Labored Realisms: Geopolitical Rhetoric and Asian American and Asian (Im)migrant Women’s (Auto)biography

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Transnational industry’s use of Asian and Latina women’s labor—in Asia, Latin America, and the U.S.—is the contemporary site where the contradictions of the national and international converge in an overdetermination of neocolonial capitalism, anti-immigrant racism, and patriarchal gender stratification. . . transnational capitalism, like nation-state capitalism and colonial capitalism before it, continues to produce sites of contradiction, and the dynamics of its own negation and critique.

—Lisa Lowe

Preservation of the integrity and fullness of the laboring person and body within the circulation process of variable capital is the fulcrum upon which contestation and class struggle both within and without the labor process occurs.

—David Harvey

In “Locational Feminism: Gender, Cultural Geographies, and Geopolitical Literacy,” Susan Stanford Friedman observes that a locational idiom characterizes the cultural and epistemological formations of third wave feminism—that is, late 1980s and 1990s North American feminism. The spatial rhetoric of location, migration, and positionality marks a shift from the prevailing temporal rhetoric of awakening, revelation, and rebirth and the exclusive focus on gender associated with second wave feminism of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. Distinct from the rhetoric of second wave “global feminism,” third wave feminism or “locational feminism” (Friedman 24) is characterized by the grammar of the geopo-

litical or transnational, which emphasizes the "effects of national identity in relation to issues of international conditions." According to Friedman, five tropes characterize the feminist grammar of the geopolitical: the metaphoric of nation, borders, migration, "glocation," and conjuncture (24). In this essay, we are particularly concerned with the tropes of migration, glocation, and conjuncturalism. The first trope focuses on migration, immigration, and diaspora, and how material bodies acquire layers of identities through such movement (29). Glocation refers to the interdependence of the local and global—how each is implicated in the other—and how the "local, private, and domestic are constituted in relation to global systems and conversely how such systems must be read for their particular locational inflection" (31). Finally, conjuncturalism, a term derived from anthropology, replaces the traditional comparison/contrast analytic with attention to the "juxtaposition of different cultural formations...[and] the light this epistemological juncture sheds on each and for the way in which each discursive system interrupts the other" (31).

To what extent are Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women's (auto)biographies, testimonials, and (auto)biographical criticism informed by this grammar of locational feminism? We approach this question not through a historical survey of the field of women's (auto)biography and autobiography criticism, but through an analysis of the production and reception of three texts that highlight representations of Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women's laboring bodies across realist genres. We begin with Jade Snow Wong's autobiography of economic "success," *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, written for a primarily white audience and read by critics, for the most part, as an assimilation narrative that supports dominant U.S. national culture and memory. Then we consider the rhetorical function of Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women workers' testimonials in anti-sweatshop and anti-corporate campaigns as depicted in Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory* and Tia Lessin's documentary video *Behind the Labels: Garment Workers in U.S. Saipan* (2001). Our goal is to enact a version of conjuncturalism—what Friedman calls cultural parataxis (31)—through a discussion of how each of these realist texts labors to produce bodies of evidence, bodies of (dis)identification, and bodies at risk.

**Location, Location, Location**

Realist self-representation entails risks as well as opportunities for the (im)migrant woman subject. For instance, documentary representations
of the Asian American and Asian (im)migrant female body run the risk of creating the spectacle of "otherness," even as they appear to be telling a "true story" of heroic resolution. In Sweatshop Warriors, Louie describes the responses of twelve Chinese seamstresses and Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) to a 60 Minutes story that aired in December 1994 about their struggle against San Francisco garment manufacturer Jessica McClintock (1–2). As the women prepare to view themselves on television being interviewed by Morley Safer, they are anxious about their decision to conduct the interviews without masking their faces. For these women, becoming visible—showing their faces as they speak out against corporate injustice—is not simply empowering but can also result in being fired, blacklisted, and castigated by their communities. As the camera zooms in on their faces, the risks of representation become increasingly clear: their voices, speaking in native dialects, remain untranslated while their faces are displayed for millions of American viewers, perhaps including bosses and community members. Safer's voice-over, meanwhile, constructs a "realist" narrative in which McClintock—not AIWA or the seamstresses—is depicted as a corporate hero. In the 60 Minutes story, it is therefore not the (im)migrant women workers, bravely speaking out and risking representation, who are revered, but McClintock, who listened to their stories (presumably only after legal intervention). The (im)migrant women are seen but not heard, gazed upon as objects but not listened to as subjects.

As critics, we are sensitive to the risks we take in focusing on this body as both a discursive and material site. However, we argue that attention to "realist" constructions of labor history as written onto and by Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women's laboring bodies is necessary for a materialist critique of neoliberal celebrations of free movement (including the myth of immigration and migration as individual choices). That is, how and why bodies move, migrate, and travel reminds us of the material and historical conditions that make such movements possible (or that compel such movements). Moreover, attention to constructions of these laboring bodies across texts and genres allows us to see the contradictions in "realist" representations. For example, reading Fifth Chinese Daughter alongside other realist narratives of (im)migrant women's laboring bodies exposes what the "labored realism" of Fifth Chinese Daughter works to mask: the rise of an exploited (racialized, gendered, [im]migrant) transnational labor force.

With the term "labored realism," we wish to acknowledge both the rhetorical in the material and to theorize the rhetorical configurations of
"the economic real" in Asian American and Asian (im)migrant (auto)biographical narratives and testimonials. "Labored realism" entails a relational view of the material and discursive. We do not treat realist texts as analogies of social reality, as if the "real" could be divorced from the discursive. Rather, we view realist genres, like the "real" itself, as sites of cultural mediation, and the laboring body as a geopolitical-rhetorical site upon and through which discourses circulate. The rhetorical challenge of realist texts such as *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is to produce a seamless narrative of (im)migrant success and social mobility by masking what threatens to disrupt it. Rhetorically, then, many (im)migrant (auto)biographies labor to create "the real" by foregrounding individualist meritocracy and suppressing—though not entirely successfully—representations of white benefactors and economic "failure." Finally, "labored realism" also refers to our strategy as critics reading for the laboring body in the North American and Pacific West in order to further explore the transnational grammar of locational feminism.

We critically engage the concept of the "West" by considering what is "Western" about (auto)biography/testimonial that emerges from Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women in the U.S. west (namely, California), and geographic regions of U.S. western territories (namely, U.S. Saipan). United States territories such as U.S. Saipan are part of the new "Western frontier," where the work of globalization gets done. Like global cities (such as New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Los Angeles, London, Bombay, Hong Kong, and Mexico City, among others), U.S. Saipan provides a material site for the implementation of a global network of corporations, the overvaluation of corporate capital, and the devalorization of disadvantaged firms and workers (Sassen xx). To what extent are Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women’s self-representations marked by the rugged utopian rhetoric of the geopolitical "West" and the "Western frontier?" And to what extent is this rhetoric challenged by more critical representations of the material effects of globalization at the local level? We ask these questions not to romanticize the "radically local" as an automatic site of resistance to the global, for we have no interest in creating a localism held up as an ideal. Rather, we are interested in how realist texts such as those under consideration here work out the relationship between the local and global and articulate the contradictions of the globalization of capital. David Harvey puts it succinctly, "spatiotemporality defined at one scale (that of 'globalization' and all its associated meanings) intersects with bodies that function at a much more localized scale" (109). Similarly, our goal is to recognize
how the local and global are constituted through each other in the production and reception of Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women’s (auto)biography and testimonials, and, following Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, to avoid the essentialist configuration of the local “as the space of oppositional consciousness and the global ... as an oppressive network of dominant power structures” (671).

