

## Korea(n) divided: Third Space Existence in Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals*

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A RECENT TREND in cultural theory is to pay attention to previously neglected and unrecognised groups and individuals transcending antithetical and dichotomous categories of Western/non-Western, male/female, hetero/homo and the like.<sup>1</sup> Cultural and social 'misfits' like bicultural and multiethnic people, transracial and international adoptees, and transgenders and bisexuals all exemplify marginal and liminal existences in-between or beyond essentialist categories. One part of this trend is the emergence of masculinity, elite, heteronormativity, and Whiteness studies even if an orphan or bastard theory as such has yet to be formulated. These theoretical and methodological approaches which are often combined through their intersection, focus on how hegemonic power is formed, maintained and reproduced, but also how it can be interrupted and subverted. Another remarkably productive aspect of this research development is a growing number of comparative studies examining similarities and differences between various bi/trans-minorities with regard to the performative, visual and bodily character of postmodern identities and the issue of passing. One such example is Vicki Bell's comparative study between Jews in Nazi Germany and today's sexual minorities, and their abilities to pass as and mimic the majority population.<sup>2</sup> All these border crossers, variously labelled as nomads, pilgrims, vagabonds, *bricoleurs*, creoles, *mestizos* whatever depending on scholars and theories, can be linked to the notion of hybridity.

Hybridity is a key term in postcolonial studies where it stands for the transcultural crossroads and spaces generated by the colonial encounter. Robert Young traces the word hybridity and its meaning to nineteenth century attitudes towards race and obsession with miscegenation as well as to the emergence of pidgin languages in colonized lands, in his magisterial study of early colonial interactions and the roots to contemporary images of racial and cultural differences.<sup>3</sup> According to nineteenth century race discourse, especially in its British Victorian version, a hybrid was a mixture of two species, whether animals or human beings, as different races were conceptualised as different species, and the state of hybridity was strongly associated with degeneration, infertility and sterility. This fear of and interest in intermixture at the time of high imperialism is for [Young] a reflection of an ambivalent attitude towards hybridity; on the one hand it expresses a desire and an attraction for the 'creolised', while on the other hand it articulates an aversion and a repulsion for the 'mongrelised' and 'bastardised'.

In one of his introductions to postcolonial theory, Young takes up the Algerian popular music genre of *raï* as an ideal example of hybridity in practice.<sup>4</sup> *Raï*, which emerged in 1970s urban and working-class Algeria represented an amalgamation of many different cultures and traditions such as West African folk music, Arabic dance and Western rock, and can be seen as a musical crossover between binary opposites like the sacred and the secular, the classical and the

popular, and the local and the global. This syncretic and hybrid character of *raï* has also made the music genre vulnerable to attacks from nationalist circles for its lack of social respectability and cultural impurity, and for destabilising Algerian society as a whole. However, it is the leading postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha who has developed the most influential and at the same time controversial theory of hybridity with his concept of the third space.<sup>5</sup>

For Bhabha, drawing on Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and the writings of Frantz Fanon, the relationship between the colonialist Self and the colonised Other is always marked by ambivalence, and the boundary between them is never totally divided, separated or closed. Instead, while the former is never fully accepting of the coloniser's image of him or her as the Other, the latter is never fully able to reproduce its authority and uphold its Self completely, so they both end up with split and incomplete identities for having 'contaminated' each other. It is exactly in the interstitial space between the coloniser and the colonised that hybridity enters and is to be located in the form of the third space. The third space is an in-between and neither-nor space characterised by constant signification, translation and negotiation where there is neither a beginning nor an end, nor any unity nor purity, and where primordial notions of culture and nation have been replaced by a floating and multiple, indistinguishable and indeterminate existence. The hybridised is rendered different from both the coloniser and the colonised and becomes an Other between, beside and beyond both cultures and worlds through what Bhabha calls the 'intervention of the third space of enunciation'.

'The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences...What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignments of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present.'<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that Bhabha's interpretation of hybridity is highly contested as it has been criticised for its premature celebration of liberation. These critics also remind readers of the problematic origin of the term itself in nineteenth century race biology, and warn that it is easily appropriated and exploited by neo-liberal and social-Darwinist global capitalism as an ideology merely for the Western and Westernised elites. Benita Parry critiques Bhabha's third space by questioning how it privileges poststructuralism before materialism, generalises the colonial encounter, and trivialises colonialism to a role-play in language philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Bhabha does not differentiate between, for example, class and gender, and very few colonial subjects had in reality any direct contact with Westerners, while the notion of hybridity itself also downplays and threatens to forget the deep antagonism existing between the coloniser and the colonised. As has been suggested by R. Radhakrishnan in his attack on postmodernism where he calls for a third space beyond metropolitan totalising universalism and indigenous reactive fundamentalism, Bhabha may even have thought about his own situation and that of other exiled and Western-trained postcolonial intellectuals living in the West, affiliated to elite universities and married to Westerners in his elaboration of the third space.<sup>8</sup>

