

Title: De/ Re-constructing History: the Problematization of Gender and Race in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980)

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Abstract

The political is dissipating into multiple disciplines, among them philosophy and literature. Aristotle reads political science in its intrinsic relation to ethics. Other philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes relate the political to the concept of power, especially state power, and oppose it to subjectivity. Karl Marx, in his turn, sums up the political in social classes' antagonism. Literature tackles the political through fictional or non-fictional narratives that investigate primordially man's relation to his environment, whether this relation is built on man's struggle to prove his subjectivity or on man's desire to dominate the geographical or social environment. Literary texts produced within a determined social context like that of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environment of the United States of America, for instance, are impregnated with political undertones which could be grasped by a simple exercise in hermeneutics. These texts are encoded by critics as being messages of resistance, or counter-discourses because they tend to subvert the modern conceptions of "self" and "other".

Recent postmodern theories subvert the previous modernist dichotomies such as majority / minority, mainstream / marginalized and center / periphery which reveal a certain conception of power relationship that relates parts of the dichotomies to each other and decides on their positioning at the center of the multicultural American society or at its margins. Another more disturbing view of the political is that elaborated by Foucault as it displays the dissipating aspect of the political and anchors it on power.

The purpose of this paper is to scrutinize the political traits in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980). As the title indicates, the book focuses on the male lineage of Kingston's Chinese-American ancestors. Her objective is to retell the stories of her ancestors' legal or illegal immigration to America, while highlighting the reductionist and dehumanizing ways in which they are treated on account of their race and gender. The hegemony of the white dominant majority can be noticed through its racist discourse that celebrates whiteness as determining factor of gaining American identity. This hegemonic discourse is answered back in Kingston's text, wherein she destabilizes Chinese-American minority's positioning within the American society and points out the injustices they suffer as an ethnic minority that makes part of the American racial strata.

Key words: ethics; justice; violence; human rights; racism; gender oppression; hegemony; resistance; discourse.

Introduction

Scholars from different fields, namely philosophy and humanities give due attention to the significance of the political. Their aim is to delineate its aspects and point out its features, an effort which led to the field's different areas of interest and namings, from political science with Aristotle to political philosophy, state politics with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. This interest in the political led to what came to be known as political theory. Each philosopher, from the above-mentioned ones, perceives the political from one angle and develops a new understanding of it, and so contributes to the establishing of its theory. Other postmodern philosophers, like Michel Foucault, have centered their focus on the power dialectic and investigated the possibilities of its application in multiple disciplines.

My attempt to contain the political in a fixed definition seems to be parochial, taking into consideration its dissipating aspect. Yet, it is possible to find key words that can enlighten the endeavor to scrutinize its traits. Taking cue from Foucault's "Power is everywhere" (Qtd. in Newman, 51), I employ power in my paper as a keyword which leads to other derivatives as "powerless" and "powerful". Another keyword related to power is "violence", be it state violence embodied in laws as Hobbes confirms in his writings, or groups' violence which is manifest through social practices such as developing racial stereotypes, massacring those who are considered lower or ill-treating them. Foucault writes about the pervasiveness of power and the significance of violence as a tool to spread this power. Violence can also be practiced individually; therefore, it is possible to talk about individuals' violence, which can be verbal or behavioral and in both cases testifies to the individuals' experiencing of power.

In this paper, I focus on political discourse with reference to the social and geographical context of the United States of America. This choice of American society is accounted for by its multiracial strata that blatantly expose power relationship that operates through the dichotomy of mainstream / marginalized. It is also supported with the following argument: "political theory [...] can be pursued consistently only in a pluralist, or potentially pluralist, society. The word "Pluralist" refers to societies in which "ends collide" (Berlin qtd. in White, 1). The previous sentence reiterates the idea that the political is a sort of antagonism which is manifest in different types of relationships, in which groups' or individual's interests do not meet.