Moreover, our focus on the spatial rhetoric of realist representations of labor and (im)migration allows us to articulate the local experiences and practices through which globalization exists, and to argue that the racialization and feminization of labor in Western U.S. territories is a part of globalization. Analyzing the “economies of place” in the global network of production and consumption, as Sassen acknowledges, enables recognition of the “possibility of a new type of transnational politics, a politics of those who lack power but now have ‘presence’” (xxi).

While *Fifth Chinese Daughter* raises questions about the universality of (im)migrant experiences and assimilation narratives, more recent testimonials pose new questions regarding “universality” and “presence.” For example, do (im)migrant women’s testimonials privilege certain forms of community and identification in their representations of economic and social injustice? Our chapter aims to challenge utopian visions of communitarianism as well as the critical romanticization of movement, migrancy, and border-crossing. Instead, we examine the material conditions and effects of (im)migrant labor and labor movements depicted across three realist genres—(auto)biography, testimonials, and documentary film. In all three texts, (im)migrant, gendered, and laboring bodies in the U.S. West can be read as geopolitical-rhetorical sites where issues of immigration, globalization, and local labor practices are inscribed and contested. Further, as the literal, material site of globalization and its effects, the (im)migrant woman’s laboring body troubles the global/local binary by bearing witness to the ways in which globalization is manifested in/as the radically local.

Moreover, in the case of U.S. Saipan and our discussion of *Behind the Labels*, we note that (im)migrant women workers do not regard the nation as a principal source of identification. The unmooring of identities from the nation and village engenders new concepts of transnational communities and sites of resistance as well as exploitation. We juxtapose *Behind the Labels* with *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and *Sweatshop Warriors* in order to reveal the historical, cultural, geopolitical, and economic correspondences and contradictions of these three realist texts. In the tradition of Walter Benjamin and adapted by Lisa Lowe, the concept of correspon-
dences proposes a "dialectic that considers the relation of parts to fractured wholes and seeks to be 'historical' amid the losses and contingencies of history" (197). Similarly, in Immigrant Acts, Lowe takes up the Marxist concept of contradiction to describe how "domination creates its own dynamic negation. . . . For Marx, capitalism generates its own contradictions, the primary one being between capital and labor that precipitates proletarian consciousness and the overflow of the capitalist system" (183). Lowe departs from Marx, however, in recognizing the "contradictory circumstances of Asian Americans within 'postmodern' capitalist global economy"; she notes that "what might be theorized as economic contradiction is within the specificity of U.S. history also always a racial and gendered contradiction" (183). Lowe argues, as our epigram suggests, that transnational industry creates contradictions between the global economy and the needs of the nation-state through the proletarianization of Asian and Latina (im)migrant women (160). For example, "the state claims to be a democratic body in which all subjects are granted membership, while the racialized (im)migrant workers from whom capital profits are historically excluded from political participation in the state" (183). Lowe does not construe (im)migrants as passive victims of economic determinism, however; instead, she looks to the political and material bodies of (im)migrants as countersites that challenge universal and exclusive notions of the national body and national memory (8–9).

Similarly, we are interested in the role that geopolitical-rhetorical bodies of laboring Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women play in supporting or challenging dominant Western narratives of citizenship, meritocracy, and foundationalist notions of the "real," truth, and authenticity. The correspondences and contradictions among the laboring Asian American and Asian (im)migrant body, narratives of citizenship, and struggles over the economic and cultural "real" represent yet another dimension of our use of the concept of "labored realism." We acknowledge the Marxist notion of the worker as transformed by the appendages of capital, Foucault's premise that the body is made over by disciplinary apparatus, and Haraway's notion that the body (cyborg) is an extension of the machine. And yet we do not adhere to narrow interpretations of historical materialism that situate the economic outside of discourse or poststructuralist theories that suggest that the material body is overdetermined by discourse and therefore lacks agency in relation to disciplinary and technological systems. Rather, we concur with readings of both Haraway and Foucault that perceive in their work opportunities
to theorize agency, and we credit Harvey’s recognition of Marx’s own account of the potential for transformative processes. Harvey notes, for instance, the space for critique opened up by “Marx’s distinction between the laborer (person, body, will) and labor power (that which is extracted from the body of the laborer as a commodity)” (102). Harvey usefully broadens the conventional definition of the Marxian notion of class (or class relations), which limits the laborer to an economic role, in order to account for the “internal contradictions of multiple positionalities within which human beings operate” (102). Harvey is concerned, as are we, with the effects of the circulation of variable capital—cultural, political, and economic—on the bodies through which it circulates (102–03). How are these laboring bodies configured in Asian American and Asian (im)migrant (auto)biography of the U.S. west? Are certain identities or subjectivities upheld or made possible by their link to the nation-state? Finally, can these laboring bodies be made visible without also being turned into cultural spectacles in the manner of the 60 Minutes story?

Bodies of Evidence: Spectacles of Labor in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*

Jade Snow [had] remained a mere spectator. . . . Now at last she too could claim to be a participant.

—Jade Snow Wong

Published in 1945, Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* appeared at a transitional moment in United States political and economic history. The 1940s saw a radical shift in immigration law and policy pertaining to Asians, neatly dividing the history of Asians in America into two distinct periods, from about 1850 to World War II, and from World War II forward (Lowe 158–59). A series of changes in U.S. domestic and foreign policy, including war with Japan, reflected the nation’s aggressive attempts to redefine its role as an international power in an increasingly globalized economy. At the same time, a series of legal changes reflected the importance of Asian (im)migrant identity and labor to this enterprise, as the U.S. sought to redefine the contested meanings of “Asian” and “American” along ethnic, national, and international lines. As part of this political and economic redefinition, the Repeal Acts of 1943, 1946, and 1950 abolished the Asian Exclusion Acts that began in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act. These Acts were designed to maintain and control a steady but “manageable” flow of Asian male labor to the states for jobs that could not be filled by citizen workers (Lowe 12–13).
repeals, though couched in a progressive rhetoric of liberation and equality, were in fact the result of international and domestic pressure, exacerbated by the war with Japan, and were designed to redefine and reorganize Asian (im)migrant identity and labor for the expanding international economy. Collectively, the acts succeeded in legally deconstructing the Asian "race" (defined by and through exclusion)—a construction no longer tenable or in U.S. international interests—and reconstructing them in terms of what Neil Gotanda calls "Orientalized ethnic categories" (324). These categories allowed the U.S. to appear to negate race as a defining factor in immigration policy even as it practiced the selective "weeding out" of undesirable Asian ethnics. That these repeals had little immediate economic but much ideological effect speaks to the caution with which the U.S. proceeded in this restructuring, as does the token immigration quota of around one hundred male Chinese laborers established by the 1943 repeal act (310).

