

A Search for Space: Dislocation and Identity in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*

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Establishing clear parallels between past and present, between historical events and contemporary problems, Amy Tan expresses the feelings of the lovesick Chinese immigrant making their exit from the life of a beloved; their homeland. Amy Tan is an Asian American writer who is considered a guide to the landscape of the Asian American experience. The tensions in her dual heritage eventually found their way into her novels in her portrayal of the generational conflicts in immigrant families. The multiple spaces she inhabits- Asia and America- raise important questions about belonging, identity, ethnicity, migrancy, diaspora, nation and multiculturalism. The vitality of her writing spring from posing the stark contrast in the histories, cultures, languages and politics of the two places that Amy Tan inhabits.

The crucial events in Tan's novels are contained within definitive boundaries: a circumscribed Chinatown neighborhood, the tiny village of Changmian, one-room accommodations for Chinese pilots and their wives, a stuffy apartment crammed with elderly mah-jongg enthusiasts. Juxtaposing events separated by decades, Tan parallels the dislocations experienced by emigrants from a familiar culture into an alien one with their daughters' painful journeys from cultural confusion to acceptance of their dual heritage.

Tan's protagonists--members of that diaspora community called Asian Americans--represent two groups: Chinese-born immigrants imperfectly acculturated despite decades of life in America, and American-born women of Chinese ancestry, uncomfortably straddling the border between their ethnic heritage and the American milieu that is their home. Enmeshed by their shared histories in California's ethnic neighborhoods, the women in Tan's novels struggle to create personal identities that reflect their lives, needs, and desires.

The *Kitchen God's Wife* which explores dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship in the context of cultural and ethnic disjunctions focuses on a woman's journey to wholeness after an eventful life that replicates the Chinese immigrant experience in microcosm. Extracting from Winnie Louie's version of the story of the Kitchen God who achieves deity status when he proves to be capable of shame upon discovering that the wife he has mistreated still cares about his welfare Amy Tan depicts Winnie, the Kitchen God's wife is denied membership in the Chinese pantheon of deities despite her fidelity.

Presenting a widening rift between Winnie and her daughter, Pearl Tan has succeeded in narrating the fully developed chronicle of Winnie's life in China. Through her story, Pearl contextualizes Winnie's reminiscences, describing a series of events and revelations that ultimately changes their relationship. Required by family obligations to attend the funeral of an ancient "aunt" and the engagement party of a "cousin," Pearl spends more time with Winnie than she has in many months, and the enforced companionship prompts the younger woman to examine the roots of their estrangement. Winnie, goaded to action by a letter from China that closes a painful chapter in her past, decides to tell Pearl about her life in China. As a native-Chinese that ever faced too many predicament cultural identity problems, her behavior is hybrid in order to settle down her nativeness belongs to her western environment. Counter discourse happens and reflects the domination of Kwan Li over the Americans.

Although she has interwoven her cultural identity with colonial behaviour, but it is done in order imitating colonizer thus she influences them back. Besides, she is able to make her strange environment believe on her in the end of story, instead. Thus, her migration as first generation of diasporic people impacts on the contrary effect of migration. Her existence threatens western's domination as Young (2004) points out thoroughly within his book : "...characteristics of cultural movements became visible to Europeans in two ways: in the disruption of domestic culture and in the increasing anxiety about racial difference and racial amalgamation that was apparent as an effect of colonialism and enforced migration".

Stated by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) : "Transnational dimensions of cultural transformation –migration, displacement, diaspora, relocation- makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of cultural signification." (172) Back to the concept which has been revealed by Said, colonizer –occident- use to be superior to colonized people. Normally, the occident is upper than the orient.

Even though mixed race frequently happens thus impacts on cross cultural identity, occident is still supposed to be the upper. Otherwise, there is a consideration when the orient gives counter-discourse toward colonizer's reign and dominates them back. It is because transmigration of the colonizer or colonized people is based on colonial desire as it is mentioned in *Colonial Desire* (1994) : "Transmigration is the form taken by colonial desire, whose attraction and fantasies were no doubt complicit with colonialism itself ."(2) Colonized is only an object, but in many cases, colonized is always able to give response. Despite of their inferiority, they do crossed cultural identity and even more resist to the colonizer's culture. Moreover, they are also able to create domination over colonizer's power.

