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## **Ghosts here and there : spectral resistance and the ethics of ghosts in postcolonial literature**

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## Introduction

If ghosts are old, they are certainly not tired. (Blanco and Peeren, *Popular Ghosts* ix)

To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our ghosts. (Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* 191)

Ghosts are intriguing and powerful. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “ghost” as the synonym for “specter” that refers to “the soul of a deceased person, spoken of as appearing in a visible form, or otherwise manifesting its presence, to the living.” It usually refers to the scary spirit of the unsettled dead that disturbs the life of the living and haunts our unjust memories. In addition to its similarity to the meaning of specter, “ghost” is also defined as “a slight trace or vestige of something” (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*). According to this definition, Michael M. Bell employs the term in a broader sense and defines it as “the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there” or “a felt *presence*—an anima, *geist*, or genius—that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place,” a person, or a thing (Bell 813, 816). As a figure of absent presence, ghosts are unintelligible and invisible to rational knowledge and science. However, they are still very real. They play vital roles in religious beliefs, cultural traditions, literary narratives and everyday discourse, representing an essence, a memory, or unexplainable feelings that can be experienced through our social and human sensibilities.

For instance, in my home country Taiwan, due to our Buddhist and Confucian ideological roots, most people believe that the spirit of every person stays in the world and continuously affects the lives of the living after s/he has passed away. Thus, many people worship their ancestors, hoping that the

spirits of the ancestors can protect them. They also hold a ceremony for ghosts that are considered to be the spirits of those who die lonely or secretly and have no one to worship them as ancestors. During the month of the ghost—the lunar month of July—they worship and devote paper money to these ghosts, begging them not to disturb or harm the living.<sup>1</sup> These traditions reveal how the people pay their respects to the unknown or the spiritual domain, and how they determine their relationships with life and death, presence and absence, the real and the unreal.

Traditions of ghost narratives like these have served roles and hold crucial symbolic values in different cultures and across a variety of periods. Tracing back to prehistoric times, stories of ghosts have been used to explain phenomena that could not be understood rationally, such as death and natural disasters. In the European as well as American cultural heritage, ghosts in literature express concerns about mortality, cultural discontinuity in the face of shifting social conditions, and psychological mechanisms of the living population.<sup>2</sup> In several Asian countries, ghosts are used to signify something

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<sup>1</sup> The seventh month is believed by many followers of Buddhism to be a time when ghosts and spirits come out of the lower realm and interact with people. So a Ghost Festival of sorts is honored, paying homage to ancestors through various rituals designed to ease the suffering of ghosts and possibly aid in direction. In Chinese culture, the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar is called Ghost Day and the seventh month in general is regarded as the Ghost month (鬼月), in which ghosts and spirits come out from the Underworld and move among the living. The annual Hungry Ghost Festival, celebrated on Ghost Day in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and elsewhere in the Chinese diaspora, is dedicated to performing rituals to honor and remember the spirits of the dead. Families prepare food and other offerings and place them on a shrine dedicated to deceased relatives. Incense and paper money are burned and other rituals are performed in hopes that the spirits of the dead will protect and bring good luck to the family.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters* (2014), Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock states that ghosts appear as characters in many genres of literature, ranging from the epic, poetry, tragedy, and church writings in classical and medieval ages to the novel and cinema in contemporary world: “In the classical period, ghosts illustrated a number of traditional themes related to restless spirits, such as the desire for vengeance or for a proper burial. In the medieval period, ghosts were tied more closely to Christian themes such as spiritual salvation ... From the late eighteenth century, the Romantic reaction against Enlightenment rationalism provokes new trends in supernatural literature, including the German *Sturm und Drang*, the French *roman noir* (whose gruesome plotlines responded directly to the real-life horrors of the French Revolution), and the British Gothic novel ... Twentieth- and

that is going wrong in a particular society. There is a common ghost narrative in which the spirits of the dead linger on earth and seek vengeance due to their unjust death. They are usually depicted as scary and violent, and only leave the world when their demands are met. In African literature, because of the severe effects of colonialism, ghosts often “serve as figures through which writers comment on immigration, return, and struggles in postcolonial national-making” (Weinstock 267).

“Ghost” can even be a political term in the literary field and everyday speech. Premised on notions of hierarchy and exclusion, one designates someone or something unfamiliar and alienated as being a ghost or ghostly. In this way, one constructs him- or herself as the dominant self in opposition to the other. For instance, in China, the term “ghost” is used to refer to those who are different and regarded as others, such as foreigners who are called White or Black Ghosts, while the despised are referred to as “Nasty” Ghosts. In America and Canada, immigrants and homosexuals are usually depicted as being spectral or spooky because of their absence in dominant narrative.<sup>3</sup> In other words, ghosts are often employed to establish a perspectival bias that fixes self and other as non-interchangeable positions.

