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THE OXFORD HISTORY OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH

Volume Ten

The Novel in South and South East Asia since 1945

EDITED BY

Alex Tickell

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Narrating the Global South East Asian Diaspora

WEIHSIN GUI

Introduction: South East Asian Diasporas in Context

HISTORICALLY, there have been three major waves of migration and diaspora associated with South East Asia. The first, occurring from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, saw an influx of people from China and India drawn by the huge demands for labour in the new commercial networks and plantation economies of Europe's South East Asian colonies. Although World War II heightened the identification of some of these migrants with China and India, as time passed most of them regarded themselves as part of a settled ethnic group rather than as diasporic subjects desiring to return home. From the 1970s many ethnic Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans also moved to Australia and North America seeking better educational and employment opportunities and quality of life, extending this diasporic wave farther afield. The second and third waves of diaspora were contemporaneous but had different geographical routes and social networks. They took place after World War II and involved emigration to Europe, Australia, and North America from South East Asian countries that are closely connected to American imperialism and cold war military conflict. After the Philippines was colonized by the US in 1902, a steady stream of migrants from the islands moved and continue to move to America. National independence in 1946 and the reform of US immigration laws in 1965 increased immigration from the Philippines; some were also fleeing the repressive regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and early 1980s. The US-led military conflict in Indochina and its aftermath involved or affected many people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, a great number of whom left and resettled in the US, Australia, and France from the 1970s to the 1990s. Given the heterogeneous nature of migration into and out of this geographical region, it makes more sense historically and socially to speak of multiple diasporas in South East Asia and from South East Asian countries while retaining the singular diaspora to refer to the situation of being displaced from one's ancestral homeland. Accordingly, this chapter

is divided into sections discussing these three distinct diasporic waves: into colonial South East Asia, from the Philippines to the US, and away from the conflict in Indochina during the 1960s and 1970s.

An important historical factor in all three diasporic waves is British colonialism and its successor, American imperialism. This legacy can be seen in the geographical provenance of English-language South East Asian diasporic novels: they are mostly written by authors who live in the former British colonies of Malaysia and Singapore or by authors who have migrated to or grown up in Britain or North America. Postcolonial literary studies, in turn, present some useful approaches to diaspora novels. Edward Said, whose criticism is foundational to postcolonial studies, advocates contrapuntal reading, which means reading *against* the grain of a colonial-era work of literature by tracing how the plots, characters, or themes are supported by the hidden presence of Europe's colonies or colonized peoples. Furthermore, contrapuntal reading means examining literature by authors living in colonial or postcolonial societies that gives voice to individuals and communities silenced by colonialism, while also showing how such voices are intertwined with colonial ideologies and the struggle for decolonization. Said compares contrapuntal reading to baroque music: 'in the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one' (1994, 51). It attends to voices and stories offering a counterpoint (a response or a rejoinder) to dominant narratives constructed by colonial powers and authoritarian nation states.

Another influential critic working within the field of postcolonial studies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, encourages us to focus on characters and stories that present 'a tangent that escapes the *narrative* conclusion' of a colonialist or nationalist work of fiction (1985, 248), and to cultivate a 'transnational literacy' which 'allows us to sense that the other is not just a "voice", but that others produce articulated texts, even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our own making' (1995, 193). Transnational literacy refuses to treat the voices or characters in diasporic novels as exotic representatives of faraway lands who reveal their cultural secrets purely for readers' enjoyment. Instead, it helps us consider how these voices and characters are articulated (joined, or connected) with both their ancestral homelands and their countries of residence, and how these articulations are shaped by powerful forces that are sometimes beyond their control.

The connection between postcolonialism and diasporas has been highlighted by a number of diaspora studies critics. Anthropologist James Clifford argues that diasporas 'may be defined and constrained' by forces such as nationalism and globalization, but 'they also exceed and criticize them: old and new diasporas offer resources for emergent "postcolonialisms"' (1997, 244). This means that although, historically, most of Europe's former colonies became independent countries in the late twentieth century, the predicament of diasporas helps us to confront the lingering effects of colonialism and to recognize new forms of imperial control and oppression. Khachig Tölölyan, founding

editor of the journal *Diaspora*, observes how diasporas express a 'nostalgia' for the homeland in 'the work of memory, commemoration, and mourning'; this commemoration is often paired with 'a rhetoric of restoration and return' or (if physical return is impossible) acts of "'re-turn" without actual repatriation' as the diaspora commits to the homeland via political, economic and cultural exchanges (2007, 649). A sociological approach is offered by Avtar Brah, who introduces 'diaspora space as a conceptual category' to underscore the importance of place and location in the way diasporas are shaped and express themselves; diaspora space 'includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put"' (1996, 181). Because a diasporic community's longing for a real or imagined homeland can sometimes create conservative and exclusive notions about ethnic origin and cultural authenticity, Brah further distinguishes between this nostalgia for the ancestral homeland and the desire to belong to a home, which may not be tied to the homeland, '*inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*' (1996, 192–3; italics in original). Colonialism, postcolonial struggle, migration, and diaspora formation in South East Asia are all interlinked, and critical reading strategies can illuminate these conjunctions in diasporic novels. Transnational literacy and contrapuntal reading reveal tangential voices and stories in novels that remember and turn toward the ancestral homeland while simultaneously criticizing and exposing the failures and flaws of both that homeland and the country of residence, or what might be termed the hostland. The novels discussed in this chapter are not meant to be an exhaustive inventory but indicate how different South East Asian diasporas are represented and contested in fiction.