My use of Bhabha's third space derives its legitimation from a cautious and critical understanding of the meaning of hybridity. This is being done by not romancing the state of hybridity, by not disregarding the violence present in the colonial encounter, by not fetishising and racialising the hybridised as a bridge between cultures and as a symbol for interethnic harmony, and by a deep understanding that a border life and a borderland existence is most often not a voluntary choice. Instead, I agree with Ella Shohat's careful note that hybridity must be understood and examined in a non-universalising and differential manner, and above all with regards to contemporary conditions of forced migration and assimilation, and internalised racism, self-rejection and self-hate as colonialism is still going strong and the anti-colonial struggle is far from over yet.<sup>9</sup> I am therefore sceptical about and critical towards the idealisation of transracial and international adoptive families as examples of post-identitarian, post-nationalist, post-ethnic, post-racial or even non-racial kinship, which is present in several recent works by adoption researchers inspired by postmodern theory, many of whom are adoptive parents themselves.<sup>10</sup>

In a Korean context, one counters the concept of hybridity when bringing up various Korean diasporas. This particularly concerns those living in interracial relationships and their children of mixed origin, ethnic Koreans from Latin America or Central Asia who have remigrated to United States, the queer Korean-Americans Lee Jee Yeun writes about, and those of third or even fourth generations in Japan whose wracked and fractured identities and feelings of homelessness and uprootedness Sonia Ryang has written so eloquently on.<sup>11</sup> However, my use of hybridity here is limited to Bhabha's meaning of the third space, namely those people who are otherised by and live outside both the majority society and the minority community. Adopted Koreans as a case study of a third space existence is in other words the point of departure when reading Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals* (1997).

### **Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals***

Kim Ki-duk, Korean cinema's *enfant terrible*, is notorious for his uncomfortable and brutal depictions of the repressed and dark underside of modern Korean society with controversial but nonetheless internationally acclaimed titles like *The Isle (Sôm)* (1999), *Address Unknown (Such'wi'in pulmyông)* (2001), and *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring (Pom, yôrûm, kaûl kûrigo pom)* (2003). Kim has a bad reputation for a violent and often cruel use of women not to mention animals in his works and *Wild Animals*, with its strong misogynist undertone, is no exception, even if it may be possible to interpret Kim's grotesque female portraits as a subtle criticism of the ugly treatment of women as second-class citizens in contemporary Korea. Former factory worker and marine soldier Kim Ki-duk comes from a poor family background and lacks a formal education unlike many of his film directing colleagues, a situation that has enabled him to create stories centred around the most marginalized people in what has otherwise been depicted as the successful development of modern Korea. Debuting in 1996, self-trained as a film director, and firmly distancing himself from what he calls the mainstream 'intellectual' and 'aesthetic' trend of Korean cinema, Kim Ki-duk is renowned for his low-budget films, produced with an incredible speed and sometimes even without any celebrity actors or actresses at all in the roles.<sup>12</sup> This fact has resulted in frequent comparisons with fellow Korean director Kim Ki-young, another legendary autodidact and outsider in the history of Korean film.

Kim has taken on forbidden and forgotten social problems such as teenage and military prostitution, incest, and mixed-race children and orphans, and it is no

surprise that his second feature film *Wild Animals* (1997) engaged with the adoption issue. Interestingly, after having received an award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004, Kim announced that he has plans for a new film about the life of a female adopted Korean in Europe. Kim Ki-duk has never been a commercial success in his own country even if he has acquired a certain cult status, while on the other hand he has been well received by Western film critics and won several prestigious prizes at different international film festivals like those held in Venice, Toronto, Rotterdam and San Francisco. Consequently the drama thriller *Wild Animals*, which also screened at the Vancouver International Film Festival, did not even reach the 1997 top ten list of the most visited domestic films at the Korean box office.

Based on his own experiences in Paris between 1990-92 as a wandering street performer selling his own paintings, *Wild Animals*, like all of his cinematic productions, depicts the cruel nature of life seen through the lives of young and alienated people who live under utter degradation and despair. The feature film can be seen as a parable of the divided Korean nation as a tragic triangle drama unfolds between three ethnic Koreans whose lives happen to get intertwined with each other in a colourful and thoroughly romanticised French capital: South Korean Ch'ông-hae (literally Blue ocean), played by Cho Chae-hyôn, a star who figures in other works by Kim Ki-duk as well, North Korean Hong-san (Red mountain) who is played by Chang Tong-jik, and adopted Korean Laura, performed by previously unknown actress Chang Ryun. The world famous French actors Richard Bohringer (*Subway*, *Total Kheops* and *Tango* among others) and Denis Lavant (*Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* and *Beau Travail*) play leading roles as a mafia boss and Laura's boyfriend Emil respectively, and the rest of the cast is populated with French actors, of whom Sasha Lukavina must be mentioned as she is Ch'ông-hae's Hungarian girlfriend Corinne in the film.

