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“Back and Forth Between the Sea and the Mountain”: Negative Mobility and Transnationalism in Hualing Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach*

Grazia Micheli

- 1 The following analysis of *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1998) by the Chinese American writer Hualing Nieh focuses on how the text portrays transnationalism and mobility negatively.¹ In our hyper-connected world, travelling has become available to many people, and mobility is often associated with ideas of freedom and self-realisation. Yet immigrants’ tales can uncover a dark, alienating side of mobility. *Mulberry and Peach* offers a female counterpart to Asian American novels produced by male writers who present mobility as negative, such as Carlos Bulosan in *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (1946). The protagonist of Nieh’s novel, Mulberry, is a Chinese refugee woman who is forced to relocate across China, Taiwan and the United States between 1945 and 1970 to escape war as well as male and institutional violence. Placed in a transnational web against her will, Mulberry refuses to attach herself to any nation, as both China and the United States are fraught with violence. Thus, she develops what might be regarded as a negative version of transnationalism. Mulberry is doomed to wander perpetually, and, at the same time, she is trapped in a frightening in-between space. As a result, she develops a multiple personality disorder that will haunt her for the rest of her life.

Beyond China: Reading *Mulberry and Peach* as a Transnational Asian American Text

- 2 As the novel was written in Chinese (桑青与桃红, *Sangqing yu Taohong*) by a female immigrant in the United States who had been in exile in Taiwan, *Mulberry and Peach* “has been claimed as an example of modern Chinese literature, overseas Chinese

literature, literature by writers from Taiwan, literature of exile, diasporic literature, Asian American literature, feminist literature, border-crossing literature" (Wong 210). Literary critics who have focused on the Chinese tradition of the novel have read *Mulberry and Peach* as an allegory of modern Chinese history, the protagonist being a symbol of the self-exiled "Wandering Chinese" obsessed with China² and her split personality a metaphor of the division between Nationalists and Communists (Pai; Lee; Yu). Other critics have concentrated on the Asian American dimension of the text and on Mulberry's experience as a female immigrant who travels from China to the United States, thus also looking at gender (Amato; Chen; Chiu; Cho; Greenberg; Feng; Fusco; Wong).

- 3 This essay further develops the discussion on Mulberry's unstable condition as a female immigrant by introducing the idea of a negative transnationalism. I draw the concept of transnationalism from social sciences that have used it to theorise the immigrant's experience of being attached to more than one country—whereas diasporic approaches tend to focus on the unilateral ties to the originary/ancestral homeland. Before the 1990s, the term "transnationalism" was mainly employed in economic and political sciences, and, in its earliest usage, it was a synonym for international relations (Clavin 433). Subsequently, the adjective "transnational" acquired the meaning that can be found in contemporary dictionaries: "extending or having interests extending beyond national bounds or frontiers" (Oxford English Dictionary). The term related to "large-scale and powerful actors such as multinational companies and, to a lesser extent, political parties" (Faist 1673). The term was first used in relation to immigrants by Randolph S. Bourne in his 1916 article "Trans-national America." It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that "transnationalism" was used again with regard to immigrants, and it spread especially after social scientists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc used it to refer to "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (48).
- 4 In my study of *Mulberry and Peach*, I reverse and problematise this concept. Indeed, critics such as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have highlighted the limits of standard definitions of transnationalism and the need to reframe and expand them. Mulberry's story demonstrates that transnational ties are not as positive and enriching as social scientists tend to suggest (Portes; Vertovec): Mulberry rejects transnational ties, but they are nevertheless imposed upon her, which has devastating existential effects on her. In addition, although social scientists usually consider transnationalism as a typical phenomenon of the contemporary, capitalistic era (Glick Schiller *et al.*; Vertovec), *Mulberry and Peach* shows that transnationalism is relevant to earlier contexts.
- 5 Recent discussions on mobility as framed by critics such as Mimi Sheller and John Urry are also worth taking into account. In describing the "new mobilities paradigm," Sheller and Urry explain how such a paradigm challenges both "*sedentarist* theories" (208) and "*nomadic* theory [that] celebrates [...] metaphors of travel and flight" (210). Thus, while acknowledging the centrality of mobility in today's world, the "new mobilities paradigm" does not uncritically praise mobility. Instead, it explores how mobility is often accompanied by immobility; how people are denied mobility depending on their race, class and gender; and how mobility does not always coincide

with freedom as it can be coerced. For Mulberry, a female refugee, mobility does not represent an opportunity: it is imposed on her, and it turns into a form of immobility.