The Indian and Chinese Diasporas in Malaysia and Singapore

Prior to the nineteenth century, there were communities of Chinese and Indians residing in the Malayan peninsula but, with the founding of the Straits Settlements (the port cities of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore) by the British East India Company in 1826 and the establishment of tin mines and palm oil and rubber plantations, demand for workers surged and encouraged a steady stream of migration from India and China until the 1930s. While some immigrants from India were traders and merchants or clerks and soldiers, the majority of 'the Indian labor force in Malaya was [...] procured from the most impoverished classes of India' (Pillai and Shangeetha 2010, 314). They came to Malaya through a system of indentured labour and many planned to return to India after earning enough money. However, 'the debt incurred in paying for travel costs [and] the financial burden of living expenses' (ibid.) meant that these labourers often did not save enough money; gradually they gave up hope of returning to India and settled down in Malaya. Even though these 'plantation workers [...] had no interest in politics', racial discrimination and the 'subsequent growth of [the] nationalist movement in India',

together with visits by politicians such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, helped create a diasporic consciousness in the Indian community up till the end of World War II (Jha 2009, 78).

K. S. Maniam's novels (which are also discussed in Chapter 36 of this volume) chronicle the changing attitudes of the Indian community in colonial Malaya and modern Malaysia. *The Return* (1981) is a semi-autobiographical novel narrated by Ravi, an Indian boy who grows up over the course of the novel and realizes how different he is from his father and grandmother, who both still maintain close religious and cultural ties to India. His grandmother builds a family house on land she does not own, and has its pillars decorated with scenes from the Indian Hindu classic the *Ramayana*: 'One pillar carried the creation of the Ganges [...] another the typical rustic look of the Indian village' (Chapter 1). Ravi's father inherits the house after his grandmother's death. Ravi's 'studies' at the English-language school gradually separate him from his family, and he calls himself 'James' when writing to his 'British and American pen-pals' (Chapter 9). After he returns from two years of studying and teaching in Britain, Ravi's father burns himself and the family house down to prevent its seizure by the local Town Council.

Rajan, a successful businessman, is the first-person narrator of Maniam's second novel, *In a Far Country* (1993). He has an identity crisis and secludes himself to jot down his musings and recollections. He remembers growing up in a rubber estate and learning from his drunkard father about India, which was 'another country [...] another era that comes through to me in a strange way' (Chapter One). Rajan rejects this diasporic nostalgia, choosing to '[run] away from my parents' [...] background and history' (Chapter Seven), and in his adulthood Rajan forms a friendship with two other men, Ramasamy (an Indian bookstore owner) and Kok (the Chinese owner of a rubber estate). Their interethnic solidarity contrasts with Rajan's relationship to Zulkifli, a Malay villager who tries to foster Rajan's identification with the land through contact with a tiger spirit in the jungle. Rajan rejects this spiritual symbol of Malayness because for him 'the tiger means authoritative behaviour' (Chapter Nine). Maniam's novels offer a counterpoint to the stereotypes of the Indians in Malaysia as uncouth and dissolute plantation workers while also illustrating the generational shift within the community from a diasporic mindset to a fraught sense of acculturation as an ethnic minority.

A multigenerational Indian family is also the centrepiece of Preeta Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day* (2008). Samarasan presents three generations of Raju Rajasekharan's family, from the 1899 arrival of his father in British Malaya until the departure of his daughter Uma for the US in 1980. Set mostly in the family's 'Big House', the novel shows how Raju's political aspirations for 'a Malaya for all Malaysians, Chinese Indians Eurasians included' (Chapter 4) are dashed after national independence in 1957, when the new country's identity was defined as predominantly Malay in terms of language, culture, and religion. The riots of 1969 also rekindled the mutual racial distrust left behind by British colonialism, as 'every man, Chinese, Indian, and Malay, forgot his contempt for the views

of the departed British and savored the taste of his old masters' stereotypes' (Chapter 7). The novel also reveals class stratifications within the Indian community: Raju and his wealthy family mistreat their servant Chellam, regarding her as a lowly 'rubber-estate' girl (Chapter 10), handing her wages directly to her drunkard father, and finally framing her for Raju's mother's death.

Familial tensions and racial discrimination also surface in Balli Kaur Jaswal's *Inheritance* (2013), about a Sikh family whose patriarch, Harbeer, leaves the Punjab region of India after World War II to work for the British colonial police force in Singapore. Harbeer has made 'the migrant's sacrifice' by leaving India, 'a distance so vast it seemed immeasurable'; when he is homesick 'he sought the image that had always soothed him—his father's lush farmland in Punjab', which fills his small apartment in Singapore with memories of 'wild stalks of green grass, and cattle roaming between clouds of golden dust' (Part 2: 1977). As the novel moves from the 1970s to the 1990s, Harbeer's masculine authority causes strains in his relationships with his Singapore-born children, who also face racial discrimination in Singapore because they are Sikhs. His son, Narain, has to put up with 'teasing from Chinese and Malay children' growing up, his uncut hair and turban 'making him stand out even more' (Part 1: 1970–71). His sister Amrit is also interrogated by a taxi driver: 'Are you Indian? How come some of you have fair skin? I thought Indians all got dark skin? [...] You look more like Malay because your skin fair. Or Eurasian. But not as fair as Chinese' (Part 3: 1984–85). Both Samarasan and Jaswal employ third-person narration focalized through different characters, in contrast to K. S. Maniam who uses a first-person narrator. What they share is the use of multigenerational families and the family house (or apartment) as a diaspora space to portray the shifting loyalties of the Indian community from a transnational identification with India to a fraught and troubled sense of home in postcolonial Malaysia and Singapore.

