

REMEMBERING AND RE-MEMBERING HOME

Asynchronicity as Postcolonial Poetics in 21st Century Southeast Asian Diasporic Narratives

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Abstract

In examining the dialectic between the diasporic subject's homes—both the absent and adopted home—this monograph maps out the ways through which collective memory and postmemory mediate traumatic experiences of dislocation. The literary and cinematic representations of mobility in Hannah Espia's film *Transit* (2013), Clement Baloup's graphic novel *Vietnamese Memories* and Lian Gouw's novel *Only a Girl* reveal a dual-displacement that characterizes the experience of diasporic mobility in the 21st century—a displacement in both space and time. This dual-displacement, which is a result of the inability to reduce the “many temporal worlds” they live in, that is, “the past of the motherland . . . a present that is often precarious, and an uncertain future,” simultaneously into one, constitutes the migrant's out-of-sync subjectivity (Köhn 109). This out-of-sync subjectivity is manifested in what I call the poetics of “asynchronicity” that undergirds the narratives of these Southeast Asian—specifically Filipino, Indonesian, and Vietnamese—stories. Asynchronicity, as postcolonial poetics, enables these texts to act as counter-memories, offering alternative ways of understanding the migrant's multi-faceted identity and belonging to place(s) in the world. By compelling readers to remember and to *re-member*—that is, to engage in a conscious re-building of one's lifeworld using the bricks of individual memory—new narratives emerge wherein the dislocated subject finds themselves included in a history written on their own terms, one that transcends the colonial grand narratives that have once delimited diasporic identities.

Keywords

diaspora, migration, memory, film studies, postcolonialism, narrative theory, Southeast Asia

About the Author

Christine Vicera is a researcher and a writer. At the heart of her work lies a broader interest in the relationship between memory, diaspora, and anti-colonialism in the context of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Her current projects include a zine about how refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong perform cultural practices post-displacement, and a documentary short, *Constant in the Chaos*, which chronicles how second-generation immigrants in Hong Kong navigate the concept of home. She is currently a Research Assistant at the Center for the Study of Globalization and Cultures at the University of Hong Kong. She holds a BA in English from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, an MA in Literary and Cultural Studies from the University of Hong Kong, and will be pursuing her PhD in Comparative Literature at UCL next fall. Her work has been published in the *International Journal of Diaspora & Cultural Criticism*, and *Ekphrasis*.

I. INTRODUCTION: RE-MEMBERING AS RESISTANCE

“Yes, it shall echo for evermore, just as the other anti-colonial words which gave us comfort and reassurance during the darkest days of our struggle shall echo for evermore. But remember, that battle which began 180 years ago is not yet completely won, and it will not have been completely won until we can survey this our own world, and can say that colonialism is dead.”

—Opening address given by Sukarno, Bandung, 18 Apr. 1955

In his opening address at the Bandung Conference of 1955, Sukarno references Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem that tells the story of how Paul Revere rode through the New England countryside to send a warning that British troops were approaching. Attributing Revere's ride to the success of the first anti-colonial war in history, the American War of Independence, Sukarno urges us to remember that until we assess the vestiges of colonialism in our world, the battle against the Empire will not be won. Throughout the rest of his opening address, Sukarno iterates the common goal of the 29 newly independent Asian and African countries present: to identify and eradicate colonialism in "its modern dress," which took "the form of economic control, intellectual control, [and] actual physical control," signalling a clear desire to reconfigure and decolonize Asia as well as Africa's political, social, and economic systems (Sukarno). What is ironic about his reminder is that the Bandung Conference itself marked a promising yet unfulfilled moment of decolonization. Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat argues that it was during the Cold War that the oppressive history of colonialism was displaced by "the fear of 'totalitarian oppression' of communist governments" thus leading to the reinterpretation of the colonial past as "'benign' and [the colonizer] appreciated as the benefactor who had brought modernity to the new nation" (233). In the years that followed the Bandung Conference, colonialism continued to permeate the geopolitical fabric of Southeast Asia through, under the guise of its "modern dress" evident in, among other things, the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹ in 1967. ASEAN's neocolonial tendencies particularly its economic statism² throughout the 1970s, while having "modernized" the region by opening it up economically, captures the paradox historian William Hardy McNeill speaks of in *The Rise of the West*: "The rise of the West . . . is only accelerated when one or another Asian or African people throws off European administration by making Western techniques, attitudes, and ideas sufficiently their own to permit them to do so" (807). What takes place here is what Ariel Heryanto describes as a postcolonial amnesia,³ the result of the nation-building process⁴ that was seen as a priority for the political elite following attempts to "decolonize."

There exists in Southeast Asia, a region whose only constants are diversity and change, a crisis of modernity that is inextricably intertwined with the urgency of the nation-building project that followed “decolonization.” The priority placed on the nation-building project had lasting consequences on the values and attitudes that later informed the region’s “political systems, social structures [and] economic practices” (Chong 66). In the latter half of the introduction to *Southeast Asia in Postcolonial Studies*, Chua points to how the delirium of economic development and the rise of consumer culture in the region have resulted in a future-oriented society that finds a critical examination of the past futile:

History loses its significance except as a measure of how far . . . society has come and how much it has left behind. History is to be selectively recalled only if it serves to drive the people forward, if only to forget the underdeveloped, materially deprived ‘bad’ old days. (234)

The refusal to acknowledge and critically examine the colonial origins of institutions that were established immediately following decolonization, a case in point being the formation of the ASEAN, results in the risk of ironically reproducing colonial legacies (Heryanto 21). It is crucial to understand the paradox inherent in the motivations of neocolonial institutions and governments. Affirming what McNeill said, in their attempt to decolonize, they have ended up “mak[ing] Western techniques, attitudes, and ideas sufficiently their own.” Insofar as this logic of coloniality permeates collective memory of the colonized, and is veiled by the global rhetoric of modernity, this postcolonial amnesia will continue to plague Southeast Asia and other places that struggle for liberation.

In “Postcolonial Diasporas,” David Chariandy calls for a reworking of critical methodologies pertaining to diaspora theory by destabilizing some of the disabling assumptions that have consolidated around the term diaspora itself; for instance, the assumption that solidarity is based purely on blood or land.⁵ This demystification of an absolute or essential identity is elucidated in Khachig Tölölyan’s definition of diaspora in “The Nation-state and its Others: in Lieu of a Preface,” where he highlights how diaspora is concerned with the ways through which culture and politics bring “real yet imagined communities” into being “on land people call their own and in exile” (3). As a region whose economic models, cultural norms, and political systems are highly susceptible to the flow of capital and the paradoxical reproduction of colonial legacies, it is noteworthy to consider how these “real yet imagined communities” can be made and unmade, or in the context of this monograph, *remembered* and *re-membered*. Originally coined by Barbara Myerhoff, in her study on Jewish communities in Southern California, this monograph transplants the notion of re-membering to the context of migration and diaspora to signify the “reaggregation of [memories],” the reintegration of

faces and places that belong to one's life story (111). Here, re-membering entails a conscious rebuilding of a lifeworld by both the artists and their audiences. Shedding light on the importance of individual memory, that which is washed ashore by the waves of historical memory, allows for a reconstruction of a new narrative wherein the diasporic subject finds their version of history acknowledged on individual, interpersonal, and societal levels. By unveiling how the migrant's out-of-sync subjectivity is incompatible with the linear temporalities of Western modernity, Hannah Espia's independent, and I argue, *accented* film, in Hamid Naficy's sense, *Transit* (2013); Lian Gouw's novel *Only a Girl*; and Clement Baloup's graphic novel *Vietnamese Memories* superimpose new narratives which belong to those dispossessed by the colonial matrix of power⁶, onto the palimpsest of collective memory. While readers are compelled to remember and to re-member stories that have been pushed to the footnotes of history, these texts in turn endow the displaced subject with the agency to transform the act of remembering into resistance and to rewrite history on their own terms.

Having destabilized the assumption that those living in diaspora possess an essential, absolute identity, it now makes sense to ask: what anchors them to their original/absent home, if not an essential identity? What influences those living in diaspora to create a new home-space in their host culture? This question warrants a deeper understanding of how the diasporic subject's inability to reconcile the spatio-temporal worlds of their past and present, result in a subjectivity that is out-of-sync. Building upon Aleksandra Bida's model of a multi-scalar home, this monograph articulates how the texts in question constitute what James Clifford refers to as transformative "moments, tactics, discourses," that reinscribe upon the palimpsest of collective memory a new mode of relation towards the migrant's conceptual spatio-temporal worlds of their past, present, and future (247). In her book, *Mapping Home in Contemporary Narratives*, Bida explores the changing notions of "home," in today's hypermobile age and how this in turn affects one's experiences of belonging on different geographical scales. In this monograph's exploration of a postcolonial, diasporic identity, Bida's model of home provides a paradigm that is receptive to "modern mobility and connectivity," and thus serves as a "nexus of mediating these cornerstones of globalization" (2-3). Bida's geocritical model of home across individual, interpersonal, social, and global scales further allows for the articulation of how space is aesthetically represented in the diasporic imaginary and in turn allows for a deeper understanding of the migrant's multi-faceted identity and place(s) in the world.

For those living in diaspora, belonging is both a spatial and a temporal issue. The literary and filmic representations of diaspora in the texts in question exemplify what Bertrand Westphal argues is one of the central tenets of geocriticism: that space is "embrac[ed] . . . in its mobile heterogeneity" (73). These texts reveal a

dual-displacement inherent in diasporic mobility—a displacement in space and in time. This dual-displacement constitutes the migrant’s out-of-sync experience, which according to Steffen Köhn in *Mediating Mobility*, is a result of the inability to reduce the “many temporal worlds” they live in, namely “the past of the motherland . . . a present that is often precarious, and an uncertain future,” simultaneously into one (109). Without a shared culture in one’s host country, or a shared past which one can anchor their identity onto, migrants often find themselves trapped in a spatiotemporal limbo. In examining works of migration and diaspora, it is important to be constantly aware of the imminent danger of simply homogenizing and categorizing migrants into one category. Geocriticism’s focus on polychrony and polytopy, the combination of multiple temporalities and spatialities respectively, allows us to prevent this homogenization by understanding belonging as something that varies depending on one’s experience of movement. For instance, the experiences of Filipino migrants working abroad as caretakers or domestic helpers in *Transit* differ strikingly to the experiences of the Peranakans in post-WWII Indonesia, or the Vietnamese diaspora who fled to America after the Vietnam War. Based on the assumption that the notion of home is inherently tied to the concept of belonging, that is, the weaving together of the migrant’s varying experiences of belonging on different scales reveals the different ways through which the migrant, as a home-maker, sees themselves in relation to the faces and places that have informed their conceptualization of home. Having destabilized the assumption that those living in diaspora possess an essential, absolute identity, it now makes sense to ask: what anchors them to their imagined homelands, if not an “essential identity”? What ties diasporic communities together in their hostlands?

