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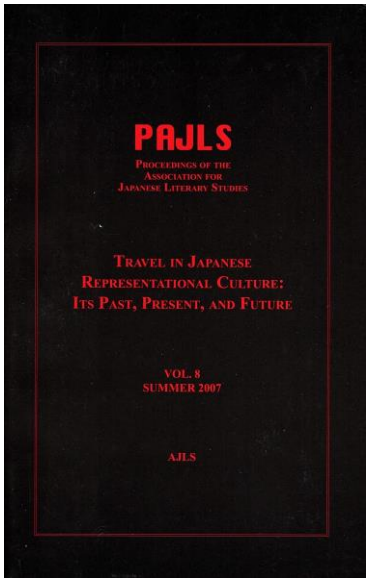

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"THIRD SPACE" IN ŌBA MINAKO'S *GARAKUTA HAKUBUTSUKAN*

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Ōba Minako (1935-2007) is known for writing tales of transnational characters caught in the interstices of two or more countries, languages, or cultures.[1] The international, mixed-race, and displaced characters who wander through her stories often embody what Ōba has called "furōnin no tamashii"［浮浪人の魂］, or a "vagabond spirit." I argue that Ōba's vagabond spirit refuses the limits of either national borders or nationalism, and finally negates the very idea of "home," be it as a point of origin or simply the act of settling down in one location.

To discuss this, let us consider Ōba's 1975 novel *Garakuta hakubutsukan* [*The Junk Museum*], a series of three linked stories about journeys and origins.[2] The first story, "Inuyashiki no onna" introduces Maria, who fled Russia via Manchuria and Shanghai as a girl. Now in her fifties, Maria arrived in the small isolated town on the northwest coast of North America that provides the setting of the novel eight years ago. Maria does not live with her third husband and daughter, instead choosing four Siberian huskies as companions. Maria's best friend is Aya, the Japanese "repairman's wife" of the following chapter. Ten years ago Aya divorced her Japanese husband and remarried an American Russ, who also adopted Aya's daughter Chizu. Russ is the town's local Mr. Fix-It, collecting castoffs which he stores and displays in a scrapped 1000-ton sailing vessel. This is, of course, the "junk museum" of the title. The focus of this chapter is Aya's "return" visit to Japan for the first time in ten years. The last chapter, "Suguri no shima," tells the story of Carlos, seemingly of Spanish origin, and an Oriental woman, most often

[1] The origins of Ōba's "double vision" may lie in the ten or so years (1959–1970) she spent living outside of Japan, primarily in the small town of Sitka, Alaska, once a Russian territory, and a melting pot home to both an indigenous and immigrant population. For a consideration of the influence of Alaska on Ōba, see Marian E. Chambers, "Ōba Minako: Rebirth in Alaska," *Japan Quarterly* Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct–Dec 1991): 474–483.

[2] *Garakuta hakubutsukan* consists of three unnumbered chapters, which were published separately in the literary magazine *Bungakkai* as "Inuyashiki no onna" ("The Dog Mansion Woman," January 1971), "Yorozushūzenya no tsuma" [trans. "The Repairman's Wife," January 1974] and "Suguri no shima" ("Suguri's Island," October 1974).

called "Sū," who is a visitor to the town, and how they are bought together by Suguri, an orphaned deer.[3]

I would argue that Maria, Aya, Carlos and Sū, all outsiders who have travelled to the unnamed town of the novel, create a "third space" where the meanings of national and individual identities are contested. Building on Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja's concepts of "third space," I argue that the characters' "wandering" constructs fluid, mutable identities, but not without cost: the end result is certainly not a utopian version of an alternate "home." Rather, "third space" in this novel may occupy the site of the "garakuta hakubutsukan," a museum of exotic odds and ends, discard and junk, around which the characters circulate and share their stories of displacement.