A sense of home had already developed in Chinese communities residing in several South East Asian regions since the sixteenth century, particularly among the Peranakan or Straits Chinese descended from Chinese immigrants who intermarried with and assimilated into local communities in Malaya and Indonesia and who possessed their own distinctive language and customs. The Chinese concept of South East Asia, or Nanyang ('south seas'), was primarily based on maritime travel and existed before European colonization. Nanyang was 'never a geographical or political concept, only a Chinese commercial one' that included 'the key coastal strips' of Indochina and the Malay peninsula and 'most of the islands of Indonesia, British Borneo, and the Philippines' (Wang 2001, 298–9). An increase in southward migration from China started in the mid-eighteenth century thanks to the Qing government's relaxed policies towards travel and trade. This brought a new wave of Chinese migrants who settled throughout South East Asia and concentrated in the port-cities of the British Straits Settlements. Singapore was a particularly important centre because there 'Chinese newspapers and Chinese education were better maintained' than in other areas (Reid 2010, 59). The overseas Chinese

became a focal point for Chinese nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as World War II loomed. After 1945, during the so-called 'Malayan Emergency', a counter-insurgency campaign waged by the returning British colonial government against the Malayan Communist Party, certain sections of the Chinese community were viewed as being allied with or sympathetic to the communists and thus having indelible ties with the People's Republic of China. After the end of the Malayan Emergency in 1960, the attitudes of the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore changed. By the 1980s 'they moved away altogether from being identified with Chinese nationalism [and] patriotism' although 'some are still willing to help relatives back in their home towns in China and perform some philanthropic work' (Wang 2001, 254), marking a transition from being overseas or diasporic Chinese to ethnic Chinese citizens of their respective nation states.

Chiew-Siah Tei's *The Mouse Deer Kingdom* (2013) depicts this shift in national loyalties through Chai Mingzhi, a scholar who flees from China during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion with some family members and friends. Mingzhi and his group settle down in the port-city of Malacca, where they find a 'great number of Chinese, all huddling together to recreate a sense of home' (Part One, Chapter 3). But underneath this nostalgia for China, Mingzhi detects subtle differences among the Chinese in Malacca 'emanating from the place', expressing a 'sense of belonging' to Malaya rather than China (Part One, Chapter 3). Mingzhi becomes a successful businessman while his circle of family and friends slowly disintegrates. He attends a lecture in the 1930s by Dr Sun Yat Sen who exhorts the overseas Chinese to remember their 'duty to save our country', and his 'long-lost' patriotism is suddenly rekindled (Part Two, Chapter 3). However, despite this brief encounter with Dr Sun, Mingzhi never returns to China and has no further political dealings with that country; in contrast, his increasing identification with local culture is indicated by his decision to build a house in the style of the Minangkabau people from the island of Sumatra (Part Four, Chapter 3).

The three narrators of Tash Aw's *The Harmony Silk Factory* (2005) paint a composite picture of Johnny Lim, a former leader of the Malayan Communist Party who collaborates with the Japanese military during World War II and profits handsomely from it. Jasper, Johnny's son, portrays his father as a diabolical traitor with 'eyes black and hard, his mind calculating, always calculating' and whose 'strong leadership' hid an insatiable lust for 'real power' (Part One). To Johnny's wife, Snow, the daughter of a wealthy Straits Chinese businessman, Johnny is a simple and uncultured man whose movements have 'the freedom and uncertain strength of a young animal flexing its limbs', appearing 'alien' and 'inscrutable' (Part Two). Johnny's friend, Peter, an Englishman, sees him as a tortured soul who has to betray his communist comrades to the Japanese to protect his wife and factory; wracked by guilt, Johnny confesses his predicament to Peter and cries in his arms with 'a thin wail that cut [Peter's] insides to shreds' (Part Three). The varying depictions of Johnny Lim might correspond to the multiple roles played by members of the Chinese

community during World War II: they were nationalists supporting republican China against Japan; victims who were brutally punished for their diasporic patriotism by the Japanese; collaborators who tried to protect their loved ones while sacrificing their conscience by working for the occupying forces. (Aw's writing is covered in more detail in Chapters 22 and 36 in this volume.) Suchen Christine Lim's *The River's Song* (2013) portrays a different kind of diasporic Chinese identity, focusing on cultural and artistic connections rather than political ties or ethno-racial bonds. Set in Singapore from the 1960s to the 1990s, the novel's two protagonists are Ping and Weng, childhood friends who become musicians and then lovers. Weng learns a different version of Singapore's past from his night school classes than the one in official textbooks: 'Mr Lee's history class conducted in Mandarin referred to Chinese history books [which] mentioned Singapore way before Raffles and the British did' as 'a port of call for thousands of Chinese junks and Asian vessels' (Chapter 15). He is later mistaken for a communist agent and detained without trial; he survives harsh interrogations by 'play[ing] his imaginary flute alone in his cell' (Chapter 30). Ping goes to Iowa for further studies; she later moves to California when her love for music is rekindled after meeting a master *pipa* player, Chen, who recognizes a 'hunger' for music 'in [her] eyes' akin to what he suffered during the Cultural Revolution in China (Chapter 32). The middle-aged Ping and Weng reunite in Singapore, where Ping reveals that she is actually the illegitimate child of her Chinese mother and an Indian man, to which Weng replies 'Chinese, Indian or Chindian, your roots are here—in this river' (Chapter 42). Ping's love of Chinese *pipa* music tethers her to Singapore rather than China: when she hears 'The Yellow River Concerto' she does not think of China's magnificent Yellow River but instead of 'the brown waters of the [Singapore] river' near her childhood home (Chapter 13).

