

# Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal

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Volume 12

Issue 1 *An Other Moment: Un-Collapsing the Chinese Presence in the Caribbean*

Article 10

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May 2015

## 'Talking Back' in Post-Colonial Discourse in Staceyann Chin's *The Other Side of Paradise*

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### Recommended Citation

Morrissy, Julie (2015) "'Talking Back' in Post-Colonial Discourse in Staceyann Chin's *The Other Side of Paradise*," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol12/iss1/10>

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**Cover Page Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr Anne-Marie Lee-Loy for her guidance in my writing this paper.

In her 2009 memoir *The Other Side of Paradise*, Staceyann Chin recounts her turbulent childhood in Jamaica. However, her story is more than a sentimental dissection of the tribulations of growing up in a post-colonial society. Chin's memoir addresses the notable anxiety in post-colonial scholarship around the construction of binary divisions in the representation of the post-colonial subject, as well as the uneasiness surrounding generalized narratives of the post-colonial experience. As Stuart Hall notes in his essay "New Ethnicities," which explores the black experience in Britain, the concern is "not simply an absence or marginality of the black experience but with its simplification and its stereotypical character" (89). Such anxieties have been reiterated in the writing of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Patricia Mohammed, Aisha Khan, and Edward Said, to name but a few. The quest for a meaningful representation of the post-colonial subject remains crucial in challenging what Mohanty refers to in her article "Under Western Eyes," as the "Third World Difference" (243). Mohanty's concern is that, particularly in relation to perceptions of the post-colonial female, prominent scholarly discourse fails to interrogate adequately the division between western and non-western women, thus, serving to represent post-colonial women as one homogenous group. Chin's memoir produces a dynamic, multi-dimensional post-colonial subject by addressing her shifting loci of identification: in her very early childhood with her black roots, later with her Chinese heritage, then as a lesbian, and following that as a member of the Jamaican diaspora.

Chin's struggle to assert her voice both through oral means and through casual and professional life-writing demonstrates how she has consistently sought a representation of herself that encompasses her multi-dimensional experience of life in post-colonial Jamaica, both questioning norms of her own society and the perceptions of those outside of it. Chin's memoir constructs an identity that is what Stuart Hall refers to as "not outside but *within* representation" ("Cultural Identity" 236, my emphasis). In this way, Chin's work in the field of life-writing is integral to the development of a space from which others can speak, thus lending greater discursive weight to her narrative both as a vehicle for the exploration of her own sense of self and as a voice to other marginalized members of society. Further, and importantly, Chin's contribution as a diasporic writer significantly highlights Ien Ang's examination of the de-centered national subject, and the unique impact of the "symbolic space" from which the diasporic writer speaks.

In *The Other Side of Paradise*, as a half-black, half-Chinese native of Jamaica, Chin participates in the scholarly discourse on the important and complex challenge of representing the post-colonial female by focusing on her own negotiation of identity throughout her life. Chin's struggle in this respect is not uncommon given the history of the Chinese in the Caribbean. As a result of the colonial British indentured labor system, many Chinese laborers settled in

Jamaica and other islands in the West Indies (Lutz 135). Chinese families sometimes entered the West Indies as “contract ticket” immigrants, and a small number of Chinese also migrated with the assistance of Christian missionaries (Lutz 143). Although many of the Chinese who arrived as part of the indentured labor system did not renew their indenture contracts, it was often difficult for the Chinese to raise funds in order to make the journey home. Thus, Chinese communities continue to exist in the Caribbean today. Chin’s particular difficulty with her Chinese identity arises early in her childhood from the lack of clarity around her Chinese father’s relationship with her mother, and continues into her teenage years and later life, as she remains somewhat estranged from her father. Her personal struggle reflects both the complexities of the multicultural nature of Jamaican society and the aftereffects of colonialism. By disrupting the primary and secondary discourses that surround her youth, Chin succeeds in establishing an authorial voice that challenges essentialized perceptions of the post-colonial woman.