*Fifth Chinese Daughter* must be understood as a "realist" text written and published in this specific legal and economic context. Indeed, the narrative is full of rhetorical moments and "images" that make the traditional distinctions between "local" and "global" (as well as "local" and "national") untenable. The text illustrates, for example, how the U.S. war with Japan had enormous impact on domestic Asian immigrant labor, including the labor of Chinese immigrant women, many of whom were eager, as was Jade Snow herself, "to make some contribution" to the war effort (178). Moreover, Jade Snow's economic and cultural "success" in local Chinatown is in fact the result of rising anti-Japanese sentiment due to global forces. As ethnic Japanese subjects were increasingly demonized in government propaganda and the popular media, ethnic Chinese subjects were (re)constructed as the "friendly" Asian. Therefore, Wong's autobiography must be understood as a conscious effort to redefine "Chinese" as "American"—that is, to erase the multiple conjunctures of the "Asian" (im)migrant body, and to replace it with an abstract narrative of emancipation and opportunity for "ethnic Americans" in the U.S. As Leigh Gilmore argues in *The Limits of Autobiography*, the connections between autobiography, law, and citizenship are no discursive accident, but constitute a "realist" rhetoric of identification and nationhood that masks the nation's failed promise to deliver equal rights to all (12–13).

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, this rhetoric of inclusion is constituted through a narrative of "economic realism" that not only masks the injustices experienced by Asian (im)migrants to the U.S., but that is also explicitly linked to a romanticized view of immigration as free choice and
immigrants as socially and economically mobile subjects. Moreover, this rhetoric, viewed alongside the “official” legal narratives of the Repeal Acts, parallels the nation-state’s erasure of Asian (im)migrant labor history. “As the state legally transforms the Asian alien into the Asian American citizen,” Lowe argues, “it institutionalizes the disavowal of the history of racialized labor exploitation and disenfranchisement through the promise of freedom in the political sphere” (9–10). This “disavowal” of the racialized and economic specificity of the laboring (im)migrant body enables the state to advance its national project of hegemonic citizenship and Wong to participate in this project by writing the “real-life” (im)migrant success story—a story that has been derided by critics as at best assimilationist and at worst “autobiography-as-propaganda” (Chin xviii). In order to correct these (mis)readings of Wong as cultural traitor and to account for the “labored realism” that they overlook, we attend to the conjuncturalism of the narrative. That is, we are interested in how the text demonstrates both the centrality of place in a geo-political context where its specificity becomes neutralized by the presumed mobility of capital, and the spectacle of the economic “real” that contributes precisely to this neutralization of locational specificity.

However distasteful critics find Fifth Chinese Daughter’s overt economic “realism”—encapsulated in a narrative of equal opportunity and (im)migrant success—it does not succeed in fully occluding other, more fragmented “images” of (im)migrant labor present in the text, images that work at times in concert and at times in contradiction with each other. In fact, the text provides its own evidence for how this economic “real” is realized through the laboring body of Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women and girls. These images of laboring (im)migrant women’s bodies expose Fifth Chinese Daughter’s “labored realism” by calling attention to what its nationalistic narrative labors to suppress: its dependence on the abstract image of the national “citizen,” built precisely on the exclusion and exploitation of Asian laboring bodies. As our reading will show, however, textual traces of these laboring “bodies of evidence”—which “testify” to both Asian exploitation and complicity in nationalist narratives—are not necessarily utopian sites of opposition and resistance. Rather, even as they expose the failure of the text’s narrative of (im)migrant success, these bodies are offered up as silent spectacles as often as spaces of critique, and sometimes they function in both ways simultaneously. The narrative therefore vacillates between the “realist” rhetoric of meritocracy and the fragmented presence of laboring bodies that disrupt this rhetoric.
As an autobiography that enacts the narrative of female "coming to voice" in the democratic U.S., *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, as Leslie Bow points out, "affirm[s] American culture as the site of gender equality" (76) and erases the complex histories of gender inequality and racial struggle in the U.S. Alongside (and intersecting with) this narrative of gender liberation, however, is an equally important class narrative that works to level the historical and material differences between "equal individuals" that enable or disable "class" mobility. As Wong puts it in her introduction to the 1989 version of the text, "Yes, being Chinese in America, I have had problems, but they have not stopped me" (xi). This narrative of equal opportunity is crystallized in an early scene in which Jade Snow’s grandmother gives her a lesson in meritocracy. "I am going to show you how plant life develops," she tells Jade Snow (31). She plants a handful of seeds in a series of cups, and, as the plants develop over the course of several weeks, she discards the weak ones and transplants the strong ones with care. One day, Grandmother shows Jade Snow that one of the plants "was just bursting into a bright yellow bloom; but one showed no promise of bloom at all." Summing up her lesson, Grandmother continues:

"Now you can see that, when conditions change some will adjust readily and come out first, while others may still be left behind."

Jade Snow nodded. She could see again that handful of all-alike seeds lying in Grandmother’s open palm, and she reflected on the wonders which water and soil could accomplish for those who would try. (33)

As one of Jade Snow’s first "life lessons," Grandmother’s story of the "all-alike seeds" and their transformations neatly sets up the trajectory of the meritocratic labor narrative that guides the autobiography: Jade Snow, equal to all other children born in the U.S., will eventually bloom and prosper through individual choice, industry, and hard work. Her eventual success both in business and in the arts are presented in the text solely as the fruits of her personal labor—a labor significantly *not* characterized by exploitation of her racialized, feminized body. This is labor in the abstract, not attached to bodies, and its rhetoric is reminiscent of both the myth of the Western "frontier" as a space of unbounded economic opportunity and abstract narratives of citizenship circulated by the nation-state. The nation’s rhetorical *promise* of citizenship as belonging is undermined by its *practice* of citizenship as exclusion; likewise, Grandmother’s happy story of botanical "success" plants the seeds of its
own undoing, for the plants, as Grandmother acknowledges, need proper climate and care in order to thrive.

In precisely this way, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*'s narrative of abstract, unembodied labor provides its own evidence for how this fantasy is realized. When struggle ensues, threatening to expose the tenuousness of Jade Snow's economic and social position, it is immediately resolved in the text by the appearance of a gracious white benefactor. For instance, when Jade Snow, denied a scholarship to the state university, worries over having enough savings to afford furthering her education there, her anxiety is cut short by "an unexpected offer" from an anonymous patron who "has had a lifelong interest in the Oriental people" (147). Dr. Reinhardt makes it possible for Jade Snow to attend not the state school, but Mills College, "the fashionable private women's college" that is usually open only to the upper strata of society. However, Dr. Reinhardt's generosity, after being briefly if gratefully mentioned, is quickly forgotten, and the rhetoric of individual hard work and just reward supplants it. Indeed, Jade Snow seems uncannily blessed with benefactors, a host of white "guardian angels" who remain virtually unseen but whose condescending graciousness make Jade Snow's "individual" success possible. In stunning contrast to the urgent specificity of laboring (im)migrant women’s bodies, these ethereal angels breeze easily through the narrative, filling in the gaps that threaten to expose the failure of (im)migrant economic "success."