Ghosts have a long history as metaphors or literary figures. There are thousands of different representations of ghosts in oral and written narratives, visual arts, and popular culture. From benign ancestors, spooky family ghosts to fearsome otherworldly creatures, the ghost appears in a variety of forms throughout history and across cultures. I will argue that the ghost is diverse and

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twenty-first-century cinema renewed Europe’s fascination with the spectral, often casting the phantom as a symbol for absence, alienation, or cultural discontinuity. Today, European literary and cinematic ghosts continue to reflect personal and national traumas” (252-54).

<sup>3</sup> The propensity for lesbian subjects to be culturally considered as ghosts has been elaborated in Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian*, which sees ghosts as a metaphor representing “an absence,” a disavowal, or “amor impossibilia—a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist” of lesbianism (Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* 30-31). For other works focusing on the spectralization of queerness, see Bobby Benedicto, “The Haunting of Gay Manila: Global Space-Time and the Specter of *Kabaklaan*,” *GLQ* 14.2 (2008): 317-38; John Fletcher, “The Haunted Closet: Henry James’s Queer Spectrality,” *Textual Practice* 14.1 (2000): 53-80; Mair Rigby, “Uncanny Recognition: Queer Theory’s Debt to the Gothic,” *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 46-57.

intriguing because of its undecidable nature—its association with the issues of death and afterlife, which are irredeemable and inexplicable to the living. It sometimes serves as a figure of return—the return of repressed desires or hidden secrets from the past—which continuously haunts the present. Sometimes the metaphor marks “a present absence”: despite being invisible or ephemeral, “something is *there* that matters and has to be taken into account” (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphors* 10). In this sense, subjects designated as ghostly are those that have been marginalized and disavowed by different forms of dispossession and exploitations, such as outcasts, migrants, homeless, and homosexuals, but are persistently present in their absence, silence, or invisibility. Spaces considered as spectral may refer to empty houses, castles, or landscapes that have been haunted by repressed memories and history.

A ghost also emerges as a figure of liminality, being neither and both at the same time, so that one “does not know whether it is living or if it is dead” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 6). Its presence in cultural imagination blurs multiple borders, between life and death, body and spirit, past and present, reality and imagination. In other words, through their “ambivalent multiplicity”—their different shapes, acts, and effects, and their association with transgression of temporality, corporality, and causality, ghosts are never subjected to a fixed meaning (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 33). Rather, they are transcultural and possess a narrative potential for invoking an alternative signification.

Minority and postcolonial literature are fundamentally intertwined with differentiated and complex presences of ghosts in a metaphorical sense. They have a variety of names and forms, appear at specific moments and locations, and are capable of producing divergent acts and effects. For instance, in much of African and Caribbean literature, where the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead is depicted as being permeable, and the spirits of the dead are assumed to return easily or in many forms (such as in the form of wild animals), ghosts serve to represent everyday practices or ways of being that are associated with African and Caribbean traditions, landscapes and histories.

In some works of ethnic writers, ghosts are represented as otherworldly manifestations that need to be lived with rather than exorcised, including oppressed groups of people in a society, and the repressed individual and communal histories. In some of these texts, groups of migrants, workers, and colonized people are linked to ghosts or related figures on the basis of their dispossessed and uncertain status between life and death. Peeren calls such spectralized figures of the present “living ghosts” since they, in their lifetimes, already resemble ghosts when they are ignored and considered invisible (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphors* 14). Though these people are invisible or marginalized in society, under certain circumstances they have the power to haunt and ask for a response from the subjects affected.

There is also a deep connection between the ghost and the realm of memory in postcolonial and minority literature. Judith Richardson claims, “[g]hosts operate as a particular, and peculiar, kind of social memory, an alternate form of history-making in which things usually forgotten, discarded, or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire” (Richardson 25). Ghosts in American and Canadian minority literature tend in particular to mirror the immigrant experience. For instance, many Asian American writers employ the figure of ghost to reflect on the lost or unspeakable histories of Asian immigrants and the deep connection between the forgetting of the community’s history and the loss of group identity. Through their description of the ghosts’ trans-generational haunting, these writers deal with the question of how to revise the cultural memory and ethnic identity of their communities.