This "junk museum," a town landmark, is a scrapped ship which is anchored in Russ and Aya's backyard. Incongruent items are placed side by side in this museum; things which other people would discard are put on display: "The junk that Russ had collected over many years included door knobs hundreds of years old, old keys, sets of salt and pepper shakers…a model dungeon made of piles of old coins…a stuffed sheep fetus that had two heads,…instruments of torture that looked like looms or tools for pounding rice…hair ornaments, broken musical instruments, irons, pots and pans" (tr. 93–94). The phrase "junk museum" is in itself somewhat of a mismatch: "junk" conjures up images of worthless objects, while "museum" implies an official space where a censored or authorized version of history is put on display. Ōba's junk museum is not full of "the relics of those who were in power;" rather, it is "a record of the common people who had lived, [a place] that had a familiarity like the smell of a great-grandmother's powder room" (tr. 128–129). As we can see, the value of "junk" is inverted, becoming treasure in this space. It does not take a large leap of the imagination to see that the items inside the junk museum are metaphors for the characters themselves, rejected as they are by their countries for not fitting in to the "official story." Maria, Aya, Carlos and Sū are human flotsam and jetsam whose stories problematize the notions of "home" and "nation."

For example, Maria vehemently denies the ideology of nationalistic pride. Her philosophy is best embodied in the following speech: "But why is it when it comes to nationality that everyone becomes so

[3] Sū［スウ］introduces herself to Carlos as "Su-ying Wells"［スウイェン・ウエルズ］, although this is only one of her names. Born in Japan to a Korean mother and Japanese father, she was called Sue［すえ］, a Japanese name, as a child. Her Korean name, So Young［ソヨン］is written with the same characters as her Chinese name, Su-ying［素英］.

obstinate? If you're born in Russia, you're Russian; if you're born in Japan, you're Japanese; if you're born in America, you're American? I believe that everyone, once they've reached adulthood, should choose a country they like and become a citizen of that country. If the nation is going to ask things of its citizens, then isn't it natural that the citizens should have the right to choose? You're not obligated to love a certain country just because you were born there. I think that just as children have the right to forsake useless parents, citizens have the right to forsake useless countries" (*OMZ* 95). Ironically, of course, Maria did not really choose to forsake Russia—rather, she was forced to leave. She uses the words "hōrō" ［放浪］ or "wandering," and "furōnin" ［浮浪人］ or "vagabond" throughout her diary.[4] "Hōrō" maintains an air of romanticism, where the wanderer has a home to return to, or at least implies that they have not given up on the idea of home. As Janice Brown has pointed out, of the two terms, "furō" is more radical in that is implies a nation-less state, with no home and outside of the boundaries of society – in modern terms what we might call "homeless." Maria is fond of calling herself a "furōnin," as when she says to Aya: "…in the end, we're really vagabonds. We're vagabonds who have been evicted. We're a wandering tribe［流浪の民］who will never have a place to settle no matter where we go" (*OMZ* 58). And yet, as her use of "hōrō" also implies, she cannot completely cut herself off from the nostalgic pull of Russia. Indeed, she was drawn to this town because of its Russian history; her room is full of boxes of Russian classics, and tears come to her eyes when she thinks of the awful English translations of her "dear Pushkin" (*OMZ* 15). Unlike Aya, Maria cannot go back to Russia, so her image of "home" is in no danger of being shattered. In the end, Maria seems to both claim Russia and deny it, and the text implies that Maria is not quite as free of the baggage of home as her use of the term "furōnin" would have as believe.

At first glance, Aya's denial of "home" seems to be less complicated. Of all the characters in *Garakuta hakubutsukan*, it is Aya who most clearly states her hatred for her home country Japan, a sentiment that is bound to her feelings for her ex-husband Takanobu and

[4] In the essay "Furōnin no tamashii" (*Ōba Minako Zenshū* 10), Ōba idealizes the position of the *furōnin* as it enables one to see Japan "from both the inside and the outside" (131) and therefore avoid nationalistic sentiment. Janice Brown (2001) proposes that Oba's use of "furō" implies no home to return to and concludes that she writes "of the transnational female caught in the interstices between two cultures, painfully aware and bitingly critical of the two homelands and her problematic position within and between them" (93).

his mistreatment of her. When the Japanese male tourists who occasionally visit the junk museum give Aya small gifts from Japan, the items give her a feeling of "horror, as if she had touched a drug" (*OMZ* 81–82) and she tosses them from the ship into the sea. Although she says her only reason for visiting Japan is because Russ suggested that she take Chizu, or Liz as she is called in America,[5] to meet her father, her ulterior motive is to get revenge on Takanobu by showing him how completely Americanized Chizu is. Aya has not taught Chizu anything about Japan and the trip goes according to plan, as Aya is able to confirm the rift between Chizu, who cannot speak Japanese, and Takanobu.