Robin Cohen’s pluralist notion of diaspora forgoes the notion of an “ideal’ diaspora bound to a particular cultural group or experience of dislocation” and instead extends the term so that it includes different diasporas that are “distinguished by the experiences or ambitions that create them” (9). The shared experiences and ambitions Cohen speaks of play out in *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories*, unravelling the various attempts of the characters to synchronize themselves to the linear temporality of Western modernity. It is interesting to note, moreover, how different mobilities signal distinct responses to Western modernity and colonialism. In the case of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) in *Transit*, the perceived attainment of progress takes the form of upward social mobility. For the OFWs in *Transit*, migrating from the Philippines to Israel, or anywhere outside of the Philippines, for work is seen as a way one can move upwards in the class system, a widely-held belief amongst OFWs even today that has been perpetuated by the neoliberal policies⁷ of the Benigno Aquino III administration. Lian Gouw’s novel exemplifies this attempt to synchronize oneself to Western modernity through the colonial mimicry that Carolien and her family—Peranakans who lived in colonial Dutch East Indies throughout World War II and the Indonesian National

Revolution—engage in. Later in Gouw's story, it is revealed that colonial mimicry acts as a mechanism for economic survival. The family's tie to the Dutch colonial government is seen as the only way they can escape from being a marginalized fraction of Indonesian society and attain upward social mobility. The act of forgetting amongst the second-generation Vietnamese migrants that Baloup writes about in *Vietnamese Memories* is yet another way one can synchronize oneself to the linear temporality of Western modernity. In their attempts to assimilate into American society, these second-generation immigrants have, consciously or subconsciously, forgotten the socio-political tensions in Vietnam that forced their parents to leave their home and migrate to the West in the first place.

At this point, it becomes important to ask: how are these threads of individual experiences and ambitions weaved into the collective diasporic consciousness? Influenced by his teacher Henri Bergson, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs developed an understanding of memory in societal context, which he wrote about in his seminal texts *The Social Framework of Memory*, and *The Collective Memory*, with the latter published shortly after his death in 1950. As opposed to Bergson, the consciousness of duration for Halbwachs was a social, collective act. Re-contextualizing Halbwachs notion of collective memory in the study of diaspora and migration allows us to understand how those living in diaspora experience belonging. Collective memory “distinguishes between those who can refer to [a] common past and those who cannot” (Lacroix and Fiddian-Quasmiyeh). Here and as iterated earlier, belonging is understood as both a spatial and temporal problem. While it remains difficult for those living in diaspora to refer to a shared time and space with the people of their hostlands, the ability to conceive of the multiple worlds wherein they exist—the past of their homeland, the present of their hostland, and the future—and their subsequent “out-of-sync” experience, is shaped by memories of dislocation, and for second-generation migrants, what Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory.”

In *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories*, memory mediates the migrant's ability to reconcile their many conceptual worlds. Building upon Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, Hirsch introduces the “postgeneration,” who is “the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma” (104). This generation is able to bear the experiences of the preceding generation and to “remember” as a result of “the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up” (Hirsch 107). Hirsch's concept sheds light on the ways in which recollections of “home” are passed down from first-generation migrants to second-generation migrants, accounting for the ambiguous relationships that different protagonists have towards their respective homelands and hostlands. Glynn and Kleiss, in their discussion of the migration-memory nexus, point to the importance of considering the different ways in which migrants remember

their past. This in turn affects the extent to which they assimilate in their host societies, illuminating the importance of storytelling. By passing down stories—whether implicitly, through habits, social norms and practices, and language; or explicitly, by recounting memories and experiences of the past—of a home that is geographically, socially, and culturally distant from a migrant’s current “home,” storytelling allows these narratives to reinscribe themselves upon the palimpsest of collective memory and become complicit in the act of decolonizing memory.

Asynchronicity Across Genres

Through an analysis of cultural texts produced by writers and filmmakers from Southeast Asia, a region that has been colonized so brutally and modified so thoroughly by foreign influences, this monograph seeks to argue that “asynchronicity” as postcolonial poetics enables these narratives to engage in a new mode of relation towards their past and present, thus rendering them acts of counter-memory vis-à-vis histories written by Empire. This project transplants Elleke Boehmer’s idea of texts as “scores for reading,” onto the Southeast Asian diasporic imagination, to underpin how the postcolonial poetics of asynchronicity allows for the aforementioned cultural texts to “confront, expand, re-imagine, and to some extent make sense of the reversals and disruptions . . . within global history” (12). Expounding on Rita Felski’s observation that reading “is fundamentally a matter of mediation, translation, even transduction” and therefore “is what allows texts to move across temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries,” there exists something intrinsically postcolonial to the process of reading cultural texts that insists on radical engagement with other worlds and other imaginations (qtd. in Boehmer 6). Employing “readerly pragmatics” to postcolonial criticism, this monograph is an attempt to think through and to rethink the possibility of “postcolonial poetics” which Boehmer defines as the creative principles that underpin postcolonial readings of texts. How does “asynchronicity” as postcolonial poetics offer alternative ways of understanding the migrant’s multi-faceted identity and belonging to place(s) in the world? How then do the narratives of the texts in question, as evocations of diasporic consciousness, reinscribe themselves upon the palimpsest of collective memory, and how can they be considered uniquely Southeast Asian responses to Empire?

In “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” Homi Bhabha justifies how a post-structuralist approach arises out of postcolonial contra-modernity: “the encounter and negotiation of different meanings and values within ‘colonial’ textuality,” have foregrounded the “problematics of signification,”⁸ prevalent in poststructuralist theory (173). Through their asynchronous poetics, the texts in question address

the “problematics of signification” that Bhabha refers to, particularly in how they challenge totalizing concepts of a “pure” culture and the notion of a single, static home. The out-of-sync subjectivity of the diasporic subject manifested in the “gaps, uncertainties, and discontinuities” of the texts, beckons readers to zigzag back and forth and to dance in-between the liminalities of the text (Boehmer 43). Readers are thus encouraged to “suture”⁹ through these disparate threads of meaning to exteriorize the migrant’s out-of-sync subjectivity and enter the storyworld of the texts. Through an examination of the ways in which a particular medium of representation portrays the diasporic subject’s out-of-sync experience and their layered and complex conceptualization of home allows for a deeper understanding of how this out-of-sync subjectivity is at once a reflection and a product of the crisis of modernity in Southeast Asia.

Hannah Espia’s experience working for her mother’s travel company has led her to travel back and forth Israel. Inspired by an encounter with an OFW during one of her airport transits, *Transit* retells the stories of the Filipino diaspora in Israel. She explains in an interview with *Native Province*: “The Filipino community in Tel Aviv . . . told us stories (which were later included in the script) and even let us film in their homes” (“In Transit”). The film revolves around Israel’s 2009 deportation law, which brought forth changes to citizenship of children born to foreign workers. According to the United Children of Israel, some 600 families living in Israel now risk the threat of expulsion. In an interview with Sivan Noel, the daughter of Filipina domestic worker Ramela Noel, she expresses the constant fear of being deported to the Philippines, a place she has never set foot in. Despite the Philippines being her family’s homeland, for Sivan, “[i]t’s really unfair that after being born here and having a family, friends, school and studies, we are being told that . . . we now must leave to a place that we hardly know” (Mraffko). For many OFWs and their children who now live with them in Israel, the threat of being deported is a burden they have to live with every day. Sigal Rozen, co-founder of the Israeli organization “Hotline for Refugees and Migrants,” points to the paradox inherent in how “Israel encouraged them to come,” to “fill a labour shortage,” and eventually forces them to go (Mraffko). The controversial law specifically targets women whose citizenship is threatened on the grounds of pregnancy: “migrant workers who give birth must leave State party with their baby within three months of giving birth or send their baby out of the State party’s borders so as to safeguard their work permits” (UNCEDAW). Despite widespread opposition and protests by locals which eventually did lead to the government granting amnesty to 800 migrant workers, the aftershocks of this arbitrary law are felt up to this day (Margalit).

Tilman Baumgärtel’s essay situates Espia’s independent film, *Transit*, in the context of Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake’s notion of the global/local nexus¹⁰. He builds upon Anderson’s notion of imagined communities, arguing that

independent cinema in the region has found itself circulated in the international “-scape” of global film as a result of limited reception in their respective countries of origin (Baumgärtel 25). Having premiered at Busan International Film Festival, screened at over 40 international film festivals and at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as part of the film series “A New Golden Age: Contemporary Philippine Cinema,” *Transit* is a prime example of an independent Southeast Asian film that is present in the “zones of territorial and cultural disjuncture,” which Arjun Appadurai calls the diasporic public sphere (qtd. in Baumgärtel 31). Involved in what Baumgärtel posits as the construction of “imagined worlds”¹¹ that differ greatly from “imagined communities” their fellow countrymen experience, this monograph argues that *Transit*, as an independent film, has the ability to re-imagine a new postcolonial identity for the Philippines. Espia’s cinematic narrative mediates the out-of-sync experience of the diasporic subject that unfolds in these imagined worlds, thus instilling among the dispersed collective a renewed sense of shared history and identity.

As an independent transnational film, *Transit*’s “linking [of] genre, authorship, and transnational positioning” transforms the film itself into a site of “intertextual, cross-cultural, and translational struggles over meanings and identities” (Naficy, “Phobic” 121). When read as an accented film, it can be further argued that Espia’s deviation from generic narrative conventions, through her appropriation of the elliptical narrative, as well as the open and closed cinematic form, allows the film to encode the “struggles over identities” that Naficy speaks of, specifically the tension of displacement and emplacement inherent in migration. The evasive nature of memory has an effect on the production of narratives that are “palimpsestical, inscribing ruptures, fantasies, and embellishments as well as ellipses, elisions, and repressions” (“Phobic” 121). Espia’s visual strategy of claustrophobia presented cinematically through closed spaces functions to highlight the juxtaposition between those who are able to remain in Israel and those who are forced to either live in fear of deportation or, for the unfortunate few, to experience deportation. For those who are able to live freely in Israel, the cinematographic spaces open up marked by a *mise-en-scene* that favors bright, natural lighting and landscapes. On the other hand, Espia’s consistent use of low-angles and shooting in dimly lit, and even dark rooms inscribes the spatio-temporal claustrophobia these migrants experience while living in Israel. *Transit* thus embodies the out-of-sync subjectivity not only of the diasporic subject but moreover the “interstitial location,” of the independent filmmaker in “the film industry” (Naficy, *An Accented Cinema* 10). When read in conjunction with Boehmer’s assertion that postcolonial poetics functions to facilitate a revisiting and rereading of texts, it is arguable that film as a medium confers upon readers a glimpse of the tension between the migrant’s multiple worlds.

Gouw's novel is set against the juncture of World War II and the Indonesian revolution. Although initially written without any political agenda, Gouw notes in an interview that revisiting the novel allowed her to "[hear] and [feel] her roots" (Lim). Arguably a semi-autobiographical piece, *Only a Girl* is a retelling of Gouw's own story—the story of three generations of Indonesian-Chinese women, but also the story of the Indonesian-Chinese community who have been subject to othering by both Dutch colonizers and native Indonesians. Historically, Chinese immigrants within Southeast Asia have been the subject of widespread resentment, which can be understood in light of the political implications of their economic roles. In taking up commercial endeavors, Chinese immigrants were often engaged not only in trade, but also moneylending (Osborne 123). With regard to the Peranakan community in Indonesia, resentment against those of Chinese ethnicity stemmed from their political affiliations with the colonial governments (123). Her interstitial identity as an ethnically Chinese native of Indonesia inculcated with Dutch cultural values as a result of her Dutch education bleeds through the characters in her novel. On the other hand, Baloup's graphic novel, *Vietnamese Memories*, takes place post-World War II, and continues on into the Cold War, portraying how the Vietnam War facilitated the uprooting of thousands of Vietnamese.