By advancing her voice and her self-representation in *The Other Side of Paradise* through interaction with both primary and secondary discourses, Chin challenges the ideologies and viewpoints, not only of her own immediate community, but also of the wider global community. James Gee defines discourse as an “identity kit” that includes “ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or...network” (Gee 21). However, discourses are inherently ideological, resistant to internal criticism, and closely related to the operation of social power and hierarchy in society (Gee 22). Gee uses the term “primary discourses” to describe the environments, usually familial, where an individual’s “first voice” emerges, whereas “secondary discourses” refer to “those requisite for participation in dominant, institutional literacies” through which the “second voice” develops (Zuss 655).

Initially in her childhood, Chin disrupts the ideology of her immediate community by “talking back” in primary discourse (hooks “Talking Back” 5). Chin establishes her “first voice” through interaction with her family, especially with her grandmother, her brother Delano, and her guardians. Later in life, Chin adapts her voice to align with secondary discourses in order to challenge further the ideologies formed therein. Gee explains that primary discourses, or “the oral mode,” develop through socialization with one’s family or close community (25). It is through such oral interactions that a child initially establishes the value of his/her own voice, or lack thereof. In Chin’s childhood, she begins to understand how to negotiate conversation with both her peers and with those in positions of dominance over her. Throughout her childhood, Chin is consistently admonished for interrupting, talking too much, and asking too many questions. Several times in the book, Chin’s grandmother refers to her “mouth being set on a spring”

(Chin, *Other Side*, 37). It is clear from Chin's memoir that the environment for a child in Jamaica is very similar to the one that bell hooks describes in "Talking Back" where she says, "children were meant to be seen and not heard" (5). Despite the scolding and punishment, Chin continues her attempts to assert her voice, particularly in relation to religion, gender and class.

Early in her memoir the reader notes Chin's skeptical attitude toward religion. Though raised by a religious grandmother in a religious community, and despite Chin's clear understanding of the significance of religion in the primary discourse, she is not deterred from questioning it. At the age of four Chin says, "Look at the people in the whole Bible, nobody in there look like me or you or Grandma. Everything look like a storybook. And there is no Black people, or Chinaman, and there is not even one verse about Jamaica – nothing that we have is in the Bible" (*Other Side* 43), illustrating Chin's struggle to identify with and fit into the cultural and ideological narratives surrounding her. Even as a child, she rejects a system that does not seem to have a particular place for her and her family. It is interesting in light of such rejection that Chin chooses to frame her memoir within a religious context, using biblical references as the titles for each chapter of the book. In his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall notes, "[all writers] write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history, and a culture which is specific ... all discourse is 'placed'" (222-23). By grounding her narrative with religious references, Chin attempts to make a place for her story within the biblical structure from which she previously felt alienated. Her use of such structure reflects how Chin represents herself from *within* her culture rather than placing herself outside of her culture and upbringing. It is important that Chin be seen as participant in her culture in order for her representation to have meaning to members of Jamaican society. Further, the strength of Chin's defiant voice throughout the novel is in its participatory nature, in that she challenges the surrounding discourses, not just as a diasporic writer who benefits from a removed perspective, but also as a member of Jamaican society herself. Not only does this incident demonstrate Chin's resistance to the role of religion in the surrounding primary discourse, it also touches on the very early formulations of her sense of self and identity.

The production of identity does not happen in a vacuum, and the intersections of Chin's racial and gendered identity operate in direct comparison to her brother Delano. After overhearing a conversation between her grandmother and a neighbor about the children's complexion, Chin asks Delano about their "whiteness" to which Delano responds, "We are not white like real white people. But we father is Chiney, so we not Black...but you know I am more whiter than you, right?" (Chin, *The Other Side of Paradise*, 16). When Chin challenges Delano, he points to the difference between the hair types of the two as evidence. Because Delano's hair is straight and Chin's is "rough," Delano is more white

(16). Chin's discomfort with her brother's essentializing formulation of her race is emblematic of the attempts made by post-colonial scholars to demystify the binaries surrounding race.

