No Name Women Write Back: Transnationality in South Asian American Women’s Poetics

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This thesis focuses on silence wrought and refracted through transnational Asian American gender formation in the works of Maxine Hong Kingston, Rupi Kaur, and Tarfia Faizullah. Experimentation with the genres of memoir and poetry forms a critical feature of these texts, and captures the nuanced forms of articulation each narrator adopts as she grapples with the transnational layers of her subjectivity. In my project, “transnational” serves as a geographic, spatial mode that destabilizes the American and Canadian home life Kingston, Kaur, and Faizullah each describe in their writings. As a result, a transnational framework facilitates the discussion of how these texts and their narrators broach lineage and history that traces back to the lands from where their parents emigrated.

This meditation on transnationality is symptomatic of each author’s narrative vantage point as a second-generation daughter of Asian immigrants. Maxine in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* attempts to locate herself amidst the stories her mother tell her about their village in China. Kingston strays from the linear conventions of memoir to reveal a narrator who struggles with the concept of linearity itself. Kaur’s *Milk & Honey* features a narrator who works to grow as she encounters forces within her Indian immigrant community that seek to silence the women in her family. The poems in this collection feature drawings, which serve to capture this narrator’s perception of an additional operative dimension in her encounters with her family, her lover, and herself. In Faizullah’s *Seam*, the narrator endeavors to know more about the War for Independence that her mother and grandmother lived through, and travels to Dhaka, Bangladesh, for this exact purpose. The poems in *Seam* contain interviews with rape survivors of this war, and the narrator switches between several voices and poetic forms to illustrate her fractured positionality in the spaces she occupies.

In pairing *The Woman Warrior* with *Milk & Honey* and *Seam*, this project strives to address not only these prevailing tropes of gender, silence, and transnationality, but also aims to incorporate South Asian North American authorship within the discourse of Asian American feminist literature. This pan-ethnic conjunction stems from a transnational feminist approach that groups these texts and places these Chinese American, Indian Canadian, and Bangladeshi American women writers in conversation about silences exacted through a disciplinary gender formation that implicates transnationality, and calls for inventive articulation.