

## New Steps in Japanese Studies

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# War Brides as Transnational Subjects in Mori Reiko's *The Town of the Mockingbirds*

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**Abstract** Mori Reiko's 1979 Akutagawa prize-winning story *The Town of the Mockingbirds* portrays a community of Japanese war brides in a small military base town in Midwestern America. The narrative explores how the release from prison of Jun, a war bride imprisoned for killing her son, impacts on the community. Employing Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih's theory of "minor transnationalism" this article explores how the protagonist, Keiko, connects with her community across binaristic lines of gender, culture and nation.

**Summary** 1 Transnational Literature. – 2 War Brides in Japanese Literature. – 3 Mori Reiko's *The Town of the Mockingbirds*. – 4 Literary Criticism. – 5 Minor Transnationalism. – 6 Language Hybridity. – 7 Triangulation of Identity.

**Keywords** Transnational Literature. War Brides. Minor Transnationalism. Language Hybridity. Mori Reiko. *The Town of the Mockingbirds*. Françoise Lionnet. Shu-mei Shih.

## 1 Transnational Literature

It is difficult to ignore the increasingly influential paradigms of globalization and transnationalism and their impact on studies of literature and culture worldwide. Some modern and contemporary Japanese writers appear to hold international appeal; others address topics that transgress boundaries of nation and identity.

Global literary sensation Murakami Haruki writes books that are translated into multiple languages almost as soon as they are published in Japan. Tawada Yōko, a multi-lingual Japanese author who resides in Germany, publishes fiction in both the German and Japanese language. Mizumura Minae writes fiction about cultural identity and racial tensions based on her personal experiences as a Japanese living abroad in America. The rise of border-crossing subjects in literatures across the globe (to say nothing of the traffic of culture and capital goods) has led to a flurry of research on globalization and the transnational.

American Studies scholar Robert A. Goss has argued of "transnational-

ism” that it “captures a world of fluid borders, where goods, ideas, and people flow constantly across once-sovereign space” (Goss 2000,378). A reflection of the multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism that have come to characterize parts of the globe over the past few decades, transnationalism is frequently associated with, though not restricted to, globalization. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih define the transnational as “a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the centre” (Lionnet, Shih 2005, 5). The field of transnational literary studies has its earliest origins in the West, and in the United States in particular. Historically, the field has been dominated by African American, Asian American, Chicana/Mexican American and other ‘minority’ literatures. In this study, however, I employ the term ‘transnational literature’ to refer not only to literature produced by border-crossing or migrant writers in English, but also to works written in other languages about border-crossing agents, which I refer to as ‘transnational subjects’.

There is little research in the academy on transnational subjects in modern Japanese literature, with the majority of studies of transnational literature focusing primarily on so-called ‘Third World’ writers or ‘minority writing’. Clearly there are issues of accessibility at play here, as comparatively fewer works of Japanese literature are available in English translation. It is perhaps for these reasons that at present, research on Japanese literature from the perspective of transnational studies remains a largely underdeveloped field.

This raises a number of important questions: What are the meanings associated with transnationalism in modern Japanese literature? How are transnational Japanese subjects portrayed in literary fiction? Given that the majority of transnational studies has its origins in the West (the United States and Canada, more specifically) and frequently takes the ‘Third World’ as its object of its study, what interpretive strategies are most appropriate for reading transnational Japanese literature? These are no doubt broad methodological questions, and the present study constitutes but one preliminary attempt to address them. I take as my object of analysis in this study war brides, border-crossing subjects who were frequently the target of controversy in both Japan and the United States in the decades following Japan’s defeat in the Second World War. The term ‘war bride’ or *sensō hanayome* refers to “a Japanese woman who married a member of the foreign armed forces or a foreign civilian who was in Japan as a result of the military occupation after World War II and the subsequent military presence in Japan up to 1960” (Tamura 2003, XV).

There are relatively few representations of war brides in Japanese literature, although numerous accounts can be found in Asian American

writing.<sup>1</sup> War bride narratives in both contexts operate as complex sites of negotiation for discourses of culture, power and gender. War brides occupy liminal spaces as subjects on the margins of the nation in their native countries and in their adopted homelands. As Yoshimizu Ayaka has argued, war brides were stigmatized in various ways as promiscuous, submissive, and as traitors to their native country; at times they were even vilified as the enemy due to lingering resentment towards Japan's military campaigns in the Second World War (Yoshimizu 2009, 115-6). As literary subjects war brides were similarly coded with meaning in the post war and the decades that followed.