Delano attempts to assert a dominant position over his sister using a scientific formulation of race. Ang notes, "While scientific racism has long been discarded...it is in situations like these that the notion of race continues to thrive in everyday life, where race theories operate in practice as popular epistemologies of ethnic distinction, discrimination, and identification" (239). Chin resists such formulation, which may point to her inherent discomfort with scientific racism from an early age, or perhaps to her heightened awareness of race as a result of her personal circumstances and those of the society surrounding her. Grasping instead for an identity that she is more comfortable with, Chin, in this instance, aligns herself with their absentee mother, a notably important person to both children in attempting to form their identity. She says, "Okay, that must mean say me must look more like Mummy than you" (16). Chin's challenge and resolution to resist being reduced to a hair type demonstrates an intellectual sophistication beyond her four years, and a bold courage in her undermining her male counterpart.

In a later scene in the church, the Sunday school teacher scolds Chin for causing a disruption during the service. When Chin attempts to implicate her brother Miss Lerlene says, "In every house someone has to be in charge. Your brother is older and he is the boy. It is ordained in the scripture that a woman must yield to the will of the men in her family" (29). Here, primary and secondary discourses begin to intersect, with the institutional religious discourse dictating the terms of Chin's family life. In characteristic fashion, Chin remains defiant, and as punishment is forced to explain to her Sunday school class why she must always obey her brother. Chin's last thought on the matter is her desire to repeat the offence and hit Delano with her Bible again. Through Chin's continuous assertion of her "first voice" in the primary discourses of her childhood, she lays the groundwork that allows her to negotiate her voice as she moves into areas of secondary discourse, and eventually into professional life-writing.

Through her education Chin begins the crucial process of what bell hooks refers to as "chang[ing] the nature and direction of...speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard" ("Talking Back," 6). Whereas in her childhood Chin is constantly corrected for speaking out of turn, through secondary discourse she learns how to refine her speech in order to represent herself in a more fulfilling manner. As Zuss notes, primary discourses are often viewed as being "more natural [and] more representative of basic relational knowledges and selves than the secondary discourses [which are concerned with] more abstract or general classes of knowledge" (657). Such secondary discourses "require communication with non-intimates...and extend the uses of language

[one] acquires as part of [his/her] primary discourse” (Gee 25). Zuss discusses the problems with the “call for a return to primary discourses,” noting among them a romanticized notion that fails to address the “very real structures of hegemonic power and constraint” inherent in such discourses. By problematizing notions of gender, race, and class, Chin challenges those hegemonies in the primary discourses surrounding her.

Secondary discourse is, of course, fraught with institutional constraints that can serve to repress one’s voice; however, it is within this framework that Chin’s voice takes the vital step toward reification in the written word. This process is not without its difficulties. Chin faces many setbacks in her teenage years in her attempt to assert her voice, both in primary and secondary discourse. Chin’s “first voice” is immediately undermined upon her family’s arrival into Aunt June’s household. Aunt June criticizes Chin’s use of Patois, commanding “Not a bit of that language in here. In here we speak in proper English” (*Other Side* 32). Aunt June’s insistence on “proper English” is symptomatic of Chin’s institutionalization into a colonial system of language and power. As Cliff notes, such restrictions are meant to “tame” the wildness of the first voice (qtd. in Zuss 658), and thus, take the speaker closer to the dominant forms of power. Her aunt’s position replicates the devaluation of native/developed linguistic forms by the colonial master.