A number of literary critics have explored the specific way in which the figures of ghosts operate in postcolonial literature, including how a ghost is linked to the identification of specific postcolonial subjects in terms of class, gender, race, and sexuality, and how it effectuates a reworking of phenomena previously ignored, suppressed, and overlooked. Noting the ineluctable encounters between ghosts, memories, and subjectivities in postcolonial and minority literature, the aim of this dissertation is to reach a deeper and broader understanding of the narrative potential of the ghostly in spatial, cultural, and

ethical dimensions. I do not attempt to entail a statement about the ontological status of the ghosts' being. Rather, I perceive ghosts as a concept as well as a metaphor. In addition, instead of perceiving ghosts in general, I will pay attention to the specificity and diversity of ghosts. I will incorporate a variety of notions of ghosts into my analysis of some postcolonial and minority texts to explore the concepts of "spectral space," "ghost language," and "mediums." I will investigate how these ghost-related concepts or metaphors function to facilitate a deeper understanding of the realms of knowledge, history, and identity, as well as to illuminate a new mode of thinking about the ethics of ghosts—the ethics of living with ghosts and being a ghost.

### **Ghosts as Methodology**

The concept of the ghost encompasses various possibilities since it conveys a radical potential of deconstruction that directs our attention to something still ambiguous, invisible, unfamiliar, and undecidable. In the academic discourse of the humanities and social sciences, the ghost or its synonyms, such as a specter or phantom, are employed as a powerful conceptual tool in reconsidering our relation to different aspects of otherness and borders. Between the early 1990s and the present, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to the figures of ghosts as representing the return of the repressed that haunts the living and urgently calls for attention or justice. The psychoanalytical elaboration of phantoms by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok suggests that our secrets or repressed desires (from the past) might continuously disturb our consciousness (in the present) through their unpredictable and inexplicable effects such as "a series of parasitic foreign bodies, lodged inside the psyche" (Punter 63). When transposed to literary and cultural studies, this notion of ghosts as "a lying intruder to be exposed and expelled through psychotherapy" effectuates a revision of memory and identity of the subjectivities that have been disavowed by different forms of dispossession, but are never erased completely and persistently reappear to disturb authority.



In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida develops a fresh idea of “the specter as possibility” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 12). He achieves this through an exploration of the disjoining function of the specter to ontology, and his association of the specter with notions of absolute alterity, inheritance, hospitality, and the messianic. According to him, a specter is a figure of liminality. By indicating the ghost’s ambiguity and its liminal status between life and death, his concept of spectrality has been adopted as an analytical tool to question the binary oppositions embedded in the western linguistic and cognitive frame. The concept of ghost enables us to think “beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and in-actuality, life and non-life and question the rigid boundaries between dominant and subordinate, self and other” (12).

In addition, by relating the specter to “a question of repetition”—which is both *revenant* and *arrivant*, or which is called upon to come and to come back—Derrida suggests that the concept of spectrality functions as “a deconstructive force that disturbs traditional notions of temporality and history” (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor* 11). According to him, a specter operates on a number of temporal planes, marking “the unbidden imposition of parts of the past on the present, and the way in which the future is always already populated with certain possibilities derived from the past” (Brown 36).<sup>4</sup> Fredric Jameson further assumes a connection between the specific temporality of a specter with the messianic. He claims that the messianic specter belongs to both the unborn (the future) and the dead (the past): “the messianic is spectral, it is the spectrality of the future, the other dimension, the answers to the haunting spectrality of the past which is historicity” (Jameson 108). The

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<sup>4</sup> In order to understand this statement, one should explore Derrida’s view of time first. Derrida’s notion of the specter’s time is neither a scientific (linear) time, moving from the Birth of Time toward the Death of Time, nor the Heideggerian Being’s time in which the present is the part of the self-constituting production of a particular kind of being. Rather, it is a messianic time, a time without clock, without “Being-towards-the-end,” a time “out of joint” and always “not yet” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 224). It stays open for the specter to join and come: “repetition and first time, but also repetition and the last time, since the singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time ... Let us call it as a Hauntology” (10). Associated with the eternal return of singularity and the repetition of first-time-and-last-time, a specter is the incorporation of the past into the present and the future.

messianic singularity of the specter signifies just this waving co-existing of a first time in the past and a last time in the future—the event of coming back as a singular haunting.