This article examines war brides as transnational subjects in Mori Reiko's Akutagawa Prize winning story, *Mokkingubādo no iru machi* (The Town of the Mockingbirds, 1980).<sup>2</sup> *The Town of the Mockingbirds* offers rare insight into Japanese literature on these transnational subjects as a piece of Japanese fiction narrated from the perspective of a Japanese war bride. Mori's narrative highlights the challenges facing not only the war bride community but also other minority cultures, specifically the Native American community.

I will argue that Mori's narrative is best understood viewed through the lens of Lionnet and Shih's "minor transnationalism", as the text reveals latitudinal connections across lines of gender, culture and nation, resisting the binaristic logic of globalization. Mori's text accomplishes this in a number of important ways. First, *The Town of the Mockingbirds* demonstrates resistance on the formal level of the text: Mori's use of language (*kanji*, *katakana*, and *ateji* in particular) creates a hybridity of identity that fundamentally calls into question cultural binarisms. Secondly, the text disrupts these cultural binarisms through triangulation - that is, it introduces a Native American perspective on the dominant narrative of white American society, which allows the Japanese war bride protagonist to draw horizontal connections across minority cultures, thereby challenging the hegemony of American culture in the narrative.

1 Japanese American author Ruth Ozeki, for example, has written numerous English stories and novels featuring Japanese war bride protagonists.

2 Mori Reiko's *Mokkingubādo no iru machi* (The Town of the Mockingbirds) was first published in the journal *Shinchō* in August 1979. It was awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for literature in 1979. An English language translation of the story was published in two instalments of the *Japan Christian Quarterly* in the Fall 1985 and Winter 1986 issues under the title *Desert Song*. See Mori Reiko, 1985-6. Unless otherwise indicated, translations cited here are from the Brannen translation. In this article the story will be referred to as either *The Town of the Mockingbirds* or abbreviated as *Mockingbirds*.

## 2 War Brides in Japanese Literature

The subject of Japanese war brides has been addressed in several works of Japanese literature during the decades spanning the 1960s to the 1990s. Frequently regarded as a writer of social issues, Ariyoshi Sawako (1931-1984) was one of the first writers to address issues of racism and national identity experienced by war brides in the post war in her novel *Hishoku* (Without Colour) (Ariyoshi 1964). Set in the post war Occupation and beyond, *Hishoku* is the story of a Japanese woman who marries an African American soldier. The protagonist Emiko keenly experiences racial and social discrimination as a *sensō hanayome* (war bride) in her native Japan, particularly after giving birth to a *hāfu* (half Japanese, half foreigner) daughter. Despite the fact that her American soldier husband is able to provide a decent living for them in the difficult economic climate of the Occupation, Emiko and her family are regarded as second-class citizens by the local Japanese community. Emiko's husband receives military orders to return to America, and sometime later Emiko and her daughter make the long journey by ship to join him. Whilst on the ship Emiko is surprised to discover that the network of racial relations in America is far more complex than she had previously imagined: she encounters war brides from other cultures and learns that there is a hierarchy amongst foreigners. Moreover, Emiko discovers to her surprise that as a Japanese in the post war era, she is nowhere near the top of this social hierarchy. She moves to Harlem and is surprised to discover that her 'American dream' of white picket fences and a better life is shattered: they occupy a basement flat in a poor neighbourhood, and her husband provides a meagre living for their growing family through his job as a hospital orderly. After giving birth to three more children, Emiko attempts to escape the banality of her life in Harlem by working as a housekeeper for a well-to-do Japanese woman married to a university professor. Through these experiences in America Emiko develops a profound and nuanced awareness of and sensitivity to issues of race relations, American culture, and national identity.<sup>3</sup>

Three of the four war brides narratives discussed in this article were awarded the prestigious Akutagawa prize for fiction: Yamamoto Michiko's *Betei-san no niwa* (Betty's Garden, 1972),<sup>4</sup> Mori Reiko's *Mokkingubādo no iru machi* (The Town of the Mockingbirds, 1980), and Yoshimeki Haruhiko's novel, *Sekiryō kōya* (Solitude Point, 1993). Recipient of the 1972 Akutagawa prize, *Betty's Garden* portrays a Japanese war bride living with her

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3 Osada Kazuko argues that Ariyoshi Sawako's *Hishoku* is a prescient narrative that demonstrates the author's keen insight into race relations in the 1960s. See Osada 2007.