Although Chin learns to adapt her speech to the secondary discourse, she does not make a full switch, and often communicates in Patois with Delano and her grandmother in the absence of Aunt June. Chin quickly realizes the relation between language and identity, and the importance of negotiating this space. Later, her schoolmates in Montego Bay mock Chin’s “proper” speech, saying, “Listen to how she talk speaky-spokey!” (*Other Side* 114). Although she remains self-conscious about her speech, Chin overcomes her insecurity and comes to understand when secondary discourse serves a purpose and when it does not. For example, Chin continues to use Patois in her exchanges with Miss John’s daughter, Elisha, in the Paradise Island household, but during the same time speaks in formal English to her schoolmates at Mount Alvernia. Chin understands the role of language when moving through different societal spaces within Jamaica, and uses her liminality in this regard in order to assimilate to both her home life and her school life.

Similar many Caribbean intellectuals’ and authors’ life narratives, Chin’s education has an important in the establishment of her written voice. Chin performs well in school, being awarded gold stars for story writing and comprehension (*Other Side* 45). In losing elements of her first voice, Chin gains from her ability to adapt by succeeding at school and forging her way forward in ways that had eluded other females in her family. She becomes highly focused on her education, determined to succeed in her entrance exams and attend a reputable

high school. By the time Chin moves into Miss John's house in Paradise at ten years old, her childhood has already been deeply fragmented. She has been passed from her grandmother, to Aunt June, to her own mother, then to Miss John, all the while her voice and behavior being strictly governed by those responsible for her. The Blood Lane household on Paradise Island proves to be an exceptionally difficult place for Chin to assert her voice. In this household where, in spite of the physical and sexual assaults committed against her, Chin begins to use her education to explore her voice through life writing.

During her life in Blood Lane, Chin makes efforts to explore her Chinese background in order to build her identity. Her quest in this regard showcases Chin's ability to seek out knowledge and support, thus, enabling her to survive in difficult circumstances. Although Chin has known of her father's existence from a young age, she only learns the details of his life when she starts attending school in Montego Bay. The children poke fun at her whiteness and her Chinese heritage, saying, "Chinese people eat dead cat and dog with mange" (*Other Side* 114). Chin strikes back by taking ownership of her racial background, and distancing herself from her black origins. She screams, "Leave me alone! I don't bother any of you. If I am a red mongoose, then all of you are black like john crows and dunce as bats" (114). More and more while living in Miss John's house, Chin allies herself with the Chinese members of the community. She boldly contacts her father and meets with him. Despite his rejection of Chin as his daughter, she continues to entreat him for financial support in order to continue her schooling. Chin also connects with Uncle Desmond, her father's brother, whose family provides a nurturing atmosphere for Chin. During this time, Chin also reaches out to Delano, who has a limited interest in her, but through the rekindling of her sibling relationship, she forges a strong bond with Delano's Chinese father Mr. Charles. Over the coming years, Mr. Charles consistently provides money for her education, as well as welcoming her into his home.

Chin asserts her Chinese identity in two separate defining moments at Blood Lane. The first is when Chin acquires a new bathing suit from her friend Natalia. Elisha comments on how white Chin looks when she is wearing it. Further, Elisha says that it because of her whiteness that Miss John does not like her. Chin responds by saying "How much time I must tell you? I am not white! I am *half-Chinese!*" (185, author's emphasis). When Chin presents herself in the bathing suit to Miss John, she is the victim of a severe beating. She talks back, even after the beating, leading to Miss John warning her to "keep her stinking mouth shut" (189). In instances such as this one, Chin's voice remains strong.

Chin's defiance is notable later in the memoir when she goes against Miss John's instructions not to have her hair straightened. This is another example of Chin's conscious forging of a Chinese identity. When she sees her newly

straightened hair Chin says, “For the first time in my life I feel beautiful. Now I really look like my father could be Uncle Hartley or Uncle Charlie or Junior Chin” (204). Her statement emphasizes the importance of her having a father figure in her life, as well as her positive attitude towards her Chinese roots. Although straight hair is generally accepted as a sign of beauty in Jamaican culture (Miller and Girvan 363), Chin specifically notes that her new hairstyle brings her closer in appearance to her Chinese heritage. In many black cultures, straightening one’s hair also signifies the assertion of womanhood and a move toward a sexual identity. As hooks notes, “To arrive at that point where one’s hair could be straightened was to move from being perceived as child (whose hair could be neatly combed and braided) to being almost a woman. It was this moment of transition my sisters and I longed for” (“Straightening Our Hair”). These small resistant acts illuminate a period in Chin’s life when she is especially invested in creating a Chinese identity for herself, and perhaps also signify the beginning of her grappling with womanhood.