Fundamentally, *Wild Animals* deals with the relationship between Koreanness and Whiteness told through the perspectives of North Korean Hong-san and South Korean Ch'ông-hae. The film concentrates upon their respective relations to Laura and Corinne, and the development of their fraternal friendship and how they are able to acknowledge each other's versions of North and South Korean masculinity in a dangerous and hostile Western setting. The adopted Korean woman Laura is, however, unable to take part in Hong-san's and Ch'ông-hae's pan-Korean alliance and homoerotic gaiety, and in the final spectacular scene, she destroys their on-going reunification dream by killing her South and North Korean compatriots. In the film, Whiteness comes to stand for disease and decadence, as adoptive parents are portrayed as abusive and white boyfriends as malicious, while Koreanness is made to stand for brotherhood and masculinity, and even more importantly, for unity and homogeneity. *Wild Animals* is also a film overloaded with vain dreams of a better life, misdirected desires to fit in, and fatal misunderstandings played out on the very level of the body. In the course of the film, the boundaries between Koreans and French, as well as between North, South and adopted Koreans become increasingly passed, perforated and blurred, leading up to the tragic but inevitable denouement.

### **Desiring Whiteness**

The plot of *Wild Animals* unfolds on a Budapest-Paris train where deserter and defector Hong-san, a former soldier and martial arts expert in the North Korean army who can only speak Korean, sits alone in a compartment. As the representative of North Koreanness in the film, Hong-san is a tough and silent but gullible young man who dresses in combat-style paramilitary clothes, and harbours a dream to go to Paris and sign up as a soldier of fortune in the French foreign legion. Laura, an

adopted Korean girl in her late teens with coloured hair, heavy make-up, and provocative and defiant body language, enters the film by boarding the train and taking a seat in the same compartment. The naïve and kind-hearted Laura, who represents yet another type of Koreanness in the film, has been persuaded by her boyfriend Emil to return to and resume her peepshow at his club in the red light district of Pigalle in Paris. Laura's dream is to quit her dubious profession, and live a normal family life together with Emil. Laura's arrival to the compartment is a moment fraught with ambiguity: she could be anything from a French woman of Asian origin, to a first generation Asian immigrant, a visiting Asian tourist or an ethnic Korean. As a North Korean with a characteristic lack of knowledge about the existence of adopted Koreans in Western countries, Hong-san first mistakes her for a North Korean woman but soon realises his error when he sees her behaving in ways that are characteristically associated with French.

Laura in her turn does not seem to respond to his (North) Koreanness at all, and she acts as mannish and bold as any other young French woman of her age. She coughs when he starts to smoke, which makes him stop, and he helps her to open a bottle of soft drink, which she empties in one gulp. Hong-san is puzzled and fascinated by her un-Korean style, and he falls helplessly in love with her. When two French gendarmes enter the compartment to check their passports, Laura is immediately addressed as a French woman, gives them her name card and jokes with the policemen in her fluent and native French, saying that they must come and see her show. At the same moment, she saves the non-Francophone Hong-san from uncomfortable questions by pretending to be his companion, something which the gendarmes easily accept as the two travellers are both ethnic Koreans. However, when the train arrives in the terminus in Paris and Hong-san sees her being met by Emil at the platform, he is deeply disappointed.

The audience is also introduced to Ch'ông-hae, the third Korean character who represents South Koreanness in the film. Ch'ông-hae is a rude and mischievous small-time crook, petty criminal and rascal, who dreams of becoming a painter and part of mainstream French society. He hangs around a studio for Korean artists in Paris where he harasses his countrymen, steals their paintings and sells them on the street. At the same street corner where Ch'ông-hae sells his stolen goods, Corinne, an illegal immigrant of Hungarian origin who earns money by performing as one of August Rodin's marble busts of Camille Claudel, stands immobile, nude and totally covered in white paint. Ch'ông-hae takes a liking to Corinne, and when two men throw water on her to destroy her body painting, Ch'ông-hae resolutely chases them away. Together they visit the Luxembourg garden, and Corinne shows Ch'ông-hae the marble statue of Rodin, which she is obsessed by and wants to own. Ch'ông-hae tries to steal the bust for her, and after being hunted by the French police, they end up in bed in Corinne's apartment. Laura and Emil have at the same time arrived in his apartment, where they too end up in bed. Laura tells Emil that she loves him, and begs him to agree that she would never have to perform at his club again. The self-centred Emil exploits Laura's feelings for him, openly treats her like a child and an exotic toy, and makes use of her naïve personality and vulnerability as an abused adoptee to extract money, and he answers by just laughing.