My focal book is Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980). From her vantage point of belonging to a minority group in America, she exposes her ancestors' experience of being marginalized because of a power relationship that relegates them to a lower status than that of the mainstream White Americans. My intention is to examine the powerful / powerless identity pattern imposed on Chinese-American community members, especially those first immigrants to the Gold Mountain, in the light of Aristotle's reading of political science. I also aim to highlight Kingston's ancestors' ways of resisting the violence oriented to them via racist laws that rob them of their right to lead a happy and ethical life. For this reason, I employ postmodern deconstructive techniques because Kingston deconstructs the hegemonic political discourse and reconstructs an alternative discourse of resistance.

China Men displays the history of Kingston's male ancestors in the Gold Mountain, a Chinese appellation of America. The book offers a mythical and factual account of the historical power relationship that opposes the mainstream whites to the Chinese-American ethnic group. My paper comprises three parts; in the first one, I refer to Aristotle's philosophical writing about "Politike," to find a theoretical ground from which to gloss over the political and apply the findings to the Chinese-American case. In the second part, I canalize my focus on the modernist notions of 'Same' and that of 'Other', while pointing out the significance of race and gender in the dialectical of political identity. In the third part, I shed light on Kingston's book as being a narrative of resistance that answers back a racial hegemonic white mainstream discourse, deconstructs its claims of supremacy and reconstructs an alternative narrative that re-inscribes the Chinese-American within the American history from which they are erased.

For the smooth succession of the different parts of this paper, I find it necessary to distinguish between "politics" and "the political" because the fact of using them interchangeably might lead to a sort of confusion. Mouffe states:

By 'the political' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. 'Politics', on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seeks to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political' (Qtd. in Newman, 153).

Mouffe sums up the difference by defining 'the political' as being a "dimension of antagonism" which is mainly relational; while 'politics' refers to a set of practices. This calls back the idea of state or individual violence as being a kind of practice. It also refers to the white mainstream supremacist discourse that relegates Kingston's ancestors to the margin of American society. Having clarified the ambiguity between the political and politics, it is feasible to move to the first point which is the philosophical conception of the political.

1-Power, Violence and Justice: Self / Other Conception in the Philosophical Discourse

For Aristotle, "Political Science is the second half of a subject of which Ethics is the first half. In the opening chapters of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the term *Politike* is applied [...] to the science of human affairs, of man's happiness or good. This consists in a certain mode of life, and man's life is shaped for him by his social environment, the laws, customs and institutions of the community to which he belongs" (Rackham.H, xii).

In this quote, Aristotle links the idea of political science to that of ethics and points out their intrinsic relation to man's happiness and good. The laws that are created to organize human life are supposed to be the means whereby people reach happiness. Aristotle, equally, stresses human inclination to live with others. Man is described, in Aristotle's words as a "political animal" (Qtd. in Bevin, 79). He emphasizes the fact that man is political by nature. "Human beings have a natural impulse to form a political community, but this is not to say that political communities spring up necessarily and without being deliberately established" (*Ibid*). From a philosophical Aristotelian perspective, man has a natural inclination to practice power. Aristotle thinks that man is "an ethical being [...] destined to live an ethical life [which is] above all a life of justice" (Qtd. in Bevin, 72). What is relevant to my investigation in this quote is the relation between the political as embodying antagonism and justice which is supposed to realize ethical life for every person.

Political discourse uses power to situate one group of people in an unequal relation with another and refers to them respectively, as “powerful” and “powerless.” Pinder clarifies that “power is a major factor in the relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘other.’ Whiteness and otherness are relational. White supremacy correlates with nonwhites’ inferiority. Whiteness cannot stand alone; it cannot exist by itself. The nonwhite self is measured against the white self and is reduced accordingly to an ‘other’ ” (47). The two parts depend on each other to gain recognition whether as “self” or as “other” and none of them could exist by its own.