Historical writing is, in itself, a form of history and a means by which we understand the past. In *The Historical Novel*, Herbert Butterfield suggests that fiction does what history cannot: history "does not merely inspire fiction by providing a tale," because history "may only provoke a tale . . . provid[ing] situations and relationships and problems" that form the basis on which storytelling begins (30). Inspired by historical events, *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories*, through the intertwining of history and fiction, are thus complicit in the act of counter-memory, allowing writers and readers not only to remember forgotten pasts, but to rewrite history on their own terms.

György Lukács's concept of the "mass experience of history," accompanied by a growing awareness of the "connection between national and world history," is the fabric through which imagined communities, in this case, diasporic communities, are brought into being (25). This concept echoes Heryanto's assertion that in today's global/local assemblage, the nation is always already transnational. For Lukács, this historical consciousness can be transfused in fictional narratives. By being at once "humanly authentic and yet be re-liveable by the reader of a later age," it is arguable that historical narratives can be understood as instances of postcolonial writing that "[insist] on a deep minute-by-minute involvement not only in the often painful past, or in anticipations of the future, but, intensely, in the now, in the jagged dimensions of the postcolonial present" and thus are (Lukács 40; Boehmer 7). Asynchronicity in these literary and cinematic narratives allow for an awakening of the past. As readers and spectators are drawn into the story-worlds of

the texts, they are able to revisit and live through these historical events through the fragmented subjectivity of the characters and thus understand how the diasporic subject comes to remember and *re-member* home.

Finally, Baloup's graphic novel recounts the stories of the Việt Kiều¹², specifically the Vietnamese diaspora in America. According to Long S. Le, there exists within the Việt Kiều multiple waves of migration that include, but are not limited to, the refugee diaspora that fled the country in an attempt to escape the Communist regime towards the end of the Vietnam War, "export workers and students sent through government-run programs to the former Soviet Bloc," and more recently, marriage and labour migrants who have left Vietnam from the 1980s onwards (173). Before undertaking an analysis of how the Vietnamese refugee diaspora offers insight into understanding certain aspects of Southeast Asian subjectivity, it is important to recognize that the following discussion on the experiences of refugee diaspora as presented in the works of Baloup is by no means representative of the entire Việt Kiều. It is especially clear when applying Gabriel Sheffer's categorization of "state-linked" and "stateless" diaspora to our understanding of the Việt Kiều, which highlights the political tensions that still exist within the Vietnamese diaspora. For Le, it is clear that there are some in the Vietnamese diaspora who "entertain better relationships with the present ruling regime" than the stateless diaspora who are currently settled in the "democratic West" and often "considered 'opposition' groups to the regime back home" (172–173). These political tensions are mirrored in the juxtaposition of text and images in Baloup's graphic narration, which reconfigures the ways in which we read and understand the Việt Kiều's unique experience of displacement.

As a follow-up to his seminal text *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen's *Comics and Narration* develops concepts pertaining to the ways in which graphic narratives articulate meaning. The concepts Groensteen introduces such as iconic solidarity, the poetic uses of sequentiality as well as the question of the narrator, resonate with Boehmer's emphasis on readerly pragmatics. For instance, his citation of French comics writer, Benoît Peeters's "suturing function," beckons readers' involvement in the creation of meaning by using text on the page, which usually signifies speech by a narrator or the characters, to "build a bridge" between images that are *non sequitur*. The act of threading through strands of meaning endows the graphic narrative with the same structural and linguistic resistance that Boehmer asserts is inherent in postcolonial poetics. Sam Knowles et al. further expand this discussion of the ways in which graphic narrative mediate postcolonial issues in "Introduction: Trans/formation and the Graphic Novel." They outline several questions that are relevant to my discussion of *Vietnamese Memories*: "What do the interactions between words and images enable these creators to say about postcolonial experience that other forms might not? What

might these particular graphic narratives be able to disclose about the politics of representational strategies more generally in a globalized world of mass migration and displacement?" (Knowles et al. 4). Based on the premise that graphic narratives are inherently, in Bakhtinian terms, heteroglossic as a result of the tensions arising from the juxtaposition between word and image, it is arguable that the mere act of reading graphic narratives involves "reconciling violence and reconstructing brokenness" that would allow for a redefinition and recreation of the diasporic subject's fragmented subjectivity (4). The asynchronous poetics embedded in *Vietnamese Memories* negotiates the proliferation of meanings within what Bhabha refers to as the "colonial" textuality of the graphic narrative and are therefore a manifestation of the structures of postcolonial poetics.

By bringing into dialogue the texts in question with Chong's, Chua's, and Heryanto's discourse on modernity and postcolonialism, this introduction lays open the logic of the crisis of modernity that exists in Southeast Asia. In examining the effects of modernity on the creation of an "out-of-sync" subjectivity, the following reveals not only the tensions that exist within each individual nation, but more so the transnational connections that can be made between them. The effects of these processes, particularly the ways in which an "out-of-sync" subjectivity is reconstituted as a result of a growing awareness and desire to "progress," is apparent in the stories of migrants in *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories*. The ambiguous relationship between these migrants and their absent homeland will be examined vis-à-vis Zygmunt Bauman's idea of "liquid modernity" to reveal how, emblematic of Southeast Asia's crisis of modernity, home is conceptualized as an object or a resource.

The ways in which the diasporic subject has created a home in their hostlands through recollection allows for an understanding of a diasporic consciousness that is a response to Empire. Having established links between the effects of modernity on one's conceptualization of home, Martin Heidegger's concept of "dwelling," allows for an understanding of the "personal nuances involved in inhabiting space" (Bida 20). By considering the various ways in which generic features of the texts mediate memories of the absent homeland, it becomes apparent that the migrant is able to cultivate in their hostland a sense of belonging reminiscent to that which they once experienced towards their absent homeland. Understanding the different experiences that shape this sense of belonging, or in Heidegger's terms, the ability to "dwell poetically" amidst a highly mobile era will moreover be underlined. As a result of their inability to completely reconcile the worlds of their past and their present, they experience a fragmented, out-of-sync subjectivity, which is mirrored in the texts' asynchronous poetics.

As texts that display uniquely postcolonial poetics, *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories* interrogate, through the process of reading and watching, the ways in which one conceptualizes home and, in turn, how one's identity and sense of belonging comes into being. Asynchronicity is weaved through these narratives, invoking the imaginative involvement of readers to understand how the ways in which one's conceptualization of home—both the absent and the adopted home—and, in turn, one's identity and belonging is mediated through collective memory and postmemory. Vis-à-vis the “global/local” assemblage, this monograph concludes that the migrant's out-of-sync subjectivity is emblematic of the crisis of modernity in Southeast Asia. What all this unravels is a portrait of migration that is inflected by processes of neocolonialism and capitalism. In a world where politics has adopted an increasingly anti-migrant rhetoric, it is important to see how these cultural texts give a voice to the otherwise disenfranchised. Through remembering and *re-membering*, these narratives become complicit in an act of counter-memory, endowing not only the diasporic subject the agency to rewrite history on their own terms, but a deeper understanding, on part of the readers and spectators, of the complexities and contradictions of diaspora.

II. FORGETTING HOME: POSTCOLONIAL AMNESIA IN A LIQUID MODERN ERA

Zygmunt Bauman, a Jewish-Polish sociologist whose multiple experiences of exile—first, during the Nazi invasion of Poland in World War II, and once more due to the political turmoil in Poland in 1968—informed most of his work, contends that the current age in which we live exists as a dialectic between solidity and liquidity. In “Time and Space Reunited,” Bauman defines liquid modernity as an era based on uncertainty and constant change, which is distinguished from solid modernity. Citing Max Weber’s idea of instrumental rationality, he argues that solid modernity is marked by its obsession with imposing order and categorizing so as to rationalize, understand, and predict the ways in which the world works. He forwards this point using the Fordist factory to exemplify how in solid modernity, time is rendered malleable and therefore susceptible to the ordering of routine. For Bauman, this “operative principle of modern civilization,” which entails spending the least amount of time possible in performing specific tasks, so as to yield the highest possible outcome, shifted gears with the advent of liquid modernity (“Time and Space” 173–174). The ever-increasing mobility characteristic of today’s globalized era compelled Bauman to reconfigure the notion of postmodernity, which to him was problematic, as liquid modernity. He highlights the transience and ephemerality inherent in this age, arguing that liquid modernity is the “growing conviction that change is the *only* permanence, and uncertainty the *only* certainty” (*Liquid Modernity* viii). This profound transformation of modern society is attributed to the dissatisfaction with the rigid nature of solidity:

The original cause of the solids melting was not resentment against solidity as such, but dissatisfaction with the degree of solidity of the extant and inherited solids: purely and simply, the bequeathed solids were found not to be solid enough (insufficiently resistant or immunized to change) by the standards of the order-obsessed and compulsively order-building modern powers. Subsequently, however (in our part of the world, to this day), solids came to be viewed and accepted as transient, ‘until further notice’ condensations of liquid magma; temporary settlements, rather than ultimate solutions. Flexibility has replaced solidity as the ideal condition to be pursued of things and affairs. (ix)

Given that the rigidity of solid modernity is no longer viable in today’s highly mobile era, where everything is prone to change, what then are our alternatives?

Vis-à-vis our discussion of how Southeast Asian migrants experience belonging, Bauman’s contention raises the question of how these migrants are able to form a “solid” identity in an era of liquidity. Is speaking of such an identity even possible for those living in the diaspora in the first place? How can the migrant, to borrow Bauman’s words, “position [themselves] in a network of possibilities rather than paralyzing [themselves],” and therefore “flourish in the midst of dislocation” (124)?

In highlighting liquid modernity's radical acceptance of change and uncertainty, Bida transplants Bauman's concept to her geocritical model of home and her understanding of belonging: "If solid modernity suggests a stable and rooted life, liquid modernity is marked by the flows of changing routes and the uncertainty of where these might lead" (71). Bauman's dialectic of solid and liquid modernity makes apparent the ambiguous relationship of the migrant, one who is constantly on the move and who occupies a space in time that is transient and susceptible to the flows of globalization, to their absent homeland, a place that remains trapped in the realm of the past, a place wherein migrants are only able to access through their memories, or in the case of second-generation migrants who have never experienced this homeland first-hand, through their postmemories. Emblematic of Southeast Asia's crisis in modernity, this ambiguous relationship is reflected in how home, for the dislocated Southeast Asian migrant, transforms from a space wherein their identities are anchored, to an object or resource that is impermanent, vulnerable to the flux of globalization, and that which they can never truly hold on to. Each of the texts depict instances wherein "home-making is replaced by searching for, consuming, and replacing or wishing to replace home spaces" (Bida 71). Once home is "commodified," its potential of being a source of solidarity diminishes, and its ability to act as a site wherein one can root themselves is forgotten. The value of a country's economic openness, once seen by these migrants as a means to attaining upward mobility, is destabilized, thus signalling a crisis in Southeast Asian modernity.