Based on these notions of the specter's temporality and its association with the messianic, one can assume that the specter of the repressed past has a power to haunt the present and ask for answers and responsibilities toward the future. Being characterized by a heterogeneous temporality, such a ghost proposes historiography as “a form of haunting,” which questions closed and smooth historical narratives and reveals multiple versions of the past (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 482). In addition, due to its ability to haunt, such a specter engages in a “spectropolitics”—“a politics of or *for* specters”—designed to address and criticize the way the process of spectralization produces particular subjects as the metaphorical ghosts of our society (immigrants, foreigners, social outcasts, or victims of historical injustices such as colonialism and slavery) (*Spectralities Reader* 20). Slavoj Žižek associates the specter and its haunting force with *insistence*:

that which does not exist, continues to *insist*, striving toward existence ... When I miss a crucial ethical opportunity, and fail to make a move that would “change everything,” the very nonexistence of what I *should have done* will haunt me forever: although what I did not do does not exist, its spectre continues to exist. (Žižek, *Welcome* 22)

A specter of “what I should have done” but didn't do insists on haunting so that it propels us to pay attention to and take responsibility for the inscrutable otherness or neglected aspects of social and cultural realms. It marks as “*symptoms*, points of rupture that insist their singular tale be told and their wrongs acknowledged” (Luckhurst 542), and plays a distinctive role of “producing a something-to-be-done” (Gordon xvi). Thus, Derrida urges us to treat these ghosts through the principle of absolute hospitality that respects their otherness and allows this otherness to disrupt rigid categorizations

(presence/absence, life/death, past/present/future). By doing this, we, as Janice Radway argues in the forward to Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*, are able to "revivify our collective capacity to imagine a future radically other to the one ideologically charted out already by the militarized, patriarchal capitalism that has thrived heretofore on the practice of social erasure" (Radway xv). Inspired by Derrida's theory of hauntology and the prior psychoanalytical elaboration of phantoms and the uncanny, scholars in the humanities have employed ghosts as a methodology to reconstruct an ethical framework. They have employed it to open up the analysis of disavowed histories or hidden subjects that haunt like ghosts, and figure out how to establish an ethical relationship with repressed otherness.

## **Specter and Space**

Issues concerning space became important in the humanities and social sciences at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. As one of the most profound thinkers in contemporary human geography, Doreen Massey has stated in a Podcast interview with Social Science Bites that most scholars in social sciences and philosophers seem to pay much attention to time, thinking of it as the dimension of change and of dynamism, but treat space as "a kind of flat surface out there"—something static and neutral, something we simply pass through. In her prominent work *For Space*, she argues for a rethinking of space as the dimension of the social—the dimension of things being at the same time, of multiplicity and simultaneity. She claims that space, by presenting us with questions of how it is inhabited by the contemporaneous co-existence of others or imbued with all kinds of stories, memories and events, is about relationships between human beings or about our connections with each other.

Such a spatial emphasis is productive in the face of recent theorizations of ghosts, which have analyzed the specter or the ghostly more in its temporal dimension than in spatial terms. Many scholars begin questioning the persistent focus on temporality in Derrida's account of the specter as well as within

psychoanalysis and trauma studies.<sup>5</sup> In her critique of Derrida's privileging of time over space, Esther Peeren argues that it is not merely time "that spectralizes space" and "transforms space into spacing," but also space that "spectralizes time by giving it body and causing it to appear" (Peeren, "The Ghost as a Gendered Chronotope" 82). As such, "the ghost of time" is "conjured in space." The ghost is "both out of sync and out of place" (82). In the "Introduction" of *Popular Ghosts*, Blanco and Peeren also analyze a specter in spatial terms, claiming it "as a physical occupation of everyday sites ... in a disturbance of space as much as of time" (Blanco and Peeren, *Popular Ghosts* xvii). In their studies, however, the question of where or what kind of space is "spectral" is still under-theorized.

In the first chapter, I will explore the connection between the current spectral turn and spatial turn in cultural studies by proposing the term "spectral space" as a haunted place or a space characterized by the diverse nature of ghosts. Some literary scholars have explored the spatial dimension of ghosts, demonstrating how haunting is attached to particular architectures, landscapes, and places, such as the haunted house, the ghost town, the desolate landscape and the site where disastrous events have transpired. For instance, through her analysis of the history and the causes and consequences of haunting (ghost stories) in the Hudson Valley in her work *Possessions*, Judith Richardson re-considers haunting in terms of both its temporal and spatial dimensions. Through its geographical focus, *Possessions* shows how the Hudson Valley hauntings came to operate not merely as an instance of social and cultural memory, but function as a kind of possession that relates to the issues of identity and belonging in an ongoing, contentious politics of place. In other words, these hauntings reveal "how senses of the past and of place are apprehended and created" (Richardson 3).