- 6 Nieh combines Eastern and Western literary techniques and borrows both modernist and postmodernist techniques such as interior monologue, montage and pastiche from the Western literary tradition. Considering that *Mulberry and Peach* was first published in Chinese in 1976, it represents one of the earliest examples of modernist and postmodernist Asian American texts together with Chuang Hua's *Crossings* (1968), the better-known *The Woman Warrior* (1976) by Maxine Hong Kingston and *Dictée* (1982) by Theresa Cha. Evidently, modernist and postmodernist literary devices, by creating fragmentary and heterogeneous texts, are particularly suited to give voice to the equally fragmented, plural subjectivities of immigrants and their descendants. Ethnic-minority writers have often been expected to create realistic portraits of their community and its history. This literature is thus reduced to the status of historical or sociological document; hence the lack of critical attention toward the aesthetic aspects of their works. In *Mulberry and Peach*, form matters: "Nieh's innovativeness reveals itself not only in the text's structure but also in its diction, syntax, and even page layout: variations in sentence length and rhythm, paragraph structure, and typography are carefully correlated with narrative content" (Wong 211). As Nieh herself has pointed out, "in art, form is one of the artistic expressions. Form has meaning too" (quoted in Nazareth 17).
- 7 Yu-Fang Cho reads Chinese literary modernism as a legacy of U.S. cultural hegemony in post-war Taiwan as well as, more generally, a trace of Euro-American imperialism in Asia. He explains that Nieh was part of a group of writers who relocated from mainland China to Taiwan after the Communist takeover in 1949. These writers "formed the mainstay in the modernism movement and dissident voices that challenged the Nationalist government's dictatorship in Taiwan" (161). Thus, Nieh's use of both modernist and postmodernist techniques reveals the transnational links between China and the United States, and it contributes to the novel's transnationality³ as Nieh's style is not purely Chinese but is also infused with Western influences.
- 8 The publication history of *Mulberry and Peach* further confirms the transnationality of this text. *Sangqing yu Taohong* was first serialised in a Taiwanese magazine in the early 1970s. The serialisation was soon interrupted as the novel was considered immoral for its satire of the Nationalist regime. The novel was finally published in Hong Kong in 1976, and a second, expurgated edition appeared in Beijing in 1980. Nieh agreed to such intervention in her novel because that was the only way to see it published in China at the time. The unexpurgated version was published on the mainland in 1989. The text was translated into English in 1981 by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin and published in Beijing by New World Press and in New York by Sino Publishing Company. Changes were made by New World Press, which was "under government control, like all publishers on the mainland at the time" (Wong 149). The altered version appeared in Great Britain in 1986, published by The Women's Press. In 1988, Beacon Press of Boston published a version based on the original manuscript but later dropped the title because of unsatisfactory sales (Wong 225). The text was republished in 1998 by the Feminist Press at the City University of New York.
- 9 Despite the English translation and the fact that Nieh lives and writes in America, *Mulberry and Peach* is still an overlooked text outside the Asian American literary field. This is certainly true for many other Asian American works with probably the

exception of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989). According to Sheng-mei Ma, these authors' success is determined by their ability to satisfy the dominant American readership's appetite for "exotic (hence ethnographic) and politically correct (hence feminist) readings" (12). Monica Chiu compares the success of *Jasmine* with the invisibility of *Mulberry and Peach* and affirms that "*Jasmine's* reception [...] becomes representative of 'acceptable' women's immigration trials [...]. Meanwhile, less positively concluding and more difficult novels, like *Mulberry and Peach*, attract scant critical attention and are relegated to library shelves" (20). Thus, Jasmine's ostensibly successful assimilation into the U.S. social fabric may facilitate its appeal for an American audience.

- 10 Initially, under the influence of cultural nationalism—which represents the earliest phase of Asian American studies—and its emphasis on Americanness, *Mulberry and Peach*, like other overseas Chinese novels, did not receive much attention from Asian American critics either. Cultural nationalism defined Asian Americans as those who were born in America, spoke English as their mother tongue and knew Asia through the media. Consequently, if membership in the Asian American canon "is dependent upon being born in America [...] those who lie outside this imagined community are pushed into a form of symbolic literary exile" (Amato 34-35). Not only was Nieh not born in the United States but also, unlike writers such as Mukherjee, she kept writing in her mother tongue. Furthermore, overseas Chinese authors' "continued identification with the socio-political realities of their homelands" reinforced their exclusion from early Asian American literary scholarship (Amato 34). Thus, "until recently overseas Chinese works from the U.S. [...] were usually considered the sole terrain of Chinese literature or area studies departments" (Amato 35). It is only after the transnational turn that such texts have been rediscovered to some extent.
- 11 The transnational turn in Asian American studies represents its most recent development: it emerged in the late 1980s in response to post-1965 demographic changes in the Asian American population as well as to the phenomenon of globalisation. After the 1965 Immigration Act, much more diverse Asian populations—in terms of gender, class and region—started migrating to the United States in larger numbers. The transnational phase was especially inaugurated by Lisa Lowe's article "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity," published in 1991. Lowe introduces the idea that there is no unifying or fixed Asian American identity but rather heterogeneous, hybrid and multiple Asian American identities. The arrival of a significant number of Asian immigrants also meant that it no longer made sense to define Asian American identity and literature on the basis of American origin and English language proficiency. Thus, the United States stopped being the pivot around which Asian American identity and literature were supposed to revolve according to cultural nationalism. The transnational turn has led critics to consider the works of Asian immigrants like Nieh as well as of American-born Asians and to explore the connections between Asia and America in their works. Indeed, the transnational approach sees immigrants not as individuals who need to be assimilated into the host society but as active agents able to build networks of social relations that span borders and link them to their country of origin as well as country of settlement.
- 12 As for *Mulberry and Peach*, only a transnational reading could do justice to this "border-crossing" text: "because the protagonist's journey originates in China and continues on to the United States, [...] the novel could be understood as a text spanning the Chinese