And yet, if this realist rhetoric of labor in the abstract, unattached to bodies, is privileged in the text, the bodies of (im)migrant laborers are not entirely suppressed. They appear at other moments in the narrative, revealing the very gaps and fissures that Jade Snow's white angels labor to suppress. However, these bodies appear only in and as narrative fragments, like "queer" Uncle Kwok, whose dragging feet, "cardboard soles," and "thin, patched trousers" do not mesh in Jade Snow's young mind with her knowledge that he works around the clock. Re-membering these fragmented "bodies of evidence" requires piecing them back together both within the text and in conjunction with other narratives of Asian (im)migrant women's labor. A useful place to begin to piece them together is, appropriately enough, in the Wong's garment "factory-home," where workers' overalls are cut and sewn together by the Wong family and their female employees (3). The "factory-home"—located in San Francisco's Chinatown "on Stockton between Clay and Sacramento Streets" and "around the corner" from the Presbyterian Home where "women 'in difficulties' sought refuge" (3, 5)—serves both as living and
working space, and is filled with female employees: “On the second floor were the finishing machines and more long cutting tables where women sat all day examining the finished overalls before folding and tying them into bundles of a dozen each” (4). After preparing breakfast for the family, Jade Snow’s mother, “breath[ing] in rhythm to the running stitches,” becomes one of these women workers: “For the rest of the day Mother was at a machine except when she stopped to get the meals or to do other housework” (52, 4).

Despite Wong’s statement that “home life and work life were . . . mixed together,” this early mention of the (im)migrant women laborers is one of the very last (4). Throughout most of the rest of the autobiography, scenes in the factory-home are narrated as if the seamstresses were not present “all day” and are only mentioned again when Jade Snow brings her college “labor problems” class for a tour of the Wong family factory (a scene that will be dealt with in greater detail below). Nor does Wong continue to focus on her mother’s continuous labor; instead, she narrates in detail scenes of grand leisure and “bourgeois” entertainment, such as the strolls she takes with her mother on Sundays throughout the San Francisco waterfront, a fishing expedition, and the family’s participation in Chinese New Year celebrations. While some critics have noted the dynamic of cultural “tourism” enacted in these scenes—a dynamic that exoticizes Chinatown as a space of radical difference—it is important to note the dynamic of class at work here as well, a dynamic that works to domesticate the racialized “Other” through a rhetoric of shared leisure interests (holidays and fishing expeditions, for example). Like the contradictory representations of Europeanized Native Americans participating in “civilized” activities that predominate in Western frontier fantasies, Wong’s self-representation imagines economic and civic participation while failing to fully erase her “exotic” difference. Moreover, it (re)constructs a rhetoric of “rugged individualism” that is attached to (im)migrant labor and lives throughout the narrative. More to the point, these representations of Jade Snow and her mother at leisure directly conflict with the image of her mother bent over a machine for most of each day.

The suppressed rhetorical presence of the (im)migrant worker and the fragments of her laboring body, however, surface elsewhere, in scattered, disconnected scenes with no direct attachment to the dominant labor narrative. When the Wong family is forced to relocate to a new factory-home during the Depression, eleven-year-old Jade Snow must take over the housework so that her mother can “do as much sewing as
possible" (54). Wong describes her mother's labor matter-of-factly, but hints at its physical burden on her body, of which her mother "never complained" (53). This erasure of physical stress is echoed later in the text when Jade Snow describes her own and her grandmother's back pain as detached from any mention of labor or other hardship. In a unique scene in which Jade Snow visits the doctor for her ailments, her back remains rhetorically disconnected from the rest of her body and its history of labor in the factory-home; though the doctor tells her that her lower back has been under "continuous strain," she does not overtly link it to her body's near-constant labor from childhood to college (202). Instead, she describes it as a slap from "Fate," an abstraction free from the cultural specificities of an increasingly racialized and gendered Chinatown garment industry.

Perhaps even more than a mother's laboring "hands" and generations of aching "backs," the text's suppressed portrayal of the seamstresses disrupts and contests Jade Snow's meritocratic rhetoric of (im)migrant success. As noted above, these (im)migrant women laborers, though constantly present in the Wong factory-home, become visible only twice, and only as a rhetorically undifferentiated mass, a single bodily "machine" for garment production. Significantly, their second appearance coincides with a scene in which Jade Snow takes upon herself the role of cultural tour guide and invites her college "labor problems" course to tour the family factory-home. In a stunningly condescending pedagogical move, the course's instructor "interrupt[s] a conversation about piecework factories and workers to ask her one day: 'Do you think that our class might visit your father's factory?"' (163). The tour, paired with a tour of a larger garment factory, is designed to elicit comparative notes. But it does more than contrast the family factory and the large factory; the Wong's factory-home is opened up to the predominantly white students as a spectacle of Asian (im)migrant life: "Jade Snow also showed the class through their living quarters" (164). The seamstresses, as well as the children that they have had to bring to work, are likewise made into a spectacle for curious white tourists, for Jade Snow's benefit: "The Chinese women workers stared at the young, healthy Caucasian girls just as curiously as the students stared at the native costumes and the Chinese babies" (164). Although the laboring Chinese seamstresses and the "young, healthy Caucasian girls" are represented as equal partners in an intercultural gaze, it is the racialized (im)migrant's factory-home, the space itself as a site of production, that is put on display by the pedagogical and racial dynamic. Moreover, Wong's distinction between the
laboring bodies of the seamstresses and the "young, healthy" bodies of the students suggests the unequal distribution of power in this gaze. The seamstresses stare in awe at the privileged bodies of the Caucasian girls, while the students stare at the racialized spectacle and place of (im)migrant work and dress.

Crucially, it is precisely through presenting this spectacle of (im)migrant women's laboring bodies that Jade Snow is able to disidentify with the exploited, racialized seamstresses and to rhetorically reorient herself as a full participant in dominant white U.S. culture. As she fulfills her roles as hostess and tour guide, she feels herself splitting her own gaze into two distinct perspectives:

Although everyone seemed more or less at home, the parents as well as guests, Jade Snow suddenly felt estranged, for while she was translating conversation between instructor and parents, she was observing the scene with two pairs of eyes—Fifth Daughter's, and those of a college junior. (164–65)

These "two pairs of eyes"—one Asian and filial, belonging to Fifth Daughter, and the other "white" and independent, those of a college student—are clearly divided along racial lines. Jade Snow's sudden estrangement from family and culture is a "realist" requirement in the narrative of successful assimilation; in this text, it comes about through the politics of the racialized gaze. By positioning herself as "spectator" to her family, Chinatown culture, and the racialized and gendered bodies that constitute (im)migrant labor, Jade Snow is able to rhetorically reimagine herself as a full "participant" in mainstream white American life (even as it is she whose home, family and culture are put on display, both in this specific scene and in the autobiography as a whole). By constructing herself as both audience and agent, she is able to distinguish herself from those who are merely observed.