Chin gets an opportunity to assert her voice publicly through life writing when she is invited to make the speech at her graduation. The speech is a wonderful example of primary and secondary discourses coming together, and an example of Chin’s use of the formalized language of her education to give a powerful message. In the end, as she accidentally forgets the script for her speech, Chin is forced to hash together elements of her “first voice” and the voice that she has refined through her education. Chin finds freedom in the experience of telling her personal story, and says, “I feel as though someone has lifted half my weight away. I promise myself that as long as I live I will never tell another lie again” (*Other Side* 219). The speech is a success with her audience and represents another important step that Chin makes in asserting her voice through writing, as well as a step forward into the next phase of her life.

Although such examples demonstrate the ways in which Chin strongly establishes her voice, there are equally many instances where her voice is repressed. In relation to the secondary discourse of her education, Chin’s voice is kept hidden in a significant way when she writes her journal assignment for school. This represents Chin’s first attempt at life writing, and she uses it as an opportunity to tell the truth about her home life and her desires. Much of her life at school is spent hiding where she lives and where she comes from, but in the journal Chin explores her true voice in writing. Despite taking great care to hide the journal at home, Miss John finds it and punishes Chin harshly for its contents. She also forces Chin to rewrite the journal and submit it to her for approval before handing it in at school. In the wake of this incident, Miss John calls Chin’s grandfather over to the house to admonish her. The meeting goes more smoothly than Chin expects, but as her grandfather speaks Chin says to herself, “*I am not a Jennings. I will never be a Jennings and have no desire to be a Jennings or a*

*Jennings virgin. I am a Chin and even though my father doesn't want me I am always going to be a Chin!*" (*Other Side* 197, author's emphasis). Even though Miss John succeeds in quelling Chin's voice in this instance, her attempt to write about her life in a manner that rings true to her is foundational to her professional life writing. Chin is constantly working toward building an identity for herself with which she feels comfortable. Even when facing the ideologies of her surrounding primary discourse, she clings to the elements of her voice that she feels represent her.

However, during her time living in Blood Lane, Chin is the victim of several sexual assaults perpetrated by two of Miss John's sons and by the local pastor. When Chin tries to tell Miss John about the details of the assaults by her sons, the blame is placed on her for not having any "manners" (*Other Side* 121). In the incident with the pastor, Chin asserts herself but does not report the assault to anyone else. She says, "Since nothing actually happened to me in there, there's actually nothing for me to tell" (*Other Side* 176). This statement demonstrates the power of ideology behind both the primary and secondary discourses surrounding Chin. The pastor is protected by the church, but also in her prior complaints to Miss John, Chin has been repeatedly told that she is bringing these assaults on herself, and as is seen in Chin's childhood, the primary discourse generally protects the male in a situation of conflict.

Chin's efforts to create an authentic multi-dimensional identity reflect Ang's commentary on the relationship between "descent" and "consent" in the formulation of race (242). Perhaps at this point in her life Chin associates Chineseness with a certain kindness and benevolence, whereas her interactions with her black roots thus far, such as her experiences with her mother, Aunt June, and Miss John, have generally been traumatic and oppressive. She may also be resisting categorization in any sort of totalizing fashion, and thus, attempting to embrace a more holistic form of identity that allows her to represent several sides of herself at once. As Ang notes, liberating oneself from a single identity in this way "allows diasporic subjects to break out of the prisonhouse of [race] and embrace lives – personal, social, political – ...[in order to] to construct open-ended and plural...identities through investments in continuing cross-influences of diverse, lateral, unanticipated intercultural encounters in the world at large" (241). Chin's consciousness in the construction of her identity at this adolescent stage of her life foreshadows the ways in which she continues to question limitations placed on her identity in adulthood.