4 *Betei-san no niwa* was the lead story in the collection *Betei-san* (Betty-san). It was published by Shinchō-sha (1972).

family in the arid and unforgiving climate of Darwin, Australia. Despite raising her three sons in Australia, Betty-san still feels culturally and spiritually isolated within her community. Betty-san has largely adapted to life in Australia, even becoming baptized at her husband's urging and adopting the Christian name, "Elizabeth", or "Betty". Nevertheless, she longs to return to her native Japan, and these emotions become more pronounced as her children are older and no longer rely on her as they had when they were young. Betty-san becomes increasingly emotionally estranged from her family, whilst desperately clinging to anything that reminds her of her native Japan. She befriends the Japanese fishermen whose ship docks periodically near her hometown, and enthusiastically hosts barbecue parties for them. She even takes one of the young fishermen into her home to nurse him back to health after he is injured in an altercation on the ship. At the end of the story Betty-san and her sons see their father and his new secretary to the airport as they prepare to depart on a business trip. Betty-san fears that her husband is about to embark on a love affair and the story ends with Betty-san and her sons encountering the seemingly portentous omen of a burning buffalo on the outback road during their journey home.

Yoshimeki Haruhiko's *Sekiryō kōya* (Solitude Point) (Yoshimeki 1993) is a sentimental portrayal of a Japanese war bride who, together with her American husband, a veteran of the Korean War, raised two sons in the heart of Louisiana's bayou country in the American south. The novel was awarded the 109th Akutagawa prize in 1993. After nearly four decades of family life in the United States, 64 year-old Yukie develops Alzheimer's disease. Together with her 69 year-old husband, Richard, the couple struggle to negotiate their way through this medical crisis alongside the aftermath of the collapse of Richard's business. The narrative details how she and her family struggle to cope with the progression of her disease, as well as how her own repressed emotions as a war bride over four decades come to the fore as she is less able to consciously exercise control over her own speech and behaviour. The novel was made into a film titled *Yukie* by director Matsui Hisako in 1998.

### 3 Mori Reiko's *The Town of the Mockingbirds*

Mori Reiko's 1979 Akutagawa prize-winning story *The Town of the Mockingbirds* depicts a community of Japanese war brides living in a small military base town in the American Midwest. The women have spent over half their lives living in the United States as the wives of American servicemen. The protagonist of the story is Keiko ("Kei"/"Kay"), a middle-aged war bride whose two children who have recently left home. Keiko's husband, Jeff, has recently retired from a lengthy career in the United States military. Unable to bear an idle retirement, Jeff spends weeks at a time away

from home working at his cousin's farm. Keiko fills her days cleaning the family home, and she gradually begins to question the meaning of her existence in the small mid-western air base town. This interrogation of her identity is inspired by the return to the community of Junko ("Jun"/"June"), a fellow war bride who was married to an American military officer.

Nine years earlier whilst Jun's husband was away during the Korean War, Jun killed her young son Ronny in a fit of rage after he railed against her when she discovered that he had received a poor school report card. Jun has recently been released following her incarceration for the murder of her son. Jun had been married to Captain Atkins, a West Point graduate who had treated the other Japanese war brides with disdain. After her release from prison, Jun explains to Keiko the nature of her relationship with Captain Atkins and her struggle with her own cultural identity as a Japanese living in America:

But when anything went wrong, he'd yell at me and call me a "Jap". That's why I did my best to behave like an American. He was so proud of Ronny because he was blond, blue-eyed and smart. When he left for Korea, he told me to make sure that Ronny was an 'A' student. I raised Ronny just the way he wanted, because I didn't want to lose him. I lived for the day when Ronny's name would appear in the newspaper on the honour list and I could send him the clipping to Korea. I guess it was too heavy for little Ronny; that's why he behaved as he did. Everything just fell apart. (Mori 1986, 36)

Jun returns to her community and seeks to establish the American base town as her *furusato* (hometown) through the act of remaining there to memorialize her dead son. When Keiko listens to Jun's explanation for her act of violence against Ronny, to her surprise, she finds herself identifying with Jun's emotions:

Keiko also had memories of her own children railing against their Japanese blood. It angered her that her children spoke ill of the blood that she had given them. Keiko empathized with Junko, feeling the same suffocating sensation that she must have felt.