Interestingly, the dialectic of powerful and powerless is intrinsically related to the notion of race and that of gender. In this paper, the powerful self refers to the white American; while, the powerless other refers to Chinese immigrants and their American born descendents. Referring back to Aristotle’s idea of ethics, these two poles have the right to an ethical life that is based on justice. However, the inclination to possess power works more in favor of the White Americans than in that of other subsequent immigrants from Asia. “In the United States, the relationship between the majority and the minorities has often been violent, either explicitly so for the overwhelming duration of the nation’s history or implicitly so, as the case may be now for many, if not all, immigrants” (Nguyen, 96). Violence has tainted American history since the first white settlements in the New World. White European settlers dealt with the natives of the country i.e. Indians, in a violent inhuman way, massacring them in pogroms. This violence is the outcome of White man’s natural inclination to use power and subject the other to this power through violence. This echoes Aristotle’s idea of human inclination to use power.

The history of founding the U.S.A. is a history of establishing the Whites’ state and expanding their nation. To achieve this goal, the Whites institutionalized the use of violence so as to protect the state’s right to power. This idea is buttressed by Benjamin’s “The state demands a monopoly of violence [...] this monopoly of violence by the state masks itself through a discourse that transforms state violence into law.” (Nguyen, 96) the institutionalization of violence helped the White colonists who were mainly European determine who was eligible for being American and who wasn’t.

Eventually the American government had to take on the task of determining who was an American. Even though there was a social practice already in place, nothing offered a more powerful description of who was an American than the first Naturalization Act of 1790, which provided citizenship only to white men [...] Citizenship was not only about the legality it entailed in terms of rights; it also signified one’s equal status in society, equality that was denied to all racialized groups as well as to women. That America was “a white man’s country” gained both literal and symbolic meaning” (Pinder, 39).

This statement applies to colored people, the Chinese immigrants included. State violence boosts a feeling of White nationalism. Pinder adds: “All documents that defined America, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, contributed to promote a white America” (40). Chinese and other racial groups were not allowed any admission to this praised cultural and social unity. Later on, Chinese would also be viewed as a threat to white racial purity. John F. Miller at the 1878 California Constitutional Convention [...] openly declared the Chinese are:

“Morally, the most debased people on the face of the earth. Forms of vice which in other countries are barely named, are in Chinese so common that they excite no comment among the natives. They

constitute the surface level and below them are deeps and deeps of depravity so shocking and horrible that their character can not even be limited... *their touch is pollution*” (Moy, 35) (emphasis in original).

From the Whites’ perspective, this racial minority constitutes a hazard to the purity of the white superior race, which explains why Blacks are marginalized as savages, Indians as cultureless and the Chinese as exotic. The white American successive governments viewed the Chinese as the ‘yellow peril’ (Pinder, 46). Therefore, White American did their best on the part of legislation and laws to deny them admission to the American territory. For instance, Chinese women and families were not allowed into the States with the passing of the Page Law in 1875 which prohibited not only Chinese prostitutes, but also Chinese wives from joining their husbands. A succession of legislative acts was crowned with the Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882 which banned Chinese immigration to America for half a century and led to the construction of bachelor communities in Chinatowns (Moy, 47).

This effort to dehumanize the other and maintain white racial supremacy on the political and legislative levels are paralleled by social practices such as reductionist racial stereotypes that aim to deface the identity of these othered groups. Throughout its history, America has testified to its white institutionalized violence that is implemented to protect the Whites’ power and status of hegemony. “The experience of Asian Americans with violence provides evidence to supplement these earlier studies, demonstrating even further how endemic violence is to American culture and its new initiates” (Nguyen, 89). Examining this quote in the light of Aristotle’s ideas, I find that Aristotle’s conception of man’s right to an ethical life based on justice is mutilated by the White mainstream American discourse of supremacy, which centralizes white man in particular and grants him the right to enjoy ethical life at the expense of the other colored groups in America. “Race and racial thinking permeated the laws and public discourse, and embedded itself in the very core of American cultural consciousness” (Pinder, 45). The politics of race in America decides on ethnic groups’ political identity. Being White means being part of the mainstream supremacist majority which entitles the white Americans to power and sculpts their political identity as the powerful, hegemonic and dominant. Racial minorities that are marginalized are dictated powerlessness as a political identity. This is what is meant by “Political identities are constructed not only around a perceived incommensurability or uniqueness, but also around an experience of oppression” (White, 136).