and the Chinese American, the Asian and the Asian American" (Wong 131). Thus, "Sinocentric readings" (Wong 137) of this novel need to be integrated with readings that account for the Asian American dimension of the text. My analysis endorses this transnational perspective and contributes to establishing *Mulberry and Peach* as a transnational Asian American text since, although it was originally written in Chinese, it reaches beyond Chinese borders in terms of content, form and reception.

- 13 This study is based on the English translation (by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin) since, although translation is limited in its ability to convey a perfectly corresponding version of the original text, here it highlights the transnationality of the text. Indeed, the translation of *Mulberry and Peach* into English has made the text available to an Anglophone audience, thus increasing its already transnational character. As long as the text was only read by a Chinese-speaking audience, its transnationality in terms of content was barely acknowledged (because of the focus on its Chinese aspects), and it was definitely not transnational in terms of its circulation and reception. Studying this work in the light of the transnational turn in American and Asian American studies consequently draws attention to the transnational connections between the United States and China and their literatures while also problematizing too positive views of transnationalism and mobility.

Mulberry and Peach: A Story of Im/mobility and In-betweenness

Escaping War and Violence

- 14 *Mulberry and Peach* is divided into four parts preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue. In the prologue, the protagonist, Peach, discusses her identity with a U.S. immigration officer: she claims that Mulberry (her former self) is dead. Each part of the novel opens with a letter from a defiant Peach to the U.S. immigration officer, telling him about her relocations across the United States and including a map of her itineraries. Each letter is followed by an extract from Mulberry's diary. The time span covers some of the most significant events in twentieth-century Chinese history (broadly understood to include Taiwan): the Sino-Japanese war, the Communist takeover and the White Terror in Taiwan. In the first part (1945), on the eve of the Chinese victory over the Japanese, sixteen-year-old Mulberry escapes from the war and her dysfunctional family but is stranded on a boat with other refugees in a Yangtze River gorge. In the second part (1948-1949), shortly before the Communist takeover, Mulberry flees to besieged Beijing where she marries Shen Chia-kang, the son of a declining upper-class family to whom she was betrothed from childhood. Part Three (1957-1959) sees the couple escaping to Taiwan where they are forced to live hidden in an attic with their eight-year-old daughter Sang-wa because Chia-kang has embezzled funds from the bank where he worked. In the last part (1969-1970), Mulberry is alone in the United States: she is an illegal alien chased by the Immigration Service and pregnant with an illegitimate child. In this part, Peach takes over Mulberry. The epilogue retells a Chinese myth.
- 15 Mulberry/Peach escapes war and political repression but also male violence. In Part Two, male violence and oppression are portrayed through Mulberry's relationship with Chia-kang who objectifies her as "a vehicle in service of male sexual desire and

patrilineal reproduction" (Cho 175). Mulberry has no other choice but to marry him: "she is bounded by the arranged marriage and she does not have a home to which to return. [...] she cannot escape her role dictated by the patriarchal script" (Cho 176). At the wedding, the master of ceremonies says to Mulberry: "I will quote from *The Classic for Girls* the following words of advice: 'A woman must submit to her husband'" (89). He then adds: "May your sons and grandsons be without end" (89). Mulberry wants to escape this patriarchal order that puts her in a lower position than men and imposes on her the established role of wife and mother.