This rhetorical dynamic of spectacle and display is significantly echoed in the culminating scene in the text's (im)migrant success narrative. After the war is over, during which she had obtained a position with the War Production Board in Marin County, across the bay from San Francisco, Jade Snow must once again look for work in Chinatown. Having discovered a talent for pottery-making, she decides to open her own pottery shop in Chinatown, which will cater to white tourists. Not having the financial resources to rent her own space, she is forced to ask other merchants to share their space. She is refused by all but the owner
of the China Bazaar, who not only agrees to share his space but also allows Jade Snow to set up her wheel in his front window: "Perhaps my working there would attract people to your store to buy your own wares," she suggests hopefully. Her plan works to attract not customers for the proprietor, but spectators for Jade Snow's displayed body. Significantly, her "foreign" feminine appearance is of particular interest to the spectators, who openly discuss her among each other: "'Oh, look, and it is a China girl too. Look, she has no permanent wave. Her braids are still the way they wear them in Shanghai. Here is a Shanghai girl!'" (243-44). Notwithstanding the demeaning talk of the spectators, Jade Snow continues to sit in the window, "her legs astride a potter's wheel, her hair in braids, her hands perpetually messy with sticky California clay" (244). Her business' success, much like her other successes, is linked directly to her willingness to put her labor and her body on display for white tourists: "Caucasians came from far and near to see her work," while "the Chinese did not come to buy one piece from her" (244). This scene, with its proud description of the "exotic" Asian female body at work, provides a striking contrast to the muted representation of the laboring bodies of Jade Snow's mother, grandmother, and the seamstresses, sewing "all day" at machines in a cramped factory-home, probably without windows. The text's privileging of this exoticized body—which is clearly distinguished from the undifferentiated spectacle of the seamstresses' bodies—illustrates how the (im)migrant woman's "success" story is built on and maintained by the white gaze (recoded rhetorically as white "generosity").

Critics, reading this final scene as a metaphorical illustration of "cultural mixing" and a "biracial identity," have emphasized Jade Snow's "blending" of Eastern and Western artistic materials, in, for example, her use of American clay to create traditional Chinese designs. For example, Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer Paulson argue that this scene shows "the successful integration of both cultural experiences in her description of Jade Snow with her hair braided in the traditional Chinese fashion, yet sitting most unconventionally astride a potter's wheel" (56). What critics seem to have missed, however, are the ways in which the geopolitical rhetoric in this scene and throughout Fifth Chinese Daughter is connected to the visual dynamic of "exotic" spectacle and the politics of the racialized gaze. This rhetoric constructs Asian American laboring bodies as passive and complicit spectacles for the white tourist gaze, either fragmented into parts that remain unconnected to labor or fused into a single abstract "machine" for production. Perhaps most impor-
tantly, these suppressed "bodies of evidence" reveal precisely what *Fifth Chinese Daughter* works to exclude: the rise of an exploited female (im)migrant labor force beginning around WWII and culminating in the modern-day stratification of racialized (im)migrant women workers in a transnational economy. The rhetoric and politics of realist representations of this new "body" of transnational workers, as well as the shift away from the nation as a primary site of identification for these workers, is the subject of our next section.

**Bodies of (Dis)Identification and the Testimonial Gaze**

Through the pages of this book, you, Dear Reader, have participated in a kind of written word "workers' exchange" and "study tour" that poor peoples' groups have organized across the decades... The women who clothe, feed, and care for us, who take risks and lead resistance on our behalf, have shared their stories with us so we can better understand their movements and join them in their struggles.

—Louie

(Im)migrant women workers' testimonies in Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take On The Global Factory* and *Behind the Labels: Garment Workers in U.S. Saipan*, a documentary video by Tia Lessin, exemplify the labor of realist genres to document human rights violations and to persuade viewers and listeners to get involved. In *Behind the Labels*, the hidden camera moves through the garment factory and workers' barracks in an evidentiary fashion to reveal the horrible living and working conditions of garment workers on U.S. Saipan. The spatial rhetoric is characterized by images of overcrowded, rat- and cockroach-infested barracks, with no hot water or air conditioning. Black and white images from high, surveillance-like camera angles reveal piles of garments at each workstation; some piles are so high they function as partitions. The hidden camera gives viewers the ability to see without being seen; viewers share the quality of invisibility with the concealed camera. Yet, the rhetorical function of the hidden camera is not one of passive voyeurism; rather, the gaze constructed for viewers is that of a critical witness. The testimonial gaze contrasts with tourist appeals and images of Saipan as a lavish island retreat with green rocky shores and clear waters, as well as with the tourist gaze at Jade Snow's laboring body in the window of her shop in Chinatown. Like the hidden camera, the testimonies of (im)migrant women leaders inter-
viewed in *Sweatshop Warriors* “take us behind gated windows and blocked exits to what they [the workers] call the ‘back of the house’ of the garment and service industries” (20).

*Sweatshop Warriors* spotlights grassroots Asian and Latina (im)migrant women workers as agents of change—as “woman warriors” (5). Louie employs the grammar of locational feminism—spatial rhetoric—to describe the racialization and feminization of migration and labor. She argues that the histories of (im)migrant women working in sweatshops in the United States “read like timelines and road maps of the global economy” (2). Many women, for example, first migrate to urban centers and free trade zones within their own countries before coming to work in the United States. Louie invites readers to “listen harder to hear the vibrant voices and lyrical leadership of grassroots folks on the bottom, the foundation rock of mass movements” (253). In a desire to narrow the divide between academics and activists, she imagines her audience as potential activists. She urges readers to “remember to make time to walk those picket lines, send in those protest letters, mail in those labels, organize those actions, and extend our unstinting solidarity to grassroots women everywhere” (254). This imagined community and projected identification establishes a rhetoric of belonging to counter the consumption of (im)migrant women workers’ testimonies as mere products of the global economy. “Listening to the women speak cannot be an act of consumerism,” Louie exclaims. “Seeing them fight for their rights cannot be an act of voyeurism” (253).

*Sweatshop Warriors* establishes rhetorical reciprocity through its inclusion of workers’ testimonies and excerpts from interviews Louie conducted with (im)migrant women exploited by sweatshop pyramids who are involved in workers’ centers in California, Texas, and New York, which have revitalized community activism and influenced broader anti-sweatshop and anti-corporate campaigns (231–33). Positioning readers as cross-cultural and transnational witnesses, in contrast to mainstream humanitarian movements that construe unfortunates as passive victims, *Sweatshop Warriors* makes visible the action that victims have taken to confront injustice, and imagines—indeed, requires—a similar commitment from its readers. The rhetoric of listening proceeds, as Krista Ratcliffe argues in another context, “from within a responsibility logic, not from within a defensive guilt/blame one” and “locate[s] identification in discursive spaces of both commonalities and differences” (204).

As texts of listening and witness, the testimonies of Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women garment workers in both *Sweatshop*
Warriors and Behind the Labels challenge formulations of abstract labor, such as those configured in Fifth Chinese Daughter, as well as the division of material and discursive associated with historical materialism. These texts focus on laboring (im)migrant women workers’ bodies as geopolitical-rhetorical sites upon and through which economic, cultural, and national discourses circulate and are contested. To view workers’ bodies as geopolitical-rhetorical sites is not to turn corporeal bodies into texts, but rather to recognize the interdependence of the material and discursive, the global and local, and the personal and political. The primary sites of struggle depicted in Sweatshop Warriors and Behind the Labels are with industries; however, many of the women also acknowledge struggles within their own families and communities. In Behind the Labels, (im)migrant women workers express conflicting roles; many women lured by the promise of good wages come to the United States to improve the economic status of their families in their home country. The sad irony for these workers is that they face labor and living conditions more terrible on U.S. Saipan than those in their home countries. As one woman from China says, “Like millions of other people in the world, I wanted to come to America. I thought that since Saipan was part of the United States that I would find new opportunities to earn a living. Instead, I stumbled into a nightmare.”