This politics of identity is reiterated throughout the history of America from its inception to the contemporary era, always upholding the hegemony of the White Americans. Pinder states: “Whiteness was everything. It was the foundation of literal as well as symbolic power. [It] reinforced the despotic position of Whites in America and defined an American cultural identity as white” (50). Whiteness is the only criterion for gaining American identity. Other racial minorities are to be viewed automatically as inferior and so deserve to be subjected to the power or oppression of the Whites. “This racial construction had to be an *ongoing process* that hinged on a repeated appeal to the hegemonic position of whiteness” (Pinder, 45) (emphasis mine). In the same vein, Judith Butler writes, “White supremacy must *repeat itself* in order to establish the illusion of its own uniformity and identity” (Qtd. in Pinder, 45). The objective of conserving a homogenous racial identity is the main reason behind the violence exercised over marginalized groups labeled at best as lower races. It is in the light of this racial dialectic that governed the American social environment throughout its

history that I investigate Kingston's book, *China Men* (1980). Dealing with political identity within the context of the Chinese racial minority, due emphasis should be given to the notions of race and gender as they are intertwined to the politics of identity.

In the following part, I revisit the notions of gender and race in order to make salient their significance in Kingston's process of not only deconstructing imposed identity on her ancestors and the white-written American history, but also on the process of reconstructing an alternative identity by relocating Chinese immigrants within the American history.

1-Race and Gender Quandary in China Men's Identity Formation

In *China Men*, Kingston retells the history of her ancestors' immigration to America relying on the Chinese technique of storytelling and on Chinese myths. Her narrative techniques range from employing blatant factual information to fictionalized history. Dead ancestors are resurrected in Kingston's open book and are endowed with a fierce voice to tell their painful stories of emasculation and racism which reveal their bitter history in The Gold Mountain. Because Kingston uses myths, stories and history in her book, it becomes a methodological necessity for me to refer to the book itself for illustrations. I shall back my ideas with textual evidence for each element, starting with the myth of Tang Ao in the first chapter "on Discovery", to the stories of Bak Goong and Ah Goong in the fifth and seventh chapters entitled respectively "The Great Grandfather of The Sandalwood Mountains" and the one entitled "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains", to the use of pure history in the eight chapter "The Laws".

A/ The Myth of Tang Ao: the Problematization of Gender

Tang Ao's myth deals with the quest of the father figure and problematizes the notion of gender. It is based on an episode taken from "The Country of Women" in the Chinese novel *Flowers in the Mirror* by Li Ru Zhen (1763-1830) (Gao, 57). The Chinese version of the myth goes like this: Tang Ao is a scholar who becomes cynical and tired of his life after being denied official and scholarly rank for political reasons; therefore, he sets out on a voyage to visit foreign countries and finally chooses to become a Taoist hermit on one of the fairy isles (*Ibid*). In Kingston's book, Tang Ao becomes an adventurer. "Once upon a time", Kingston writes in the first chapter "a man, named Tag Ao looking for the Gold Mountain, crossed an ocean and came upon the Land of Women. The women immediately captured him, not on guard against ladies [...] we have to prepare you to meet the queen" (*China Men*, 1). In the Land of Women, Tang Ao is subjected to feet binding, ear piercing, facial hair plucking and is given women food. "The tea was thick with chrysanthemums and stirred the cool female winds inside his body; chicken wings made his hair shine; vinegar soup improved his womb" (*Ibid*, 2). What is striking is Tang Ao's reaction to the women's degrading treatment. When they ask him to follow them he follows; he doesn't show any protest. A descendent of Chinese patriarchal cultural heritage that glorifies man, he is made to cross the boundary of his androgynous gender and is relegated to the position of woman. What exacerbates his emasculation is that in Chinese cultural heritage, a woman is equated to a slave. "There is a Chinese word for the female I-which is slave" (*The Woman Warrior*, 49). The emasculation of Tang Ao foreshadows the situation of Kingston's grandfathers in the Gold Mountain and decides about their identity as womanly. Tang Ao undergoes effeminization in order to serve in the queen's court as a maid. This violence done to Tang Ao's gender hints at the injustices