- 16 Her journey to America, however, does not secure her a final escape from male violence and oppression. Here, Mulberry/Peach has an affair with Chiang I-po, a Chinese professor married to a white woman. I-po, like Chia-kang, uses Mulberry/Peach to reclaim his masculinity (see Cho) but does not want to compromise his social position and so demands that she has an abortion when he finds out that she is pregnant with his child. Although Mulberry/Peach wants to keep the baby, Mulberry knows that she is "*an alien with no way out I must get an abortion*" (201; emphasis in original). Her position as an illegal immigrant in the United States does not give her the security she needs: if her application for permanent residency is unsuccessful she will be deported although "*the Chinese are foreigners who haven't any place to be deported to*" (182; emphasis in original). Mulberry declares of her pregnancy: "*an illegitimate child with no roots I don't have the courage to keep it*" (193; emphasis in original). She herself is now rootless as adverse circumstances and the experience of violence preclude a physical and psychological return to China.
- 17 Furthermore, in both countries, Mulberry/Peach is subjected to state control. The attic where Mulberry, Chia-kang and their daughter hide symbolizes the "claustrophobic political policies" of the Taiwanese government in those years (known as "White Terror") and their "alienating effects" (Amato 39).⁴ The family "can't stand up straight" (118) because the room is too small, they "don't dare stand in front of the window for fear someone might see [them]" (118), and they cannot talk aloud so they write words with their fingertips on each other's palm or use matches to reproduce ideograms. As a consequence, conversations are very short and compressed; sometimes they are a sequence of isolated words:

SOMEONE ON ROOF

RAT

MAN

WHO

SOMEONE IS FOLLOWING US (117)

This conversation between Mulberry and Chia-kang also reveals Mulberry's persecution complex, a sign of her declining mental health rendered on the formal level by the repetition of the same words and phrases. Indeed, "the narrative style of this section of the novel is obsessive in its use of iteration" (Fusco). Some examples include: "The noise on the attic roof has started up again" (116); "On the roof the gnawing is beginning again" (121); "The rat teeth on the roof gnaw into my body" (121); "Tonight there is no gnawing on the roof" (123); "The noise on the roof starts up again" (125). Thus, the language and images used in this section effectively reflect the sense of oppression within a tight and isolated space and the resulting sense of alienation further exacerbated by the prohibition to communicate or move freely.

- 18 State power is embodied in Part Four by the U.S. immigration officer, a meaningfully neutral and anonymous figure:

He is dressed in a dark suit with a black and grey striped tie. He wears sunglasses, although it's an overcast day. The dark lenses disguise the only distinguishing part of his face: eyebrows, eyes, the bridge of his nose. Only the anonymous parts are visible: bald head, sharp chin, high forehead, beak nose, and pencil-thin moustache. (3)

As Serena Fusco notes, the officer is "almost parodic in his anonymous de-humanization." Peach, however, calls him "Mr. Dark" (3; emphasis added), thus providing him with a masculine gender and reinforcing the idea that violence is primarily masculine. Mr. Dark wants to determine Mulberry's identity on the sole basis of her behavior: "What we want to investigate isn't your state of mind, your emotions, or your motivations. I'll say it again; what we want to investigate is your behavior" (165). Therefore, Mulberry is not considered a human being whose actions are driven by a variety of reasons and feelings: she is just an "alien" whose identity is dictated by the numerical sequence "89-785-462" (3).⁵

- 19 Mr. Dark demands that Mulberry/Peach be loyal to the American government if she wants to obtain permanent residency. Mulberry protests that she is Chinese but is forced to confirm her U.S. loyalty:

"Are you loyal to the American government?"

"I'm Chinese."

"But you're applying for permanent residency in America. Are you loyal to the American government?"

"Yes." (165)

Mr. Dark's language is coercive and does not leave much freedom of speech or room for maneuver to Mulberry. Thus, "from the Mainland, to Taiwan, to the U.S., Nie [*sic*] places her protagonist(s) in the middle of a complex and inescapably transnational web" where Mulberry is subjected to the pressure of "a double request of political loyalty" (Fusco n. pag.). Therefore, if Mulberry's split personality can be read as a metaphor of "political disintegration" (Pai 210) or "political irreconciliation" (Chiu 24) in China (namely the division between Nationalists and Communists but also between mainland China and Taiwan), such national divisions actually develop on a larger, transnational scale. Mulberry is required to choose between Right and Left but also between the United States and China. Yet America and Asia are not two separate entities: not only because many Asian immigrants chose to inhabit U.S. soil (especially after the 1965 Immigration Act) but also because of U.S. involvement in Asian matters—of which the Vietnam War is a prime example.

- 20 Thus, Mulberry is forcibly placed within a transnational network that turns into a trap. Throughout the novel, Mulberry's limited freedom is rendered by the juxtaposition of images of mobility and immobility. While Mulberry is often placed within confining spaces such as the refugees' boat, the Shens' house, the attic and Taiwan itself ("Taiwan is a green eye floating alone on the sea" [118]), in her letters Peach seems to celebrate the American myth of mobility and, particularly, of Westward movement:

He [a Polish lumberjack] wanted to go east. I wanted to go west. (159)

I'm wandering around these places shown on the map. [...] Sometimes I hitchhike. Sometimes I take a bus. As soon as I get somewhere, I leave. I don't have any particular destination. I'm always on the road. [...] One by one, the horizons sink behind me and new ones rise ahead of me. (11)

Yet "when an Asian American mobility narrative consciously alludes to Westward movement as a possible structuring principle, the effect is typically ironic" (Wong 127).