She realized that only by accident had she herself escaped stepping on the unspoken but infinite dark cracks that lie hidden beneath the veneer of everyday existence. (Mori 1986, 37)

Some time after Jun is sent to prison, Jun's husband, Captain Atkins, arrives unannounced at Keiko's doorstep and deposits Jun's suitcase, asking Keiko to return it to Jun. Keiko conceals the suitcase in the attic and does not inform her husband or children of its existence. Some years later

Keiko realizes that the suitcase functioned as a material reminder of what happens when “things fall apart”, and that she herself was only a suitcase away from succumbing to the same fate as Jun. By remaining ever mindful of the presence of the suitcase in the attic and what it symbolized, Keiko manages to navigate her own existence as a war bride in the base town in the years following Ronny’s death and Jun’s imprisonment.

The two other war bride characters in *Mockingbirds* are Gisella, an Italian war bride, and “Sue” (Tōko), another Japanese war bride. Gisella is married to a doctor, and together they have eight children who constantly keep Gisella on her toes. Cheerful and carefree, Gisella playfully chides Keiko for her inability to control her husband Jeff, allowing him to leave her alone for weeks while he works away from home to occupy his time in his retirement. Keiko is embarrassed that Gisella has correctly identified a spiritual weakness in Keiko. Keiko categorizes this as a “weakness” in character shared in common by the Japanese war brides.

But it was a weakness shared by all Japanese wives, not just limited to her. With Jun, it caused her to murder her own child for something Gisella would have laughed off. With Sue, it had involved her in hopeless love affairs. [...] They were all weak. Was it Japan’s warm, mild climate and gentle surroundings that placed them under a spell and prevented them from developing independent personalities? Or was it a racial trait they had inherited? Perhaps it was the life style in Japan that was responsible. (Mori 1986, 27)

Japanese war bride Sue feels trapped in a loveless and childless marriage with Phil, a former prisoner of war in a Japanese concentration camp. As a result, Sue constantly seeks attention through her extramarital love affairs. Her most recent affair was with Edgar Lightfoot, a young Native American artist who teaches art at the local YMCA; it is precisely this relationship that forms the basis of Keiko’s coming into consciousness about minority cultures. This interaction with Edgar enables Keiko’s own understanding of their shared identity as foreigners living in America.

Frustrated by the end of her most recent love affair with Edgar, Sue persuades Keiko to take her to visit Edgar in an attempt to salvage their relationship. Sue even slips an envelope of cash under Edgar’s door on the pretense that she knows someone who is interested in purchasing Edgar’s art. When Edgar refuses to come to the door, Sue breaks down crying outside his apartment door. Later, Edgar contacts Keiko to return the cash to Sue and also to ask Keiko to intercede on his behalf and inform Sue that he would like to sever all ties with her. During their meeting at the local YMCA where he teaches art, Edgar tries to convey to Keiko his feelings about growing up as a Native American in a “white man’s world”. Edgar explains to Jun how difficult it was for him to gain acceptance in the local

white community as a Native American artist and art teacher; he claims that the people in his local Comanche tribe are incapable of understanding his decision to leave the Reservation behind. Edgar seems pleased with himself for his accomplishments and smug in the certitude of his life choices. At the same time he is obviously full of resentment towards his tribe, the Comanche on the Elk Wood Reservation:

I've overcome white people's prejudice that all Indians are uncivilized savages; I now have a respectable position as instructor of art in white society. On the reservation they look down on me as a rebel and a traitor. What will they ever accomplish clinging to their narrow tribal consciousness, preserving their traditions, and turning their backs on the advancements of white society? (Mori 1986, 31)

Edgar's comments elicit an unexpectedly powerful response from Keiko, as she begins to draw parallels between Edgar's denial of his Comanche heritage and her own position as a Japanese war bride living in America: "Perhaps we, as human beings, are not as free from the land of our birth and the ties of blood as we think we are" (Mori 1986, 33). Keiko comes to realize that both she and Edgar are foreigners struggling for acceptance in white America. When Edgar naively solicits Keiko's opinion on his paintings, she indicates to him: "All your paintings are made to catch the attention of white Americans" (Mori 1986, 33).

