s the way it is” (230). This breakdown of the ability to speak the Chinese language only adds to Bobby’s removal from a firm self-identity, at least one that is rooted in fixed notions of what ethnicity and identity mean. In gradually forgetting the language of his father and of his ancestors (his first language), Bobby also departs from his heritage.

Perhaps another reason Bobby works so hard (aside from wanting to earn money to support his own family and his brother) is to immerse himself in so many jobs that he no longer has to think about himself, his identity, or what his life currently is like in the United States.

For much of the novel, Bobby behaves as if he is content with his situation and does not seem to understand why his wife Rafaela is always “complaining” (Yamashita 17). He later acknowledges, however, that perhaps their current circumstances are not completely satisfactory; maybe they need “something more” (80). Like the strange combination of foods that he consumes – “Chinese burritos. Fish tacos. Ensopada. Camaron chow mein” (101) – Bobby tends to blend in to “American” society by combining the “culture-specific traits of language, food, custom, and value” (TuSmith 65) of various cultures. Bobby has a Mexican wife, a mixed-race son, and grew up in a Latino/a neighborhood. He possesses a curious hybrid identity that initially appears successful. It is only later on that he realizes such hybridity is insufficient in his current circumstances: “Chinamex” is “not bad” (Yamashita 101), and Bobby’s situation is not bad, but neither is it *good*. Something needs to change, because being a hybrid is not enough.

Compared to Bobby, Emi’s background is far less complex. In fact, as a member of the third- or fourth- *post*-immigrant generation (as opposed to Bobby’s immigrant generation), Emi’s life suggests a far more advantageous “American” assimilation, at least to that of the “model minority.” She is a loud-mouth Japanese American TV executive who wears a “big ruby ring” and “red nail polish” (Yamashita 19), has her own “hairdresse[r] in Torrance” (162), drives a “black twin-turbo Supra” (60), and uses the

latest (given the time of the novel) technological gadgets, from an “electronic scheduler” (19) and “cellular phone” (20), to a “laptop complete with modem, connecting printer, and fax” (166). All in all, Emi looks like an “Asian princess” (166); her success in the United States seems indisputable. However, even as Emi gains material wealth, she also loses cultural qualities.

Emi loves to be “antimulticultural” around her boyfriend Gabriel Balboa (21), causing him to later wonder why he connects her to “Asianness” when she “defie[s] definition” (111). ““Do you know anything about your community at all?”” (111), he asks her. Emi herself jokes that she might have been switched at birth when her mother scolds, ““no J.A. talks like that”” (21). In reality, Gabriel, Emi, and her mother are all correct. Emi is *not* Japanese American, in the sense that she rejects the cultural aspects of being Japanese American, and even of being “Asian” American. Aside from using a few typical Japanese food terms here and there, she speaks no Japanese in the novel (124), nor does she behave in a stereotypical Japanese or Japanese American manner (such as emotional discretion, extreme politeness, etc.). She even distances and disassociates herself from her grandfather, Manzanar Murakami, who, because of his homelessness, is himself a “blight” on the Japanese American community’s “image as the Model Minority” (37), but is nevertheless part of that community.

Emi is, in all respects, just another shade of almost white. In fact, an illuminating moment occurs early on in the novel, when Emi and Gabriel meet for a drink at a restaurant filled with “an assortment of Hollywood types” (19):

Emi crunched into the celery and waved around the stringy end of it. “Order a Sauvignon Blanc. Go ahead. For my

sake, you could try to blend in with this crowd.” Blend in with this crowd. Blend in with all these white studio types. That comment should get his goat.

“*You* blend in,” he quipped and pushed the glass of water toward her. (20-21)

“*You* blend in.” While Gabriel’s words can be read simply as a quick retort in order for her to stop pestering him, his words also literally signify that Emi blends in with the “white,” Sauvignon Blanc crowd.

Emi’s material and social success in “American” society, then, stems from her denunciation of and/or disinterest in her Asian heritage. “What proves false,” explains TuSmith, “is the expectation that one can realize the American Dream – a notion of ‘success’ based on individual attainment – without altering one’s communal [and cultural] values” (68). Invited, on the one hand, into white society, Emi must also behave in a certain way, and must sacrifice a part of her culture and her identity, in order to be considered at least an honorary (i.e., model minority kind of) white. Emi is, in fact, “so distant from the Asian female stereotype” – or, perhaps, *tries* to be so distant from the stereotype – that it is “questionable if she even [has] an *identity*” (Yamashita 19, my emphasis). So determined to be something else, Emi cannot accept her own cultural background – which is most obvious in her denial of her grandfather. So far from what people think of as the “typical” Japanese American woman, Emi can only be labeled as the “Chinese woman” when described by others (66). This is partly because most people are ignorant about different Asian nationalities, but also partly because Emi herself “defie[s] definition” (111). Like Bobby, no one is able to correctly identify her ethnically.