Although Peach claims to be headed West, she does not move Westward but in a circle (Feng 147) in contrast with the American myth of Westward movement.

- 21 Furthermore, Peach's optimistic tone is easily destroyed in a context of forced migration. While

she seems to have complete agency and control over her movement [...] [h]er ostensible mobility [...] is forever haunted by the reality of her *forced* flight across the United States: the constant threat of the officer's efforts to hunt her down, to mark her as an illegal alien, and to deport her. (Cho 164; emphasis added)

- 22 Another example of forced relocation is Peach's banishment from the water tower where she was living with a Polish lumberjack and where she had decided to have her baby. Before leaving, Peach hangs a wooden plaque

imitating what was written on the plaque that the astronauts left on the moon:

A WOMAN WHO CAME FROM AN UNKNOWN PLANET
ONCE LIVED IN THE WATER TOWER
22 FEBRUARY 1970-21 MARCH 1970
I CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND (159; emphasis added)

The reference to the unknown planet presents Peach as an "alien": such designation is given real substance by the U.S. Immigration Service which actually labels her as "(Alien) number 89-785-462" (3). Moreover, just as the astronauts left the moon after their exploration, so too as an "alien" Mulberry will actually never be able to settle in the United States. Mulberry's reworking of the moon plaque reveals her desire to "claim America" (see Feng 147): she portrays her presence in America as a conquest, but she is aware that her foreignness will prevent her from staying longer.

- 23 Immigrants' tales of mobility, therefore, often constitute a counter-discourse to exalted portrayals of the same themes of mobility and travel. Mobility is, in this case, a necessity or even an imposition. As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong affirms, there is

one striking difference [...] between mainstream and Asian American discourses on mobility. In the former, [...] movement across the North American continent regularly connotes independence, freedom, an opportunity for individual actualization and/or societal renewal [...]. In the latter, however, it is usually associated with subjugation, coercion, impossibility of fulfillment for self or community—in short, Necessity. (121)

Wong's classification is perhaps too rigid given that novels such as Mukherjee's *Jasmine* or John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) end on an optimistic note, implying a movement toward America that is liberatory, full of hope, warmth and light. The same is true for Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*: yet the ending contrasts with the fact that, throughout the novel, mobility does not translate into a linear movement toward a final resolution. In fact, mobility is dictated by reasons that are out of the protagonist's control, and so he embarks upon a directionless journey at the end of which he does not achieve what he was looking for. As for Mulberry and Peach, they are both compelled to cross multiple borders without actually wanting to do so because of the war and as a result of male and institutional violence. Hence, although images of confinement, imprisonment and immobility seem to conflict with Mulberry/Peach's endless relocations, both mobility and immobility constitute a form of oppression and a cause of suffering, what Cho calls "immobility within mobility" or "im/mobility" (160).

Mulberry/Peach: Fragmentation and Multiplicity

- 24 In order to avoid the trauma of another relocation and of male and institutional control, Mulberry recedes and metaphorically dies to make way for Peach who is not afraid of the U.S. Immigration Service or of travelling and is assertive in her relationships with men. Nieh describes Mulberry's metamorphosis into Peach as a process of disappearance and rebirth:

I grope my way into the bathtub. As I sink down into the water, I become a new woman [...] all my pains vanish. All feelings of suspicion, fear, and guilt disappear. The water warms my whole body. I am translucent as water.
It is wonderful to be alive. (166)

The symbolic image of water is usually associated with both death (as in flood mythologies) and rebirth (as in the Christian baptism) as well as with the erasure of a definite identity. Mulberry, becoming as "translucent as water," a natural element that takes the shape of its container, can abandon her previous identity and acquire a new one. Yet Peach emerges from Mulberry's trauma, and therefore represents an illness that will destroy rather than save Mulberry.

- 25 Interior monologue, a typically modernist technique, is largely used to express Mulberry/Peach's thoughts, especially in Part Four where Peach and Mulberry emerge as two distinct voices (in Mulberry's narrative). However, just as the final transition from Mulberry to Peach happens almost imperceptibly, so too does the splitting of their voices. To distinguish between them, the author italicises Mulberry's thoughts, but she does not explicitly indicate who is talking. Therefore, it is the reader's task to understand and follow the shifts between voices. It is only after some time that Peach openly addresses Mulberry, making it clear that the italicised paragraphs report Mulberry's thoughts:

My finger tips [sic] hurt suddenly I realise that the cigarette I'm holding is burning my fingers my shoes are splattered with mud on the table beside the bed there's a half-drunk Bloody Mary. What's happened to me. I never touched alcohol cigarettes or mud.
[...]