Another set of novels depicts Malaysians and Singaporeans who have moved abroad; most are ethnic Chinese who have the educational and economic wherewithal to migrate. Tash Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* (2013) follows four men and women from Malaysia who are part of the regional economic migration back to China; living in Shanghai, they are overwhelmed by the bustling Chinese metropolis. As Justin Lim, scion of a family-run insurance company on the verge of bankruptcy, observes, 'everyone in this city was living life at a hundred miles an hour [...] he had fallen behind, out of step with the rest of Shanghai' (Chapter 14). Even powerful businesswoman Leong Yinghui reflects that 'you arrived thinking you were going to use Shanghai to get what you wanted, and it would be some time before you realized that it was using you, that it had already moved on and you were playing catch-up' (Chapter 20). The four become caught up in the tangled schemes of another Malaysian, Walter Chao, a shadowy business investor who bears a grudge against Justin's and Yinghui's families. Walter interpolates his own life story into their narratives, couched ironically in the language of self-help business books such as 'How to Invest Wisely' and 'How to Be Inventive'.

Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* (2000) interpolates the voices of two sex workers from nineteenth-century colonial Singapore into the main narrative of Wu Lan, a psychologist living in 1980s Canada who must confront her father's sudden suicide and the departure of her long-time lover. Originally from Singapore, Wu Lan's 'flight into exile' (123) to Canada is partly for further studies and partly because of Singapore's social and political hostility towards homosexuality. Unlike her brother in Singapore who is married and expecting a child, as a lesbian Wu Lan is 'dancing with danger, yet keeping the magical safe distance away from the instincts of others' (150). In Wu Lan's imagination, Ah Choi and Chat Mui, the two sex workers, are also lesbian lovers who share 'the pleasure of hidden beauty' (58); by imaginatively portraying them as her forebears, Wu Lan comes to terms with her emotional losses and exorcises her father's ghost. Kwa's *Pulse* (2010) also features a lesbian protagonist living in Canada, Natalie, who returns to Singapore at the request of her former and now-married lover, Faridah, whose son Selim has committed suicide. As teenagers, Natalie and Faridah were forced to separate by Natalie's father because their romance crossed racial and heterosexual boundaries. As Natalie reunites with Faridah and unravels the circumstances of Selim's death, she also confronts her own troubled family history. Both Selim (who was also gay) and Natalie had been sexually abused by their fathers; Natalie feels that she 'can never be a good enough daughter' (Chapter 7) and is 'tortured by a litany' of her father's 'past wrongs' (Chapter 5). By delving into Selim's life and his decision to end it, Natalie understands the need to 'release [her]self, redeem that inexplicable experience of inner freedom' by forgiving her father (Chapter 17). Hsu-Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo* (2000) starts with Grace and Sonny Tay attending the funeral of their mother, Pandora, whose family came from both Malaysia and Singapore. The first half of the novel describes the romance and marriage between Pandora and her husband Jonah; the second half concerns their migration to Australia and the gradual disintegration of the family. Grace reflects that 'immigration forced us in on ourselves and moulded us into a family' ('Family Bonding'). In Australia, however, Grace and Sonny are teased because of their accents: 'we grew to hate the sounds of our voices' that highlighted 'our cultural difference and our social leprosy before the age of multiculturalism' ('Advance Australia Fair'). Pandora eventually returns to Singapore and commits suicide; during her funeral Grace confronts the disparity between her mother's Australian and Singaporean identities: 'these Singaporean roots of hers, this side of her—and possibly of me too—were unacceptable. [...] I was determined not to belong, not to fit in, because I was Australian, and Mum ought to be Australian too' ('Prelude'). A transnational reading of these novels about the Malaysian and Singaporean diasporas reveals that, even though the characters may be racially marked as Chinese in China, Australia, or North America, their allegiances and sense of belonging are tied to Malaysia and Singapore.

The Philippines and the Filipino Diaspora

The 1898–1902 Filipino–American war ended with American victory and colonization of the Philippine islands formerly controlled by Spain. Attempting to ‘pacify’ and ‘civilize’ Filipinos, the US colonial administration imposed an American-style, English-language education system to refashion the Philippines in America’s image (Strobel 2001, 25). From 1909 to 1946 many Filipinos went to Hawaii and California as labourers (ibid., 23); because of their colonial status they were regarded as US nationals but lacked citizenship rights, an ambivalent situation with lasting sociopolitical repercussions. After national independence in 1946 and the reform of US immigration laws in 1965, another wave of Filipino migration to America occurred as military veterans, war brides, and skilled professionals left to seek better employment opportunities, escape martial law, and reunite with families (ibid., 25). However, because the Philippines’ national and cultural identity has been shaped by American colonialism, many Filipinos and Filipino Americans find themselves aware of ‘enfolded borders’, which means they often feel ‘simultaneously inside and outside’ of America (Isaac 2006, xxvi), having been Americanized but not recognized as Americans.

This awareness of enfolded borders appears in Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (1946). Widely hailed as a pioneering and canonical work about Filipino migration and based largely on the author’s own life, it is the coming-of-age narrative of Carlos, who leaves the Philippines due to economic hardship and moves to the west coast of the US in 1930. After spending some years in America, however, Carlos realizes that, even though he and other Filipinos are subject to American colonial rule, ‘the lives of Filipinos were cheaper than those of dogs’ (Chapter XIX). This suffering causes the Filipino diaspora to turn against itself: ‘my countrymen had become ruthless toward one another [...] As time went by I became as ruthless as the worst of them’ (Chapter XIV). The ambivalent state of being colonized by America and not being recognized as American is underscored when Carlos and other Filipinos volunteer as servicemen to help defend the Philippines during World War II, but ‘were refused since we were classified as aliens’ (Chapter XLVII). Carlos eventually finds political solidarity with his countrymen when he begins participating in workers’ unions, ‘becoming aware of the dynamic social struggle in America [...] planning how to spread progressive ideas among the Filipinos in California’ (Chapter XXV). *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco* (1987) by Bienvenido Santos also takes place on the west coast of the US in the late 1970s. David Dante Tolosa, a writer, is in self-exile due to martial law back home. He is asked to be the editor of a new magazine backed by a diasporic group of Filipino men who ‘wore expensive suits and spoke English rather self-consciously as if they were trying hard to sound American’ (Chapter 7). The magazine is supposed to be ‘expensive, dignified looking’ (Chapter 7), showcasing ‘the psyche of the Filipino, his peculiar predicament as exile’ (Chapter 11), but it fails because of disagreements among the financial backers.

