



from ***Inbetweenness***

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In the beginning, there was One, and then there was Two, the second. The one became the Self and the second became the Other and with both came definition and identity, which in turn, bore the undefined, the space in between.

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In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes:

... no matter what position [the ethnic-feminist writer] decides to take, she will sooner or later find herself driven into situations where she is made to feel she must choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties? (6)¹

The key word is “conflicting.” Because those identities are not allowed to equally coexist—I cannot be a writer of color AND a woman writer. One identity must supercede the other. “To ‘belong,’ we must fragment and exclude particular parts of our identity” (Alsultany 106).² Forced to create hierarchies of difference, my self fractures; I have to choose. “I thought I had to choose to be either Indian or American and that I could not be both at the same time” (Milczarek-Desai 126).³ In choosing, I must question: in choosing to explore WOMAN over ETHNIC, what narrative am I choosing? Then I must confront the reality: choice is futile. I (my words), either desirable or undesirable, am determined desirable or

¹ Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989.

² Alsultany, Evelyn. “Los Intersticios: Recasting Moving Selves.” *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002. 106-110.

³ Milczarek-Desai, Shefali. “Living Fearlessly With and Within Differences: My Search for Identity Beyond Categories and Contradictions.” *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002. 126-135.

undesirable by someone else, by an entire history of someone else. My words (I am) are necessarily political and politicized by both myself and my other. I have no choice of politicization, of choosing to avoid identities, of invisibility, because politicization is exposure. Politicization is evidence of existence. Politicization is survival.

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A new twist to an old question: if an Asian-American writer does not write about Asian-American issues, is s/he still an Asian-American writer? Does difference have to be claimed in order for it to matter? And does it matter if I, as the writer, claim my difference, when it will be claimed for me regardless?

In order to promote their community and support their own, minority groups set up organizations, scholarships and prizes to recognize the work of people in their communities. Often, the organizations seek out people who consciously, actively claim and express their difference—for artists, this is through language (medium) and subject matter. As an Asian-American writer who doesn't write about Asian-American issues, I expect to be overlooked in the Asian-American context. Neither my language nor my subject matter are sufficiently imbued with overtly Asian-American issues for it to be found explicitly relevant to Asian-Americans, thus, my words are overlooked by the Asian-American community. But I AM Asian-American, so neither can my words express the norm in the mainstream context. I experience a double rejection.

Similarly : the inbetween identity “crisis.” An inbetween writer is neither of one world, nor of the other. But in a society that demands choice between “one” and “other,” the inbetween writer will always have to choose between one or the other. Either I move towards the ASIAN and away from the AMERICAN (read: the “Asian mafia,” which is what Asians who have exclusively Asian friends are referred to on high school and college campuses), or toward AMERICAN and away from ASIAN (read: “not Asian enough”). Much like struggle the woman writer-of-color faces to make a choice between WOMAN or ETHNIC (“[H]ow can they? You never have/are one without the other” (Trinh 104)), the inbetween writer never can sever the second part of the hyphen or description from her/his identity. An inbetween writer's life is a negotiation between the two “extremes,” the two branches of the binary. When the first generation writer writes, s/he is at once navigating

AND creating the inbetween (because there was no inbetween before, there was only one, or the other.).

A difference between the inbetween writer and the notbetween writer: one might describe the typical writing experience as *about* the self—personal or collective, actual or theoretical. The inbetween writer will necessarily always be writing *to* the self and, at the same time, *writing the self*, writing to create the self:

I didn't know who or what I was, only that I was
each question answered by the echo of my voice alone: I, I, I.
("Generation" Kim)⁴

The inbetween writer is in the strange position of creating the self s/he is writing towards by writing towards the self. "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you" (Anzaldúa 187).⁵

The inbetween writer experiences a displacement of the self similar to that of the exile writer. Exile writers, in an attempt to resolve and negotiate their physical displacement, write towards the homeland. Even if the homeland no longer exists, it did exist and becomes an ideal to write towards. The inbetween writer experiences more than just displacement—physical and emotional. S/he experiences nonexistence:

Being both Indian and German, German and Indian, I want my face to be unreadable. Where does the Germanness begin and the Indianness end? And yet at times I am unreadable to myself, as my face seems to be neither Indian nor German. Maybe people are right after all, and I am really Portuguese. Sometimes I look Italian to myself. (Banerjee 117)⁶

Like an indefinable that exists only relative to the definable, the inbetween writer exists only as relative to the notbetweens. Banerjee is only what others perceive her as. Because of this, the self cannot locate the self; the inbetween body is "always at odds with [her/him]self who is no self at all" (Trinh 52). So the inbetween writer *has* to write her/himself into existence—"writing myself into existence ... means emptying myself of all that I can empty

⁴ Kim, Suji Kwock. *Notes from the Divided Country*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

⁵ *This Bridge Called My Back: writings by radical women of color*. Ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Berkeley: Third Woman Press: 2002.

⁶ Banerjee, Mita. "The Hipness of Mediation: A Hyphenated German Existence." *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002. 117-125.

out ... without ceasing from being”—because writing is a means to negotiate how s/he is being defined by others and how s/he wants to define her/himself (Trinh 37).

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When one has difference, one spends an entire life apologizing.

I am either apologizing to the dominant culture for my language difference, or apologizing to my community (and to my self) for not being fluent enough in my language difference. Caught between languages, those who are inbetween are forever held responsible to translating their selves, and must constantly apologize for not belonging properly to either tongue. “But we Chicanos no longer feel we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step” (Anzaldúa “Preface” 2).⁷

To resist culturally defining the self is death by nonexistence. Self-definition only counts if it happens publicly, if someone else consumes one’s self. So the inbetween body chooses an identity out of necessity, all the while realizing choice is moot. Because identity, especially that of a person of the inbetween, a person outside the norm, cannot exist without interpretation, without someone else to do the identifying.

⁷ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Co., 1987.