Tan examines identity--its construction, boundaries, and contexts. Indelibly branded by their visible ethnicity, Tan's characters daily negotiate the minefields of cultural disjunction and tensions between Chinese tradition and Americanization, family connections and individual desires. These tensions inevitably surface, causing intergenerational conflict and the disintegration of family relationships as the mother, the

member of the older generation, looks back to China while her daughter remains firmly connected to the new land. Unable to discover common ground, the two groups of women speak different languages, embrace different values, aspire to different ambitions, and lead divergent lives.

The novel chronicles the eventful life of Jiang Weili--Winnie's Chinese name--as she negotiates the difficult journey from a privileged childhood through an abusive marriage and the tragedy of war, and ultimately to a secure life in the United States. The daughter of a wealthy Shanghai merchant, Jiang Weili marries the dashing Wen Fu, only to discover after the wedding that he has misrepresented his family's wealth and status. Worse yet, he turns out to be an adulterer, abuser, and pathological liar. Forced to follow her pilot husband as he is posted to different cities during the war, Weili tries to be a good wife and mother, laboring to establish a home wherever they happen to be assigned. She must spend her dowry for family expenses when Wen Fu gambles away his pay or squanders it on a mistress. After silently enduring her miserable existence and the deaths of her two children, Winnie finally escapes to America and a new life with Jimmy Louie.

Amy Tan opts for an ethnic identity, which is understood as “the individual level of identification with a culturally defined collectivity, the sense on the part of the individual that she or he belongs to a particular cultural community. Amy Tan's novel is attracted and accommodated the issue of postcolonial instead in which Chinese-American's diaspora is related to cultural memory.

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behavior and code is very unlike and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human.

The novel explicates the feelings of exile and Diaspora, revealing the characters clutching to their roots and nostalgic for their homeland. The longing of the characters to revisit their past exposes their deep love and nostalgia for the land and sets the theme- longing, memory, homeland, nostalgia, diaspora and exile. Exploring the relationships between self-community and identity, Amy Tan highlights the heterogeneity of identity within community, as well as the traumas of change from outside pressures. There are ethical issues of massive proportions both in the time and locale of the story, issues which are alive and provocative now.

Amy Tan presents the events and details of the characters' struggles to find their identities in the postcolonial world, as well as immigrants' attempt to adapt to their new worlds. Post colonialism represents an attempt at transcending the historical definition of its primary object of study towards an extension of the historical and political notion of 'colonizing' to other forms of human exploitation, repression and dependency. The feeling of being left out of the cultural mainstream is uniquely reflected in the way. Amy

Tan's characters are displaced and consistently searching for a new identity, whether through emigration or re-inventing themselves through enlightenment.

The cultural ambivalence of the character's circumstances in the United States is conflictual and oppositional. The novel traces their struggles to survive; the emergence, for an agonizingly brief period, of a sense of community amongst them; and the eventual destruction of this community in the face of the brutality of larger social forces.

If the postcolonial novel is to be seen as a site of resistance in its ideological positioning within cultural institutions, its material referent and its condition of production is the postcolonial nation. Yet the postcolonial nation is neither unitary nor homogenous, but is actually the stage on which the social contradictions of class, gender, race and ethnicity are played out. Analogously, the world of the postcolonial novel is itself a radically fractured space, where different social groups contend for power and control, both of their world and of the narrative itself.

Postcolonial novel thus often highlights the contradictions inherent in the national imaginary. Far from viewing displacement and marginality as subject-positions that enable resistance, such that the margins of the nation displace the center, here marginality and resistance emerge as mutual exclusive terms. Through their vicissitudes, they cling to memories of China and to fading traces of their ancestral culture, and they eventually establish stable new lives for themselves.

Amy Tan demonstrates the universal theme of mother-daughter estrangement and reconciliation. Her fiction is more than a report of Chinese customs, and it speaks truths about relationships not confined to a single culture. The message of Tan's work lies not in analysis of each single detail but in the broader narrative. Like the mothers of her novels, Tan intrigues us with her stories and shares with us her interpersonal wisdom.

"Through storytelling, the daughters come to accept their mothers' and their own race and are willing to seek their ethnic and cultural roots" (242). Just as Jing-Mei and Olivia learn from Kwan and Suyuan's stories when the daughters put aside their criticism and close-minded assumptions, so will we learn when we put aside our attempts to label and limit Tan's work as either cultural ambassadorship or misrepresentation. When we read Tan's stories, she leads us into a world where differences are resolved by listening to each other.

A real artist portrays life during his inspired moments, when he can be equated with the lover and the lunatic. In such moments writers are prophets. They present before us not only what has happened or is happening to society, but also what might happen to it. For this reason Amy Tan will retain her value even after centuries.

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