U.S. Saipan is part of the Marianna Islands in the Western Pacific; a territory of the United States, it flies the American flag but is exempt from U.S. immigration laws and crucial federal labor laws, such as minimum wage. Sixty percent of the population on Saipan are “foreign” workers; over thirteen thousand “guest” workers from China and the Philippines work in garment factories in the island for $3.10 or less an hour, fourteen to fifteen hours a day, six to seven days a week (Louie, Sweatshop 85). The Gap, owner of Old Navy and Banana Republic, is the largest producer of the island’s billion dollar-a-year garment industry. Companies such as JC Penny, Nordstrom, The Limited, Jones New York, Polo, Sears, and others are permitted to use the “Made in the USA” label, though their goods are not produced in compliance with U.S. federal labor laws. The garment factories and barracks are isolated on the island, secluded in the jungle. Gates are locked and evening curfews are imposed on workers. As one worker explained, “I felt like I was in a prison. There is no freedom here. . . . I felt freer in China.” Many of these women have paid high recruitment fees (up to $5000) and little, if any, of their earnings remain after debt payments and room and board fees. In Behind the Labels, (im)migrant women workers on Saipan describe their constant fatigue
from long workdays and injuries, and the verbal abuse they endure from managers who push them to match and often exceed daily quotas. As Helen Wong, a former garment worker, explains:

They have to move their hands in the same motion over and over again so that some women have very sore hands and shoulders and back pains. They have to sit for a long time and many develop bad circulation or hemorrhoids. The dust in some of the factories is so thick you can see it in the air and you develop allergies. So sometimes we work with masks made by ourselves. . . . I've heard some women who have lung and breathing problems because of having worked in garment manufacturing for so long.

Here, as in Wong's machine-like description of the seamstresses, (im)migrant women workers are configured as a rhetorical whole. Yet unlike *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the testimonials in *Sweatshop Warriors* offer an explicit critique of how exploitative labor conditions and subcontracting systems fracture workers' identities. 20

This correspondence between "parts and fractured wholes" is captured in *Behind the Labels* in a sequence consisting of three short scenes that feature a Chinese woman reading from her journal. The woman is not pictured in any of the scenes; we hear only her translation of the imaged Chinese characters on the page. In the public staging of this private act—reading from one's personal diary—the sequence positions viewers as eavesdroppers, yet also appeals to them to identify with the girls. The first journal excerpt conveys the woman's perception upon arrival at the barracks: "I was dumbstruck at the sight of the barracks. Other girls who came before us started to cry when they saw us." The second journal entry establishes rhetorical correspondences between the laboring body and motherhood, the personal and political, and the local and global: "Today I am so exhausted from work. I want to go home so badly. I miss my family and my children. There is very little freedom here. The quota is so high that no matter how hard I work I can't seem to reach it." The line leader shouts at the women to "work faster; otherwise you'll be sent back to China. I kept silent." Finally, the third entry conveys how workers are threatened and intimated by factory managers: "At 2:30 p.m. we started meeting, and the manager said, 'Here, you get money when you don't argue. When you argue, you get no money. You are not workers, you are slaves.'" Activists also appropriate this slavery analogy to disclose the continued exploitation of these workers: "It's indentured servitude," as one activist says, "all over again." Similar correspondences can be
discerned in Sweatshop Warriors, as illustrated by lines from the poem "Sewing Sisterhood," which concludes the book: "Wu Wan Mei insists they [(im)migrant women workers] make up half the world hold up half the sky/Do double triple shift duty birthing babies families communities movements" (254).

Through the grammar of locational feminism, Behind the Labels foregrounds (im)migrant women workers’ relational subjectivities and, like Sweatshop Warriors, imagines viewers/readers within this intersubjectivity. Spliced between the reading of journal entries, women speak about their children back in their home country. These scenes establish identification among the workers as mothers without children—as fractured wholes. In Behind the Labels, one worker says, as she holds up a photograph of her son, “I have a son who is nine years old. He was five years old when I came here. He doesn’t remember what I look like. I really want to go back to see him. But I haven’t earned enough money. I’d be embarrassed to return to my parents and relatives now. I miss him badly. Every mother feels the same way,” she continues. “I haven’t fulfilled my responsibility as a mother. I thought by coming here I’d improve the economic situation of my family. But I can’t get my hands on the money I made here, and I have no faith that I ever will.” These testimonies are framed with close-up shots of each woman’s face with tears in her eyes. Letters from their children are also translated and read as evidence of women’s similarity: “Mama, how are you in America. I hope you come back soon. I’m waiting for you.”

Testimonials like these imagine their audiences as willing to witness the sometimes painful inauguration of the testifier and listener becoming ethical subjects (Britzman 38). The testimonies included in Sweatshop Warriors and Behind the Labels thus “offer the possibility of subjects and practices constituted through dialectics of difference and disidentification” (Lowe 167). In Immigrant Acts, Lowe identifies common rhetorical strategies in literary works such as Fae Myenne Ng’s Bone, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s Dictee, and the documentary film Sa-I-Gu by Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson. She argues that such texts are exemplary cultural forms—countersites—that highlight intersecting axes of exploitation, racialized and gendered relations of production, and links between individual and collective subjectivities in transnationally divided social spaces (155, 169). (Im)migrant women’s testimonies in Sweatshop Warriors and Behind the Labels likewise suggest the “horizontal relations between subjects across national boundaries” and “the contradictions of the national-within-the-international,”” as the nation is
not the primary site of identification here, as it is in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (167).

(Im)migrant women workers’ testimonies in *Sweatshop Warriors* and *Behind the Labels* engage the narrative progression from female worker as victim to activist. Yet, in contrast to the traditional narrative patterns of autobiographies, wherein the individual reconciles with social and public systems, these texts do not offer a “singular narrative of emancipation” (Lowe, 170), nor do they allude to a conciliatory identification with the nation, as in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Instead, a sense of community is created around the solidarity of (im)migrant workers united around a cause (155). The rhetorical juxtaposition of Asian and Latina (im)migrant workers’ testimonies in *Sweatshop Warriors*, as well as the fact that some of the workers’ centers collaborate, also imply institutional identifications. The testimonies enact a rhetoric of belonging when articulated in contexts such as support groups and protests, wherein one makes one’s own experiences visible and known to others.21 This affirmation and identification of a group around a cause, along with external recognition of this group identification and cause, imply that speech is action and that the testimonies are of a group (190). In other words, individual testimonies function rhetorically as collective texts. In this way, (im)migrant women workers’ testimonies partake in the conventions of testimonial literature as a “realist” genre of resistance.