Ch'ông-hae is discovered by the Korean artists to be the person stealing their paintings, and gets thrown out of the Korean artisan community in Paris. Instead he finds a new way of making a living: pretending to be a kind stranger who shows newcomers how the lockers at the railway station work, and then steals their luggage. Korean tourists are not exempt from Chong-hae's scam; director Kim quickly dispels viewers from rosy notions of solidarity loyalty between Chong-hae and fellow

Koreans. Not surprisingly, when Hong-san turns up at the lockers, Ch'ông-hae immediately mistakes Hong-san for a fellow national and addresses him as a South Korean. Hong-san is happy to have received help from two ethnic Koreans on the same day, and he accepts Ch'ông-hae's assistance and walks away for some brief sightseeing. By chance and unknowingly, he happens to pass by the sex club where Laura works and, upon returning, finds the locker empty and realises that he has been deceived. Two Frenchmen who have also been duped by Ch'ông-hae suddenly turn up, and together, they chase after him. The Frenchmen take the lead, manage to capture Ch'ông-hae, and proceed to beat him. When Hong-san catches up, he unexpectedly changes side, driven by some kind of ethnic solidarity, and helps Ch'ông-hae out of the precarious situation by chasing away the Frenchmen.

The audience has by now been introduced to *Wild Animals'* three principal characters, and it is obvious that director Kim juxtaposes and looks upon their fates equally. It is true that what they all have in common is that they are misplaced Koreans who have ended up in Paris, but the reasons behind their outcast experiences must be said to differ widely. While Hong-san certainly has deserted voluntarily from the North Korean army, and Ch'ông-hae at least must be credited for his own excommunication from the South Korean community in Paris, Laura's life as an adopted Korean completely cut off from both Korea as well as from other diasporic Koreans is neither self-chosen nor self-caused. The male characters of Hong-san and Ch'ông-hae actively desire and seek out Laura and Corinne; Laura, in particular, is desired and portrayed as totally victimised and subordinated. Hong-san is attracted by Laura's queer state as an adopted Korean, and Ch'ông-hae is absorbed by the literal Whiteness of the Hungarian refugee Corinne. The two women can be seen as signifiers and bearers of Whiteness even if they are not French in a classical meaning and inhabit the margins of French society. As both Hong-san and Ch'ông-hae dream so passionately of entering French society, they misdirect and project their desperate desire for Whiteness on a hybridised Korean and on a whitened Hungarian.

This reading is inspired by Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks who goes against the idea that Whiteness is primarily a bodily and material property, something which is still the general assumption despite the fact that most people today would agree that race is a social construct.<sup>13</sup> In her study of Whiteness, Seshadri-Crooks reviews the works of leading scholars in race studies like David Goldberg and Étienne Balibar, and finds that they presuppose race in the same way as sex, namely as a biological certainty of human embodiment. Inspired by a Lacanian understanding of the production of sexual difference, Seshadri-Crooks instead deciphers Whiteness as the unconscious master signifier that makes race thinking possible in the first place, ordering and organising the structure of racial difference not just between whites and non-whites but also between all kinds of 'people of colour', and which always attempts to disavow its own historicity and cultural grounding to be able to transmute race into biological necessity. Racial difference is sustained through a regime of visibility, bodies are 'raced' just like bodies are 'sexed,' and according to Seshadri-Crooks, this creates a vain and unattainable desire for Whiteness to overcome lack and difference, and accomplish wholeness.<sup>14</sup>

This also makes it possible for Seshadri-Crooks to call for a politics of discoloration instead of an identity politics that only reinforces the privileged and hegemonic place of Whiteness. By creating disarray and discontinuity in the system, Whiteness can be dismantled. Richard Dyer points out in his excellent study of the unmarkedness and neutrality of Whiteness in Western visual culture, that Eastern Europeans and Ugrians are not considered as fully white as Northern Europeans and

Scandinavians.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by painting herself white, the Hungarian woman Corinne both expresses her own desire for Whiteness and subverts the logic of racial difference by making Ch'ông-hae desire her. The same transcending of a visible phenotype is even more evident for Laura who acts like a white French woman and makes Hong-san desire her.