David forms diasporic bonds at a local college where he teaches a course introducing the Philippines to students who are ‘born of Filipino parents in California’ (Chapter 30) and whose attitudes range from curiosity to resentment. Through David’s guidance, students eventually appreciate Filipino culture, performing in a Philippine Culture Show near the end of the novel that culminates in the singing of a patriotic song ‘*Bayan Ko*, or “My Country”’ (Chapter 45). Salvador ‘Buddy’ dela Raza, the protagonist of F. Sionil José’s novel *Viajero* (1993), also learns to love the Philippines and returns to his homeland after living for many years in the US. When his family is killed by Japanese soldiers during World War II, Buddy is adopted by an African American soldier and gains US citizenship. He becomes a scholar and embarks on a journey around the world to find out more about the myriad histories of the Philippines. The novel interleaves documents discovered over the course of Buddy’s archival research with Buddy’s own narrative, describing encounters between Filipinos and the Chinese, Malay, and Spanish. Buddy also meets and chronicles the life of Old Tele, a *manong* (one of the Filipino labourers who came to America in the early twentieth century) ‘who had borne witness to an America that was morally shrunken’ (Chapter 12). Buddy’s intellectual quest and his diasporic sojourns finally bring him back, as a ‘*balikbayan*’ (one who returns home), to ‘that distant and unhappy land of his birth’ during Ferdinand Marcos’s presidency (Chapter 20). Suspected of being a subversive agitator, Buddy dies during a confrontation with the Philippine army. (F. Sionil José’s body of work is covered in more detail in Chapter 35 of this volume.)

The dictatorial and corrupt presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, who was backed by the US because of his staunch anti-communism, is a popular topic in many diasporic novels about the Philippines. Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1990), which has become a canonical text of both Philippines and Asian American literature, is set in the Philippines during the late 1950s but has resonances with Marcos’s presidency from 1965 to 1986. The assassination of senator Domingo Avila in the novel echoes the killing of former senator Benigno Aquino in 1983, with ‘the Senator’s lifeless body, so much blood from one man spattered everywhere’ (‘Paradise’) inspiring a popular political movement. A thinly disguised version of First Lady Imelda Marcos appears in an interview as ‘Madame’, insisting that her hoard of designer shoes are all ‘local made’ and defending her husband’s despotic measures by claiming that ‘the opposition’ are merely ‘wild dogs fighting among themselves for a chance at power’ (‘Bananas and the Republic’). Hagedorn also interweaves excerpts from a nineteenth-century ethnography about the Philippines and a speech by US President William McKinley about educating and civilizing the newly conquered Filipinos, thus contrapuntally tracing the historical roots of American domination and cultural denigration from within a diaspora space. The playfulness of Hagedorn’s prose, with its constant stylistic and perspectival shifts, may be attributed to the author’s strong homing desire that also refuses a single, fixed origin or idea of home and nation. The Marcoses also make brief appearances in Gina Apostol’s *Gun Dealers’ Daughter* (2010). Narrator-protagonist Soledad Soliman learns that her ‘parents sold arms that prop

up [the] country's military dictatorship' (Part Two, Chapter 2). Soledad, who in the present time of the novel is recuperating in the US after attempting suicide, recalls the events leading to her participation in a plot to assassinate Colonel Grier, an American military adviser. Soledad only understands Tagalog 'in fragments' and 'accidental bits' (Part I, Chapter 13); her fluency in English and other European languages leads to sharp and intense experiences of cultural conflict, because having 'grown up a stranger in [her] country' she suffers 'an elemental eruption' and a 'split in [her] soul' that parallels 'the state of the country' (Part I, Chapter 13). Her involvement in Grier's assassination stems from a desire for validation from her Filipino peers, but her arms-dealing parents discover the plot, turn it to their advantage, and whisk Soledad away to America after she attempts to take her own life.

In *Dream Jungle* (2003), Jessica Hagedorn shows how America's influence on the Philippines extends beyond military bases and arms trading. With its allusions to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the novel also draws a link between an earlier period of British colonialism and contemporary American imperialism now centred on South East Asia. *Dream Jungle* offers a thinly veiled version of real events: the making of a Vietnam War film, *Napalm Sunset*, is a fictional parallel of the filming of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Paz Marlowe, a Filipino American writer and journalist, returns to the Philippines for a story about an apocryphal hill tribe but ends up interviewing Tony Pierce, the 'great American director' of *Napalm Sunset*, who sports 'a smile full of heat, big and terrifying' ('The Final Interview'). Pierce's directorial megalomania is undoubtedly a comment on American imperial arrogance: he sees in the Philippines 'the beauty of a location [...] Beach, ocean, jungle, lake, mountains, waterfalls, cheap labor' ('The Final Interview'); here he can create 'lavish audiovisual feasts of destruction' and use Filipinos as 'fallen, bloody corpses or extras in crowd scenes' ('American Movie'). Such extravagance contrasts with Rizalina's humble story: a young girl who has endured abuse and neglect by her family, she dates an American actor and eventually moves to California. Rey Castro, the protagonist of Timothy Mo's *Renegade or Halo*² (1999), is from similarly humble origins. The child of an African American soldier and a Filipina, Rey is an oddity even in the Philippines: he is 'darker than the lowest Filipino and [...] next to them vast' in size (Chapter I). In this picaresque narrative, through a series of misadventures Rey travels as a 'Tago ng Tago' (Chapter XIX) or illegal migrant to Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the fictional Middle Eastern country of Bohaiden, Britain, and Cuba, before returning to the Philippines after a brief stop in the US. His globe-girdling travels and underdog perspective make Rey aware of the problems facing Filipino guest workers and migrants as well as their resilience: as 'the largest group of foreigners' in Hong Kong they 'were on sufferance as a necessary evil' (Chapter VII); in the Middle East they sometimes suffered 'capital punishment' after being 'set up by the Arabs who were the perpetrators of the crime' (Chapter XVII); in Britain the Filipinos congregate in West London because in this affluent area there is a constant demand for a 'DH' (domestic