the Chinese immigrants suffered in their journey and during their stay in The Gold Mountain. Kingston closes the chapter by the following sentence, "In the Women's Land there are no taxes and no wars. Some scholars say that that country was discovered during the reign of Empress Wu (A.D.694-705), and some say earlier than that, A.D. 441, and it was in North America" (*Ibid* 2). This last sentence orients the reader to a specific destination that is North America, where she says "there are no taxes and no wars" (*Ibid*). The land that is supposed to be the land of men becomes the land of women. The queen is a metaphor for the statue of liberty which stands for freedom. The irony is that under the statue of liberty Chinese immigrants, for whom Tang Ao is an emblem, are stripped of their liberty and masculinity. Tang Ao foreshadows the immigrants' political, historical and social experience in America.

B/ Bak Goong and Ah Goong: Two Ancestors' Experience of the American Dream

In chapter seven entitled "The Great Grandfather of The Sandalwood Mountain," Kingston retells the story of her grandfather who, like many others, has the dream of sailing to work in the Gold Mountain.

Bak Goong is recruited by the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society. He moves with other Chinese workers to Hawai'i to work in sugar plantations. The pay they are given hardly matches the harmful work or the terrible working conditions. The rough conditions coupled with the demons'- the land or the business's white owners- prohibiting the workers to rest or talk causes the Chinese workers physical illnesses as well as psychological sufferings. The demons dictate orders and state the working rules because they are the powerful or rather because they made themselves powerful by force that is violence, what Michel Foucault refers to as "the operation of power as a regime of force or symbolic violence" (Qtd. in Pinder, 48). Foucault explains "[it] applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the *individual*, marks him by *his own individuality*, attaches him to *his own identity*, imposes a *law of truth* on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a *form of power which makes individuals subjects*" (Qtd. in Pinder, 48). I read the previous quote as being, in one way, a reformulation of the White Americans' dealing with the colored groups. The Whites impose the truth of their superiority on other racial communities and oblige them to endorse their logic of superior 'Self' as opposed to inferior 'Other'. This being reiterated in a sort of self regenerative process leads the 'Other' to internalize this logic and accept it as truth that dissipates into everyday life.

Bak Goong endures the harsh working conditions, the stifling heat, the severe prickling of the wild plants' thorns that he and his fellows are asked to remove and level between the sea and the mountain, but he couldn't endure the no-talking rule. The silence imposed on him is the most unbearable thing he couldn't take up. Kingston writes "the cough that had begun when he cut trees and stripped leaves worsened because of the hoeing in the rains. On the hottest days, the cough made his nose bleed. He stuffed rags in his nostrils and kept working" (*China Men*, 102). While suffering fever, "he yearned so hard for his family that he felt he appeared in China. He reached out his hands and said "wife, wife. I'm home" (*Ibid* 113). China men, who are homesick, are left vulnerable preys to fever which makes them hallucinate. "[Bak Goong] told the sick men around him, you can't die because then your poor wife will miss you, your family will go hungry waiting your pay. [...] If there were only you, you would have the luxury of dying. Uncles and Brothers, I have diagnosed our illness. It is congestion from not talking" (*Ibid* 113). With the purpose of curing themselves the workers dig a hole and voice out all their secrets and pain to mother earth.