Because of the long history of Asian racialization in the United States, neither, however, does anyone ever call Emi “white,” despite her rejection of her heritage and adoption of the dominant US American one. She is not Japanese American, or Vietnamese American, or Asian American in society’s eyes, but neither is she ever simply US American. No matter how hard she tries to assimilate and fit in, Emi is still racialized as some kind of “Asian,” and is never considered “completely” white.

Unfortunately, Emi does not regain her JA traditions, either. She dies just before she acknowledges her grandfather (Yamashita 252) – who stands both for the history of oppression of Asian Americans in the United States, such as the 20th century internment (205), and, in a general sense, Emi’s cultural background. Shot and killed just before she is reunited with her grandfather, Emi never gets the opportunity to reunite with her heritage. ““Just cuz you get to the end doesn’t mean you know what happened”” (252), she says to Buzzworm. Just because Emi is aware of the United States’ lack of acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity, just because she might consciously know all of the sacrifices she has made in order to join white society, does not mean she can stop it or change it in the end. Emi’s “programming” is malfunctioning, but she cannot try to fix it. Her last, cryptic words, “Abort. Retry. Ignore. Fail...” (252), essentially summarize Emi’s actions regarding her heritage and identity.

Conversely, Emi also dies *because* she resists returning to her “original space.” Since Emi is not a recent immigrant, her “original space” is not Japan. Rather, Emi’s complex “original space” is her Japanese American past, present, and even future. Emi dies because she rejects her Japanese American place and *space*. She is too assimilated into white, Anglo-American society, too far embedded with the predominant status quo to

want to change, to want to return. Similar to the sexual/cultural cross-dressers of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* who refused to re-dress, Emi dies.

Tropic of Orange, however, does *not* present the same messages that *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* does about cross-dressing and re-dressing. Certainly, Emi does not return to her “original space” and she dies. However, Bobby does not return to his “original space,” either, but he does not die. In fact, at the conclusion of the novel Bobby lives, he thrives. Up through Emi’s death, *Tropic of Orange* does seem to match the cross-dress-then-re-dress track of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. However, Bobby’s survival becomes the pivot upon which everything turns and alters. Bobby’s enduring life pushes *Tropic of Orange* into a reinterpretation of cross-dressing and re-dressing.

Chapter 4

Life and Death Pt. 2: The Trickster and Recreation in *Tropic of Orange*

Although Bobby, his little cousin (mentioned briefly in the previous chapter), and Emi are all examples of the interlacing between cultural cross-dressing and un/documented immigration, perhaps the most obvious representation of this juncture is the character Arcangel, who shape-shifts, transforms, and transfigures into and between all sorts of people, objects, and moments, mythical, historical, and allegorical. He is simultaneously a physical individual in the novel, and a metaphorical character who represents all un/documented migrants. Traveling up the American continent and through the US-Mexico border “with its great history of migrations back and forth” (Yamashita 198), Arcangel brings “a broken bus and a boy and an orange and, for that matter, everything else South” (197) with him to the North.

Arcangel’s passage into the United States manifests the explanation given by Adalberto Aguirre, Jr. and Jennifer K. Simmers that the “U.S.-Mexico border moves on the backs of the border crossers” (101). Moreover, Aguirre and Simmers have suggested that the “[p]ublic perception that the border is erected wherever Mexicans situate themselves in the United States creates a sense of urgency for criminalizing their movement” (103). Similar to sexual cross-dressers in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the “Mexican body is perceived as creating tension in communal social space where it is not expected to be present” (103) and not wanted. The un/documented immigrant body, in other words, is perceived as dirt – as something out of place and space and order. That is why Arcangel himself, when crossing north into the United States, is bombarded with the chant of “Catch ‘em and thow ‘em back. Catch ‘em and

throw ‘em back” (Yamashita 198); why border officials question him about his name, age, place of birth (198), education, and the goods he is carrying (199); why they “h[o]ld the border to his throat like a knife” (198); why they demand his “visa” and “passport” and command that he “SPEAK ENGLISH NOW!” (199).

Earlier, I drew the connection between the sexually ambiguous and the legally ambiguous. Arcangel is also ambiguous. His very lack of a solid, single identity delineates that the identities of un/documented migrants are both shaped by, and a result of, the policies and practices of nation-states, for without such laws there would be no un/documented immigrants. These policies, in turn, continue to change, mutate, and develop based on “labor-market needs, political climate, and public sentiment” (Aguirre and Simmers 104). Arcangel represents the border itself, fluid and changing; he is a composite of many immigrants, especially migrants from all of Latin America. Arcangel also literally signifies shifting identities when he takes on the names, lives, and histories of individuals and stage and performance names – the most significant being that of “El Gran Mojado” who fights “SUPERNAFTA” (Yamashita 132) and its neoliberal version of the Americas.