It was my joke. You're dead, Mulberry. I have come to life. I've been alive all along. But now I have broken free. You don't know me, but I know you. I'm completely different from you. We are temporarily inhabiting the same body. (182-183)

Mulberry's speech is an example of stream of consciousness: while Peach's thoughts are somewhat more rational (e.g. conventional punctuation and a logical sequence of thoughts), the syntax in Mulberry's speech more closely reproduces the ramblings of the mind (e.g. lack of punctuation and flows of sentences without conjunctions). Mulberry is indeed the character suffering from the mental illness whereas Peach is the mental illness, what makes Mulberry delirious.

- 26 Other modernist features of *Mulberry and Peach* are its non-linearity and fragmentation, which reflect Mulberry's "fractured self-images [...] coupling the novel's [...] form with function" (Chiu 22). To begin with, the protagonist's duality is rendered on the formal level by the juxtaposition of Peach's letters and Mulberry's diary entries—which in turn are directed to a double audience, that is, the U.S. immigration officer and the addressees. As Cho observes, "the entire novel consistently juxtaposes two fragmented temporalities (in Peach's letters and Mulberry's diaries), dual geographical references (the United States versus 'Chinas'), and alternate voices of Mulberry/Peach" (159). The epistolary or diary form, being constituted by a series of letters or diary entries, is in itself fragmentary, and it is often employed to give voice to a fragmented rather than a

unitary self (Goldsmith cited in Greenberg 278). Moreover, although Mulberry's diary entries follow a chronological order, such order is fragmented and disrupted by numerous flashbacks and by Peach's letters.

- 27 Generally, in *Mulberry and Peach*, syntax is also quite fragmented. Both sentences and paragraphs tend to be short, thus contributing to the text's fragmentation:

Our boat lurches along the crest of a wave, bobbing up and down, then lunges downstream like a wild horse set loose.

There's a crash. The boat stops.
The drum stops. The cursing stops.
We're stranded on the rocks. (25)

Taiwan is a green eye floating alone on the sea.

To the east is the eyelid.
To the south is a corner of the eye.
To the west another eyelid.
To the north, the other corner of the eye.
The sea surrounds the eyelids and the corner of the eye. (118)

As it is possible to see from these excerpts, language is charged with symbolism and poetic rhythm as it plays with short sentences, repetition, enumeration and assonance.

- 28 To increase the text's fragmentation, Nieh makes use of the literary device of montage⁶ by inserting in the text heterogeneous materials such as maps, drawings, newspaper clippings, slogans, popular stories, rhymes and songs. The text presents other typical features of "montage literature" such as "syntactic contractions and breaks, or visualizations through an emphasis on typography [...]. Furthermore, it stresses intermediality by experimenting with discourses of modern communication technologies: newspaper, radio, film" (Barndt *et al.*). For instance, in Part Two, the narration is frequently interrupted by the radio whose "talking" is signaled by the italicized font: "*'I, the commander, am mounted on my horse, and I am busy looking for signs of movement. [...]' Chia-kang keeps moving the radio dial back and forth*" (78). Capital letters are also used to report the materials mentioned above, thus providing the text with a visual quality that recalls fragmentation. Indeed, the usual fullness and homogeneity of the conventional written page is disrupted by the insertion of variously formatted written fragments or of drawings. Nieh also employs, although to a lesser extent, the postmodernist technique of pastiche, reproducing, for instance, fragments taken from Beatles songs or from Buddhist texts.

- 29 All these features combine to provide the reader with a sense of the protagonist's fragmented self. Moreover, through the heterogeneity of its formatting as well as of the fragments it incorporates, the text reflects the protagonist's multiplicity: her multiple identities and multiple (re)locations. In addition, there is no single narrative voice in the text but three: an omniscient narrator (in the prologue); Peach's voice; and Mulberry's—although, as mentioned earlier, shifts between voices are often not marked, thus providing a sense of fluidity between voices that are, in fact, one. Thus, the fragmentary and heterogeneous nature of the text strengthens Nieh's depiction of the protagonist as a fragmented and plural subject, traumatised and destroyed by forced mobility and transnationalism.

- 30 Another post-modernist feature of the text is its metafictionality. Usually, the epistolary genre implies its own authenticity. The letters that compose the novels suggest the genre's value as artifact, and editorial introductions often

reiterate the text's status as found material. This is a fiction, of course, but one that explicitly asks the reader to suspend disbelief, to treat the material as historical sources. (Greenberg 273)

But here the presence of a "theatrical apparatus" (Chen 96) that introduces the characters and the setting draws attention to the fictional nature of both Peach's letters and Mulberry's diary entries. The author added the paratext (i.e. the subtitle and the lists of the characters) to the English translation to make the text more understandable to the Anglophone reader. Yet this paratext also plays a subtler role: by revealing the fictionality of the narrative, it presents the text as an allegory rather than as an accurate account of Mulberry/Peach's life. By adding the subtitle "*Two Women of China*," Nieh also establishes a link between individual and nation, private and public, thus anticipating that the novel is a metaphor for "what it is to be Chinese in the twentieth century" (Nieh in Nazareth 12).