As an accented film, *Espia* poignantly conveys how home is replaced by a constant "searching for" home through the film's visual strategy of claustrophobia, achieved in the juxtaposition of the open and closed cinematic form. While the flux of liquid modernity enables Janet and Moises, two OFWs in *Espia*'s film, to find work in Israel as a domestic helper and a caregiver respectively, their migration to Israel for the sake of a better life replaces the home they once built in the Philippines. In the 1970s, the Philippines created a model of exporting labor that allowed them to address the increasing unemployment rate while at the same time offset the country's debt. Taking advantage of the developing contract labor market in the Middle East, the Philippine government promulgated the 1974 Labor Code of the Philippines (Mendoza). The institutionalization of labor migration, particularly its ramifications on the experiences of Filipino contract workers are inscribed in the film's visual claustrophobia. Janet and Moises, lured by the promise of economic stability, become convinced that their jobs in Israel allow them to earn much more compared to what they would earn doing the same jobs in the Philippines. This fleeting moment of hope is captured in the film's open form which is made apparent towards the end of Moises's narrative vignette. Here, spectators see him speaking to Susan, his wife, by the seashore, in broad daylight. The open form is spatially represented in the scene's *mise-en-scene* which favors both "open settings

and landscapes” and “bright natural lighting” as well as in the filming which suggests openness through the long shot that situates Moises and Susan within the open setting of the seashore thus preserving their “spatiotemporal integrity” (“Chronotopes” 153). Although the audience is not given any explicit information about how Moises and Susan left the Philippines for Israel, it is implicit in the dialogue that the two are now separated and that Susan remarried an Israeli presumably for the intention of securing citizenship.



Fig. 1. Moises confronts Susan about Joshua’s future. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

The overwhelming fear of deportation that permeates the film’s narrative beckons these characters to consider whether moving to Israel in search of a new home that promises economic stability was a prudent decision. Susan’s apprehension towards Moises’s plan of hiding Joshua, their son, before he reaches the eligible age for residency, and his unwillingness to move back “home to Manila” and “get a job there,” is demonstrative of how the narrative confronts two conflicting instances of dislocation. Moises acknowledges that while it would be difficult for him to find a job in Manila since his job as a caregiver in Israel offers him a better chance at life, remaining in Israel would mean a life in hiding. Moises’s dilemma exemplifies what Naficy would refer to as a “temporal claustrophobia.” His decision to “hide [in Israel] than to starve [in Manila]” embodies the migrant’s spatio-temporal displacement as he is unable to conceptualize home where he was once rooted, in Manila, nor where he currently lives, in Israel.

Despite the numerous protests against the 2009 deportation law that threatened the citizenship status of the children of migrant workers, hundreds of children were “forced to leave the country they call home,” while others remain “in hiding” (Espia). This life in hiding is inscribed through the film’s closed form. In the scenes that precedes Moises’s encounter with Susan, the audience sees Moises and Joshua staying in the living quarters of Moises’s employer, Eliav. Although Eliav welcomes both Moises and Joshua into his home, which throughout the movie is seen as a place of refuge from the uninviting outside world, Espia’s visual language reveals the nuances of this understanding of home. One particular scene that exemplifies this nuance is when Joshua gazes longingly out of one of the windows in Eliav’s living room. He is immediately reprimanded by his father who says that he has already warned him. Although the audience is once again not given explicit information as to what Moises warned Joshua about, it is understood that Moises has warned Joshua not to wander outside and risk getting caught by an Israeli police.



Fig. 2. Joshua looks out the window. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

Although Eliav’s house offers Moises and Joshua refuge, the fact that Joshua is robbed of the childhood pleasures of freely playing out in the sun paints an image of imprisonment. The brightness of the outside world stands in stark contrast with Eliav’s dimly lit living room (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Eliav, Joshua, and Moises in the living room. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

Here, Espia's use of lighting inscribes these feelings of being trapped. Bearing in mind that the "house" in which they live does not even belong to them, the scene is demonstrative of how these migrant's concept of home, although still to some extent a place of refuge, transforms into a space marked by impermanence. For Moises and Joshua, Eliav's home only offers them a fleeting sense of refuge, as they eventually have to return to their own living quarters where the uncertainty of creating a stable home-space is a result of living a life under the constant risk of being caught by the police. The juxtaposition in the film's spatial openness and temporally closed cinematic form exemplifies the poetics of asynchronicity that undergirds the film's narrative. By pushing spectators beyond the "immediacy of the violent moment" that is the dislocation from one's homeland, audiences are forced to reflect upon how the economic flows of liquid modernity have contributed to the increasing need to replace home (Boehmer 65).

While in film, asynchronicity is manifested in the juxtaposition of cinematic open and closed forms, the realm of literary texts encodes this asynchronicity through narratorial indirect discourse. Gouw posits that in fiction writing, emotional truth is elicited in the spontaneous flow of words that resonate not only with "the truth that comes from the deepest part of [a writer's] heart," but more so with a "universal truth" (Lim). In *Only a Girl*, free indirect discourse melds the third-person narrative with characters' subjectivities allowing readers to articulate Carolien's desire to give up the security and stability of solid modernity and search for a new home space that would grant her freedom from the confines of tradition. At the beginning of the novel, readers discover Carolien's plan to marry Po Han, an

Indonesian photographer. To Carolien, marrying Po Han means succumbing to the temptation of freedom promised by the flow of liquid modernity despite the uncertainty that it is often accompanied with. The novel opens with a metaphor that encapsulates Carolien's determination to discover peace and stability amidst the chaos of liquid modernity, despite her family's deep-seated belief that peace can only be found through financial security:

The outline of the *Tangkuban Prah*, the sleeping volcano, filled Bandung's northern skyline with the image of a capsized boat. Today, the familiar sight seemed ominous. Carolien shivered. She wasn't going to allow her boat to be overturned. Her boat was going to skim across the water with full sails. (Gouw 11)

By comparing the outline of the *Tangkuban Prah* to a capsized boat, this opening metaphor functions to foreshadow the waves of uncertainty that accompany her decision to marry Po Han. Going between the impersonal and subjective modes moreover encourages readers to speculate the consequences of Carolien's decision to marry Po Han.

As the narrative unravels, readers come to know that Carolien's family has political ties to the Dutch colonial government. This secured Carolien and her siblings a Dutch education while they were growing up, and eventually allowed them to take up positions in government. Gouw's use of free indirect discourse guides readers through Carolien's thought process, revealing that her hesitation in pushing forward with her plan to marry Po Han is because she knows that she would have to do away with the security her life was built upon: "Could she do it? Would it be worth it in the end?" (Gouw 12). These rhetorical questions strike a balance between an impersonal retelling of events by the narrator and Carolien's personal thoughts and emotions. What appears to be the root of Carolien's hesitation to push forward with her plan is her unwillingness to go against her family's conservative stance. As soon as she breaks the news to her family, she is chastized by Nanna, her mother. The dialogue that subsequently takes place reveals to readers that although their family maintains close ties with the Dutch colonial government, Nanna was not blinded by the "risk that comes with exposing girls to the Western way of life" (Gouw 14). Nanna was aware that her children's Western upbringing, which places more importance on the individual as opposed to the collective, meant accepting the risk that they might one day decide to leave home, in a literal and metaphorical sense, to pursue their own aspirations. The fact that her sister, Sue "had spent a lifetime catering to the wishes of the family," and her brother's stern reminder that the main purpose of her Dutch education was so that she could "be an asset to some decent man's household," highlights the gendered dimension of the experience of belonging that is inflected by colonial mimicry (Gouw 13). Gouw's use of dialogue allows readers to understand how filial

piety, gender roles, as well as her family's colonial mimicry play an important role in Carolien's struggle to bring up her decision.

The shift between impersonal and personal narratorial modes as well as the use of dialogue signals the text's asynchronous poetics as it beckons readers to move across the certainties and uncertainties of solid and liquid modernity. The rhetorical questions specifically elicit the fear associated with the instability of creating a home in a liquid modern era. More so, they foreshadow their eventual divorce, marking a nostalgic return to the security of solid modernity. Gouw's evocative use of foreshadowing allows readers to recall, once they reach the part of the story where Carolien and Po Han divorce, Nanna's response when Carolien asks if anyone in her family knows "what it means to be happy instead of just financially secure": "Happiness is peace. You won't find peace unless you are secure. And you won't find security in an unstable situation" (Gouw 14). Nanna's assertion that security is elusive amidst instability functions to instil within the readers later on in the story, a nostalgia for the security of solid modernity that Carolien once had in her family's home.

Transplanted onto Baloup's graphic narrative, asynchronicity is inscribed through the use of flashbacks that function to juxtapose the multiple spatio-temporal worlds of the migrant. The latter half of *Vietnamese Memories* is a re-imagining of Pierre Daum's nonfiction investigative novel, *Immigrés de Force*³ into the graphic form. It recounts stories of the *Lin Tho*¹⁴—literally translated as "working soldier"—which reveal how homemaking is replaced by a constant search for home. Migrant mobility facilitated by liquid modernity can be understood here in the context of the war effort, whereby the French colonial government enlisted young Vietnamese men, leaving them no choice but to migrate to France. Thieu Van Muu's account of his enlistment and dislocation from Vietnam demonstrates how home transforms from an immutable space wherein one anchors their identity, to something that is fleeting and requires a constant searching for. One of the ways in which Baloup's comics reportage mediates the retelling of the experience of dislocation is his extensive use of flashbacks. These flashbacks are presented through the "retrospective viewpoint" of the *Lin Tho*, who are in Groensteen's term, actorialized narrators who propel the narrative forward. In re-imagining the interviews conducted by Daum, Baloup includes the *Lin Tho* themselves in the graphic narratives, who appear as if they are speaking to the readers (see fig. 4). By transforming Daum's interview transcripts from written words to visual images of their faces, Baloup engages the medium of the graphic narrative in an act of counter-memory. Hence, presenting to us an account of their experience of dislocation, one that allows for a re-membering of their own individual histories, the histories of the *Lin Tho* told by the *Lin Tho* themselves. Readers come to understand that Tieu Van

Muu, and by and large the *Lin Tho*, fall under Bauman's notion of the "vagabond" who is defined in opposition to the "tourist":

The tourists stay or move at their hearts desire . . . The vagabonds, however—know that they won't stay for long, however strongly they wished to . . . [I]f the tourist move because they find the world irresistibly attractive, the vagabonds move because they find the world unbearably inhospitable . . . The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds—because they have no other choice. ("Tourists and Vagabonds" 14)

As vagabonds, the *Lin Tho* are vulnerable to the "inhospitable" flows of liquid modernity and thus are constantly in search for home. Governed by what Philippe Lejeune calls a "referential pact," that is "a relationship to reality founded on a contract of reliability and truth," Thieu Van Muu's story is endowed with a degree of authority (qtd. in *Comics and Narration* 98). Readers thus rely on his flashbacks, marked by the sepia-toned panels, to understand how his "extraordinary desire to integrate" resulted in attempts to replace the home he once cultivated in Vietnam with a new one in Venissieux. Hence his decision not to speak "of his native culture" and give "his children Western names" (Baloup 134).

What takes place here is what Spivak refers to as the "indeterminate sharing" between the writer and reader that takes place in fiction writing, but is also present in graphic narration. This "indeterminate sharing" underscores the poetics of asynchronicity in Baloup's narrative, as it allows for the experience of dislocation and migration to be "encod[ed], interpret[ed], and vicariously experienc[ed]," thus allowing readers to "think beyond the . . . realities they inhabit" (Spivak qtd. in Boehmer 53). Although his assimilation is understood here as a means by which one replaces home, it does not merely signal the complete erasure of one's past roots. Instead, Thieu Van Muu's story is demonstrative of an understanding of roots not as static, but mutable and susceptible to the effects of liquid modernity.