From spaces haunted by ghosts, memory, or history to the landscape as palimpsest, I will explore the spectral quality of space through the question of

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida thinks of the specter as a figure of relentless repetition and temporal disturbance by claiming the specter's time is the time "out of joint." Psychoanalytic critics such as Freud and Abraham and Torok also have focused on the temporal dimension of the ghost by aligning their apparition with theories of trauma and the returned of the repressed.

how the spectral creates spaces that have powerful effects upon identity and experience. I will further examine the narrative and ethical potentials of such spectral space by performing close readings of portrayals of three kinds of spectral spaces in a selection of postcolonial novels, including Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*. I will argue that spectral space is a space of heterogeneous temporality, a space of fluidity, and a space of uncanniness; and I will explore how the manifestations of these three kinds of spectral spaces question the essentialist notion of binary demarcations between the present and the past, inside and outside, self and other, and propel the characters to re-create their time-bound, place-bound, and socially constructed identities in the novels. In so doing, I will assert that the ghostly or the specter not only functions productively to re-conceptualize the relationship between subject and space, but also serves as a useful narrative tool for us to imagine a more communal future.

## **Ghosts, Gender, and Ethnicity**

Spectral studies in the 1990s have ignored the issues of gender and race. According to Peeren's comparison between "Antonio's Negri's ontological spectrality" and "Derrida's deconstructivist hauntology," both of these studies suggest a generalized theory of spectrality that considers the political implications of a ghost from a western and male-dominant perspective (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor* 23).<sup>6</sup> In the case of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, when Derrida "spins a reading of the literary ghost of the king in *Hamlet* and a discussion of the legacy of Karl Marx into a conceptual meditation on

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Spectral Metaphor*, Peeren elaborates the differences between Antonio's Negri's ontological spectrality and Derrida's deconstructivist hauntology. In the case of Negri's study of spectrality, she argues, "In a response to *Specters of Marx* entitled 'The Specter's Smile,' Antonio Negri suggests that Marx situated the ghost firmly in the world of the living by showing how the 'abstraction of value' in capitalist production 'vampirizes all the worker's labor and, transforming itself into surplus-value, becomes capital'" (Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor* 21). Ghosts for Negri refer to the workers whose subjects become "unlocatable" under the spectral movement of the capitalist system (9).

spectrality” as a figure of deconstruction, he is questioned by some scholars, especially those in feminist and postcolonial studies, as being biased and having a lack of awareness of the gender of the ghost and the specific way in which the postcolonial subjectivity is theorized (*Spectral Metaphor* 11).<sup>7</sup> In their attempts to examine the ghost or spectrality beyond the Derridean framework, many other scholars have argued for the need to culturally and sexually specify the ghost and its association with different forms of violence and oppression.

From the perspective of gender, in Derrida’s analysis of spectrality, the focus on the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who demands Prince Hamlet to investigate his murder and seek revenge upon his uncle, King Claudius, neglects a rich variety of legends of female ghosts around the world and their moral and cultural significance. For instance, White Lady legends are popular in many countries. It is a type of female ghost reported to appear in rural areas in Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States. Analogous to Western legends of the White Lady, ghosts in Asian literature and cinema are also predominantly female. They usually appear angry and destructive, and return to or linger in the world of the living for vengeance. In Korea, the most renowned and ferocious female ghost is the *cheonyeogwishin*. Known as virgin ghosts, *cheonyeogwishins* are portrayed in a similar form as the scariest ghosts with long hair, wearing white dresses and haunting the men who unfairly oppressed them when they were alive. There are also many female ghost myths, such as those about the female vampires Pontianak and Penanggalan, shared throughout the regions of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. Common to most of these female ghost stories is the theme of losing or being betrayed by a husband,

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<sup>7</sup> In her 1995 response to *Specters of Marx*, the essay “Ghostwriting,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Derrida is writing a “how-to-mourn-your-father book” (Spivak, “Ghostwriting” 6) that, citing Blanco and Peeren’s words, “configures haunting as a masculine economy and, in describing the new world order, overlooks how global capitalism particularly exploits the labor and reproductive power of subaltern women” (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 310). Nancy J. Holland also criticizes Derrida’s focus on haunting as a patriarchal structure: “at the very moment when Derrida attempts to say something, however partial and attenuated, about *the* ghost, he must at the same time recreate a tradition in which the Father/Ghost, and all that they represent, speak only to the Son” (Holland 69).