The narrative concludes with Keiko and her friends celebrating American Independence Day, the Fourth of July, in their usual way with a barbecue at a site by a local lake. Keiko's children are unable to attend the celebration as their father, Jeff, refuses to send them the money to return home. Sue is conspicuously absent from the festivities, and her husband Phil reveals that she is en route to Japan by airplane. Gisella attends with many of her children and their spouses.

What distinguishes this particular July Fourth celebration from others is the impact of Keiko's recent encounter with Edgar Lightfoot on her perceptions about the Native American community. Nearby, a traditional Native American ceremony is taking place, and some of the members of Keiko's party observe the festivities. Keiko imagines that she sees Edgar Lightfoot's characteristic blue eyes amongst the crowd of Native American tribes performing. Phil identifies the ceremony as a 'Squaw Dance', which he explains consists of prayers and chanting in song for several consecutive days; the tribes dance in the hope that their gods will return from the dead after the white man has stolen their land. Keiko marvels at the Native American people's capacity for faith and hope, "How could they wait so patiently for the resurrection of their gods since the white man's invasion? - Keiko marveled" (Mori 1986, 43-4). Then, enthralled by the soft, mournful sounds of the chants carrying across the desert, Keiko



has a revelation: "All of a sudden she was struck with the meaning of it all. - That chant and those bells! Why it's the same chant and the same bells I heard from Buddhist pilgrims in Japan!" (Mori 1986, 44). Keiko's revelation suggests an appreciation of the minority position of the Native Americans, and reveals her understanding that as minorities amidst a white American majority, they are somehow spiritually linked.

Suddenly it all became clear to her: this was no ritual of vengeance; it was a ritual of nostalgia, a longing for the spiritual home that had been taken away from them by the white man. The firm, monotonous tread of the moccasins symbolized their ancestors' trek across the Aleutian Straits thousands of years ago. The jangling bells were the cries of their people who had been robbed of their homeland where they had buried their dead. (Mori 1986, 44)

#### 4 Literary Criticism

When Mori Reiko's *The Town of the Mockingbirds* won the 82nd annual Akutagawa prize for literature in 1979, the panel of distinguished judges praised the author's ability to portray foreigners and the parched, desolate landscape of the American Midwestern town in such a vivid and realistic manner. Yoshiyuki Junnosuke lauded Mori's evocation of the landscape and atmosphere of the Midwest, but offered only half-hearted praise for the work itself, stating that it possessed "no literary style" (Yoshiyuki 1980, 452). Both Inoue Yasushi and Yasuoka Shotarō also commented in a similar vein, although Inoue was careful to offer praise to the author as she "skilfully portrays the lives and mental state of Japanese women as outsiders with a settled brush" (Inoue 1980, 454). Nakamura Mitsuo stated that the characters in the *The Town of the Mockingbirds* were stereotyped, but that the work brought about a "newness" or "freshness", and that it was easily chosen as the Akutagawa prize-winner. For Nakamura, the primary appeal of the story lay in the realistic portrayals of the lives of average everyday people in a small American town (Nakamura 1980, 450). Author and Akutagawa prize judge Endō Shūsaku remarked that the task of portraying foreigners constituted a difficult endeavour for a Japanese author, but that Mori overcame this challenge with ease (Endō 1980, 450). Niwa Fumio offered the highest praise for *Mockingbirds*, stating that he was profoundly moved by this "long-awaited work". Niwa also aptly pointed out that the story could have easily been titled "The Japanese Wives" (Niwa 1980, 455).

## 5 Minor Transnationalism

Evidently, for the Akutagawa prize panel of judges much of the appeal of Mori's story could be located in the narrative's ability to realistically convey both the foreign landscape as well as the mindset of the Japanese war bride characters and foreigners (both white Americans and Native Americans). The present study, however, is less concerned with the ability of Mori as a Japanese writer to portray a foreign landscape and mindset, than with the ways in which the narrative informs discourses on transnationalism and identity. This study suggests that the *The Town of the Mockingbirds* can be read as a 'transnational narrative', and that Lionnet and Shih's "minor transnationalism" in particular offers a productive methodology for analysis.