Despite the impediments to homemaking posed by the liquid modern flux, Bauman's dialectic of solid and liquid modernity reveals the possibility of attaining stability through the construction of a multi-scalar home. One's map of home can act as a palimpsest upon which multiple routes can be drawn, effectively destabilizing the unidirectional movement typically associated with diaspora. When mobility is conceived of as asynchronous as opposed to unidirectional, it not only mirrors the flux characteristic of the liquid modern age, but more so offers ways in which home becomes one's anchor for their identity, allowing them to root themselves and find stability through mobility. *Transit, Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories* demonstrate through "strategies of adaptation" the possibility of attaining "stability, commitment, and community" amidst this liquid modern era yet likewise, by showing failed attempts at escaping the flux, the inability to adapt.

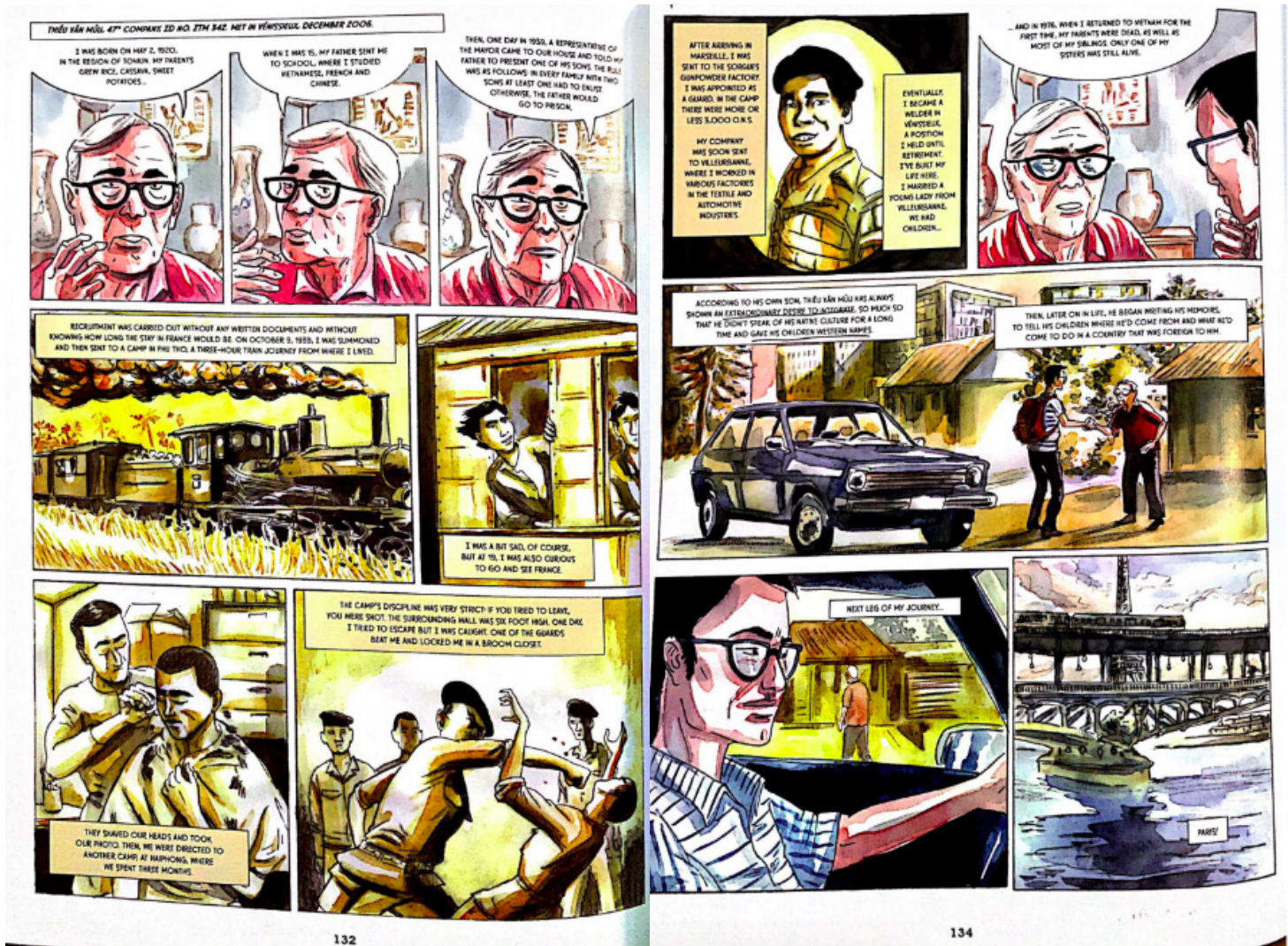


Fig. 4. Thieu Van Muu recounts his experience working for the war effort and eventual dislocation. Clément Baloup, *Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon*, 2018.

Transit's elliptical narrative and use of repetition reveal Moises's failed attempt to find stability amidst the instability of liquid modernity. When Rotem, a volunteer from the group Children of Israel, knocks on Janet's door asking her to sign a petition against the deportation of the children of foreign workers, Janet appears willing to sign the petition. The asynchronicity is manifested when this scene is repeated, as Espia's use of shot reverse shot brings Moises into the conversation.



Fig. 5. Janet meets Rotem, a volunteer of Children of Israel. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013.

As Rotem introduces herself and explains the petition to Janet, the camera focuses on Moises instead of either Janet and Rotem, intercalating his cautious gaze at Rotem as she introduces herself and the cause to Janet. In prioritizing Moises's reaction over Rotem's words, Espia effectively conveys Moises's scepticism towards the motives of Rotem and the group she represents, revealing the fears "associated with the risk and uncertainty of liquid modernity" (Bida 82). Moises convinces Janet not to sign the petition, arguing that hiding until Joshua reaches the eligible age to live in Israel is the safest course of action.



Fig. 6. Rotem convinces Janet to sign the petition against the deportation of OFW's children. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013



Fig. 7. Moises is hesitant to sign the petition. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013.

Espia's use of repetition in conjunction with the elliptical narrative demonstrates the imaginative charge of asynchronicity as postcolonial poetics as it *literally* enables viewers to relive scenes that have passed, something which linear narratives, as well as the other two literary texts in question wherein readers would have to physically flip back several pages, would not otherwise allow. As established earlier on, the increased mobility facilitated by liquid modernity allows Moises and Janet to find work in Israel, hence ameliorating their quality of life. Nonetheless, Moises's reservations in signing the petition lie in the fact that by signing it, he is jeopardizing his own son's chance of staying hidden in Israel. Despite the sense of community and imagined solidarity this petition offers to migrants, it is important to ask whether migrants are even able to think about being part of a community when faced with constant threats of deportation. This question will be addressed in the final section of this monograph that looks at socially constructed modes of belonging. In *Transit's* encoding of asynchronicity in its elliptical narrative, the film reveals the moment wherein Moises becomes aware that he and his family are trapped in a spatio-temporal limbo. While in one of the following examples, there exists some agency on part of the individuals to find stability through mobility, Moises, Janet, and their children are restricted by the enforcement of harsh laws on immigrants in Israel. Liquidity is thus presented as a double-edged sword—one that problematizes what could have possibly been an opportunity to build a sense of community and solidarity through non-violent protest.

Another character who struggles to adapt to the flux of liquid modernity is Carolien in *Only a Girl*. This is evident in her failed marriage that inadvertently reveals an insatiable nostalgia for the stability of solid modernity. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as “the incurable modern condition” (xiv). Vis-à-vis liquid modernity's volatile economic flows, this nostalgia for solid modernity sheds light

on the effects of Southeast Asia's globally oriented economy on the formation of home spaces. Carolien's nostalgia for economic stability, embedded in the third-person narrative, is made apparent when Po Han suggests the possibility of migrating to Holland. Just as she begins to "slip into [his] fantasy" she gets a hold of herself and "remember[ing] the pile of unpaid bills, the empty bank account" she realizes that "Po Han had persuaded her to marry him with stories about happiness that were not based on financial security" (Gouw 75). The Great Depression, whose ramifications have reached the Dutch East Indies, cost Po Han his job. What once was a means for them to break free from the enslavement of tradition soon becomes the source of enslavement itself. Gouw encodes asynchronicity through her use of free indirect discourse that forces readers to disentangle the incongruities in Carolien's expectation of marriage. What she initially saw as a means by which she could free herself from the "yoke of tradition" in exchange for a "comfortable, secure life," Carolien feels a sense of disillusionment as this reality of marriage does not fall in line with its harsh realities in a liquid modern era (Gouw 81). The novel's asynchronous poetics is revealed in this melding of a supposed impersonal third-person narrative with the disenchantment Carolien feels towards marriage, inadvertently unveiling the irony of liquid modernity. Liquid modernity's emphasis on movement and change, as opposed to the stable rootedness of solid modernity, deludes one into believing that risk and uncertainty are directly correlated to upward social mobility and economic stability. What ensues is a violent cycle that begins with one taking risks to attain upwards social mobility only to realize that the "invisible hand of global capitalism" has caught up (Bida 169). This cycle perpetuates a nostalgia for the comforts of solid modernity often guised as a desire "to be secure from the daunting, harrowing, incapacitating fear of insecurity" (Bauman, *Collateral Damage* 66). For Carolien, a nostalgia for the economic stability she was once privileged enough to experience. In spite of how her family's traditional norms suffocated her, they still offered a sense of stability that Po Han's passion for photography could not.

Despite the liquidity of political and geographical alliances in *Vietnamese Memories*, Baloup's graphic retelling of Thai Quan's story is exemplary of the homemaker's ability to root themselves in multiple locations and thus construct a multi-scalar home that can be conceptualized as a space for collective identity and political struggle. The panels that contain Thai Quan's story are demonstrative of how the narrative's asynchronous poetics is mediated by the heteroglossia, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term, inherent in graphic narratives.



Fig. 8. Thai Quan recounting how he took his brother's place in conscription and sided with the resistance. Clément Baloup, *Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon*, 2018

At this point it makes sense to break down the multiple voices involved in graphic narratives, the first of which being Baloup's role as the fundamental narrator. Groensteen cites Gaudreault's definition of the fundamental narrator as "always already extra-diegetic" and "im-personal (or rather a-personal)" since it was never given the status of a character within the fictional world (qtd. in Groensteen, *Comics and Narration* 96). The fundamental narrator intervenes by superimposing its voice-over, the passage that separates the top and bottom halves of the narrative, onto the sequence of panels. With this piece of information, readers discover that Thai Quan returned to Vietnam in 1953 after fighting for the resistance "against Hitler's armies," but decided to "[stay] in Saigon," so as to cut ties with his family who lived

in the North and had “all become communists” (Baloup 144). Since this chapter of *Vietnamese Memories* is merely a graphic re-storying of Daum’s non-fiction novel, Baloup remains masked throughout the novel, leaving the task of representing Thai Quan and the rest of the *Lin Tho* to the monstrator. The monstrator, responsible for articulating Daum’s stories into drawn form, depicts Thai Quan sitting on a chair whilst facing the reader. Thai Quan thus appears to be interviewed not only by Daum, the original recipient of the *Lin Tho*’s stories, but also the readers, hence conflating the positions of both Daum and the readers. As an actorialized narrator, Thai Quan demonstrates one’s ability as a homemaker to root himself across three different geographical locations: Northern Vietnam, where he grew up in; France, where he migrated to as a result of the war effort; and finally the home he re-built for himself in Saigon. The multiplicity of voices reveals how the tension between the marginalized voice of memory and authoritative voice of history is mirrored in the tension between word and image. Thai Quan’s story destabilizes the totalizing narrative of diaspora that favors the notion of a single, static home one must return to. His story moreover demonstrates that through a mapping of home on multiple scales, stability can be attained through mobility.