### **The Perilous Act of Passing**

However, there are other important bodily misunderstandings taking place in the film as well. While Laura and Corinne are able to pass as French women, Laura, Hong-san and Ch'ông-hae are able to pass as different kinds of Koreans. Confused by each other's different Koreanness, and disoriented in a Western surrounding, first Hong-san misreads Laura for a North Korean woman, and Ch'ông-hae initially misreads Hong-san for a South Korean man. Yet another misreading takes place when Ch'ông-hae wants to take revenge on the Korean artists, and dupes Hong-san into believing that they are going to beat up a gang of Japanese. Hong-san agrees, but during the brawl, he hears one of the victims speaking Korean. Hong-san and Ch'ông-hae soon learn about each other's backgrounds. However, the most significant passer is again Laura, who passes as both a French and Korean woman, as well as being treated like a living oriental fantasy. Passing is a familiar trope in African-American literature, where it once evoked the stereotype of the tragic mulatto living on the borders of both the black minority community and the white majority society and suffering from a compulsory psychic crisis, and who constantly feared being revealed and exposed as not completely white. However, as Giulia Fabi argues in relation to the Harlem renaissance of the first half of the twentieth century, the tragic mulatto motif was instead used in a subversive way and turned into a powerful critique of the myth of the American colour line.<sup>16</sup>

Probably the most heavily critiqued literary text from the period of the Harlem renaissance dealing with the issue of passing is the novel *Passing* from 1929, written by Nella Larsen who herself was of mixed origin as her father was a Caribbean and her mother Danish.<sup>17</sup> In *Passing*, a mixed woman named Clare passes as white and lives together with Bellew, a white man who detests black people. At the same time, she is desired by Irene, another mixed woman who generally does not pass and tries to conceal her homosexual feelings. Trapped between this dangerous conflation of forbidden transgressions of race and sexuality, Clare is finally exposed as a black woman and dies. Another work of the Harlem renaissance analysed by Cynthia Callahan is Charles W. Chesnutt's novel *The Quarry*, which was submitted to but rejected by the publishing house in 1928 and instead published posthumously in 1999, and which deals explicitly with the relation between passing and transracial adoption.<sup>18</sup>

In *The Quarry* a boy named Donald is a domestic adoptee of a white couple known as the Seatons. However, when Donald grows up rumours start to spread that he has a mixed background, and when the Seatons visit the adoption agency they discover that this is correct; Donald's biological father was a so-called 'light mulatto'. As a result, he is re-adopted into a working-class black family named the Glovers, who raise and educate him like an African American. During adolescence, as a consequence of his light complexion, he gets many opportunities to pass as white, but he successively rejects them all. Years later, the Seatons are notified by the agency that they had mixed up the records, and that Donald is not mixed but of Anglo-American descent. The Seatons offer Donald the opportunity to come back to them, telling him that they will give him all the opportunities a rich middle-class white man can have, but Donald refuses, preferring to remain with his adopted

community. Finally, the subject of passing has also appeared in a Korean American context where it too is linked to mixed and adopted people, but also to the practice of eating with chopsticks, of having a Korean name, and of speaking English with an accent as evidenced by Wendy Ann Lee's paper on passing as a Korean American.<sup>19</sup>

In *Wild Animals*, Laura's ability to pass is once again not a voluntary one. Instead, it has been enforced on her as she was born in Korea, adopted to France, and acculturated and socialised as French without her consent. Laura is not always conscious of the fact that she is able to pass, even if she uses this ability in the train compartment where she on the one hand communicates like a French woman with the French gendarmes, and on the other hand makes them believe that she is the girlfriend of Hong-san. Laura's self-image is clearly that of a white French woman, and her identification is with Whiteness, but she is also aware that she can be identified with East Asia and Korea in certain situations. However, as the queer theorist Judith Butler argues in her Foucaultian-inspired theory of performativity, the borders between different categories and subjectivities are governed by numerous regulatory and circumscribing juridical laws, cultural customs and social conventions which delimit and constrain the potentialities for passing, and which punish those who dare to by marginalisation or even death, as in the case of Clare.<sup>20</sup> It may be that Laura is a floating signifier who disturbs and disquiets the boundaries of race, culture and nationality, but just like Clare, she will end up being severely punished for her transgression, and like Donald, she will also choose to stay with the community that fostered her even if she has been abused by it.

Ch'ông-hae is impressed by Hong-san's fierce fighting spirit and excellent knowledge of martial arts, and he hatches a new plan to make money by arranging a spectacular martial arts and knife-throwing show on the street. As a result of the success and popularity of their street performances, they are also recruited by and taken under the wing of Richard Bohringer's French mafia leader, an intelligent and philosophically minded boss, who is in need of fresh henchmen. Ch'ông-hae, who persuades Hong-san that this is a good job and that they now have the chance to fulfil their dreams, somewhat pathetically believes that he has now succeeded in reaching his goal of entering French society, while in reality, they have ended up on the fringes, living on a worn-out boat on the Seine.