Ah Goong, Kingston's great grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, takes part in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad with many other Chinese laborers. Working in miserable conditions and suffering loneliness and homesickness, he attaches himself to China through two constellations: The Spinning girl and The Cowboy, a Chinese folk story of love. By so doing, he tries to compensate for an emotional and a sexual void caused by the laws that prohibit Chinese wives to join their husbands for half a century and other laws that strip them of their masculinity.

The White demons are interested in achieving the project of connecting cities through expanding railroads. How the railroads are constructed and how mountains are hammered and, then, dynamited to force a way out and what pain the Chinese endure in the course of all this is what Kingston unveils in telling the stories of her ancestors. Describing workers she writes, "Across a valley a chain of men working on the next mountain, men like ants changing the face of the world, fell *but it was very far away*" (*China Men*, 129) (emphasis mine). The expression 'very far away' hints at the deliberate distancing of Chinese cheap laborers who died falling from up the mountain or who, being dynamited, blow to pieces that fall apart. "Human bodies skipped through the air like puppets and made Ah Goong laugh crazily as if the arms and legs would come together again" (*China Men*, 134).

While digging tunnels, many China men die but there is no official counting of corpses. When spring comes and the snow melts, it reveals "the thawing bodies, some standing with tools in hand [...] Remember Lee Brother? And Fong Uncle? They lost count of how many died building the railroad or may be it was demons doing the counting and Chinamen not worth counting" (*Ibid*, 136). As if not satisfied with the terrible working conditions, the railroad officials added two hours to the working time and four dollars per month which aroused the workers' anger and pushed them to go on strike in the 25th of June 1867. After nine days of strike, the Central Pacific gave the workers a four-dollar raise and announced that the shifts in the tunnels would remain eight hours long. Kingston's goal is not only to display her ancestors' experiences in the Gold Mountain, but also stress their suffering of racism and emasculation implemented by tyrannical state institutions.

Kingston uses the technique of storytelling to accentuate the pain of racism and discrimination. Ah Goong protests against rising the working hours by two. He says: "The demons don't believe this is a human body. This is a chinaman's body" (*China Men*, 137) and this testifies to the dehumanization of the Chinese workers. The opposition between "human body" and "chinaman's body" categorizes "chinamen" as toiling creatures who are not human. Of course, 'not human' could be understood as below the human status or in an ironic way super human. I am inclined to the first understanding as it serves my point of dehumanizing China men. This dehumanization is institutionalized by force of law.

C/ "The Laws": Kingston's Historicist Unveiling of Racial injustices

In chapter eight of *China Men*, "The Laws", Kingston uses pure historical information that enumerates the unjust laws passed against the Chinese immigrants in America which triggers wide criticism. "Most criticism sees Kingston's inclusion of this chapter in the middle of the book either as the author's explicit attempt to redress the wrongs of historical erasure of China men's contribution to the building of American nation, or as her ironic commentary on their loss of subject position" (Ling, 120). I think that, in this chapter, Kingston's task is to report accurate legal history-and it *is* accurate (emphasis mine)- because it is meant to educate

readers on an important part of American history that is erased because of the politics of race that did not work in favor of the Chinese workers. I provide some examples of these laws in what follows.

An extract of the legal text of the Burlingame Treaty is the first document that Kingston refers to in the beginning of this chapter:

The United States of America and the Emperor of China cordially recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively from the one country to the other for the purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents. ARTICLE V OF THE BURLINGAME TREATY? SIGNED IN WHASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 28, 1868, AND IN PEKING, NOVEMBER 23, 1869 (*China Men*, 150).