Literary works identified as testimonial typically amplify the histories of subaltern peoples on the periphery or margins of a colonial situation. Testimonial literature, according to Gulberger and Kearney, is characterized by a testifier or protagonist “who does not conceive of him/herself as extraordinary but instead as an allegory of the many, the people.” In contrast to conventional autobiography such as *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, which aims to narrate the story of the extraordinary individual, testimonials situate groups that are historically positioned as objects of an anthropological gaze as subjects who speak for themselves—though the dynamics of translation and editing must be acknowledged.22 That testimonials display an ethic-aesthetic of solidarity with the oppressed (see Yudice) and construe a plural “eye” is not to say that differences are ignored or that identities are collapsed into essentialist categories. Lowe writes, and we concur, “We can read testimony as more than a neopositivist ‘truth,’ as a complex mediating genre that selects, conveys, and connects ‘facts’ in particular ways without reducing social contradiction or compartmentalizing the individual as a site of resolution” (157).
Indeed, the (im)migrant women workers’ testimonies under consideration here suggest that disidentification and identification work in concert. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke argues that paradoxically, difference is foundational to identification; that identification does not presume identicality but rather identification with another: “In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives” (21). In *Sweatshop Warriors* and *Behind the Labels*, for example, in demonstrating—acting-together—(im)migrant garment workers and college students share “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (21). Burke continues, “To begin with ‘identification’ is . . . to confront the implications of division” (22). Likewise, the exploitation of (im)migrant workers, male and female, girls and boys, through the mechanisms of neoliberalism and global capital can be read as division (the hierarchy of the sweatshop pyramid) within identification (desired economic capital). This paradox of identification/division is painfully portrayed by a woman in *Behind the Labels* who explains that she came to U.S. Saipan in order to make enough money to send her children to college in the United States: “I’m trying to make money now so I can send them to America to study,” she says. “I want to make enough for my daughter to have a promising future.” Lured by the promise of fair wages and safe living and working conditions in America, mothers identify the property of their labor with the property of their children’s education. Workers are thus ethically and legally betrayed by multinational corporations as well as the United States and its territories. Even as they are betrayed in this way, the company and the women’s communities participate in constructing a betrayal narrative that “blames” women for their outspoken activism and cross-ethnic identification. These women are accused of being “disloyal” to their men, their families, and their ethnic communities.23

We can also see the identification/division dynamic at play in the rationale given in *Behind the Labels* by Richard Pierce, Executive Director of the Garment Manufacturers Association, for the existence of factories such as those on U.S. Saipan. Pierce says that if workers want to work under better conditions, then they should come to the U.S. proper. Pierce not only configures (im)migration and (im)migrant labor as socially unencumbered choices—turn the channel if you don’t like the show—but repeats the fundamental (and unethical) logic of identification at the heart of neoliberalism. Moreover, he also denies the violations of the industry’s own code of conduct: “Most of the big names have
been manufactured here, and they have been for the last twelve years or so. . . . Why in the world would they continue to come here if they felt those laws weren’t being followed?” But he answers his own question: “Businesses are in the business of making money.”

Like (im)migration itself, anti-sweatshop and anti-corporate activism is not risk free. One potential consequence of workers’ speaking out, for example, is the closing of factories. Rather than taking steps to implement a living wage and improve working and living conditions, companies move on to other territories where they can pay workers less and produce more. Following a work-stoppage in which garment workers on U.S. Saipan rallied for payment of three months back wages, Eurotex (who produces garments for Sears, The Limited, and Nordstrom, among other large retailers) closed its Saipan factory. A lawsuit was subsequently filed against the garment industry that alleged systematic violations of codes of conduct and exploitation and intimidation of workers. The U.S. Department of Labor collected one and a half million dollars from retailers and Eurotext. However, at the time of the film’s production, less than half of the money had been distributed to workers. Two dozen former employees remain on the island awaiting the money owed them.

The challenge of anti-sweatshop and anti-corporate campaigns is to alter the rhetoric of labor by shifting the terms of identification from property as profits to property of human rights, specifically economic rights, and to take into account the “correspondences” between economic, material, and discursive systems. Burke suggests—and both Sweatshop Warriors and Behind the Labels powerfully bear this out—that “we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of identifications” (26). As we have shown, the “labored realisms” of (auto)biographical representations out of the U.S. west at times rhetorically mask and at times reveal the correspondences between economic, material, and discursive systems that cohere on and around Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women’s bodies in transnational spaces. Moreover, our readings of Fifth Chinese Daughter, Sweatshop Warriors, and Behind the Labels expose the risks—not just the benefits—of self-representation for subjects whose laboring bodies are put on display as spectacles for consumption, effectively creating, as Grewal and Kaplan put it, “new sites of power as well as simply forms of resistance” (671). Attention to the risks of representation highlights the urgency of theorizing not just the production of (im)migrant women’s narratives, but also their circulation and reception among activists and academics. How are these risky representations used by first
world audiences, and for what purposes? Does their use of these representations recreate the spectacle of “otherness,” as does 60 Minutes, by displaying their bodies but silencing their voices? By calling for more critical attention to the laboring female (im)migrant body as a site for the production of a new geopolitical rhetoric of labor, we hope to open up a space that “bears witness” to the transformation of laboring Asian American and Asian (im)migrant women’s bodies from cultural spectacles to political actors.

To bear witness to the transformations of the female laboring body in an increasingly global economy is to engage a form of feminist conjuncturalism—a spatial epistemology that frames the body that works as a rhetorical and material effect of different cultural and national formations in specific geopolitical locations. In the midst of neoliberal and neoconservative celebrations of the flexibility and mobility of the global economy, we argue for the emergence of a methodological imperative that brings together gender, the political economy, and global/local labor practices in examining the production and consumption of realist forms and their activist potential. That is, we call for a feminist geopolitical rhetoric that creates spaces of intersubjectivity and bears witness to the cultural and (trans)national circulation of bodies of evidence, bodies of (dis)identification, and bodies at risk in feminist (auto)biography and rhetorical studies.

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Notes


2. Grewal and Kaplan note several ways in which the term transnational is used in the U.S. academy: (1) as a description for migration as a transnational process; (2) “to signal the demise or irrelevance of the nation-state in the current phase of globalization” (a usage they find ahistorial in its formation of borderless worlds); (3) as a “synonym for diasporic” to describe cross-border migration (a formation that they say often mystifies and romanticized displacement); (4) to “designate a form of neocolonialism”—which can mystify what existed before the advent of late capitalism and earlier forms of globalization—and a call for a long historical viewpoint; and (5) NGOization of social movements, for example, as a supplement for global feminism as a policy and activist arena—they do not suggest that we abandon the term but that it has been overused to mean nothing in particular. We use term “geopolitical rhetoric” as the larger
category, which includes transnational grammar to highlight the interdependence of the discursive and material.

3. We use the term "(im)migrant" as shorthand for migration and immigration, and as a way to rhetorically acknowledge the terms as shifting and historical. Likewise, we use the term "(auto)biography" as shorthand for both autobiography and biography, and as a way to recognize rhetorically the slippage between these genres, particularly in documentary forms.

While theorists have often used the term "migrant" to designate any person "on the move" across or within national borders (whether voluntary or involuntary) and "immigrant" to designate a voluntary migrant to a host nation with a specific non-citizen relationship to that nation constructed through national and legal policy, these distinctions are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. We use the hybrid term "(im)migrant" to call attention to the problematic nature of the discourse of "choice" that gets attached to immigrant narratives, as well as to include in our discussion racialized and feminized workers from within the U.S. and its territories. For instance, immigrants and their cultural environments are often subsumed under the notion of ethnicity, as Sassen argues. But, as Sassen correctly points out, immigration also has to do with the process of "globalization of economic activity, of cultural activity, and identity formation" (xxxi). Finally, "immigration" is intricately tied to the history of Asians in America and their construction as both "unassimilable alien" and "model minority." As Lowe argues, "Immigration ... can be understood as the most important historical and discursive site of Asian American formation through which the national and global economic, the cultural, and the legal spheres are modulated" (10).

4. We see the "rhetorical" as the means through which the discursive and material work. This conception of the rhetorical relationship between the discursive and material builds on Hesford's earlier formulation in "Reading Rape Stories," and subsequent conversations with Rebecca Dingo.