Arcangel is a shape-shifter, a juggler, and a fighter by turns, an “actor and prankster, mimic and comic, freak, a one man circus act” (Yamashita 47). He “perform[s] tricks of magic, prophecy, comedy, and political satire” (213). Arcangel symbolically represents numerous people, places, and objects, singular and plural, and also designates names to himself constantly: he is “*el Frito Bandio* [sic]” (47, original emphasis); the “Latino Ronald Reagan” (48); “Chilam Quetzal” (48); “El Gran Mojado” (132); “Conquistador of the North” (198); “Cristobal Colon” (198), and many others. He is a

man of a thousand names who has “died a thousand deaths, but they could never shut him up” (48). He is “Post-Columbian” (199), he is the immigrant experience, he is the border. Arcangel is so many things in *Tropic*, but he is, above all, a trickster figure.

In his book, *The Study of American Folklore*, Jan Harold Brunvand explains how the trickster figure will “engage in all manner of outrageous, dangerous, and even obscene behavior, often injuring themselves as well as others (140).” Barre Toelken, in his essay “The ‘Pretty Language’ of Yellowman,” infers that the trickster is “an enabler whose actions, good or bad, bring certain ideas and actions into the field of possibility” (qtd. in Georges and Jones 298). Thus, by the very act of doing, the trickster makes things possible. Most importantly, “boundaries are not so much nonexistent as arbitrary” to the trickster, “and the comic play of his folly lies in his refusal to accept or recognize what seems self-evident to those who govern boundaries” (Lock). In other words, the trickster is “*the enemy of boundaries*” (Kerényi qtd. in Lock, my emphasis), who “add[s] disorder to order and so make[s] a whole,” and who “render[s] possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted” (Kerényi qtd. in Babcock-Abrahams 183). The trickster is the quintessential crosser – of gender (Mills 237), of borders, of life and death.

Understanding Arcangel as a trickster explains all of his abilities, idiosyncrasies, actions, and peculiarities. His multitude of names, his costumes and disguises (Yamashita 72), his various personas are components of the role. As trickster, he is able to take the orange (75) north and bring it into the United States, into LA, unimpeded by the “transparent” line that “[winds] about him gracefully” (150). Moreover, because he is a

border-crosser, because he is an enemy of boundaries, Arcangel steps through the US-Mexico border without hesitation. In the face of a barrage of questions, interrogation, and demands, Arcangel crosses the border unfazed and unconcerned with rules or barriers, “mov[ing] forward, slipping across as if from one dimension to another” (199), all the while speaking an indigenous language (198). He makes it look easy, he makes it look possible again. He crosses the border so that people remember that the border is crossable; he crosses the border and because he does, others follow.

Likewise, Arcangel’s “Ultimate Wrestling [Championship]” against SUPERNAFTA (Yamashita 256) points back to his trickster makeup. This time, he takes on yet another new identity, that of a wrestler who dons the name of “El Gran Mojado” (258), or the “Big *Wetback*” (257, original emphasis). Arcangel gives a big show, “appear[ing] by magic in the center of the ring,” and “juggl[ing] the orange and the ears of corn” (260) while strutting around the wrestling stage. Comparable to a “Power Ranger or a Ninja Turtle or Zorro” (258), he battles against SUPERNAFTA, “flying and leaping, dancing and taunting, scissoring necks, crunching legs, pummeling stomachs, pulverizing faces, butting heads” (261). However, just as it seems as if El Gran Mojado will triumph, SUPERNAFTA sends a missile “into Arcangel’s human heart” (262).

Arcangel’s death, however, is not in vain. In fact, Arcangel’s death is necessary. The trickster often dies and regenerates, but its temporary death serves a purpose. As Brunvand explains, the trickster’s “behavior provides negative models for conduct... that is, the... audiences are shown in the stories how *not* to behave” (140). While some might consider Arcangel’s death as a sign of a Christ-like role, I would argue that such a

comparison alone insufficiently explains Arcangel's life and death. After all, Arcangel is not being sacrificed/sacrificing himself to save humanity, to take its place, or to atone for the sins of others. Arcangel dies to show us what *not* to do. Arcangel's defeat in the fight against SUPERNAFTA, therefore, demonstrates that direct confrontation over the border and immigration might not work; direct confrontation can end in destruction. That does not mean, however, that there are no good answers. By "introduc[ing] death," the trickster also introduces "with it *all* possibilities to the world" (Babcock-Abrahams 185, original emphasis). By dying (at least temporarily), Arcangel also reveals a possible solution.