Together the South and North Korean now become embroiled in the criminal underworld of Paris like wild animals in the jungle, and develop a deep brotherly friendship which is easily read as an allegory for a separated and divided Korea. While Hong-san of course is the more physically able of the two and has to save his buddy from time to time, Ch'ông-hae is arguably the cleverer one, and it is he who comes up with their intriguing schemes. Their relationship is clearly based on sympathy for each other's outcast experiences, and their male bonding is filled with violent beatings and reconciling hugs. As part of Ch'ông-hae's and Hong-san's intimate and almost homoerotic brotherhood, they also visit prostitutes together. In line with the dominant Korean reunification discourse which states that there is no real discernable difference between North and South Koreans in spite of half a century of separation; their respective Southern and Northern backgrounds are never an issue, and they therefore manage to create a new kind of pan-Koreanness or at least a pan-Korean masculinity. However, a third party is suspiciously missing from this joyful and utopian reunification fantasy, namely the hybridised but nonetheless ethnic Korean Laura.



### **In-between Koreanness and Whiteness**

Hong-san cannot forget Laura, and one day he visits Laura's peepshow. The club has made a big thing of Laura's Korean appearance and Asian background; she performs her routine as a vulgar Egyptian belly dancer, stripping to Arab dance music, a practice that further takes this visual orientalist drag spectacle to the extreme. Growing up in North Korea, Hong-san has most probably never in his life seen something like this before, and he marvels at and is absolutely taken by Laura's shocking but exciting behaviour as an ethnic Korean woman. Hong-san returns time and again to the club, and tries to communicate with Laura by addressing her in Korean and showing her notes written in Korean, encouraging her to perform even more outspokenly and undress even faster. When Laura comes back to Emil's apartment, her adoptive father suddenly knocks on the door and asks her for money. It turns out that Laura's adoptive father has abused her and threw her out on the street at the age of 14, and Emil screams at him, informing him that he is no longer her father, that he cannot beg her for money and that he must know what kind of job Laura has. After Laura's adoptive father leaves, Emil comforts Laura but asks her to perform for him at the club one last time, for his sake.

With Laura's status as an ethnic chameleon, she is able to cross and transgress both worlds and pass as both a Korean and a French woman, but she is also subjected to a double otherisation of what can be called a self-otherisation of Us and an otherisation of Them. In her liberated Western femininity and in her embodiment of the orientalist phantasmagoria, she is otherised by the occidentalising gaze of the North Korean man and by the orientalisating wishes of the French boyfriend. Occidentalised as well as orientalist racialisation and fetishisation are articulated and projected on Laura's body. In this way, *Wild Animals* is not just a classical example of a colonial production of alterity, but also becomes a case study of how Us are deemed as Others. This is in line with what Dafna Lemish shows in her paper on dominant media images of female immigrants from the former USSR in Israel.<sup>21</sup> Lemish finds that these women's bodies are loaded with occidentalising fantasies in spite of being of Jewish descent, and argues that this is a good example of the process of self-Otherisation. Occidentalised and orientalist, Laura is trapped in a third space in-between Koreanness and Whiteness even if she reverses the gaze of Hong-san by killing him in the end.

Ch'ông-hae, in turn, cannot forget Corinne and tries to get in contact with her again, but it appears that just like Laura, she is also living with an oppressive and woman-hating Frenchman. Corinne's boyfriend is a sexist bigot and an extremely jealous man who beats her up with a frozen mackerel every time he suspects her of cheating on him. When Corinne protests, he threatens to go to the police and hand her in as an illegal immigrant. However, Ch'ông-hae continues to meet with Corinne and eventually her French 'benefactor' barter with her by offering Ch'ông-hae to 'take over' her in exchange for a large sum of money. Hong-san continues to visit Laura at the club. He also continues to communicate with her in Korean, and once he shows her a drawing of himself made by Ch'ông-hae. It is evident that Laura is slowly but steadily getting thrilled and fascinated by her frequent Korean customer, who gives Laura a sort of connection to Korea. Hong-san carves a small wooden doll, paints it as a Korean woman wearing a *hanbok*, and leaves it as a gift for Laura. Hong-san's act can be interpreted simply as a token of love, but also as a way of addressing her as and racialising her into a Korean woman. To understand this, it may be productive to make use of the Marxist Louis Althusser's and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's understandings of subject formation.