Chin continues to take control of her identity and to make her voice heard throughout her university education. With her transfer to the University of the West Indies, Chin is exposed to new and progressive perspectives that compliment her search for identity. During this time she struggles with her sexual identity, paying attention to her attraction to women for the first time. At first,

Chin channels this attraction by “writing love letters that [she] will never send,” again using the written word to explore her deepest desires (*Other Side* 243). Her hesitancy is understandable in the cultural context of attitudes towards homosexuality in Jamaica. Kamala Kempadoo explores the issue of homophobia in her 2003 article “Sexuality in the Caribbean” noting in particular Barry Chevannes’ statement that “homophobia is particularly intense in the Anglophone Caribbean, with Jamaica perhaps heading the ranking” (qtd. in Kempadoo 75). In fact, it is only as a result of Chin’s liberating experience during her time in New York City that she returns to Jamaica ready to unveil her identity as a lesbian.

Chin’s move from Jamaica to New York City is crucial to the memoir’s role in developing the “future” of Chin’s identity and her consequential status as a diasporic post-colonial writer. Chin’s confidence to explore her sexual identity comes as a result of her time spent in New York City. Speaking in an interview about her immigration and the assault she experienced in Jamaica as a result of her sexual orientation, Chin states, “[While in New York City] I acquired a language for my condition...and started claiming a sexual identity...I made a switch and said if this is what can happen [in Jamaica], and this is what has happened here, then I am going back to where I imagine this wouldn’t happen quite as easily” (“Chat with Staceyann Chin”). By spending time outside of Jamaica, Chin gains clarity in relation to the ways in which her voice is limited by Jamaican cultural norms. She realizes that neither can she safely assert her voice, nor can she challenge such norms, from within the borders of Jamaica.

At this point in the memoir Chin returns to a more untamed “first voice,” much like the voice of her childhood. She is vocal and outspoken about her sexual orientation in a way that makes many of her friends and peers uncomfortable. People begin to turn away from Chin, afraid of the consequences of being her friend. In the epilogue to the book Chin states, “I wish I hadn’t been so hard on my friends when I came out in Jamaica” (*Other Side* 275). Chin’s regret perhaps reflects a feeling that in her eagerness to assert her sexual identity, she failed to make her speech one that could be heard (hooks, “Talking Back” 6). Yet, Chin’s ostracism and assault in reaction to her homosexuality suggests it is not simply a case of Chin’s first voice being too raw or aggressive for those around her to nurture her homosexuality, but that the ideology and cultural context of Jamaica at that time was too heavily opposed to homosexuality for her voice to be heard.

Chin’s emergence into the world of professional life-writing marks the powerful integration of her “first voice” with the more formalized voice that she learned through secondary discourses, such as her education. In bringing together all facets of her voice, Chin manages to achieve the kind of “*métissage*.” Zuss defines *métissage* as “a writing and weaving of plural, often contradictory, aspects of identity, [that] offer critical interventions through which narratives of selves may be composed and revised” (653-54). Thus, Chin emerges not as a person who

can be reduced to race, gender, culture, or nationality, but one who sees herself as a blend of all of these identities at once. Chin shatters any reductive representation of the “third world woman” as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic [and] family-oriented,” (Mohanty 243). Rather, Chin revels in the multiplicity of her identity, exploring in her memoir her experience of her Chinese heritage, her Black heritage, her femininity, her national identity as a Jamaican, her effective status as an orphan, and her sexual identity. It is in such “refusal to allow finalization or dichotomization” that Chin effectively challenges perceptions of the post-colonial experience as single and unifying. Hélene Cixous notes her struggle with the question, “in whose name do I write?”(qtd. in Zuss 663). Chin, however, does not write in any one name. The strength of Chin’s voice is found at the “material intersections of gender, race and class” (Zuss 661). In her insistence on liberation through her expression of a life experience that is not constrained by the task of representation of a single group. Her continued efforts to draw awareness to the intersections of identity are crucial in challenging reductive or essentialist views of the post-colonial female.