- 31 However, Mulberry/Peach is actually "stateless—a wanderer cut off from homeland, family, and community" (Wong 220), and if she is "a representative of the Chinese in diaspora" (220), she nevertheless rejects China as well as America. Jean Amato affirms that "there is no security of an essential homeland to go back to in this novel—no comfort zone" (39). Cho further argues that *Mulberry and Peach* "does not cast exile in a sentimental light, imagining home, and by extension, the nation, as the authentic origin of belonging and return" (187). This is why it would be wrong to read the protagonist's mental illness "as an active resistance to assimilation and as a reaffirmation of the character's 'Chineseness'" (Martin 348). Nonetheless, not only can Mulberry/Peach not return home but she also cannot stay in America.
- 32 Therefore, Mulberry/Peach's story does not belong either to the diasporic or to the assimilationist paradigm. As a matter of fact, various forms of violence encountered both in China and America make Mulberry/Peach reluctant to choose between one or the other. Pin-chia Feng's statement that *Mulberry and Peach* is "about how a Chinese diasporic woman turns American" (147) ignores the fact that if Mulberry/Peach wants to claim America, she soon has to come to terms with its hostile reality. Thus, Mulberry/Peach experiences a negative kind of transnationalism: instead of establishing links between her homeland and her host land, she rejects any national attachment. *Mulberry and Peach* conveys that transnational ties are not necessarily as enabling as sociologists tend to suggest: the protagonist is forcibly placed within a transnational web that traps her rather than enriches her.
- 33 Hence, Mulberry remains in a "liminal" position (Feng 138), a frightening in-between space that causes "a vertiginous unbalancing of life and self" (Roberson 11). Susan Roberson points out that "for the immigrant, exile, or refugee, living in diasporic border zones multiplies identities, loyalties, voices, and violence, making the diaspora a site of hybridity and alienation" (12). Therefore, hybridity can be a resource, but it also entails violence: as Lowe argues,

hybridization is not the 'free' oscillation between or among chosen identities. It is the uneven process through which immigrant communities encounter the violences of the U.S. state, and the capital imperatives served by the United States and by the Asian states from which they come, and the process through which they survive those violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives. (82)

But even though Mulberry survives, her solution to end her suffering, turning into Peach, does not work as expected: "the agency she gains depends on her psychic

fragmentation into two different personae, a fragmentation that the Mulberry persona [...] finds terrifying and not at all enabling" (Greenberg 287). As a matter of fact, Mulberry keeps re-emerging and is plunged into a state of confusion and fear: "*How could I have done such a shameless thing [...] I don't even recognize myself!*" (177); "*Does this face in the mirror belong to me?*" (195). These excerpts vividly convey Mulberry's state of disorientation and distress, her terror as she realizes that she has become a threat to herself and that she has lost every anchor, even her own self. Mulberry is ultimately an unbalanced, alienated and destroyed character, resisting "notions of the malleable and empowered postmodern subject, the border-crossing nomad, the happy transnational" (Chiu 30-31). Mobility destroys her, and having no place to go is traumatic.

Conclusion

- 34 The epilogue further confirms Mulberry's in-betweenness, her troublingly liminal, transnational positioning. Nieh retells a Chinese myth: Nu-wa, the daughter of a god, drowns in the sea (hence the metaphor of water recurs) but "refuses to die" (207) and so transforms herself into a bird. Princess Bird goes to live on a mountain but flies "back and forth between the Sea and the Mountain" (207), each time carrying a pebble in her beak in order to turn the sea into solid ground. There is definitely something positive about Princess Bird's resilience and confidence ("I will do it if it takes me billions and trillions of years, until the end of the world" [207]), but a sense of desperation is also intrinsic to this story. The final sentence, "To this day, Princess Bird is flying back and forth between the Sea and the Mountain" (207), suggests that Princess Bird will never accomplish her impossible task and will always fly "back and forth." Similarly, Mulberry rejects physical death and so turns into Peach. Mulberry, however, will always come back, weaker but conscious that Peach is destroying her.
- 35 Princess Bird's story also implies that Mulberry/Peach will never stop wandering, and so she will always be a foreigner. If identity can be constructed outside the national space (Feng 145), Mulberry/Peach's grievous state indicates that this is not a desirable condition. The tale of Princess Bird stresses "the impossibility [...] to find a real home, either permanent or temporary" (Cho 180) and how this constitutes a cause of suffering. Nieh "constructs the movement from China to America as incomplete, as an oscillation between 'Chineseness' and an (im)possible translation and absorption within a 'Chinese American' identity label" (Fusco n. pag.). It is precisely this "oscillation," this movement "back and forth," that marks the desperation in Princess Bird's tale as it recalls trauma through repetition. Trauma, "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" is a "pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals" (Caruth 1-3). Hence, traumatic events keep coming back for those who lived them.
- 36 To conclude, Nieh makes use of modernist and post-modernist literary techniques such as interior monologue, stream of consciousness, montage, pastiche, metafictionality, and a fragmented and non-linear narrative structure. These and other formal features combine to give substance to a fragmented and multiple character, destroyed by coerced mobility and transnationalism. Mulberry/Peach's forced relocations disrupt positive notions and narratives of mobility and travel. Mobility is imposed on the immigrant and refugee, and so it does not represent an experience of liberation and self-fulfillment but a form of oppression and, therefore, paradoxical immobility.