5. As Sassen notes, the focus on the spatial components of economic globalization raises issues distinct from those raised by that national/global duality. She argues that the duality leads to the proposition about the declining significance of national state, which is correct but only a partial account of globalization and its implications for economic actors (xxix). She is therefore interested, as are we, in the "growing significance of sub- and supra-national political categories and actors" (xxx).

6. See Foucault; Haraway; Marx and Engels.

7. Gotanda convincingly argues that The Repeal Acts' "use of 'descent' and blood-lines [rather than national origin] as means of determining both quotas and naturalization marks the racialization of these 'ethnic' categories" (325). Both Gotanda and Lowe point out that immigration laws were technologies of gendering as well as racializing: the 1943 act that redefined Chinese Americans as "citizens," for example, defined that citizen as always already male (Lowe 11). Moreover, early immigration from "Asian" countries to the U.S. was almost
exclusively male, as the U.S. specifically sought out male laborers without domestic or family ties.

8. It is significant to note that, according to Wong, two-thirds of the original manuscript was excised by her editor (see Bow 89). This leads to speculation about the politics of editorial production that we will not be able to address in this essay.

9. For a provocative exploration of how Fifth Chinese Daughter is informed by and participates in this project, see Motooka.

10. See Chin et. al.

11. In constructing herself as a "captain(ess) of industry," Wong situates herself in a long tradition of male American autobiography, from Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography to Henry Adams' The Education of Henry Adams. This self-presentation clearly eludes racial and gender difference, as well as masking differences of (im)migration, citizenship, and national belonging.

12. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong argues, for example, that these scenes give white readers a "guided tour" through exciting, "exotic" Chinatown.

13. Significantly, the Wong "factory-home" compares favorably to the large factory: "What a difference between the relaxed attitude of the Chinese pieceworkers and the frantic preoccupation of the Caucasians!" (165). Jade Snow's narrative racializes labor conditions, locating relaxation and ease within Asian laboring bodies, and "frantic preoccupation" within Caucasian laboring bodies.

14. The use of Jade Snow Wong and Fifth Chinese Daughter by the U.S. State Department in the 1950s uncannily mirrors the politics of cultural display in this scene. In 1953, the State Department sent Wong on a speaking tour in Asia for the purpose of garnering support for U.S. political and economic policy. Since then, Wong has continued to conduct both "local" tours of San Francisco's Chinatown and "global" tours for Americans in Asia.

15. As Sassen notes, by 1985, numbers of European immigrants to the U.S. declined by nearly fifty percent from rates in 1960s. And today the majority of immigrants are from Asian, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Annual levels of Asian immigrants rose in 1985 to 264,700. The largest sources of Asian immigrants are the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. Hispanic and West Indian immigration rose in the 1980s and reached about 368,000 (excluding Mexico) from the 149,000 from 1970–1974. West Indians reached 445,000 from 1980–85, from an earlier 318,000. The new Asian immigration, which began as a middle-class migration, is increasingly a working-class migration. Another characteristic of recent immigration patterns is the prominence of female immigrants. California and New York receive nearly half of new immigrants (35–37). Sassen argues that the typical wisdom that holds to the idea that the cause of emigration is overpopulation and poverty tells only part of the story. For instance, she points out that "the establishment of political, military, and economic linkages with the U.S. seems to have been instrumental in creating conditions that allowed the emergence of large-scale emigration" (40). More-
over, Sassen urges us to consider the changes in labor demands in the U.S. and how they factor into new immigration patterns. For example, the rapid expansion of low-wage jobs—namely, in the service industries—and the channeling of jobs to low-wage countries has increased demand in the U.S. for work for poorly paid, semi-skilled or unskilled production jobs (46). The new low-wage jobs, Sassen points out, were created by three trends: (1) reorganization of work processes—namely, sub-contracting out production and the expansion of sweatshops; (2) the technological transformation of work; (3) the rapid growth of high-technology industries that employ low-wage production workers (47).

16. Louie notes that “the rate of female migration has caught up to and in some cases superseded the rate of male migration” (“Migrating”).

17. “Sweatshop pyramids” organize labor and profits hierarchically, and create conditions in which workers and bosses must compete with each other. Workers toil and sweat at the bottom of the pyramid, making up the largest force; subcontractors, the workers’ immediate bosses, act as buffers between them and the real profiteers, the manufacturers and retailers at the top of the pyramid who garner enormous profits from workers that remain invisible to them (Sweatshop 4–5).

18. The centers studied are: the Asian Immigrant Women’s Advocates (AIWA) in Oakland’s Chinatown; Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) and the Thai Community Development Center (CDC) in Los Angeles; Fuerza Unida [United Force] in San Antonio; La Mujer Obrera [The Woman Worker] in El Paso, Texas; and Chinese Staff and Workers Association (CSWA) in New York City. Workers’ centers are independent groups that organize workers overlooked by the trade union movement; they provide educational support, legal assistance, and a place for workers—namely, workers of color—to share experiences and to strategize. Different generations, classes, cultures, and discourses of the workers’ home institutions and adopted countries fuse at the centers (233). (Im)migrant organizers are from working and middle-class backgrounds. Extended family members (children and grandchildren) of (im)migrant workers, play the role of translators; these youth are described as code-switchers, bridge builders, and border crossers.

19. Saipan is the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific. The island’s history reads like a case study of colonization: it was controlled by Spain from 1565 until it was purchased by Germany in 1899; in 1920, Japan received the island as a League of Nations mandate. In 1944, during WWII, Saipan was taken by U.S. forces. Since January 1978, it has been a commonwealth of the United States. This status, as well as its offshore location, has allowed global manufacturers to legally exploit (im)migrant workers—mostly young women from nearby Asian countries—since the 1980s, while still boasting that their products are “Made in the U.S.A.” Recently, however, workers on Saipan have fought back, winning a series of important settlements from seven major U.S. retailers. The settlements are subject to court approval and do not involve any admission of wrongdoing from the retailers. In fact,
retailers have remained firm in their opposition to the workers’ claims. The San Francisco Chronicle quotes James Hale, executive vice president for the Target Corporation, blaming the lawyers for “profiteering”: “It is a sad fact that these lawsuits were never about the public good. They were simply one more instance of class-action lawyers acting as publicity profiteers by using the media to smear a company’s reputation without regard for the truth” (Collier and Strasburg).

20. If the 2002 settlements are approved by the Federal Court in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, working conditions on Saipan will likely improve. The settlements include provisions concerning employment standards, factory monitoring, worker compensation, and the option of repatriation for workers who want to return to their home countries.

21. M.Offerle in reference to demonstrations at the end of 19th century in France characterizes the sharing of testimonies as “reciprocal testimonies of belonging” (qtd. in Boltanski).

22. Recent controversies over the “truth-value” of I, Rigoberto Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala illustrate the pressures that attach to the testimonial genre. Menchú’s testimonial, “collected” by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray and translated by Ann Wright, has been accused of falsity and exaggeration (see Carr). For more on the genre of testimonial, see Beverly, who argues that testimonial and literature are poised against each other in generic contest.

23. Bow argues that a charge of ethnic “betrayal” is frequently leveled against Asian American feminists. In this narrative, in which ethnic loyalty takes precedence over gender loyalty, “betrayal” can be an act of subversive agency for Asian American women (1–8).

Works Cited