help) or nanny, which is 'what the vast majority of Filipinos abroad were' (Chapter XIX). (For further discussion of Mo's writing see Chapter 34 in this volume.) Like Mo's Rey Castro, Vincent in R. Zamora Linmark's *Leche* (2011) returns to the Philippines in 1991 after leaving for Hawaii as a child in 1978. In Manila, Vincent's mother tongue, Tagalog 'that's been silenced by years of assimilation and school-enforced laws' in America, 'is waking up, waiting for him to transform a simple phrase into music' (Book VIII). The dispersion of Filipinos from the archipelago is not a recent phenomenon: 'it is in the blood of every Filipino. It is in their nature and dreams to roam, to seek a better life, to adapt and adopt another country. Migration is at the core of their existence and survival' (Book IX). However, this poetic sentiment has a more poignant side; a nostalgic Vincent returns to his grandfather's house and finds it completely 'empty' without any trace of his or his family's past (Book IX). Interwoven with the historical and heroic legacy of Filipino migration is a tangential narrative of sadness and emptiness, of a country suffering a 'brain drain' as many of its ablest citizens seek a better life overseas.

Vietnam and Burma/Myanmar and their Diasporas

The military conflict that occurred in Indochina from the 1950s until 1975 triggered a massive dispersal of people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to Australia, Europe, and North America, with novels about the Vietnamese diaspora being the most prevalent in the English-language literary market. Historian Shelley Sang-hee Lee's work is focused on members of the Vietnamese and other South East Asian diasporas in the US but largely applicable to these diasporas in other countries too. Because of the violence and suffering precipitating their dispersal, these communities 'have struggled to maintain their traditions and ethnic solidarities while adopting new practices and identities', trying to commemorate their homeland while acculturating to their new home (2014, 284). Although 'participating in homeland politics [...] reinforced ethnic cohesion while additionally sustaining a transnational orientation' among some immigrants (ibid., 284), for others 'constructing a new identity [...] involved incorporating the legacy of war and being a refugee into their personal and collective narratives' (ibid., 287), re-turning towards the homeland through writing and art rather than politics. 'The shared experience of American racism has become a common basis of identity' for younger generations who may 'explicitly identify as "Asian American"' rather than as Vietnamese (ibid.). Such identification is often the result of a long and difficult process of self-reflection and negotiation with one's community: 'many Southeast Asian American youth express frustration with their inability to articulate [...] their entanglement with existential questions about [...] their ethnic, national, and cultural self-awareness'; these are not 'superficial' struggles as they often have serious repercussions on the youths' relationships with their immediate family and diasporic community (Lee 2015, 1). Unsurprisingly, the

tensions between parents and children often appearing in these novels can spiral outward from simple family quarrels into larger social and political debates.

Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge* (1997) portrays the fraught relationship between Mai and her mother Thanh after they come to the US, and the difficulty of fitting in as refugees. When Thanh is hospitalized, Mai sees her mother's body as 'a battlefield, she a war wound fastened to a bed in a suburban hospital' (Chapter 1), and she realizes that the Vietnamese diaspora in America is 'a ragtag accumulation' and 'an awkward reminder of a war the whole country was trying to forget' (Chapter 2). Mai investigates the mystery of her grandfather's identity by speaking to various people, both Vietnamese and American, for whom 'Vietnam remained like an implant [in their] brains' (Chapter 5). She finally discovers that her grandfather was a Viet Cong agent and that Thanh is haunted by the memories both of his violent acts and of her own mother to whom she failed to give proper funeral rites. The refugee predicament is also portrayed in lê thi diem thúy's semi-autobiographical *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003). The narrator, a young girl, learns from her parents the sufferings of war and displacement: as her mother says, 'war has no beginning and no end. It crosses oceans like a splintered boat filled with people singing a sad song' ('the gangster we are all looking for'); when her father speaks 'she can see boats floating around in his head. Boats full of people trying to get somewhere' ('suh-top!'). She is the only Vietnamese student in her school in southern California, and upon receiving unfriendly stares from other students she 'imagined the stripes on [her] underwear flashing on and off, like traffic signals' ('suh-top!'). But what links the narrator to Vietnam is not nostalgia for a homeland but the memory of her deceased older brother: 'when I stopped looking for my brother, I began to feel that he was right beside me. So close, I couldn't see him' ('nu'ó'c').