Just before the start of the match, Arcangel hands both Sol (Bobby's son) and the orange to Bobby, saying grouchily, "'Where have you been? What do you think I am? A baby-sitter?'" (Yamashita 261). Ostensibly, Arcangel refers to himself as a caretaker for Sol, yet the fact that Arcangel also "tosse[s]" the orange over (261) right after he returns Sol to Bobby implies that Arcangel has also been a temporary guardian of the orange and all that it represents. Before he goes to meet his death, Arcangel passes the orange over to Bobby; Arcangel might have given it directly to Sol, who takes delight in the orange, but Sol is too young to understand the burden of the orange. Bobby, on the other hand, is the only one who sees SUPERNAFTA's fatal blow (262) against Arcangel. Only Bobby *sees*. Therefore, Arcangel bequeaths the responsibility of national borders, of un/documented immigration, of boundaries, to Bobby, who sees what others do not. Bobby is the one who takes on orange and its lines and concludes the novel.

Hanging on to the “two ends” of the in/visible line (Yamashita 267), Bobby sees his loved ones “[s]till stuck on the other side” (268). Holding tight to the two lines, Bobby realizes that his desire to “embrace” his family far outweighs anything else, especially the notion of borders that separate his family: “What are these goddam lines anyway? What do they connect? What do they divide? What’s he holding on to? What’s he holding on to” (268)? Instead of returning to his “original space” in Singapore or remaining in his hybrid US American space, Bobby embraces Rafaela and Sol – his multicultural, transnational family – and *recreates* the “American” space into one suitable for all of them in the United States.

I stress the word “recreate” because I do not believe Bobby generates a third, or hybrid, space for himself and his family. As Halberstam explains, “in all attempts to break a binary by producing a third term,” the “third space tends to stabilize the other two” (26). In fact, “‘thirdness’ merely balances the binary system and, furthermore, tends to homogenize many different... variations under the banner of ‘other’” (28). Similarly, the border/land, which some call a third space, actually stabilizes the two lands on either side of it. For example, in the North American situation, the borderland between the United States and Mexico only serves to emphasize that the United States is the United States, and Mexico is Mexico. Living in a borderland does not reshape the nations surrounding it; living in a borderland Others the people within it.

Bobby, however, does not form a third space. Instead, he “lets go” of the lines in his hands (Yamashita 268); he lets go of the concept of the border and of separate spaces that need to be bridged in the first place. Bobby does not carve out a third, marginalized

area, but reinvents the one he already lives in to better suit him and his family. He reinterprets and reconstructs the US space into one that is multidimensional, multiethnic, and multicultural, like his family. Bobby – not Arcangel – is the one who can reimagine US space. “In a drag performance,” Halberstam remarks, “incongruence becomes the site of gender creativity” (236). Along the same lines, incongruence can also become the site of national/border/identity creativity. It is Bobby’s hybridity – his discontinuity and incongruence to others – therefore, which allows him to be creative with his identity, which allows him to *recreate* US space. Arcangel might have brought Mexico into the United States by dragging the Tropic of Cancer north (Yamashita 200), but Bobby is the one who refashions and solidifies the new space. For much of the novel, Bobby knows that he wants his son to have “the good life” (17), but the only way he believes this can be made possible is to keep working, to never “stop” working (17). By the end of *Tropic of Orange*, however, Bobby has arrived at new insights about what matters in life – something beyond consumerism – which is what Rafaela has tried to teach him all along. Bobby “lets go” of the lines of race, borders, ethnicities, status, and identity, and “fli[es] forward to embrace” (268) the new multidimensional United States. Bobby remolds the United States into the “something more” (80) that he and Rafaela were missing before.

Additionally, while Arcangel is an immigrant in the United States, he is not a resident of the United States. He does not *live* in the US experience. Emi is a US citizen and resident and a descendent of immigrants, but she enjoys the current status quo, and she does not want to change the way things are. After all, although she is a member of an ethnicized group, and thought of as the model minority, she also is in a good economic

situation. In fact, Emi rejects the possibility of reuniting with her heritage, of reimagining the United States and her place in it – and ultimately dies because of it.

Bobby, Rafaela, and Sol, on the other hand, are new US citizens and residents who want “something more” from it (Yamashita 80). They have lived, attended school, labored, and raised a family in the United States. Thus, Bobby, Rafaela, and Sol can all handle and manipulate the orange/lines/border to some degree. Sol treats the orange like a delightful “to[y]” (196), “[shaking] it up and down” (197) without fear. Rafaela grabs the line and “twist[s] it about her body, pull[ing] herself toward Bobby” (253); together, she and Bobby, “straddl[e] the line” and embrace (254), temporarily banishing the border. Bobby, receiving the orange from Arcangel and later cutting it open (267), has the choice to “hold on” to the lines/border until “he dies” (267), or to let go. Bobby realizes that he has “[s]pent so much time” trying to shield his family but the bad things “happen[ed] anyway” (268). He recognizes that in order to “protect his family” from “the bad elements” (268), he must change the way things are in the United States. To shield his family from chaos and disorder, Bobby must reinvent the context so that his presence – and the presence of his loved ones – is no longer a *disorder*, but part of the order of things. He must recreate the United States into a space suitable for himself, his family, and others like him. For Bobby, what matters is not where he is *from*, but how he can restructure a place *for* himself.