When used as a lens to understand the ways in which one’s sense of home is constructed in the texts, Bauman’s solidity/liquidity dialectic reveals that home is a construct susceptible to the flow of history, culture, and the global economy. The asynchronicity embedded in the narratives reveal the diasporic subject’s spatio-temporal displacement; hence, their constant attempts to search for a home, which, for the diasporic subject, remains an elusive and fleeting object. More often than not, this involves forgetting the faces and places that once constituted one’s home. Amidst the flux of liquid modernity, there is an increased tendency not to emotionally invest in creating a home space since the desire for economic stability suggests the possibility of constant movement. The value of economic openness is thus questioned, signalling the crisis of Southeast Asian modernity that is reflected in the out-of-sync subjectivity of the diasporic subjects. Bauman’s dialectic of liquid and solid modernity elucidates the importance of mobility in the construction of a multi-scalar home. Given the risks and uncertainties associated with liquid modernity, it may be tempting to see mobility as something that propagates an amnesia for home. The idea that home can never be fixated on one single location, especially in a world that is subject to the flux of globalization, results in an increased inability to emotionally invest in a place. It is easier, in theory, to leave behind and forget one’s past, in exchange for easy adaptation in the hostland. The texts therefore demonstrate the potential of locating stability through mobility and how being on the move “searching, looking for, not-finding-it or more exactly not-finding-it-yet is not a malaise, but the promise of bliss; perhaps it is bliss itself” (*Globalization* 83).

III. REMEMBERING HOME: IMAGINED PASTS, IRREPLACEABLE DESIRES

Written during the housing shortage in Germany post-World War II, Heidegger's essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" points to how human beings have forgotten how to dwell because of the exigencies of the modern era. In light of the increased mobility and uprooting of people, the increasing flow of capital, and the advancement of technology, Heidegger argues that in forgetting to dwell, we, too, have forgotten too how to build homes that can withstand the flux of liquid modernity. For Heidegger, dwelling is on one level the manner in which human beings exist on earth, but more so, it is how human beings transform the space we live in into home. He continues to argue that dwelling is the preservation of the unity of the "fourfold," which consists of the earth, that which nurtures us physically and provides for us a sense of stability; the sky, which Heidegger describes as "the vaulting path of the sun" and the "course of the changing moon," elements that allow us to meditate upon the ever-changing nature of the world around us; divinities, which for Heidegger refers to the existence of a Higher Being; and mortals, a term which he uses to refer to human beings with the purpose of underscoring the ephemerality of our existence ("Building, Dwelling, Thinking" 147). Anne Buttner sums up Heidegger's definition in her article on how phenomenology offers new ways of understanding our modes of being in the world: "To dwell implies more than to inhabit, to cultivate, or to organize space. It means to live in a manner which is attuned to the rhythms of nature, to see one's life as anchored in human history and directed towards a future, to build a home which is the everyday symbol of a dialogue with one's ecological and social milieu"¹⁵ (277). Exacerbated by "hyperconsumerism, the emergence of manufactured landscapes, the transformations of formerly public spaces into the repurposed or rebranded properties of multinational corporations, increasingly common planned obsolescence, and a popularized belief in economies of perpetual growth," the problem of forgetting how to dwell is rooted in how these aforementioned phenomena create a disunity within the fourfold, subsequently resulting in a generalized sense of homelessness (Bida 15). If dwelling means to build a home that is in constant dialogue with the "fourfold" world in which one lives, what does dwelling in today's liquid modern era imply? With regard to diasporic and migrant communities, is it possible for one to anchor themselves to "human history," particularly histories in which they find themselves excluded from?

After laying open the logic of the Southeast Asian crisis in modernity, wherein the value of economic openness is questioned, this section delves deeper into the role of the medium of representation in mediating how a migrant builds a home and eventually dwells, in the Heideggerian sense, in their host country through remembrance. Heidegger explains, "[t]o build is in itself already to dwell" ("Building, Dwelling, Thinking" 147). How then, do migrants, specifically second-generation migrants who have never set foot in their parents' homeland, understand the

spatio-temporal position that they occupy? The fabric through which these narratives of *Transit*, *Only a Girl*, and *Vietnamese Memories* are weaved is that of memory. Within these works, which have been created by writers and filmmakers who have been at one point in their lives displaced from their homeland, exist an image of an absent homeland that is reflected through “broken mirrors.”¹⁶ It is through broken mirrors that memories, or postmemories, of the absent homeland become more evocative. Bringing the texts in dialogue with Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling” allows for an understanding of the physical and metaphysical process of home-making in the context of migration. By transplanting habits, cultural norms and practices, language, and other aspects of an imagined homeland through postmemory, the migrant is able to cultivate in their host culture a “similarly meaningful” sense of belonging and eventually, in Heidegger’s sense, dwell poetically in their host culture. The texts in question thus demonstrate the kind of homecoming Heidegger speaks of, one that does not elicit a nostalgia for a mythic homeland that one is destined to return to, but instead anticipates “new possibilities of home,” by mapping a multi-scalar home (O’Donoghue 371). In the process of decentering home from its single spatio-temporal position, these texts effectively destabilize the notion of “home” as singular and static, and instead offer ways for migrants to, as Adam Sharr suggests, root themselves in “multiple centres” (70).

As cultures come into contact with one another, the significance of nationalism and national identity in informing a Southeast Asian modernity is questioned. While it is possible to argue that a migrant is able to “build” a home through remembrance, it is crucial to consider the complexities inherent in the process of remembering an imagined past. Heidegger’s definition of dwelling highlights the bidirectional relationship between the space wherein one is surrounded and one’s ability to dwell. As a result of their inability to completely reconcile the worlds of their past and their present, their subjectivity is fragmented and out-of-sync, which is manifested in the texts’ asynchronous poetics. The screen/page is transformed into a canvas upon which the migrant’s multiple worlds are inscribed. By embodying multiple layers of time, the screen/page acts as the “broken mirror” through which the migrant remembers the imaginary homeland from the hostland. The screen/page oscillates between the multiple worlds that the migrants inhabit and hence captures the tension between the past and the present. This asynchronous movement between the multiple spatio-temporal worlds embedded in the screen/page at once mirrors an out-of-sync subjectivity and shows us the possibility of building and eventually dwelling in a home, through memory or postmemory, amidst dislocation.

Transit’s dialectic of the open and closed cinematic form exemplifies the poetics of asynchronicity that encodes onto the screen Yael’s spatio-temporal

displacement. As a third culture kid who has spent all of her life outside of her mother's Filipino culture, her experience, marked by multiple attempts at claiming space in her hostland differs greatly from that of Joshua's who is an OFW's kid about to be deported. Unlike Joshua, who has no psychological capacity to begin thinking about creating a home as he lives under the constant threat of deportation, Yael, as an Israeli citizen, has the agency to build a home, and perhaps even dwell, in Israel. Earlier on in the film, as her mother Janet welcomes Tina, an OFW new to Israel, Tina calls Yael a *mestiza*, a term often used to describe women who appear to be of mixed race because of their fair skin tone. The manner in which Janet explains to Tina that Yael's father is Israeli, reveals an underlying tension within their family. Yael's father's absence throughout the film implies on one level that her parents have separated. On a more symbolic level, the absence of the person whom her Israeli identity is anchored to mirrors her struggles to hold on to her identity as part Israeli. Despite her Israeli citizenship, her apparent inability to "build" a home in Israel stems from her inability to reconcile her Israeli and Filipino identity. Yael, Janet's daughter, epitomizes the migrant's displacement in time and space as a result of her identity as an Israeli-Filipino. The establishing shot of her frame story is suggestive of the film's contrast in open and closed cinematic form. Set on an open-air rooftop in daylight, the scene's *mise-en-scene* conveys the open form and instils in the mind of spectators a sense of longing. The camera's close-up of Yael staring into the blue skies of Tel Aviv as she watches birds flutter by imbues the scene with introspection, drawing the audience into the narrative.



Fig. 9. Yael lies on her rooftop, staring blankly into the sky. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

As the spectators thread through the information presented in previous frame stories, it becomes clear that the longing Yael feels is associated with her inability to

fully root herself in Tel Aviv. The closed cinematic form is embodied in the contrast between the birds that freely fly by and her immobile body, which elicits a sense of spatio-temporal claustrophobia similar to what Moises experiences.



Fig. 10. View of the sky which Yael stares into. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013



Fig. 11. Aerial shot of Yael staring blankly into the sky. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

Yael's dual-displacement is further elucidated in the contrast of open and closed cinematic form in montage that directly follows. Despite the dark lighting typically associated with the closed cinematic form, the movement of Yael and her friends as they play with sparklers suggests the open form. Espia's inclusion of sparklers in this scene is not arbitrary as it gestures at the cultural significance of fireworks and firecrackers¹⁷ in the Philippines, specifically during celebrations and

religious festivities. This montage thus becomes an embodiment of postmemory, as recollections of their absent motherland, specifically the use of sparklers for entertainment, passed down from presumably their parents, first generation immigrants, to Yael and her friends. Yael's dual-displacement is highlighted in the slippage between what is presented on screen to the spectator and the unspoken cultural significance of firecrackers.



Fig. 12. Yael and her friends play with sparklers along Jaffa port. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

The tension between Yael's past, only accessible through postmemory inherited from her mother, and her present, reaches a breaking point in an argument with her mother, Janet who lashes out at her in Tagalog. Unable to understand her mother tongue, Janet retorts, "You're Filipino, you should know how to speak Filipino!" Yael's inability to understand Tagalog is presumably due to the lack of urgent need to speak the language in Israel. This underscores the distance, both literal and figurative, she feels towards her Filipinoness. According to Naficy, language "shapes not only individual identity but also regional and national identities" (24). In effect, Yael's "loss" of language destabilizes the notion that a Southeast Asian subjectivity inheres in national identity. Ultimately, Espia's juxtaposition of open and closed cinematic forms, as well as her use of multilinguality, highlights the multiple worlds wherein Yael and, by and large, the rest of the characters in *Transit*, who are part of the Filipino diaspora, live and are unable to reconcile.