Bich Minh Nguyen's two novels, *Short Girls* (2009) and *Pioneer Girl* (2014), also feature the ambivalent relationships between Vietnamese parents and children but shift the scene to the Midwestern states of the US. In *Short Girls* Linny and Van return to their childhood home in Wrightville, Michigan to celebrate their father's 'finally taking his oath of citizenship' with 'a reunion, a remembrance of their collective flight from Vietnam and settlement in America' (Chapter 1). The situation of Vietnamese Americans who arrived as or are children of refugees is contrasted with that of other Asian Americans, such as Van's husband Miles who is from a 'fourth generation' Chinese American family that 'behaved [...] like any white upper-middle-class family' (Chapter 5). The sisters reconcile with each other and their father when they realize that they are still 'the short girls their father had told them they always would be' and 'live in a tall American world' (Chapter 16). In *Pioneer Girl* Lee Lien, who has just finished a doctorate in American literature, also has a difficult relationship with her mother, who wants her children to take over their small-town restaurant in Illinois. Both Lee and her brother Sam resent their mother, considering her a 'total immigrant' who is 'old-school, old-fashioned, old-generation' (Chapter 2). Lee begins an archival journey to explore her family's connection

with Rose Wilder Lane, daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder and ghostwriter of many of the *Little House on the Prairie* books. Gradually Lee realizes that her 'own concept of American history had been unknowingly shaped' by the *Little House* books, 'that they rooted in [her . . .] a desire to be included in the American story and a knowledge of the limits of such inclusion' (Chapter 14). This also helps Lee understand her conflicts with her first-generation mother: she has a 'chronic, lifetime second-generation problem. Looking forward and looking back, trying to locate the just-right space in between. Always translating, and often getting the words wrong' (Chapter 17). Unlike Nguyen's protagonists, Cherry and her brother Lum in Aimee Phan's *The Reeducation of Cherry Truong* (2012) revisit Vietnam after decades abroad. The novel is a transnational saga unfolding across three generations, two families, and three continents. Cherry's extended family left Vietnam with one branch moving to France and her own going to America. Cherry's mother believes that 'in America, when you improve, you get anything you want. So the only problem her mother could see was that Cherry didn't want it enough' (Chapter Two). From her mother's perspective, the first-generation immigrants 'couldn't give up on the Vietnamese children in America. If many would fall by the wayside in American culture, then they needed to focus on the few gems they could preserve' (Chapter Four). After Lum causes a terrible accident that almost kills Cherry, he is forced to go to Vietnam to start anew; when Cherry visits him there 'no one could mistake' her 'for anything else but an American' (Chapter One). In Vietnam, Cherry also reconnects with her cousins from the French branch of her family and discovers an archive of letters clarifying family matters that her parents were reluctant to discuss.

Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) is unique as it is recounted by a half-French, half-Vietnamese man, known only as the Captain, who spies on his South Vietnamese military superiors for the communists in Vietnam and later in exile in southern California. The Captain observes that in diaspora, former Vietnamese military men became rudderless, 'consumed by the metastasizing cancer called assimilation and susceptible to the hypochondria of exile [...] with their vulnerable women and children cast as the carriers of Western contamination' (Chapter 6). When he is captured trying to infiltrate North Vietnam, the Captain is disillusioned to find that the national 'revolution' he fought for 'had gone from being the vanguard of political change to the rearguard hoarding power' (Chapter 23). Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003) also moves away from the refugee narrative. The narrator Binh is the live-in cook for the famous American literary couple Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the 1930s, having left Vietnam because he was rejected by his late father for being gay. His father's ambivalent presence in Binh's mind both ties him to and drives him from Vietnam: 'while [father's] body lies deep in the ground of Saigon, his anger sojourns with a "no-good lout" on a Paris park bench. Even here, he finds me' (Chapter 2). Binh has a brief romantic encounter with a man who turns out to be Ho Chi Minh, and in Binh's mind 'the only place we shared was this city. Vietnam, the country that we called home, was to me already a memory [...]

The man on the bridge was a memory, he was a story, he was a gift' (Chapter 24). The novel offers a fictionalized portrait of Ho as a charming and witty 'scholar-prince' (Chapter 9), adding a diasporic perspective to a figure closely associated with Vietnamese nationalism and communism.

Not all accounts of the Vietnamese diaspora take place in the US. Hoa Pham's *Vixen* (2000) is narrated by an immortal fox spirit, mixing myth and history in a manner reminiscent of Maxine Hong Kingston's early fiction. Initially a court lady of the last emperor of Vietnam in the 1940s, she moves to Melbourne in 1964 and returns to Vietnam in the late 1990s. In Australia, 'everyone assumes' that the fox spirit is 'Chinese' and she plays along with this racial confusion ('Foxyard'). The immortal fox spirit has a long view of human history, and Western military intervention in Vietnam seems incomprehensible to her: 'I do not understand why another country would send its people to Vietnam except to take over for themselves like the French and the Russians' ('Foxfriend'). Although she returns home, the fox spirit's diasporic sojourn has changed her irrevocably: 'the woman I bought some pho from had told me I was not from Vietnam' ('Foxtrot II'); 'I gave up passing as a local. When I speak Vietnamese my dialect is always from somewhere else' ('Fox love'). Moreover, if 'in Vietnam you cannot forget who is currently in power' then the presence of many French, English, and American tourists visiting the restored Imperial Citadel in Hue suggests that power might still lie in Western hands despite Vietnam's independence ('Vixen'). Pham's *Wave* (2015) portrays the romance between two women, the Vietnamese Âu Cô and the Japanese Midori, who are international students in Australia. Their relationship is disrupted by the 2011 Fukushima earthquake and tsunami which kills Midori's parents, by a school shooting carried out by one of their classmates, and by Âu Cô's engagement to an Australian-born Vietnamese boy, Dzung. Because she and her family are from Hanoi, Âu Cô is 'greeted' by 'silences' from some members of the Vietnamese community; as she says, 'the North and South divide still existed in people's hearts'. Because her parents 'were not connected to the [Communist] Party' and 'could get nowhere in Hanoi', they 'saw the promise of Australian citizenship' in Âu Cô's marriage to Dzung, and a heartbroken Midori commits suicide soon after their wedding.