The short stories in the 1912 *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* which contain sexual/cultural cross-dressing are comparatively simple, and such cross-dressing generally follows the traditional rule to later re-dress. However, sexual/cultural cross-dressing today offers

alternative situations in which the characters do not always re-dress, and still continue to live their lives.

The message of the 1997 *Tropic of Orange*, then, is that we can address and redress immigration not through fortification of borders and deportation, but by changing the perceptions of how, and the contexts in which, we view immigration and borders. We can recreate our current space into one where things are no longer about “us” or “them,” but about “all of us.” A national border is a legal construct and a means of negotiating power and distributing or withholding wealth and access to services, but current immigration issues revolve perhaps too much around wealth distribution and service access, and not enough around how immigration policies – and the decisions we make about them – can and does impact all of us. Of course, there are real dangers involved in border crossing, for both those inside and outside. Likewise, bad elements do exist, and some border enforcement measures are legitimately trying to keep bad elements out. Rather than advocating for a collapse of national demarcations, I propose a critical review of current national borders and the effects – good and bad – that ripple out from their physical and legislative presence.

In the end, what is the point of a border? What does it connect? What does it divide? What are *we* holding on to? *Why* should we “hold on” to it until we “di[e]” (Yamashita 267)? Maybe we should just “le[t] go” (268) of the concept of the border. Yes, “[t]hat’s it” (268).

That’s it.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Folklore and Immigration Today

Although it appears that today folklore studies are considered by some literary scholars as a more outdated approach that does not offer new or interesting insights, I see folklore as a living, vibrant, and relevant way to approach contemporary and historical texts like those by Eaton and Yamashita that tell us something about the centrality of immigration in our national story and identity. Instead of relegating folklore to the possession of children and the realm of the imaginary, I argue that folklore can easily be kept current by bringing folkloric analysis to more recent approaches that highlight topical themes, such as immigration studies.

While tales of dragons, princesses, and glass slippers appear at first glance to be unrelated to “real life,” folklore is similar to how Hermione Lee points out that Saint’s Lives “created links... between ordinary people and the church” (26); folklore creates links between ordinary people and the past, present, and future – not just in human history, but also in geological time and space. Folktales remain alive because they are continuously written about, reprinted, re-edited, reimagined, reinterpreted, and recreated. Viewing *Tropic of Orange*’s Arcangel as trickster, for example, provides a key to a possible understanding of his death and Bobby’s subsequent inheritance of duty. Clearly, as literary scholars, we still have a great need for folklore, even if we might initially think otherwise.

Additionally, I engaged in this study because I want to learn more about immigrant experiences in the United States and the folktales and narratives that

immigrants in the United States might relate to the most. As a Chinese American immigrant, I am interested in what sorts of tales immigrants may bring with them from the “old country,” what sorts of tales in the “new country” they find similar or different and accept, and what kind of new, mixed, and reconstructed stories may spring from such circumstances.

Because I was born in China and lived there for the first four years of my life, I initially heard not the classical European fairytales of “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty,” but Chinese tales like “Madam White Snake,” “The Butterfly Lovers,” “Mulan,” and *Journey to the West* [*Xiyou ji*]. I loved *Journey to the West* the most because it did not include any of the mushy, romantic elements found in “Madam White Snake” and “The Butterfly Lovers,” but rather had plenty of exhilarating escapades, near scrapes, exotic locations, and thrilling fight scenes. Furthermore, a year after I was born, the famous 1986 CCTV live-action TV series of *Journey to the West* aired, and thereafter appeared in years and years and years of reruns in China. I grew up watching reruns of the 1986 series: mimicking the martial art movements and daring antics of Sun WuKong, the “Monkey” (another trickster!); laughing at the extremes that Zhu BaJie, the “Pig,” would go to for food or women; rolling my eyes at the unbelievable (yet inevitable) gullibility of Tang Seng, also known as “XuanZang,” the priest.

I loved *Journey to the West* so much in fact, that my perception of reality and fiction blurred, to hilarious effects: the female demons (*yaojing* or *yaoguai*) in the live-action series were always portrayed wearing skimpy costumes, tons of glittery adornments, and heavy, heavy makeup. In the culture of China at the time when I was

little, women usually did not wear much makeup, if they wore any at all. Most people were poor, and makeup was seen as a frivolity at best, and as a sign of a “painted woman” (literally) at worst. The female demons in *Journey* really contrasted with the good maidens, goddesses, and buddhavistas, and with the female relatives and neighbors in my life. When an old friend of my grandmother’s visited, dripping with jewelry and slathered in makeup, I gazed upon her and exclaimed, “Why, it’s an old demon!” [*Yo, shi ge lao yaojing!*]

I watched the *Journey* TV-show episodes over and over and listened to the printed story read by my grandmother as a child, and, after I lived in the United States for years, read the English translation by W.J.F. Jenner as a teenager; presently, I am studying Chinese with a textbook that contains abridged excerpts from *Journey*. Now that I am pursuing folklore, I view *Journey to the West* not just as one of China’s most famous stories, or a combination of Chinese mythology and folklore, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, but also as a wonder tale that helped to frame my early perceptions of life and of how to interact with the world and its people. More than that, I am still being shaped by tales.