boyfriend, or fiancé, or being exploited by men. Through the stories of ferocious or uncanny female ghosts, women could speak to society and express their hatred toward men as well as patriarchal systems. These ghost stories also reveal how ghosts and haunting are related to specific formations of subjectivity as well as the process of subjectification itself in terms of gender.<sup>8</sup>

Kathleen Brogan has paid attention to the neglected concerns about the ethnicity of ghosts by examining the role literary ghosts play in the work of some ethnic writers. She claims that literary ghosts in ethnic writing are examples of “cultural hauntings” that reflect “the increased emphasis on ethnic and cultural differentiation in all social groups” (Brogan 4).<sup>9</sup> Each ghost or haunting has its cultural specificity and is deeply connected to the specific history and identity of an ethnic group. Likewise, many Asian American scholars have investigated how the recurrence of ghosts in Asian American literature reflects “a shadowy root in Asianness”—the psyche of “being in limbo, between two worlds”: the Asian past and the Western present (Ma 20). In addition, by tracing how some of these ghosts descend from Chinese and other Asian traditions replete with ghosts of female victims, some critics have explored the issues of gender and racial discrimination. The subjects they have dealt with include the transgenerational haunting between mother and daughter, the double oppression of Asian American women by Western racism and Asian patriarchal systems, and the relationship between Asian women’s silence (or passivity) and their loss of identity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more examples concerning issues of gender and ghosts, see: Mary Beth Mills’ “Attack of the Widow Ghosts: Gender, Death, and Modernity in Northeast Thailand,” in *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (Berkeley and LA: U of California P, 1995), 244-73; Esther Peeren’s “The Ghost as a Gendered Chronotope,” in *Ghosts, Stories, Histories: Ghost Stories and Alternative Histories*, ed. Sladjja Blazan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 81-96.

<sup>9</sup> For other explorations of the intersection of spectrality and ethnicity, see Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghost and American Subjects*. Hanover: UP of New England, 2000; Atsuko Matsuoko and John Sorenson, *Ghosts and Shadows: Construction of Identity and Community in an African Diaspora*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001; David Tyrer and Salman Sayyid, “Governing Ghosts: Race, Incorporeality and Difference in Post-Political Times,” *Current Sociology* 60.3 (2012): 353-67.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s *Reading Asian American Literature*:

When these scholars show how minority writers use ghosts as a way to reflect on the problems faced by different ethnic groups or genders, I would like to claim that they also employ the figure of ghost as a narrative tool to negotiate the past and revise identities of minority people. In order to elaborate this statement, a careful consideration of each ghost's specific alterity in each literary work is needed. The arguments about the dependency of identities on notions of alterity are not new anymore. Adi Hastings and Paul Manning assert, "identity performances are relational with respect to different aspects of alterity" (Hastings and Manning 293). Esther Peeren and Silke Horstkotte further argue, "Alterity is radically specified and differentiated: there is no singular alterity, but a plethora of forms of alterity, each of which interacts with identity in its own manner" (Peeren and Horstkotte 10). Their statements reveal that alterity has its precise form to deliver its own shock and to prompt a particular subject to take a different position in relation to self and otherness.

In three novels written by three minority woman writers—Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, the figures of female ghosts represent various forms of alterity. By portraying the strong presence of anonymous female ghosts and their vivid but silent interaction with living characters, the three writers employ ghosts as a medium not only to reflect on different kinds of individual trauma and social oppression of minority people in North America, but also to reveal the literary ghost's potential of empowerment—its potential of evoking the healing of the traumatic past and the re-creation of identity. So far, less attention has been paid to how female ghosts manifest themselves to the living when their voices or stories are silenced or fragmented. If words or the symbolic order are the sources of oppression, what kinds of alternative "language" do they use to convey their otherness? Putting the questions in a more specific way: what is ghost language? What is the difference between

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*From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993); Wendy Ho's *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-daughter Writing* (1999); Patti Duncan's *Tell This Silence: Asian American Woman Writers and the Politics of Speech* (2003); Erin Khuê Ninh's *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (2011); Sheng-Mei Ma's *Diaspora Literature and Visual Culture: Asia in Flight* (2011).



human language and ghost language? How does this alternative way of haunting function in the revision of suppressed memory and identity?