A former British colony, Burma (later named Myanmar) was plunged into civil war after the assassination of Prime Minister Aung San in 1948, and the ensuing sociopolitical instability and economic underdevelopment caused many to leave the country. Wendy Law-Yone writes about the transnational journey of two Burmese exiles in *The Coffin Tree* (1983). An unnamed young woman and her half-brother Shan are sent to America in 1969 after their father is deposed during a political coup. The narrator exhausts herself looking after her sickly sibling while trying to earn a living despite racial discrimination from American employers: one of them tells her that 'most Oriental people are honest and hardworking' but she is 'just a butterfly, flitting in and out' (Chapter 4). After Shan's death she has a nervous breakdown and attempts suicide, but as she recovers she pieces

together her memories of Burma and of her authoritarian father, giving her 'a kind of courage [she] had never known, a sense of hard-earned adventure such as explorers must feel who return from unmapped regions' (Chapter 17). In *Irrawaddy Tango* (1993), also by Law-Yone, Burma/Myanmar is thinly allegorized as the fictional South East Asian country of Daya, a name which means both 'compassion' and 'wound' (Prologue). This ambivalence is embodied by the eponymous Tango, a talented dancer who was once the consort of Daya's military dictator but later imprisoned for her association with rebels from minority hill tribes. Tango escapes to the US where she lives for several years, but cannot shake her feelings of rootlessness and displacement; she envies the American men she becomes romantically involved with because 'home was everywhere around' them (Chapter 16). Tango finds no solace among fellow Dayan exiles; although some look up to her as a political and spiritual leader, she feels 'trapped' as 'a figurehead and mascot to a group of well meaning but utterly powerless, defenseless men' (Chapter 15). Tango eventually returns to Daya where she has a final, fateful encounter with her former husband as his regime collapses. The novels of both the Vietnamese and Burmese diasporas contrapuntally interweave weighty political events and intimate personal matters, showing how later generations of diasporic individuals who have no personal experience of the homeland sometimes have to confront its fraught history.

The novels surveyed in this chapter describe the condition of being in diaspora, shaped by the historical circumstances of different diasporas in and from South East Asia. These literary representations help us 'to think of diaspora not as the name of a fixed concept and social formation but as a process of collective identification and form of identity marked by ever-changing differences' between the diasporas, their homelands and hostlands (Tölölyan 2007, 649). Unlike the Jewish or African diasporas, which are often regarded as archetypes centred around a shared ethno-cultural identity and sense of exile, diasporas in South East Asia are multiple and heterogeneous in their cultural and ethnic make-up as well as their histories of displacement and dispersal. While novels such as Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet* and Madeleine Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* depict the lives of first-generation Chinese immigrants in the UK and Canada, most anglophone novels about the Chinese diaspora in South East Asia unfold over multiple generations and show the characters' gradual acculturation and assimilation into their land of residence. The same might be said about novels representing South East Asia's Indian diaspora. Although these two diasporas have largely transformed into ethnic communities in South East Asia without any political allegiance to China or India, with the rise of these countries as global powers it is not unforeseeable that Beijing and New Delhi may look to these ethnic communities to bolster their influence in the region. Furthermore, while voluntary or forced exile due to political persecution and social instability was an important factor in the formation of South East Asian diasporas in Australia and North America from the 1960s to the 1980s, in recent decades economic causes are responsible for a new wave of transnational dispersal within the region. Since the 1990s, many

migrant workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam have sought employment in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, often as domestic helpers or labourers. Regrettably, not many of their experiences have been represented in English-language literature, although literary organizations in Malaysia and Singapore have conducted readings for and published poetry and short fiction by migrant workers. Nonetheless, the novels surveyed in this chapter create diaspora spaces where we can discern contrapuntal stories of dispersion and belonging and trace tangential narratives trying to escape the determining borders of the ancestral nation or the country of residence.

Publishing the South and South East Asian Novel in the Global Market

SHAFQUAT TOWHEED

Background

FOR South and South East Asian novelists using English as their sole or primary literary medium during the colonial period and in the decades after, the first point of contact with the publishing industry has often been from, within, or in relation to the former imperial centre. For anglophone literary novelists from former British colonial territories, colonies, or protectorates (what are now Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, and Sri Lanka), the most important centres for literary publishing, and garnering recognition and esteem, were British ones, especially London. Despite the establishment of Indian publishing firms such as Thacker, Spink & Co. in the nineteenth century, publication in London was still a key marker of success for twentieth-century Indian novelists (as Abhijit Gupta observes in Chapter 5 of this volume). The US has served the same purpose for anglophone literary novelists in the Philippines; the role of Barcelona in particular for Hispanic Philippine literary publishing pre-1900 is another colonial, albeit smaller scale (non-anglophone) example of this model. For the relatively small number of anglophone literary novelists in predominantly non-anglophone South East Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand or Indonesia, the situation has been both more varied and more complex, with post-independence diasporic communities, the rise of English as a global language of business, and the broader sense of what constitutes 'world literature', whether in translation or not, determining the ways in which novels have been published, promoted, and marketed.

The divergent career paths of two Indian novelists—Mulik Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan—in the period immediately before Independence, detailed by Gupta in his chapter, show the opportunities and challenges faced by anglophone writers. Anand established himself in the London publishing world before success in India: six of his first seven novels and both of his first two volumes of short stories were first published in London between 1935 and 1945 (by Lawrence & Wishart, Jonathan Cape, and J. A. Allen),