Aya's trip makes her realize, with some shock, that she does indeed resemble all the undernourished childish-looking Japanese women around her, a revelation which she depresses her. On the other hand, she realizes that Japan is now a foreign country to her: "I now feel I'm neither American nor Japanese" (*OMZ* 112). As the inside narrator tells us, the citizens of the town where Aya lives are tolerant of drifters because all of the residents themselves "have the blood of their drifter［流れ者］ancestors" (*OMZ* 18). However, those same townspeople tend to see Aya in terms of racial stereotypes, or they badger her with questions about Japan: "Since Aya was Japanese (born in Japan), the townspeople made Japan a topic of conversation almost as a matter of course whenever they spoke to her, and wouldn't hesitate to ask questions that showed their curiosity about that exotic land, but Aya simply ignored such questions, and never seized any opportunity to talk about things Japanese" (tr. 94). Their attitude and questions remind her of her national origins.

The text does not tell us exactly where Carlos was born but we do know that he is a traveller, as he sailed to this small town from Central America in a yacht which he built himself. Carlos makes an important speech in the third section: "A traveller's spirit［旅人の魂］, the spirit of a wanderer［放浪する者の魂］—that's the noble spirit which I want to hold on to for my whole life. If ever I think I want to settle down somewhere, then I'll know that it's a sign that I'm tired. When you want to settle, that means you've got something you should protect, something you don't want to lose; then you become conservative and stubborn" (*OMZ* 131). This speech, which uses the two key phrases "tabibito no tamashii" and

[5] Chizu/Liz is another hybrid character, although she is raised largely unaware of her Japanese heritage. In the text, Chizu's name is written in *katakana* but it is interesting that her name is a homonym of "chizu" [地図] which means "map" when written in *kanji*. This emphasizes the importance of journeys for all of the characters in *Garakuta hakubutsukan*.

"hōrō suru mono no tamashii" could almost perhaps be read as Ōba's philosophy on origins. In other words, the ideal for humans is to always be on the move and to avoid getting too comfortable with one place or identity.

Carlos is drawn to Sū, who with her multiple origins is the classic hybrid figure, straddling four different cultures (Korean, Japanese, Chinese and American). She emphasizes to Carlos that she does not have any particular preference regarding which name she is called by, as she has been called by various names all her life. She seems to have reached an acceptance of her hybridity: "I don't love Korea or Japan or America, and I don't hate them either. When I was a child, the country of Korea forced me to say that I wasn't Korean; Japan rejected me; America gave me citizenship—so what?" (*OMZ* 160–161). Sū is different from Maria and Aya in that she has never had any one country to claim as hers in the first place. She is a hybrid figure without necessarily having an uncontested origin. That is, her presence reminds us that "origin" is not always singular and is not always fixed to one point in time and place. This is, really, a comment on all of the characters in *Garakuta hakubutsukan*.

The town where Maria, Aya, Carlos, and Sū meet and live seems to be a haven for the displaced to free themselves from the shackles of nation and nationality. However, the fact that all the characters spend a great deal of their time discussing the nations they came from, and in Aya, Maria, and Sū's case, the nations that have rejected them, shows that nationality can never be rendered meaningless. The narrator reinforces this idea: the reader is initially told that the townspeople are such a mix of transnational characters that they see each other "simply as human beings" and not defined by a certain nationality. However, as Adrienne Hurley (1999) has pointed out, the narrator seems unable to ignore the national origins of her characters and invokes nationality and racial characteristics to describe them (92). Even the characters themselves fall victim to racial stereotyping, with Carlos seeing Sū as the "Oriental woman" and assuming that Sū and Aya will get on because they are both Asian, or Maria's "hatred of Negroes" (*OMZ* 96), or the fact that "Aya had despised the white race because so many whites were morbid, nervous, and excitable, unable to control themselves" (tr. 111). It seems that everyone is susceptible to this kind of racial or nationalistic categorizing. This may be because it is impossible for most people to imagine *not* having a home country. It may well be that the narrator is trying to create a new space for her characters but the constant invocation of nationality highlights the difficulty of that project.