In *Only A Girl*, a similar conflict between one's "multiple worlds" takes place for Jenny, Carolien, and Po Han's daughter. Unlike Yael, Jenny and her parents share the same homeland, the Dutch East Indies or colonial Indonesia, and is therefore not

a third culture kid. The conflict she experiences is therefore not a result of a clash between her parents' home culture and the culture of the hostland as in the case of Yael. For Jenny, these two are the same. The conflict instead mirrors her parents' conflicting values, which is a result of their distinct upbringing. Gouw captures the "multiple worlds" in which Jenny lives by juxtaposing the values of responsibility and passion, respectively embodied by Carolien and Po Han. This juxtaposition exemplifies the obliquely recalcitrant writing characteristic of the asynchronous poetics that undergirds *Only a Girl's* narrative. Carolien and Po Han's eventual divorce, which is symbolic of her inability to merge her Chinese-Indonesian roots with her Dutch upbringing, mirrors Jenny's internal conflict. Carolien's inability to break free from the shackles of tradition as a result of her nostalgia for the stability of solid modernity, as established in the previous section, is metaphorically projected onto Jenny. As she "tap[s] the pedal of her electric Singer" to sew Jenny's dress, she also "shape[s] Jenny's future" (Gouw 173). Her decision to send Jenny to Leiden to study law, which would "give [her] the education needed to be an independent woman," is at first glance merely Carolien's desire to inculcate in Jenny the value of responsibility, given their tight financial circumstances (Gouw 262). Upon close reading, the narrative reveals that Carolien's tendency to be controlling is a symptom of her fear that Jenny would experience the same fate of giving up years of education and her career, only to end up being a housewife dependent on her husband. On the other hand, the metaphor of painting reveals to readers how Po Han values passion, a quality he tries to instill in Jenny. Upon meeting her for the first time since the divorce, Po Han asks Jenny what she thinks of his painting of a sunflower, only to realize that until now "no adult had ever bothered to ask her what she thought" (Gouw 198). Jenny later expresses her struggle to draw in art class to which Po Han advises, "[d]rawing is nothing other than telling your hand to put on paper . . . what your eyes see and heart feels," guiding her to channel her emotions (Gouw 199). When the narrative reveals that for Jenny "nobody made more sense than her father," the stark contrast between passion and responsibility is made apparent (Gouw 200). Her emotionally distant mother who values responsibility as a means to adapting to the flow of liquid modernity never allowed Jenny to pursue her heart's desire, which is what Po Han's passion for photography encourages. The tension between Jenny's Dutch upbringing and her Chinese-Indonesian roots, made apparent through Gouw's use of juxtaposition, signals her inability to dwell. Jenny's conflicting identities furthermore exemplify the "repudiation of dualistic pairings" that Paul Gilroy calls for in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, as it destabilizes the assumption that those living in diaspora possess a "pure" identity. In a highly mobile era where cultures are constantly in contact, Jenny's fragmented identity mirrors the Southeast Asian subjectivity that is likewise out-of-sync.

Vietnamese Memories' graphic narrative form creates a reading experience that allows simultaneous visualization of the multiple spatio-temporal worlds—the past



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Fig. 13. Baloup's own flashbacks of his father teaching him how to prepare a Vietnamese dish.
Clément Baloup, *Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon*, 2018

of the (imagined) homeland and the present moment of the host country—wherein the diasporic subject “dwells” or attempts to dwell. Baloup’s use of flashbacks in *Vietnamese Memories* weaves memories into the fabric of the present, revealing the migrant’s multiple streams of temporality.

Vietnamese Memories’ introductory panels contain close-ups of a pair of hands peeling shrimp accompanied with a caption that appears to be something taken from a cookbook: “First, you peel the prawns” (Baloup 11). The final panel at the bottom right reveals that these hands belong to a father who is asked by his son: “Dad, how did you learn how to cook?” to which the father responds “I guess I did a good job watching my father” (Baloup 12). To understand how postmemories are mediated through flashbacks, an understanding of the rhythm of comics is warranted. In graphic narratives, images exist *in praesentia*, or in other words,

they “[coexist] before the reader’s eyes” (Groensteen, *Comics and Narration* 34). As opposed to watching films, or reading books, reading graphic narratives does not “create the impression of a story unfolding before our eyes,” as the reader is constantly made aware through every flip of the page that the graphic narrative unfolds at a “rhythm that is not imposed but under their control” (82). Despite this Brechtian distanciation inherent in the process of physically flipping through the pages of a graphic novel, the continuous flow of images propels readers to read on. The perpetuation of this flow sets up the expectations that Baloup’s use of the warm-tone color scheme would carry on into the following panels. It later becomes apparent that the panels that follow shift to grayscale, which Baloup uses to signify the father’s past in Vietnam through a flashback, as opposed to the warmer palette with reds and yellows that signify the present day set in France. The father’s present-tense voice-over is superimposed onto images of the past wherein he recounts to his son how his love for cooking developed by watching his own father cook. This present-tense voice-over is what creates a logical link between the past, accessed by the father’s memories, which are then handed down as postmemories to Baloup in the present. The alternation in color palettes emphasize the insurmountable distance between the migrant and their imaginary homeland, evident in the slippage between what is seen in the narrative present and what is presented in the flashback. Baloup’s shift in color palettes reveals a visual discontinuity mirroring the migrant’s fragmented, out-of-sync subjectivity. In this case however, the migrant’s dual-displacement is not seen as an impediment to dwelling, but instead testifies to the home-maker’s agency in building a home in places other than their motherland. Comparing *Vietnamese Memories* with *Transit* and *Only a Girl*, one sees that the traumatic dislocation from the homeland takes place within the boundaries of the story for the film and the novel respectively. Joshua’s forced dislocation by deportation in *Transit* and Jenny’s migration to America to pursue higher education in *Only a Girl* both take place at the end of the story. In contrast, in this particular vignette in *Vietnamese Memories*, the dislocation has already taken place; the father’s dislocation is presented via flashbacks but it is not experienced in the narrative present. By passing down the story of how he eventually left Vietnam, Baloup’s father is at once remembering and re-membering. In doing so, Baloup himself is able to, via these postmemories, re-member, build, and dwell in a lifeworld wherein the individual, personal stories of his father’s dislocation are included and superimposed onto the palimpsest of the collective memory of the Việt Kiều.

In a Deleuzian sense, the poetics of asynchronicity that undergirds these narratives function as crystals of time in that they crystallize the migrant’s different conceptual worlds: a past that they can only imagine through remembrance, a future that they either can or cannot envision due to the exigencies of a present that either they find themselves trapped in or has the potential to empower them

and make them recognize the agency they have within them to change their future. The existence of these multiple worlds stand in contradistinction to the notion that national identity, as put forward by Chong, is a defining feature of Southeast Asian modernity, especially in today's global/local assemblage. Reading this vis-à-vis Ranajit Guha's formulation of belonging as "nothing other than temporality acted upon and thought—and generally speaking, lived—as being with others in shared time," points to how the ways in which the migrant is spatio-temporally situated directly affects their ability to find a place in the communities they are surrounded by, and eventually dwell amongst them (4-5). For the migrants in the stories in question, this shared time that Guha speaks of is non-existent. While the "rest of the world" dwells in a linear temporality, these migrants experience time as out-of-sync and therefore experience a jarring sense of entrapment, as if imprisoned in a spatio-temporal limbo. Espia, Gouw, and Baloup employ various narrative strategies to depict how the migrants in these texts confront this spatio-temporal limbo by nostalgically reconstructing their past and hence experience the present retroactively. This either facilitates or impedes their abilities as individual home-makers to "build" a home and subsequently dwell in it (Naficy 153). In their attempts to suture the migrant's different conceptual worlds, these narratives stitch the spectators and readers into the story-world of the diegesis and involve them in remembering as well as re-membering.

The elliptical narrative of Espia's *Transit* mirrors the migrant's dual-displacement in both space and time and their resulting out-of-sync subjectivity. Comprised of five frame stories, each told from the perspective of the five protagonists, *Transit*'s narrative is characterized by its non-linear time structure. The film provides the spectators with clear markers at the beginning of each of the frame stories that signify from whose perspective the story is told. Yet, spectators are still thrust in and out of the film's narrative that consists of the same scenes depicted more than once, such as the scene wherein Moises and Janet meet Rotem who asks them to sign the petition. Espia's deliberate use of repetition allows for multivocality and heteroglossia as the audience re-visits certain scenes but from the perspectives of different protagonists. However, not all the repeated scenes in *Transit* are seen from multiple perspectives. Janet's nested narrative, for instance, is bookended by the same scene which opens her frame story. This particular scene poignantly inscribes onto the film's cinematic surface the overwhelming fear of deportation that threatens migrant workers and their children as well as insatiable longing to dwell. Janet is in the foreground and appears to be standing in the middle of a busy road waiting for someone to pick up her phone call. What follows is the diegetic sound of an automated attendant speaking in Hebrew—"The subscriber you have dialled is currently unavailable. Please try again later."—which implies two possible scenarios: that the person she is trying to contact has travelled outside the coverage area, or their phone is off.



Fig. 14. Janet calls an unnamed character. Hannah Espia, *Transit*, 2013

Throughout Janet's nested narrative, this scene is repeated thrice. Once at the beginning, once after she is asked by Rotem to sign the petition against the deportation, and again at the end. Espia's use of repetition transforms the act of spectatorship, forcing spectators to experience time in a nonlinear fashion. Threading through the proliferation of meanings suggested by the scenes that are intercalated between this repeated scene allows the spectator to vicariously experience how the migrant nostalgically reconstructs their past. The intercalated scenes that have gone past the film's present-tense cursor foreshadow Joshua's eventual deportation, suggesting that the person Janet is trying to contact is likely to be Moises, her brother and the father of Joshua. It is also noteworthy to point out that unlike other scenes that repeatedly appear in the frame stories of different characters, this scene is bound within Janet's nested narrative. In doing so, Espia highlights how Janet's particular experience of fear—which is although undoubtedly a shared experience amongst all contract workers whose children face the threat of deportation—is an experience she carries on her own as the sister of Moises and the aunt of Joshua. Despite the attempt to suture the past scenes with the present, the cinematic narrative leaves spectators with a sense of lingering uncertainty that mimics that of today's liquid modern age, as it is not revealed whether Janet manages to contact whomever she is trying to contact. This sense of ambiguity permeates *Transit's* cinematic narrative and lingers beyond it, even after the film's culmination confirms Joshua's foreshadowed deportation. This fear and uncertainty signals at once the migrant's inability to dwell in the "shared time" of those living in the host country as well as the spatio-temporal limbo—depicted poignantly in the scene's juxtaposition of Janet who remains still amidst the linear flow of the traffic in the background—in which they find themselves trapped in. It is a bleak reflection of how one's agency as homemaker to build a home for

themselves can be overshadowed by exclusionary power structures, in this case the Israeli government's enforcement of the deportation law.

In Gouw's novel, the use of heteroglossia manifests in the narrative's movement between first-person subjective and free indirect discourse and functions to highlight how, like Janet, Jenny finds herself unable to dwell in a shared time and space with the people around her. "By permitting all of the voices on its premises to be heard," Gouw's third-person narrative in *Only a Girl* exteriorizes Jenny's colonial mimicry and foreshadows her subsequent disillusionment towards the Dutch (Silverman 248). Readers are drawn into the story through this reflexivity, which, in effect, transforms the novel into the Barthesian "writerly text." Following the Indonesian independence from the Dutch, one of Jenny's teachers from Holland points to the inhumane colonial policy of the Dutch government in his explanation of colonialism. This comes as a shock to Jenny, who reacts defensively and proceeds to ask herself a series of questions in somewhat of an interior monologue: "Did he side with the natives? Did he know about the slogan rebels had painted on fences and walls? *Bunuh Belanda Asu*. In bright red letters the revolutionists had called the Dutch *dogs* and called for their murder" (Gouw 219). Her recollection of the violence that ensued during the Indonesian revolution reveals a tension between Jenny's two worlds—her Dutch allegiance, imparted to her through her family, and her Chinese-Indonesian roots. What takes place here is "an iridescent exchange carried on by multiple voices, on different wavelengths and subject from time to time to a sudden dissolve, leaving a gap which enables the utterance to shift from one point of view to another, without warning" (Barthes 41-42). By exteriorizing Jenny's colonial mimicry using free indirect speech, Gouw's novel calls readers to bridge the "gap" that Barthes refers to and play an active role in the construction of meaning, which is effectively destabilized through the rhetorical questions.