In the second chapter, by investigating the specific ways in which female ghosts manifest themselves to and interact with the living characters in the three novels, I will elaborate the concept and function of “ghost language” in relation to minority women’s ethnic and sexual identities. It is worth noting that I use the term “ghost language” in an ironic way. I do not suggest language as a linguistic system that is constructed in a rational and orderly manner. Instead, I would like to argue that “ghost languages” are ways of expression outside a linguistic and cognitive frame and even beyond human knowledge. I will elaborate two kinds of “ghost language”—two different ways of haunting, namely the ghost’s madness in *Beloved* and its uncanny silence in *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*. By focusing on the different ways in which these female ghosts demand attention and justice, I intend to suggest that ghostly otherness has plural forms and is always open to change. And through their diverse alterity, the literary ghosts will survive from one generation to another, keep evolving and invoking a re-imagining of a new, communal and transcultural identity in the contemporary racial and patriarchal society.

### **Mediums as the Ethics toward Ghosts**

In Western philosophy as well as in European ghost stories, ghosts and spirits usually take on the disturbing role of an undesirable interruption that causes shock and fear in the everyday and threatens the life and sanity of the living. The living in these stories tend to banish and exorcise ghosts in order to restore the order of their lives and return to the familiar, the comfortable, and the normal. Living subjects do not seem to attempt to enter the ghostly realm or communicate with ghosts, while ghosts make their appearance to them. In the following chapters, I will bring different notions of the ghost together and use them in my study of postcolonial and minority literature to open up a new way of thinking about the subversive potential of ghosts and the spectral. The literal and metaphorical ghosts that I will discuss in the coming chapters are

sometimes similar to Derrida's specter, which emerges as a figure of radical alterity "that cannot be anticipated" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 65), and appears in irrational and obscure ways. Sometimes they function as the continued presence of those who have died (ancestors or ghosts in Asian and African cultures) or those who exist in the spiritual world but keep playing a concrete role in everyday life. While these ghosts haunt the living through various forms of otherness or become intertwined within everyday practices such as religious rituals or oral traditions, they are either un-representable or un-assimilable. An ethical problem then arises when we reflect on the question of how to approach ghosts or ghostly domains when they are unable to be successfully banished and exorcised. Since so far it remains unclear how the living relate to or communicate with these unapproachable but irreducible ghosts or spectral aspects, I will explore in the third chapter the ways in which the dialogue is brought about and shaped. I regard the process of treating and dealing with ghosts in a respectful and responsible manner as the ethics toward ghosts that needs to be developed.

Ethics has been defined as the branch of philosophy that deals with morality and involves systematizing, defining, and recommending concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, virtuous and non-virtuous conduct. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* claims that the word ethics is also used more narrowly to mean "the moral principles of a particular tradition, group or individual." However, contemporary poststructuralist and postmodernist scholars argue that ethics should study the more complex and relational conditions of actions. Two prominent representatives of this ethical turn are Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

Levinas' philosophy has been called ethics, but it differs from traditional theories on ethics. His elaboration of the concepts of face, alterity, singularity, and responsibility in his works emphasizes more our relationship to the other than the behavior of the moral subject. In *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, Diane Perpich provides a clear explanation of these basic concepts. For instance, in chapter two, she argues that the face cannot be represented since it is neither a phenomenon with particular qualities nor a mere abstraction.

Rather, it “presents itself to me as the irreducible presence of a mortal and vulnerable other with whom I am in a social relation, whether I like it or not” (Guenther 2009).<sup>11</sup> By developing the connection between alterity and singularity, Levinas reflects on the irreducible resistance of the face of the other: its resistance to comprehension in the repetition of the face-to-face encounter, and its capability of putting our powers in question and demanding for ethical justification. In other words, his notion of ethics focuses on the intersubjective relationship, being called by and responding to the radical otherness of the Other, and the endless responsibility imposed on us in every encounter with the singular other.

Likewise, Derrida claims, “Ethics is ... the order of and respect for absolute singularity, and not only that of the generality or of the repetition of the same” (Derrida, *Gift of Death* 84). In his view, ethics not merely involves abstract beliefs and principles, but concerns a more responsible way in which people “learn to living finally” with ghosts (*Specters of Marx* xvii). He argues that an ethical act must convey our responsibility for the singular other, concretized as the specter, guest, or foreigner. The self, rather than assimilating the other, is asked to adopt an attitude of unconditional hospitality, which, as Marais reminds us, citing Derrida, “involves saying ‘yes’ to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification” (Marais, *Secretary of the Invisible* 2). Such absolute hospitality can be perceived as the ethics of hospitality that proposes a mediation on how to respect various forms of otherness: to respond to the stranger as a stranger, wait for the unexpected visitor without expecting it, or mourn the dead without naming, identifying, and so locating the dead.