As well addressing the reductive formation of the post-colonial female, Chin’s memoir problematizes ideas of creolisation and *mestizaje*. In her article “Good to think? Creolisation, Optimism, Agency,” Aisha Khan questions the usefulness of narratives surrounding creolisation, or “combinations or ‘mixes’ of cultures, phenotypes, religions, or genders” (653). Khan’s skepticism arises from a concern that creolisation often obfuscates the issues within societies in which multiple groups are present. Khan is particularly concerned about the gap between “the ethnographic and the theoretical” (664), and the notion that agency is somehow inherent in the concept of creolisation (653). In this way, the struggles implicit in forging an identity in a mixed society, such as Jamaica, can be glossed over or celebrated without due regard to the impact of those differences. Khan’s article underscores the difficulties with such “over determined macro narratives” that fail to be “in dialogue with concrete developments on the ground” (664). Chin’s non-fiction narrative strives to disrupt simplified concepts such as creolisation by highlighting her particular “on the ground” struggle in establishing a blended identity in a creole society. Certainly, Chin’s narrative cannot be labeled especially optimistic; she does not shy away from the traumatic events of her youth, many of which are connected with her blended identity. Chin’s story falls under, what Khan terms, “deviation” rather than “diversity.” Through the assertion of her blended identity Chin does more than “depart from normative models” of Jamaican society, but especially in building her sexual identity, she attempts to achieve a “modification of the norm” (Khan 657). Whereas creolization masks the tensions in society in regards to certain kinds of difference, Chin’s narrative lifts the veil of such overarching concepts, thus moving the debate from the ideological or the general to the specific.

Diversity may well be celebrated as part of the national rhetoric in Creole societies as Khan suggests; Chin's memoir, however, draws such epideictic narratives into sharp contrast with her own experience. Despite the value of the lived experience represented in "mininarratives" such as Chin's (Khan 664), these types of narratives are not without problems. In reality, what is necessary is a meaningful concept of creolisation that does more than just celebrate superficial differences while ignoring the more challenging issues that come with such differences. There is a danger that each story like Chin's becomes fragmented from the larger issues, and thus, viewed as a stand-alone commentary holding little weight in challenging the status quo. Especially for a highly nuanced narrative like Chin's that is perhaps not wholly representative of the general experience of the marginalized members of Jamaican society, there must be a connection to a larger cultural narrative in order for her story not to be dismissed as untypical. Chin makes the same challenges in her life writing to the concepts and ideologies that bolster national discourse in Jamaica that Khan makes in her scholarly work. Both women attempt to carve out space for deviation from cultural norms rather than paying simple lip service to a superficial notion of diversity. Chin's memoir does not serve to romanticize notions of hybridity or creolisation, rather the opposite.

Chin's creative work is also very much about finding her own voice, as it is a part of the body of works that represents the post-colonial subject more broadly. The type of personal exploration that Chin embarks on in *The Other Side of Paradise* has a two-fold impact. The genre of life writing can be considered in the same way as Hall's conception of Third Cinema in which creative representations of the post-colonial subject are not merely "mirror[s] held up to reflect what already exists, but [are] a form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak" (236-37). Therefore, Chin is not only explaining her discomfort with her identity throughout her life, but she is also *building* an identity through her exploration. Chin's narrative becomes a part of the story of post-colonial Jamaica, and so it is both "expressive" and "formative" when it comes to forming cultural identity (Hall "New Ethnicities" 91). The discomfort that Chin has experienced throughout her life as a result of her blended identity forces her to move away from the "essentialized past" to which Hall refers, and towards an identity, which despite maintaining a historical, cultural and personal context, at the same time allows the emergence of a more dynamic, liberated version of herself as a post-colonial subject. Further, in her memoir Chin's exploration of identity does not seek a specific end point – there seems to be no sense in which she envisions her identity an "accomplished fact" (Hall "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 222). Chin's continued search, both while in Jamaica and in the United States, as elaborated on in the epilogue of the book, demonstrates

her identity as being a constant re-positioning of herself throughout her life. Thus, Chin's memoir "belongs to the future as much as to the past" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 222).