Mulberry has to escape war and state control, and, as a woman, she has to face male abuse as well. Her pregnancy makes her even more vulnerable and complicates her situation. She needs to find a home for herself and her child, but both China and the United States are unsuitable, being places of violence and oppression. As a result, she does not forge any form of attachment to either Asia or America, experiencing a negative kind of transnationalism. Mulberry/Peach is placed within a transnational network (China-Taiwan-US) against her will, and so transnational ties turn from a powerful resource into a trap. Living outside and between national borders is eventually painful, causing the protagonist's descent into madness.

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NOTES

1. Part of this paper was presented at the inaugural British Association for Contemporary Literary Studies - What Happens Now Conference (Loughborough University, July 2018) and at the 45th Austrian Association for American Studies Conference "American Im/Mobilities" (University of Vienna, November 2018). I would like to thank Dr. Ruth Maxey and Dr. Gillian Roberts for their support and their useful comments and the two anonymous reviewers of *Transatlantica* for their insightful suggestions.
2. The expression "obsession with China" was coined by C. T. Hsia in 1971 to describe the work of modern overseas Chinese writers.
3. I use the term "transnationalism" to indicate the *process* of forging relations to more than one nation and "transnationality" to refer to the condition or *quality* of being transnational.
4. The attic also recalls Nieh's own state of isolation in Taiwan after the closure of *Free China*, the magazine where she worked from 1949 to 1960.
5. The American legal system defines as "alien" a person who is not a citizen.
6. Montage is usually associated with Soviet cinema of the 1920s and particularly with the theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (Barndt *et al.*).

ABSTRACTS

Increased mobility and interconnection have characterized the end of the twentieth century. "Globalization' is on everybody's lips," Z. Bauman wrote in 1998, and travelling is within everyone's reach, a clichéd idea that evokes images of freedom and self-realisation. Yet immigrants' tales often reveal that mobility and transnational ties can be negative and alienating. Through an analysis of *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1976/1998) by the Asian American writer Hualing Nieh, this essay focuses on the negative outcomes of coerced mobility and transnationalism. The protagonist, Mulberry, is a Chinese refugee woman who is forced to relocate across China, Taiwan and the United States to escape war as well as male and institutional violence. If by "transnationalism" we mean "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Glick Schiller *et al.* 48), in *Mulberry and Peach* the author depicts a negative version of transnationalism. Placed in a transnational web against her will, Mulberry refuses to establish links with any nation, as both China and the United States are fraught with violence. She is therefore doomed to wander perpetually, and, at the same time, she is trapped in a frightening in-between space that causes "a vertiginous unbalancing of life and self" (Roberson 11).

Dans un siècle caractérisé par des phénomènes de mobilité et d'interconnexion accrues, Z. Bauman a pu écrire : « 'Globalization' is on everybody's lips » (Bauman, 1998, 1) et voyager est à la portée de tous ; ce cliché évoque des images de liberté et de réalisation de soi. Toutefois, les récits d'immigrés révèlent souvent que la mobilité et les liens transnationaux peuvent être négatifs et aliénants. A travers une analyse de *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1976/1998) par l'auteure asiatique-américaine Hualing Nieh, cet article entend se concentrer sur les résultats négatifs d'une mobilité et d'un transnationalisme forcés. La protagoniste, Mulberry, est une réfugiée chinoise qui se déplace à travers la Chine, Taïwan et les États-Unis pour échapper à la guerre et à la violence masculine et institutionnelle. Si par « transnationalisme » on entend « the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement » (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1995, 48), dans *Mulberry and Peach*, l'auteure décrit l'envers de ce processus. Placée dans un réseau transnational contre sa volonté, Mulberry refuse toute association avec la moindre nation dans la mesure où elle se retrouve confrontée à une même violence tant en Chine qu'aux États-Unis. Elle est donc condamnée à une errance perpétuelle et, dans le même temps, elle se retrouve piégée dans un entre-deux effrayant et vertigineux (« a vertiginous unbalancing of life and self », Roberson, 1998, 11).

INDEX

Mots-clés: Mulberry and Peach, Hualing Nieh, littérature asiatique-américaine, immigration, mobilité, transnationalisme, traumatisme

Keywords: Mulberry and Peach, Hualing Nieh, Asian American literature, immigration, mobility, transnationalism, trauma

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