For Althusser and Lacan, the subject originates from and comes into being by entering the social order rather than a psychic interior, which instead becomes an effect of outside acculturation and socialisation. In his famous essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' from 1969-70, Althusser argues that subject formation takes place by way of a societal intervention known as interpellation.<sup>22</sup> Althusser's most cited example of interpellation is when a police officer hails an individual, and the individual turns around and answers, making ideology and the system able to reproduce itself. According to Lacan's reworking of Freud's concept of narcissism, formulated in the essay 'The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I' in 1949, subject formation takes place in the mirror stage, a psychic process whereby the subject enters the social realm by a process of identification with what is known as the imago or a mirror image.<sup>23</sup> Lacan's foremost example is when the infant recognises its own reflection in the mirror or in the eyes of others, identifies with it and becomes aware of him/herself.<sup>24</sup> So, to employ Althusser's framework, Hong-san interpellates Laura as a Korean woman and she answers by accepting the gift, and to use a Lacanian interpretation, Hong-san offers Laura a physical mirror image, and she answers by reflecting herself in the doll. This of course implies that Laura has only had experiences of having been taken for an 'oriental' of some sort and has never before been interpellated by another Korean as a Korean woman, and that she has acquired a self-image as a white French woman and never before had a 'Korean' mirror image at hand when growing up, a presupposition which may seem plausible given the way international adoption usually works.

Conflicts soon start to arise within the mafia gang, leading up to the dramatic ending of the film. Hong-san is ridiculed and laughed at by Carl, one of the members, for his lack of manners. When Ch'ông-hae rushes to his help, the two Koreans gain a deadly enemy. Furthermore, Ch'ông-hae realises that the boss's girlfriend Hanie is cheating on him with Paré, one of his closest aides, who will also turn out to be a fatal enemy for the couple. Ch'ông-hae and Corinne meet up again in Luxembourg gardens, and when she comes home, her boyfriend wants to beat her as usual. Instead, she stabs the mackerel into his stomach and kills him, and together Ch'ông-hae and Corinne throw the body into the Seine. The boss wants to kill the owner of a sex club, and in secret Ch'ông-hae agrees to perform the contract killing. It turns out that the target is no other than Laura's boyfriend Emil. Ch'ông-hae tells Hong-san that they are going to beat him up, but after the beating, Ch'ông-hae sneaks back into Emil's apartment, overpowers and binds Laura, and kills Emil with a knife. Before he departs, he also steals Emil's gold watch. In the next scene, Laura is lying on the dead body of Emil, crying through blindfolded eyes and with Emil's blood pouring down on her face while Hong-san's interpellating imago, the Korean doll, stares vacantly into space. Ch'ông-hae and Hong-san may have accidentally rescued Laura from her French exploiter, but rather than feeling liberated, Laura feels abandoned once more.

From now on, the events quickly escalate. Ch'ông-hae gives Emil's watch to Hong-san as a gift, a fatal act that will lead both directly to their deaths. The boss has discovered that Hanie is cheating on him with Paré, and he orders Hong-san to kill her for one and a half million francs. Hong-san kills Hanie, and he also manages to steal the Rodin bust for Ch'ông-hae to give to Corinne. Hong-san visits Laura for the last time, but this time she cannot perform and falls to the floor crying, upset about the murder of Emil. Suddenly, she recognises Emil's watch on Hong-san's wrist, while Hong-san misunderstands her reaction and thinks that she has finally answered his advances. Hong-san buys an apartment for him and Ch'ông-hae with the money he received for the killing. Paré is naturally furious after the death of

Hanie, and in response he kills his own boss, and with the help of Carl he kidnaps Ch'ông-hae and Hong-san, and drives them to a cliff by the sea, where he puts them in a sack and throws the sack into the ocean. However, they manage to crawl out of the bag and survive. In the next scene, Ch'ông-hae and Hong-san walk side by side in a back-alley, chatting about future plans, happy to have survived the murder plot. Without warning, Laura emerges out of the shadows with a pistol in her hand. Hong-san first smiles at her out of recognition, but she answers by shooting them both and Ch'ông-hae and Hong-san lie dying on the street. Hong-san picks out a picture of his family in North Korea from his pocket to look at for a last time, while Ch'ông-hae dies with the key to their new apartment in his hands. Rain starts to pour down, and like blood brothers Ch'ông-hae and Hong-san die together on the street, their blood mixed together as it streams down into a well; it is thus in death that their reunification fantasy is at last turned into a physical reality. In this way *Wild Animals* ends with Laura left alone, situated in an inescapable limbo in-between Koreanness and Whiteness. In the film, Laura has constantly threatened Hong-san's and Ch'ông-hae's pan-Korean brotherhood, and when she disrupts and destroys their supposedly unified Korean Self by killing them both, the symbolic message could be that international adoption is by all means a danger to national unity and homogeneity and must be stopped.