According to this document, the Chinese immigrants are allowed to move to the United States as traders, tourists or as permanent residents. Yet, in reality the first year the Burlingame Treaty was signed proved that the treaty did not come into force and that the USA's policy against Chinese immigration showed no sign of lenience or alteration. Kingston writes, "The same year, 40.000 miners of Chinese ancestry were Driven Out" (*China Men*, 150). Further adding:

The Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in that same year, said that naturalized Americans have the same rights as native-born Americans, but in 1870 the Nationality Act specified that only "free whites" and "African aliens" were allowed to apply for naturalization. Chinese were not white; this had been established legally in 1854 when Chan Young unsuccessfully applied for citizenship in Federal District Court in San Francisco and was turned down on grounds of race (*Ibid*).

The legislation leveled against the Chinese was an ongoing process and punctuated the intervals of two to three years from the 1850's until the 1970's. During this period different laws were passed that justified each time that the Chinese immigrants and their descendents were not considered American, but rather discarded as aliens. Hence, they were deprived of any right. In 1942 an immigration act was passed by congress and it excluded Chinese women, wives, and prostitutes. Working within the same policy of conserving the homogeneity of the white race initiated with the American historical documents. Like the Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence, the 1942 Immigration Act stated that any American who married a Chinese woman lost his citizenship; any Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship (Pinder, 60).

In the course of approximately two centuries, the Chinese immigrants suffered racial violence mediated through the tyranny of successive American governments since the birth of the United States of America as an independent country from Britain. History offers factual information about the racism and the sexual violence meaning considering the Chinese males as over sexual, asexual or as effeminate. In this chapter, readers are provided with the events that took place and their settings, but they can not grasp the trauma these injustices planted in the psyches of the Chinese pioneer immigrants and their subsequent generations. It is for this reason that ethnic or racial minority writers opt for a blending of fictional and non-fictional kind of narratives that would enable them to voice out their suffering and their ancestors'. This is exactly what Kingston does in *China Men* and in other works. Her effort is paralleled with Chinese male writers whose core objective is not to retaliate in writings, but rather to uncover psychological wounds that are hibernating the Chinese diasporized immigrant self.

The Chinese history in America is a history of racial injustice and cultural discrimination that is patched with unbearable losses one of which is the loss of their right to live ethical life. The loss of their humaneness is equally dolorous, let alone the loss of one's rights, culture and self-esteem. "Anyone who has been confronted by racism face to face understands the complicated, vexing web of feelings that ensues: shock mixed with expectation, anger with shame, and yet again shame for feeling shame" (Cheng, X). Within the same context Kenneth Clark states: "this type of racial wounds stays raw for a life time" (*Ibid*). Kingston's stories about her ancestors Bak Goong and Ah Goong, who suffer emasculation and dehumanization, reveal the power of storytelling in communicating ideas, dreams, nightmares and above all feelings of nostalgia and sorrow for the multiple losses listed above. This idea gains ground when supported by the following quote: "from African American to Asian American, narratives of sorrow and joy alike encode the yearning and mourning associated with the histories of dispersal and the remembrance of unspoken losses" (Cheng, 23). Racial minorities' narratives aim to reveal another history that is deliberately forgotten. Although the white-written history denies the Chinese immigrants their contribution in the building of America, their rights as American and even their claim of America as ancestral land, Chinese American writers continue to defend their ethnic culture to win the battle of being recognized as Americans.

Kingston rectifies the white-written American history from which her ancestors are erased and in doing so she undoes the imposed frame of identity that the White Americans use to contain and reduce the Chinese ethnicity. It's her own way of responding to Foucault's "refuse what we are" which means "that we should refuse to remain tied to the identities to which we are subjected" (Simons, 1-2). Unfortunately, the Chinese group in America remains subjected to the violent racial policy inherent from the various American governments. However different they were in their policies, it seemed that the deliberate humiliation and violence towards the Chinese Diaspora are actually the unifying points between them all. "Within the national imagination, Asian Americans in particular suffer a "*phantom illness*" because they occupy an unstable position in the ethnic-racial spectrum; their projected place in America is *ghostly*" (Cheng, 69). Their historical presence is *ghostly* and *phantom-like* because they were in The Gold Mountain, but they were not acknowledged as a shade of the ethnic spectrum. They were alienated as exotic, inscrutable who had natural talent for explosions (*China Men*, 135) or who could toil all day long like mules.