In asking herself these questions, Jenny is engaged in the act of remembering the burning down of her hometown by the natives, a traumatic event she witnessed firsthand in her childhood. Here, the act of remembering is crucial as it eventually makes room for her to confront, later on in the story, her colonial mimicry and re-member her understanding of the Indonesian fight for independence by deconstructing what she knows about the natives. A couple of pages later, the narrative shifts to the third-person as it takes readers back to the night Jenny witnessed Bandung burn down: "Jenny thought of the night Ting had sent her up into Nanna's mango tree and she saw most of the southern part of Bandung in flames" (Gouw 219). This pushing back of the present-tense cursor together with Gouw's effective use of rhetorical questions allows readers to reflect retrospectively, with Jenny, upon the ways in which the natives' fight for independence has impeded her individual ability as a homemaker to dwell. It is the trauma inflicted onto her upon witnessing her hometown get burned down by the natives where her disillusionment stems

from. How could her teacher, a Dutch man, justify the violence of the natives as a response to colonial government? The mental discord she experiences here is a result of having held the Dutch in high esteem for all her life, only to have a Dutch man tell her that it was indeed the Dutch colonial policies that incited violence amongst the natives in the first place. The rhetorical questions impart the sense of discord Jenny experiences to the readers, allowing them to understand her inability to reconcile her Dutch upbringing with her Indonesian identity. The rhetorical questions are further demonstrative of her own spatio-temporal displacement as she is neither able to find security and comfort in the past, which for her has been tainted by the violence of the revolution, nor in the future, which she cannot envision as those people who once were her home, her cousins Els and Eddie, had migrated to Holland.

The spatio-temporal limbo wherein the migrants find themselves is encoded in the graphic narrative through the use of flashbacks. Baloup's use of flashbacks in *Vietnamese Memories* furthermore functions to suture readers into the diegesis, allowing readers themselves to experience the present retroactively and to see the migrant's absent homeland reflected in Rushdie's "broken mirrors." By appropriating what Benoît Peeters calls the function of *suture*, which refers to how "the text . . . establish[es] a bridge between two separated images," the narrative forces readers to meld the present, signified by the harsh warm palette, and the past, which is painted in gray tones (Groensteen, *The System of Comics* 131). As the narrative progresses, readers are made aware that the multiframe, the totality of the panels that comprise an entire page, no longer depicts solely the present, nor the past, but an amalgamation of the two. Just as the reader's attention is fixed on the father, who is asked about his childhood in Saigon amidst war, Baloup moves the present-tense cursor backwards and divides the multiframe diagonally by incorporating the two sets of palettes that he uses to signify different temporalities.

Despite having been forcibly displaced by colonial empire, the father's retelling of his journey from Vietnam to France is an assertion of his own agency as a home-maker as he passes down the postmemory of his displacement to his son. In doing so, he inserts himself into the previously "exclusive strata of temporality" and dwells in the in between, the moments when he is able to relive the stories he tells. His ability to create a home through remembrance is mediated through the graphic narrative which evokes the migrant's streams of temporality by recalling the presence of the past while projecting images of the future (Boehmer 73). Baloup's juxtaposition of the two palettes imaginatively draws the reader into the narrative and solicits their identification with the characters, countering the Brechtian distancing involved in reading graphic narratives. Their panoptic view of the panels allows readers to, at any given moment, focus on one panel, yet still see preceding panels and panels that follow. Positioning readers such that the "future that pulls [their] reading is



Fig. 15. Baloup's father shares his experience of the war in Saigon to Baloup while cooking.
Clément Baloup, *Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon*, 2018

already present, [and] the present . . . slip[s] back towards a past to which, in fact, it already belongs," pulls them into the multiple worlds in which the migrant inhabit (*Comics and Narration* 87). Baloup's use of flashbacks is demonstrative of how the migrant nostalgically reconstructs their present. In their superimposition of the migrant's past onto their present, flashbacks are a mark of the asynchronous poetics that imbues diasporic narratives allowing readers to vicariously experience the migrant's dual-displacement in space and time.

"There is no present that is not haunted by a past and a future" wrote Deleuze in *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (37-38). The ways in which the aforementioned texts construct home through remembrance captures this exact sentiment. In reflecting the imaginary homeland through "broken mirrors," it is evident that the poetics that undergirds these narratives is marked by asynchrony; breaks in time that manifest

in elliptical narratives, repetition, multivocality, juxtaposition, and flashbacks. Each time the absent homeland is recalled in these texts, either directly through stories of dislocation and re-rooting in *Vietnamese Memories*, or obliquely through *Transit's* depiction of cultural norms and practices and the embedding of values and beliefs in *Only a Girl's* third-person narrative, what takes place is a transmission of experiences from one generation to another. Vis-à-vis Hirsch's notion of postmemory, it is arguable that because of how "deeply and affectively" these past experiences have been passed down, they become "memories in their own right" and hence find their way into the present (107). These diasporic narratives, in their portrayal of how homemakers retroactively navigate the conceptual worlds of their past to understand their present, are charged with a potential to rewrite the grand colonial narratives of diaspora that presuppose a return to a "sacred" homeland and an eventual reconciliation with one's absolute identity. Instead, these inherited memories are reinscribed onto the palimpsest of diasporic collective memory to reconceptualize a diasporic Southeast Asian subjectivity that embraces a dynamic notion of both identity and home. One that is not merely "a revivalist nostalgia for an ancient or past sense of 'home,'" but one that gestures at the "possibilities of home hitherto unforeseen or unimagined," highlighting the potential of dwelling in an increasingly mobile age (O'Donoghue 371).

IV. THE POLITICAL PROMISE OF POSTCOLONIAL POETICS

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and
least-recognised need of the human soul”

—Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*

Simone Weil in *The Need for Roots*, poignantly summarizes the importance of rooting oneself in today’s highly mobile era: “[a] human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future” (43). The narratives explored in this monograph confront the Southeast Asian crisis of modernity through their asynchronous poetics, which in turn reflects the diasporic subject’s out-of-sync subjectivity. Using diaspora as a framework, these texts reveal how home can be conceptualized through recollection. Bauman’s dialectic of liquid and solid modernity addresses how home is a notion vulnerable to the flows of history and global economy. Since globalization and the rise of capital are seen to replace homemaking with a constant search for home, the value of economic openness is questioned, signalling a crisis of Southeast Asian modernity. On an individual level, Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling” offers an understanding of how one roots themselves in new spaces through the postmemory of their absent homeland. As they perceive the present retroactively, the inherited memories of their absent homeland allow them to conceptualize a dynamic understanding of both identity and home, while at the same time, sets up expectations for a future that once could not be envisioned. In demonstrating how a mapping of home on multiple scales allows the migrant to articulate their spatio-temporal displacement and to possibly reconcile the worlds they live in, the notion that a Southeast Asian subjectivity inheres in nationalism and national culture is subverted.

As seen in the stories, attempts made by the diasporic subject to synchronize themselves to the linear temporality of Western modernity only reveals an incompatibility as a result of the migrant’s spatio-temporal displacement. Their fragmented subjectivity bleeds through the asynchronous poetics that undergirds the narratives of these texts. As a structure of postcolonial poetics, the asynchronicity manifested in *Transit*’s juxtaposition of its closed and open cinematic form, the skilful integration of the impersonal third-person narrative with the thoughts and emotional truth of the characters in *Only a Girl* and *Vietnamese Memories*’ use of flashbacks as well as the heteroglossia inherent in graphic narratives transform these texts into examples of texts of cultural resistance. These obliquely resistant

stylistic features, suture the readers and spectators into the storyworlds of the narrative, and in doing so, encourage readerly engagement in the construction of meaning. Through their asynchronous poetics, these texts are a uniquely Southeast Asian response to empire as they challenge the totalizing concept of a single, static home, as well as essentialist notions of culture. Mediated through the fabric of memory, these stories allow for a renegotiation of the Southeast Asian diasporic identity. These texts displace the role of the colonizers as cartographers, instead allowing the diasporic subject to be the cartographer of their own map. By mapping home on multiple scales, the diasporic subject is able to dwell poetically according to their own out-of-sync spatio-temporal configuration. These stories carry forward, in different ways, the palimpsestical memories of the diasporic subject's absent homeland. What results is an awakening of the past that transcends these narratives. Following the publication of *Immigrés de Force*, the investigative novel that *Vietnamese Memories* is based on, "many villages and cities of France started to restore and honor the memory of those long-forgotten immigrants, as well as their own role in this chapter of French history" (Baloup 163). Indonesian universities began to use *Only a Girl* as required reading in their courses, and *Transit* has been critically recognized, screened at over 40 international film festivals and even included in one of MoMA's film series. The words that close *Vietnamese Memories Vol. 2* beautifully capture how cultural texts like these are able to reinscribe onto the palimpsest of collective memory the "many stories . . . , heroic journeys, tales of survival, and family dramas that people keep quietly to themselves" (248). It is these stories, that have been pushed to the footnotes of history that constitute the treasures of the past that Weil speaks of. Though it remains impossible for the migrant to completely reconcile their many conceptual worlds, perhaps it is only through the power of narrative that the indescribable enigma of the constant search for home can be captured.

NOTES

1. As set out in the ASEAN declaration, one of its main purposes is “[t]o accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region” (“About ASEAN”).
2. See Ng and Wagner 20.
3. See Heryanto’s chapter in *Contemporary Culture and Media in Asia* for a thorough investigation of postcolonial amnesia in the context of Indonesia (13-29).
4. Andersonian imagined communities (Anderson 49).
5. See Gilroy 133.
6. Several other studies also question the linear narrative of history. For examples, see Quijano 533-580 and Bhabha 173.
7. See Beja.
8. These include but are not limited to: “aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to ‘totalizing’ concepts” (Bhabha 173).
9. Understood here as the means by which “texts confer subjectivity upon,” readers and viewers (Silverman 195). See Butte’s *Suture and Narrative*, for a detailed reconceptualization of the term as “networks of deep intersubjectivities.”
10. Wilson and Dissanayake, in the introduction to *Global/Local*, assert that our “world-space is simultaneously growing more globalized and localized” (1). In light of this global/local assemblage, the lines on our maps that once marked clear demarcations of a nation’s geographical space as well as the ethnic identities its inhabitants associated themselves with, have become more porous than ever.
11. Echoes Dudley Andrew’s understanding of world cinema as that which “brings us precisely to the Earth, on which many worlds are lived and perceived concurrently” allowing us to make sense of the many conceptual worlds the migrant lives in (21).
12. Directly translated as “Vietnamese sojourner.”
13. Originally published a decade before *Vietnamese Memories, Immigrés de Force* documents Daum’s research on the forced migration of the 20,000 Indochinese during World War II.
14. The phrase was the source of a “historic misunderstanding during the first Indochina war as it was understood as “soldiers fighting for France,” when it really meant “worker for the war effort.” An important nuance during a war for independence (Baloup 131)
15. For more on the link between geography and phenomenology, see Buttimer.
16. In his seminal collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie speaks of the “broken mirrors,” through which a writer, who lives outside his homeland, perceives his homeland (11).
17. Dela Piedra outlines extensively the cultural significance of fireworks and firecrackers in Philippine culture ever since it was introduced by the Chinese.

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