Some years ago, during a very difficult period of my life, when I found myself in a pit of despair and did not know how I would ever climb out of it, a friend put forth this suggestion: think of your life as a story. This friend, like me, had grown up with fairytales (classical and re-interpreted), and we often discussed and compared notes on favorite stories. When she saw my dire situation, she reminded me of all the heroes and heroines we always admired in those stories; they each had their troubles and tribulations,

they had their hurdles and their dragons to face. Therefore, she told me to think of my current difficulties as my challenge, my monster, my Road of Trials; my unhappiness was my Grendel, who nightly stole into my room and took a bite out of my spirits. However, my friend pointed out, those tales never ended in the midst of the problems. Those tales saw the heroes and heroines overcome their difficulties, transform literally or figuratively into a better person, and go on to live as merry as the day is long. Hence, my current problems – my dragons – would not be the end of me, but part of the journey and narrative of my own life. I, too, would triumph over my hardships, and I, too, would be able to grow and transform because of those obstacles. I, too, would return with Jabberwock slain and lessons learned, all beamish on a frabjous day.

Desperate for a solution, a strategy with which I could escape my melancholy, I latched on to my friend's idea. What she said, after all, agreed with what I had grown up reading and believing. Fairytales were not true in terms of facts, perhaps, but they were true in terms of how I wished to live my life: with honor, kindness, grace, and honesty. At that point, I switched from being a passive recipient of stories to become someone who seized agency and actively imagined myself into a tale – my own. I easily subscribed to how Jack Zipes describes the relationship between people and their identification with fairytales: it “has become a very specific genre in our lives and has inserted itself in inexplicable ways so that many of us try, even without know it, to make a fairy tale out of our lives” (Zipes xi).

Marie-Louise von Franz proposes that “the study of fairy tales is very important because they depict the *general human* basis,” and fairytales are “the expression of the

most general and, at the same time, basic human structure. Because the fairy tale is beyond cultural and racial differences, it can migrate so easily” (von Franz 27). The fairy tale language, she goes on claim, perhaps somewhat romantically, “seems to be the international language of all mankind – of all ages and of all races and cultures” (von Franz 27-28). As the international language of all humankind, of all ages and of all races and cultures, cannot folklore be, then, an excellent lens through which to view and compare issues of immigration, transnationalism, and borders?

Although Edith Eaton’s text does not offer that many alternatives to the discriminatory treatment of Chinese immigrants and the emergence of what was already a marginalized Chinese identity in the United States (and Canada), I contend that Eaton already accomplished something significant by writing and publishing *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in 1912. Eaton made things possible. Eaton, after all, composed the “first-known fictional representations of the undocumented U.S. border-crosser forged in the intersection of divergent and conflicting state policies in North America” (Sadowski-Smith 48). Eaton documented the lives of Chinese, Eurasian, and Caucasian characters in the United States and Canada, and focused on immigration, interracial relationships, transnational identity, and national borders. No other Asian writer had done so before in North America.

Like the sexual cross-dressers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Eaton and her immigrant peers certainly faced much discrimination. Indeed, much of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* reflects this tense period because Eaton’s characters stay temporarily in the United States before they are deported back to China; die during border crossings; and

risk excess scrutiny, separation from their family, loss of cultural identity, or severe punishment if they remain in the United States. However, the very fact that Eaton's short stories include cross-dressing and gender bending, un/documented border crossing and transnational living, interracial marriages and friendships and successful assimilation, demonstrates that such actions, relationships, and spaces are possible. Similar to the trickster, Eaton, by the act of doing – or, in her case, penning – brings these ideas and movements into the realm of possibility. Likewise, Eaton herself, through imagining and writing, becomes an enemy of boundaries.

Karen Tei Yamashita, with the advantages of Western capitalist modernity, offers even more options and ways of negotiating immigration and discrimination in the current world. Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* reflects more current immigration and color issues because the characters are depicted as naturalized citizens or descendants of immigrants; cross back and forth over national borders; and deliberate whether or not they can make a difference and change their existing spaces. Yamashita's questioning of borders and identity categories throughout *Tropic of Orange* (but especially in the conclusion of her novel) points toward a creative, conceivable future in which the immigration conflicts in the United States and the hemisphere can be resolved. Arcangel's death and Bobby's absolution of the border illustrate a way in which resident immigrants such as myself can take up the mantle of immigration and reimagine the possibilities for ourselves.