Kingston attempts to relocate them in American history on the ground that the Chinese were the founding fathers of the aiena i.e. the land, America. When Kingston's grandfather and other workers wanted to voice their suffering to mother earth and dug a hole, Bak Goong commented "That wasn't a custom [...] *we made it up*. We can make up customs because *we're the founding ancestors of this place*" (*China Men*, 116) (emphasis mine). Also, when the Chinese workers for the railroads decided to go on strike, Ah Goong admired them "Of course. Of course. No China men, no railroad. They were indispensable labor" (*Ibid*, 137). The Transcontinental Railroad was viewed as the greatest feat of the nineteenth century (*Ibid*, 142) and Kingston comments that "only American could have done it [...] which is true. Even if Ah Goong had not spent half his gold on citizenship papers, he was an American for having built the railroad" (*Ibid*, 143). He was one of the "Men like ants changing the face of the world" (*Ibid*, 129). So, he deserved to be recognized as American.

Conclusion

The present paper adds to the study of the political and politics in as much as it offers an illustration of their dialectic relationship through investigating the historical power relationship of the mainstream American whites with racial minorities, namely the Chinese-Americans. The theoretical frame, within which this power relationship is scrutinized, spans insightful perceptions of the political, from Aristotle as the Western theorizing source to the postmodern ideas about power and hegemony for which Foucauldian philosophy is a putative model. Though this theoretical frame does not cover most philosophical ideas that contribute to the construction of political theory like Thomas Hobbes' or Karl Marx's, I find it relevant to my purpose, which is to shed light on Kingston's book, *China Men* (1980), as a sort of political writing as it conveys a counter discourse of resistance.

This idea becomes even more feasible when the book is read in the light of significant philosophical and political ideas and perceptions of power and its spread through violence. The notion of power is fundamental to the study of identity politics in the context of multi-racial society of the United States. As I show in this paper, political identity is predicated on the notions of justice and violence. Actually, it is based on the absence of justice and the pervasion of violence. Dealing with the mainstream whites defined as those who hold power as opposed to the Chinese-American ethnic group, who are subjected to this power through individual and state violence, I consolidate the idea that the legislative injustices, which taint the history of Chinese in America, emanate from basic racist ideas that view the Chinese-American as the most despicable, inscrutable and filthy race (Moy, 35). Finally, it is the white race that stands at one powerful extremity and the Chinese-American minority that stands at the other extremity, where they are subjected to power and denied the human right of an ethical life based on justice that Aristotle sets as premise to his study of political science.

The first Chinese-American immigrant waves, Kingston's ancestors, are confined to silence under different practices of violence such as whipping, lynching and enslaving them through menial jobs that reduce them to the status of women or lower. The pain caused by these racial injustices is psychologically too profound to be ghettoized within their psyches. This is why subsequent generations undertake the mission of uncovering their ancestors' bitter versions of the journey to the west that heads to America. Minority writers like Kingston, realize the trauma of racism as they face it themselves and devote their fictional or non-fictional narratives to exteriorize the melancholy of race through the struggle for recognition of their legitimate rights as Americans. The investigation of Kingston's book testifies to the power of storytelling, as an oral tradition widely practiced in the Chinese-American minority, to reveal a hidden and deliberately obliterated history. What is credited to Kingston is her rewriting of this forgotten history in a new form that brings about an overlapping between fiction and non-fiction; yet, it remains faithful to the basic goal of answering back the white racial hegemonic discourse. The investigation of Kingston's book from other perspectives would lead to other significant findings concerning the book's political traits.

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