Much of transnational literature depicts the struggle to move from periphery to centre, as it is concerned with issues of citizenship, national identity and belonging, and Lionnet and Shih's "minor transnationalism" represents one theoretical attempt to resist this universalistic logic. They argue that the logic of globalization is:

centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture to be tested by its norm. It produces a hierarchy of subjects between the so-called universal and particular, with all the attendant problems of Eurocentric universalism. (Lionnet, Shih 2005, 5)

War bride narratives are particularly receptive to this mode of reading texts, as war brides by their very definition occupy a liminal space between cultures and nations. Studies of war bride narratives in Asian American literature have often emphasized reclaiming the subjectivity of war brides, as both the media and literature in the decades following the end of the war focused on the image of war brides as an allegory for the relationship between Japan and the US (Osada 2007, 17). Yoshimizu attempts to reclaim war bride subjectivity by positing memories as counter-narratives to dominant nationalist discourses (Yoshimizu 2009, 111). In her analysis of Japanese-American author Ruth Ozeki's novel about war brides, *All Over Creation*, Hsiu-Chuan Lee employs Lionnet and Shih's "minor transnationalism" to this end:

In order to free Japanese war brides from the conventional representations as traitors, victims, or the assimilated—hence the forgotten—wives scattering into white domesticity, it is imperative to re-conceive war brides as figures exceeding the boundaries of nationalistic politics. In

effect, war brides' interracial affiliations make them a pliable nexus of differences. (Lee 2013, 41)

This study suggests that Mori's *Mockingbirds* represents a similar attempt to resist the binarisms that dominate discourse on war brides. The text accomplishes this by shifting the terms of discourse away from the centre/periphery model and forging horizontal connections across minority communities. As Lionnet and Shih have cogently argued:

More often than not, minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups. We study the center and the margin but rarely examine the relationships among different margins. The dominant is posited, even by those who resist it, as a powerful and universalizing force that either erases or eventually absorbs cultural particularities. Universalism demands a politics of assimilation, incorporation, or resistance, instituting a structure of vertical struggle for recognition and citizenship. (Lionnet, Shih 2005, 2)

This model of "minor transnationalism" proposed by Lionnet and Shih offers an alternative method for examining the social relations of immigrants in Mori Reiko's *The Town of the Mockingbirds*. As will be discussed in a later section, the model demands more than a facile resistance of the 'centripetal pull' of the centre, in this case, American culture. It requires that the 'peripheral' or 'minor' cultures engage with each other in meaningful ways.

## 6 Language Hybridity

Mori's narrative employs language to represent both the hybridity and ambiguity of identity experienced by the Japanese war brides in the story. The resulting effect within the text symbolically interrogates the hegemony of English and 'white America' as the dominant language and culture, and creates hybrid spaces for the exploration of issues of identity. Although the text is written in Japanese, the author's creative use of *kanji*, *katakana*, *ateji*, and *rubi* readings produces this unsettling effect throughout the narrative. First, the names of the Japanese war bride characters in *Mockingbirds* are rendered into *katakana* in most instances: "Keiko" becomes "Kei"/"Kay"; "Junko" becomes "Jun"/"June" and "Tōko" becomes "Sue". For the former two characters, the *katakana* reading of their names contains an inherent ambiguity, as they could be transposed into *romaji* in multiple ways, each connoting different meanings. "Kei" could be regarded as an abbreviation of "Keiko", or as "Kay", an American equivalent; simi-

larly, “Jun” could be regarded as an abbreviation for “Junko” or else as “June”, an American equivalent. Clearly this is not the case for “Sue”. For the war bride characters Keiko and Junko, the ambiguity of representing their names in *katakana* mirrors an ambiguity of identity; arguably they could be said to possess hybrid identities after two decades of living in America. At the same time, however, both “Kei”/“Kay” and “Jun”/“June” express their struggle with their Japanese/American cultural identities. On the other hand, “Sue” is by far the most ‘Americanized’ character, and the one who has best adapted to life in the Midwestern base town. The story is narrated in the third person from the perspective of the protagonist, Keiko, and the text uses *kanji* characters to represent her name. Interestingly, when the other characters in the narrative refer to Keiko, her name is rendered into the *katakana* “Kei”. This variation in the nomenclature of the protagonist further underscores the fractured nature of Keiko’s own cultural identity.