As a new US citizen of still-recent immigrant background, I cannot – and *must* not – take any of the rights and privileges that I receive in the United States for granted. Moreover, I do not have an extended, generations' long relationship with the United

States as home. Its history is not my only history, its dominant language of English is not my only language. Accordingly, I, with my immigrant identity, can contribute to immigration studies my new eyes, my questioning of the status quo, my experiences in other cultures and nations. Arcangel passes on the responsibility to Bobby – and to those of us *like* Bobby - to make a difference, to reinvent our US space into one in which US citizenship is not automatically equated with whiteness, in which national borders are not viewed as natural and unalterable, in which immigration into the United States is not perceived as an invasion of unwanted peoples who should have no say in US legislation or US experience. To repeat Mary Douglas’ idea, dirt is “matter out of place,” and “[w]here there is dirt there is system” (44). In the same way, I would argue that where there is system there is dirt – or, where there is system there is undocumented immigration. Undocumented immigration does not exist, after all, until the social and legislative system makes documents necessary to immigration. If policies – if the system, if the context, if the place – can change, however, then undocumented immigration need not be “dirty,” since dirt is very much a “relative idea” (44).

Earlier this year, two colleagues at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (one, a resident immigrant, and the other, a native-born citizen) resolved a historical lapse that was 147 years late: they prompted the state of Mississippi to ratify the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery officially at last (Blum). After viewing Steven Spielberg’s 2012 film *Lincoln*, Dr. Ranjan Batra, a professor of neurobiology and anatomical sciences (Lawson), pondered the process of the implementation of the 13th Amendment in the United States after the end of the Civil War. As an immigrant from India who became a naturalized US citizen in 2008 (Lawson), Dr. Batra felt that this was

an important inquiry to make, “[l]iving in the South as I do” (qtd. in Waldron). Upon researching the US Constitution website, Dr. Batra discerned that Mississippi never officially sanctioned the change, because although the state “ratified the amendment in 1995... the state never officially notified the US Archivist,” and therefore “the ratification is not official” (qtd. in Lawson). Dr. Batra then contacted his colleague Ken Sullivan, who traced a copy of the bill, and discovered that the bill’s “last paragraph required the secretary of state to send a copy to the office of the federal register, to officially sign it into law,” but for some reason “[t]hat copy was never sent” (Blum). Sullivan then contacted Delbert Hosemann, the present Mississippi Secretary of State, who filed the necessary documentation on January 30, 2013 (Lawson). On February 7, 2013, the bill passed (Blum), and Mississippi finally and officially abolished slavery.

What is key is that Dr. Batra “felt *compelled* to act to rectify the clerical oversight” (Waldron, my emphasis): “Mississippi gets a lot of bad press about this type of stuff and I just felt that it is something that should be fixed, and I saw every reason that [it] could be done” (qtd. in Waldron), states Dr. Batra. “Everyone here would like to put this part of Mississippi’s past behind us and move on into the 21st century rather than the 19th” (qtd. in Waldron). Dr. Batra, a US citizen of immigrant background, views the state of Mississippi and the United States as his home, and took the initiative to improve matters in his home. As an immigrant of color, one who is now also often associated with the model minority myth and a member of a group who was historically also barred from naturalization as a non-white, Dr. Batra (like Bobby Ngu) accepted his responsibility, trying to play his part in resolving historical oversights such as this one, and contributing to a discourse about slavery that is often as one only concerning African Americans

rather than other groups in the United States. Additionally, the fact that Dr. Batra and his colleague Ken Sullivan watched the film *Lincoln*, were provoked by it, spurred by it to inquire into their own state's history, and actually brought about a change in their state's policy, is inspiring.

The traditional idea of folklore pertains to “expressive forms, processes, and behaviors... that we customarily learn, teach, and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions” (Georges and Jones 1). Additionally, folklore is “human expression” that has become, “[w]ith time and repetition... pervasive and commonplace” and “traditional” (1). Films, then, are often ignored even by some folklorists. When they do delve into the medium, folklorists predominantly “identify folkloric motifs and tale types in popular (fiction) films and television” (Koven 190). Others might contend that films are too “fixed” as texts (176) to count as true folklore. Bruce Jackson notes, however, that there are always “multiple versions of film narratives,” and, additionally, “we can tell narratives *about* films” (qtd. in Koven 186, original emphasis). More importantly, Peter Narváez considers “how changes in technology, like the availability of television” and film, “*generate* new folkloric forms” (Koven 186, my emphasis). Thus, I would reason that Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* is not merely a film that might contain elements or motifs of folklore, but is itself a folklore example. *Lincoln* has inspired its viewers – at least two of them – to respond, to question the existing conditions, and to engender change in their state's policy. *Lincoln* is not a stagnant cultural artifact, but one that engages its audience and inspires them to think critically in their own lives about the issues that matter to them.