Levinas’ notion of responsibility and Derrida’s discourse on hospitality are rich in potentialities because they recast the inter-subjective relationship between self and other as an ethical problem that concerns one’s identity and limits. By developing their theories into literary and postcolonial studies, scholars such as Maurice Blanchot and Derek Attridge have contributed to the

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<sup>11</sup> See Lisa Guenther’s review of Perpich’s *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* on *Philosophical Reviews: An Electronic Journal* (2009.02.23).  
<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23921-the-ethics-of-emmanuel-levinas/>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2015.

debate on the ethics of literature—the impossible task of responding to absolute alterity—in the process of reading or writing.<sup>12</sup> In order to extend the discussion into my study of ethics toward ghosts, I will explore the concept of “a medium” and examine how the literary figure of “a medium” functions to represent a mode of negotiation as well as a way to recognize and take responsibility for the ghostly others in two South African Gothic novels: J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*.

A medium is a person who receives messages from the dead, and travels between the living and spiritual worlds in many religious and cultural beliefs. Like ghosts, mediums come in many varieties. Depending on his or her specific location and capacity, a medium mediates different worlds and conceptual domains in different manners. By elaborating the literary representation of two kinds of mediums—a passive medium in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and an active medium in Mda’s *The Heart of*

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Attridge has established the relevance of Levinasian philosophy to the ethics of literature and Coetzee’s fiction and argues for the impossibility of being wholly responsive to the other in his notable works *The Singularity of Literature* and *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge states: “Otherness exists only in the registering of that which resists my usual modes of understanding, and that moment of registering alterity is a moment in which I simultaneously acknowledge my failure to comprehend and find my procedures of comprehension beginning to change” (*The Singularity of Literature* 27). Based on this, he further argues that the reading or writing subject, like Levinas’s ethical subject, is always reduced to a state of passivity in its encounter with alterity in the moment of reading or writing, and that this passivity is its responsibility for the other: “Being responsible for the other involves assuming the other’s needs (if only the need to exist), affirming it, sustaining it, being prepared to give up my own wants and satisfactions for the sake of the other” (*The Singularity of Literature* 124). Similarly, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* provides insight into the ethical significance of Coetzee’s fiction with its elaboration on Coetzee’s engagement with alterity in his fiction and its relationship with the ethical philosophy of accommodating the other. By tracing the numerous “figures of alterity” in the novels—characters like Klawer, the barbarian girl, Michael K, Friday, Verceuil, and Lucy, and investigating the way in which their otherness is “staged,” Attridge says, “The responsible answer to this paradox, to this aporia, is not to throw up one’s hands, of course, but to carry on, to increase one’s attentiveness and one’s responsiveness, recognizing that the aporia not only makes wholly responsible action impossible but also that it is a condition for any experience of responsibility at all” (*J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* 12, 124). This statement demonstrates the ethics of the impossibility of responding to the absolute other—to open oneself to the other and wait “without any clear sense of what would constitute the longed-for arrival” (120).

*Redness*, I argue that the figure of the medium serves to reveal different situated and specific accounts of the interaction between different domains, including the present and the past, the real and the unreal, modernity and tradition, center and margin, self and other, and so on. Their work of mediating oppositional entities can not only be seen as an effective way in which one approaches his or her internal or external otherness, but also provides us with a model of negotiation by which we can live with ghosts, establish a mutual understanding with them, and create a more dialogic society.

### **The Ethics of Ghosts**

By examining the concepts of spectral space, ghost language, and medium, and the literary representation of them in the aforementioned postcolonial and ethnic texts, I will be able to answer some crucial questions: when and where does spectrality take place? How and in what way do ghostly others deliver their effects to particular subjects and re-position them in relation to history and otherness? How does a subject approach and mediate these ghostly aspects so as to imagine and establish a more inclusive future? The answers to these questions demonstrate the ethical and narrative potentials of the ghostly metaphor in postcolonial and minority literature, including the metaphor's power of invoking alternative notions of space, history, and identity, as well as its power of enabling a more ethical and welcoming attitude toward others.

In the concluding chapter, I will suggest that ghosts are not merely products of human imagination or objects of social and cultural constructions. Rather, they are ethical subjects. By exploring how, in J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, the protagonist, Michael K, plays the role of an active agent or a medium for his status as a living ghost, I will argue that the ghostly have an ethical power to trigger new modes of thinking beyond boundaries and to produce ethical subjects. They have critical possibilities in reconstructing the ethics of how to live with ghosts and survive as ghosts. In sum, reflecting on the diversity and specificity of the ghost in postcolonial and minority works, I aim in this dissertation to re-conceptualize the ghost as a metaphorical concept

so as to contribute to a burgeoning sub-field in postcolonial studies.