The use of *ateji* further complicates the issue of language and identity in the narrative. There are few linguistic studies of the use of *ateji* in contemporary Japanese language. In modern Japanese literature, Meiji authors Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai were especially adept at employing *ateji* in their fiction. Sōseki, for example, would sometimes use different *kanji* to represent a native Japanese word in order to convey particular meanings. In *Mockingbirds*, however, Mori Reiko uses *kanji* that maintain their original Japanese meanings, but she also appends the *rubi* readings in *katakana* alongside them. A recent study of the use of *ateji* in *manga* by Mia Lewis refers to this type of *ateji* as “translative *ateji*”, that is “where the translation for the spoken word written in the *furigana* is provided in the *kanji*”, adding a sense of foreignness through word manipulation (Lewis 2010, 32).

There are numerous examples of this type of *ateji* in Mori’s story *The Town of the Mockingbirds*. Some examples include: “*jijō*”, which has the *furigana* “*afuea*” appended to it to denote a ‘love affair’ (Mori 1980, 8);<sup>5</sup> “*ren’ai*”, which has the *furigana* “*rabu*” appended to it to denote ‘love’ (Mori 1980, 8); “*kichigai*”, which has the *furigana* “*kure-ji*” appended to it to denote the English word ‘crazy’ (Mori 1980, 13, 15, 21). Although the meaning of these words is sufficiently clear in the original Japanese rendering, the addition of the English gloss conveys further meaning: with the “*kichigai*”/“*kure-ji*” pairing, for example, Sue and the war brides in the town are therefore described as not only “*kichigai*”, which itself connotes madness, but as ‘crazy’, further punctuating the word with the heavily laden meaning of the English language term. There are numerous other instances of this kind of word play in Mori’s text: “*gizensha*” is written

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5 In this section page numbers refer to the original Japanese text in Mori 1980.

with the gloss “*hipokuritto*” for ‘hypocrite’; “*binbō hakujiin*” is written with the gloss “*pua howaito*” for ‘poor white’; “*fuan*” is written with the gloss “*sorichudo*” for ‘solitude’. The volume of *ateji* in Mori’s *Mockingbirds* is unusually high, but it is also diverse. It is worth mentioning that in the two stories accompanying *Mokkingubādo no iru machi* in Mori’s 1980 collection of stories, this frequent use of *ateji* was not noted. Arguably, Mori’s word play with characters, their meanings and readings in *Mockingbirds* could also be referred to as *jukujikun*. *Jukujikun* can be regarded as a subset of the broader category of *ateji*. With *jukujikun*, the kanji in use relates to the meaning of the word, but not to the sound.

*The Town of the Mockingbirds* is also characterized by a double movement of language in its usage of *kanji* and *katakana*, as many proper nouns that would ordinarily be written in *kanji* are rendered into *katakana*. For example, in Keiko’s recollections of her friends’ names from her childhood, *katakana* is exclusively employed. She recalls their names to herself: “*E-chan, Daruma-san, Kō-chan, Shun-chan, Nobu...*” (Mori 1980, 16). Moreover, when Keiko is discussing place names in Japan with Sue’s husband, Phil, she refers to “*Kurihama*” in *katakana*, rather than in *kanji*. This suggests a movement of the protagonist towards English and American culture as well as an estrangement from her native language of Japanese. Decades following her immigration to America as the war bride of an American soldier, the representations of both the names of her childhood playmates and the names of Japanese places indicate a critical distance between Keiko and her native Japanese identity. Importantly, this language play does not celebrate hybridity, but instead suggests an exploration of these borderland spaces created by the intersection of cultures. Just as Keiko herself struggles with her identity as a war bride twenty-four years after her immigration from Japan to America, the text too struggles to negotiate language, words and meaning across cultures. The emphasis on these borderland spaces created through the use of language disrupts the presumed centre/periphery language binary (with English as the dominant language and Japanese as the minor language), suggesting that “minor transnationalism” offers a productive method for reading Mori’s text.

## 7 Triangulation of Identity

Transnational literature is frequently characterized by the tension between center and periphery, as issues of identity and belonging play critical roles. *The Town of the Mockingbirds* radically disrupts the American/Japanese cultural dichotomy by inserting discourse on Native Americans as a third term. By triangulating the relationship between herself as a war bride and white American society, Keiko is able to come into consciousness about other minorities, therefore calling the centripetal movement of globalization into

question. It is precisely Keiko's interaction with Sue's Native American former lover Edgar Lightfoot that enables this understanding. Edgar's open contempt for the lifestyle of the members of his Native American tribe demonstrates clearly that for him, white American culture and his native roots exist in a binary state of opposition. Moreover, Edgar's longing for acceptance by white society suggests a clear center-periphery distinction wherein movement naturally flows towards the hegemonic centre. Edgar has all but severed relations with his Comanche tribe and feels he has succeeded in life because he has gained acceptance in the white community as an artist and art teacher in spite of his Native American heritage. He swells with pride when he explains to Keiko that the young white woman in his studio is, in fact, his assistant, revelling in the reversal of their social and cultural positions. Edgar also boasts about the fact that white patrons financially support his artistic endeavours. He points out what life on the Indian reservation means for him:

Indolence and degradation – that's all it'll ever bring them. No matter how much they brag about being 'native Americans', until they get off the reservation and make their mark in white society, people will still say, 'An Indian's an Indian'. (Mori 1986, 31)

Despite her frustration with Edgar's arrogance, Keiko tempers her response to him when she observes the reaction of the women in the YMCA to their heated conversation: "She noticed some of the Caucasian women exchanging glances, with grimaces on their faces. In their eyes she could read their racial prejudice: 'Indians!' they seemed to say" (Mori 1986, 28). Keiko comes to recognize that despite their obvious cultural differences, both she and Edgar are very much citizens on the fringes of the nation. Keiko attempts to explain her newfound perspective to Edgar:

Even though I meant to live the life of the country as fully as possible, because there are customs that I could not follow with all my heart, and because of an overpowering desire not to be discriminated against by the whites because I am Japanese, I found no place to show my true self. And probably...perhaps you have been caught in the same trap.(Mori 1986, 33)

Arguably, the protagonist of Ariyoshi Sawako's 1964 novel *Hishoku* maps out a similar trajectory of coming into consciousness about identity and minority relations. In *Hishoku*, Emiko develops a more profound understanding of race relations in America, deconstructing her previously held binary model of national identity vis-à-vis Japan and the United States (Osada 2007, 21). Emiko's desire to racially identify with the African-American community, however, is not based merely on her heightened understanding of racial relations in America; she is married to an African-American man and her children are so-called *hāfu* (half). In other words, whereas Emiko

of *Hishoku* has a vested interest in this cultural understanding, Keiko of *Mockingbirds* possesses no such imperative when she posits a cross-cultural connection between her own identity as a Japanese war bride and Edgar Lightfoot's Comanche community. In her analysis of *Hishoku* Barbara Hartley argues that Emiko reaches this consciousness of racial relations through her corporeal experiences:

It should be noted that Emiko's declaration of solidarity with the Harlem community is intimately connected with her maternal body in that she re-affiliates with her children and their father. It is possible that her return to her family might be interpreted as a championing of a *telos* of motherhood. (Hartley 2003, 301)

That is, motherhood offers Emiko particular insight, enabling her to connect on a more profound level with both her family and her community across boundaries of nation and culture.

Keiko's development of a minority consciousness in Mori's *Mockingbirds* differs from that of Emiko in Ariyoshi's *Hishoku* in other significant ways. Emiko develops a consciousness of race and racism based on her own experiences as the Japanese (minority) wife of an African American man, but this development is exclusively a mono-directional process: Emiko herself achieves a more profound understanding of race and expresses solidarity with the African American community. On the other hand, Keiko's engagement with Edgar is not merely a passive understanding; she engages Edgar into a heated discussion designed to force his own understanding of her perspective on race relations. When Edgar presents Keiko with his simple, binary understanding of the relationship between Native Americans and white America, Keiko offers her own perspective as a Japanese war bride. By triangulating the Japan/American and Native American/white American binarisms that both she and Edgar bring to their meeting at the YMCA, Keiko participates in the production of discourses on race and identity. The narrative therefore creates what can effectively be referred to as a 'transnational space of exchange', where culture is produced through latitudinal relationships that are not mediated by a hegemonic center.

In *Mockingbirds* triangulation of the three terms - white Americans, Native Americans, and Japanese war brides - produces the effect of disrupting the conventional binaries used to represent the war bride experience in literature, creating this space of exchange and understanding. Linguistically as well, the text problematizes hybridity and disrupts the hegemony of the English language. Through the lens of "minor transnationalism" Mori's 1979 story *The Town of the Mockingbirds* can be read as a piece of transnational literature that disrupts global binarisms and creates a space of exchange and production that exists across boundaries of nation, race, gender and culture.

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