Moreover, Dr. Batra and Ken Sullivan are not passive viewers, but ones who are, as Elizabeth Bird writes, “active in helping to shape the way popular culture” – and in

this case, domestic policy – “is created,” and thus “they become much more comparable with folk ‘audiences’” of more traditional forms of folklore (qtd. in Koven 188). *Lincoln* as a narrative is a folklore example, and the responses *Lincoln* provoked have also produced new narratives. By taking up their duty as Mississippi and US citizens, Dr. Batra and Ken Sulliven have rectified an important oversight and refashioned US space into one in which a recent immigrant from India and a native-born Mississippian can work together to precipitate change. Watching *Lincoln* and subsequently calling into question the status quo, Dr. Batra and Ken Sulliven have generated new narratives at the individual, state, and national levels.

More recently still, this spring marks the possible beginnings of a comprehensive immigration reform in the United States as the members of the Gang of Eight draft a “sweeping immigration bill” (Lugo and Burke). At the time of writing, thousands of immigrants and immigration rights activists gather across the country “in a coordinated set of protests aimed at pressing Congress to approve immigration measures that would grant 11 million immigrants living” undocumented in the nation “a path toward citizenship” (Lugo and Burke). In Washington, DC, people hold up handwritten signs and “chan[t] ‘Si, se puede,’ Spanish for ‘Yes, we can’” (Lugo and Burke). Many undocumented immigrants who once feared to disclose their status are now “trying to shape the national immigration reform debate by sharing their stories, attending marches and sit-ins, and lobbying state and national lawmakers for expanded rights” (Silva). They are willing to risk “possible arrest and deportation if it means giving a voice to a community long in the shadows” (Silva).

Even Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has added his voice, introducing a political group, FWD.us, that he formed with other leaders from Silicon Valley, “aimed at revamping immigration policy,” as well as “boosting education, and encouraging investment in scientific research” (Ortutay). In an opinion piece for The Washington Post, Zuckerberg declares that “We have a strange immigration policy for a nation of immigrants,” adding, “it’s a policy unfit for today’s world” (Zuckerberg). A descendent of immigrants himself, Zuckerberg calls for “comprehensive immigration reform that begins with effective border security, allows a path to citizenship and lets us attract the most talented and hardest-working people, no matter where they were born” (Zuckerberg). Acknowledging that such changes cannot occur independently, Zuckerberg hopes that FWD.us will concentrate on such issues, “build support for policy changes,” and “strongly support those willing to take the tough stands necessary to promote these policies in Washington” (Zuckerberg).

Zuckerberg’s inspiration seems to derive from his involvement earlier this year in an after-school program for middle-school students in his area, “teaching a class on entrepreneurship” (Zuckerberg). When Zuckerberg brought up the subject of college, one of his “top” students expressed doubts of his ability to attend college because of his undocumented status (Zuckerberg). “These students are smart and hardworking, and they should be part of our future,” Zuckerberg asserts, “but our current system blocks them” (Zuckerberg).

Facebook – whose media, social, cultural, and political (and possibly folkloric?) impact is undeniable – and Zuckerberg’s support might go a long way with other people and organizations still on the fence, and I hope that the combined efforts of

un/documented immigrants, immigration rights activists, and US business leaders can finally bring about the changes needed in this country.

I may not have cared about immigration issues in the past, nor did I regard immigration policies as things that pertained to me, but I certainly do now after examining both *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* and *Tropic of Orange* through the lenses of folkloristics, cross-dressing, and immigration. Barbara Fass Leavy maintains that “the pattern that emerges from variants of the same basic story” in folklore “reveals often profound meanings not found in a single version” (3). Likewise, the cause of my own transformation in regards to immigration cannot be found in a single source, but in a combination of experiences and knowledge gained. Where I once felt detached, I now feel committed and obligated to participate in the US immigration discourse, because I now view my own experiences as both part of a larger history of immigration to the United States (particularly Chinese immigration) and as part of a larger movement that has always been racialized in certain kinds of ways and excluded different people (racialized as excludable) at different times in history. Arcangel as a trickster and Bobby as a US resident immigrant demonstrate that US resident immigrants have not only the ability, but the *responsibility*, of redressing US immigration policies and recreating the United States – its context, its experience, its space – into one in which we all belong.

I have listened to and read folkstories and fairytales since early childhood, and have favorite tales (from *Mulan* and *Journey to the West*, to Grimms’ renditions such as “The Singing, Soaring Lark,” “The Twelve Huntsmen,” and “The Princess in Disguise”) that I return to again and again, year after year. Although there is no direct connection between me and cross-dressing heroines, trickster monkeys, and dresses as glittery as the

stars, I have often pondered why I love folktales so much. This project is partially an attempt to discover why I remain so enamored with tales, as well as a wider exploration of folklore theory and how it intersects with other interests and experiences in my life. This study probes merely the beginnings of a link between folklore, gender, immigration, and borders; between ordinary people (“the folk”) and the past, present, and future.

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