In her quest to continue to assert this dynamic post-colonial identity, Chin feels it is necessary for her to leave Jamaica. Through the publication of her memoir, her appearances on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *60 Minutes*, as well as her performances on Broadway and off-Broadway, Chin's representation of the post-colonial female as multi-faceted and diverse has reached far beyond the island of Jamaica. Chin's self-imposed exile is both interesting and important in light of Stuart Hall's emphasis on representations from within a culture. For a diasporic writer like Chin, her physical removal from Jamaica could result in the questioning of her authenticity and the value of her message to her culture of origin. Ien Ang's article "Can One Say No To Chineseness?" illuminates issues around the value of diasporic writing in the formation of cultural identity. Ang explores the role of diaspora in expanding a "cultural" center separate from the geopolitical homeland, which allows the development of "a newly constructed cultural space...that both encompasses and transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries that normally define [culture]" (228). Chin's emigration is valuable, if not crucial, to the formation of a larger Jamaican cultural identity because of, rather than in spite of, her exile. Chin seeks a lifestyle that is not available to her in Jamaica; however, through her emigration she continues to assert her voice, as she has done throughout her life, in order to broaden perceptions of cultural identity abroad, and to draw attention to constraints within her own culture.

In this sense, diasporic writers speak for those members of their own societies who cannot be easily represented from within those societies. It is in such diasporic spaces that issues, such as the hostility towards homosexuality in Jamaica, can be addressed and spoken about in a meaningful, and safe, way while still asserting one's cultural identity. Without contributions like Chin's, it is quite likely that the voice of those marginalized members within Jamaican society would remain silenced. Thus, Chin's memoir provides a dialogue between the diaspora, or de-centered culture, and the geopolitical, territorial center that is Jamaica. Within such diasporic space Chin continues to constitute her identity as part of the Jamaican culture, even from outside of that culture.

Her status as a diasporic writer allows Chin to unsettle and challenge the norms of the society from which she originates, albeit as a peripheral member. She says herself that as a result of her settling in Brooklyn "There is a way that who I speak for and why I speak began to widen" ("Chat with Staceyann Chin"). The importance of *The Other Side of Paradise* as a literary work is not only in using the written word to work through the anguish of her personal experience, but also in establishing that voice and her identity in life-writing, Chin's lived

experience becomes part of a wider Jamaican cultural identity. Further, through her constantly evolving identity Chin comes to represent a variety of individuals and collective groups both inside and outside of Jamaica.

Chin's choice to leave Jamaica in adulthood reflects that of many prominent Caribbean writers such as Andrew Salkey, Sylvia Winter, Elizabeth Nunez, and Margaret Cezair-Thompson. Specifically discussing notions of Chineseness, Ang interrogates whether representation from the periphery can sometimes be "at the expense of the center" and poses that such concerns are "a clear indication of the increasingly self-confident voice of some...intellectuals in diaspora" (229). *The Other Side of Paradise* is an excellent example of a non-fiction narrative that achieves both transforming essentialized perceptions of the post-colonial subject and contributing to the development and progression of post-colonial societies themselves. Chin's memoir, along with her entire body of creative work, makes a pivotal contribution to the existing scholarly and creative work in realm of the post-colonial and the diasporic experience. The importance of work like Chin's must not be underestimated in its ability to transform, challenge and overcome many areas of difference, and in its dogged refusal to accept stereotypical attitudes that originate both within her own culture and outside of it.

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