The introduction to this article sought to demonstrate that hybridity is most closely associated with the study of colonised subjects and postcolonial diasporas. However, to my mind it is adopted Koreans who best represent a third space existence, being as they are completely severed, estranged and isolated from both the North and South Korean national communities and other diasporised Korean minorities, as well as being marginalized and othered in their Western host countries by the discourses of anti-immigrantism and orientalism. *Wild Animals* reminds its viewers that despite widespread support for the concept in postcolonial studies, hybridity seldom offers any liberating potential, at least not at an individual level. Some may interpret this as a provocative statement. However, there is a strong tendency in postmodern academia to theorise about and evaluate hybrid existences which are difficult, if not impossible, to categorise and define, which constantly challenge and transgress otherwise secure identities, and which are frequently conceptualized as being ideal people belonging to a utopian and truly postcolonial and post-identitarian future. Yet at the same time very few people actually know what it means to be hybrid and live in the third space. It is on this basis that Laura provides a good example of the fatal consequences such an existence can lead to. In the course of the film, we see Laura constantly mistaken and misread for being something other than a French-adopted Korean woman. Laura created a desire for Whiteness in the North Korean man Hong-san, who at the same time never ceased to interpellate her into a Korean subject position, and she was forced to act as an orientalist fantasy by her French boyfriend Emil, while passing as a French woman and as an East Asian immigrant on other occasions. It was clear that Laura had problems to rule over or even understand all these passing acts that were going on and which she was subjected and forced into performing. Finally, Laura was also severely punished for her transgressions of the boundaries between Koreanness and Whiteness, and her refusals to respond to Hong-San's essentialising calls. The end result was she ended up being othered by Koreans and Westerners alike and found herself left alone trapped in the third space which for her was so obviously neither a self-chosen nor fulfilling state. Laura's fate in Kim Ki-duk's *Wild Animals* offers a cautious warning to those who would romanticize hybridity and hybrid existences

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Torika Bolatagici, 'Claiming the (n)either/(n)or of 'third space': (Re)presenting hybrid identity and the embodiment of mixed race', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 25, 1 (2004), pp.75-85; Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes, eds., *Hybridity and its discontents: Politics, science, culture*, Routledge, London, 2000; May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink, eds., *Performing hybridity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999; Yasmin Prabhudas, 'Bisexuals and people of mixed-race: Arbiters of change', in Merl Storr, ed., *Bisexuality: A critical reader*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp.150-151; Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix, eds., *Black, White or mixed race? Race and racism in the lives of young people of mixed parentage*, Routledge, New York, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Vicki Bell, 'Mimesis as cultural survival. Judith Butler and anti-Semitism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16, 2 (1999), pp.133-161.

<sup>3</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race*, Routledge, London, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp.69-79.

<sup>5</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of culture*, Routledge, London, 1995,

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp.218-219.

<sup>7</sup> Benita Parry, 'Signs of our times. Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The location of culture*', *Third Text*, 28/29, Autumn/Winter (1994), pp.5-24.

<sup>8</sup> R. Radhakrishnan, 'Postmodernism and the rest of the world', in Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, eds., *The pre-occupation of postcolonial studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2000, pp.37-70.

<sup>9</sup> Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the 'post-colonial'', *Social Text*, 31-32, Summer (1992), pp.99-113.

<sup>10</sup> For example Signe Howell, 'Kinning: The creation of life trajectories in transnational adoptive families', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, 9 (2003), pp.465-484; Barbara Ballis Lal, 'Learning to do ethnic identity: The transracial/transethnic adoptive family as site and context', in David Parker and Miri Song, eds., *Rethinking 'mixed race'*, Pluto Press, London, pp.154-172.

<sup>11</sup> Jee Yeun Lee, 'Toward a queer Korean American diasporic history', in David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, eds., *Q & A. Queer in Asian America*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1998, pp.185-209; Sonia Ryang, 'Diaspora and beyond: There is no home for Koreans in Japan', *Review of Korean Studies*, 4, 2 (1998), pp.55-86.

<sup>12</sup> Kyung Hyun Kim, *The remasculinization of Korean cinema*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2004, pp.8-10.

<sup>13</sup> Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness. A Lacanian analysis of race*, Routledge, London, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*, Routledge, London, 1997, p.19.

<sup>16</sup> Giulia Fabi, *Passing and the rise of the African American novel*, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'She'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a nigger', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16, 2 (1999), pp.87-106.

<sup>18</sup> Cynthia A. Callahan, 'The confounding problem of race: Passing and adoption in Charles Chesnutt's *The Quarry*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48, 2 (2002), pp.314-340; Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Quarry*, edited with introduction and notes by Dean McWilliams, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Wendy Ann Lee, 'Passing as Korean American', in David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quays, eds., *Relocating postcolonialism*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp.282-293.

<sup>20</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter. On the discursive limits of 'sex'*, Routledge, London, 1993, pp.167-185.

<sup>21</sup> Dafna Lemish, 'The whore and the other. Israeli images of female migrants from the former USSR', *Gender & Society*, 14, 2 (2000), pp.333-349.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*, London, New Left Books, 1971, pp. 160-169.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I', in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in theory 1900-1990: An anthology of changing ideas*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, pp.609-613.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*