Maria, Aya, Carlos and Sū are displaced characters for whom the world cannot be divided into a simple "here" and "there," or "home" and "not home." Thus, for them, the junk museum becomes a kind of hybrid "third space" where they can tell their stories because it destabilizes what is "treasure" and what is "rubbish."[6] That is, it refuses dualisms. Here we might recall Homi Bhabha's idea of third space which he approaches through the notion of hybridity. To paraphrase Bhabha, hybridity is the third space which enables other positions to emerge, and it is in this third space that the "politics of polarity" can be eluded. Edward Soja's theory of "thirdspace" shares with Bhabha a belief in the radical possibilities of "thirdspace" as a new awareness, simultaneously real and imagined, that extends beyond traditional dualisms.[7] If we apply these ideas to *Garakuta hakubutsukan*, we could say that the junk museum itself forms a new space for identity to be contested and performed. The junk museum is shrouded in an outlandish atmosphere, giving it a feel of a place where the real and imagined simultaneously mediate the performance of identity.

What makes the junk museum an even more compelling metaphor for the space which Ōba's vagabonds occupy is that it is physically "housed" in an old ship. Ships bring to mind the trope of the journey. (Interestingly, besides the junk museum, two other boats which physically move appear in the text). I would like to suggest that Ōba's ship is a heterotopia.[8] According to Foucault, heterotopias are capable of

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[6] Another way in which junk is inverted is through Maria's jewellery box, in which she keeps a mixture of valuable jewels and apparently worthless trinkets, such as a brooch made of plastic and scraps of wood by her daughter when she was a primary school student. Maria's jewel box is the junk museum on a miniature scale in that it tells her story – unofficial and perhaps unimportant to the nation but one which needs to be told all the same. Ōba seems to be saying that all stories deserve the chance to be told, and that it is only in these subversive third spaces that the outlandish tales of the displaced and the minorities can find a voice.

[7] In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), Soja expounds a "trialectics" of spatiality which uses Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of social space as perceived, conceived, and lived. Soja draws on bell hooks's exploration of the margins as a space of radical openness, Homi Bhabha's postcolonial critique, and Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias.

[8] In his 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault focused on the relations between space and time and outlined his theory of heterotopia. Edward Soja quotes from Foucault's text liberally in *Thirdspace* and interprets Foucault's heteropia as a theory of thirdspace (154). In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault covers six main points, including the idea that heterotopias are found in all cultures and that they change in function and meaning over time.

juxtaposing several spaces which are foreign to one another in one real place, thus invoking the odds and ends of Ōba's junk museum, as well as the diverse nationalities of the characters contained within. Given that Foucault wants to question how time is privileged over space, one might think that he would reject Ōba's museum as a symbol of accumulated time. Yet Ōba's junk museum tells an *un*official version of history (time) as well as creates a space for displaced characters to explore their identities. What interests me is that Foucault actually names the *boat* as a heterotopia par excellence because "the boat is a place without a place, a floating space that exists by itself yet is the greatest reserve of the footloose imagination" (162). Although the boat which houses Ōba's junk museum can no longer physically move from port to port, there is no difference in what it represents at its core: a counter-space of imagination in which, to paraphrase Soja, "real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (157).

I would like to conclude by mentioning James Baldwin and Margaret Mead's *A Rap on Race* (1971), which Ōba translated as *Ikari to ryōshin* (*Anger and Conscience*) in 1973. In her essay "Miido to borudouin" (*OMZ* 10), Ōba points out some comments by Baldwin which struck a chord with her, such as when Baldwin said "But I do think, especially in this century of displaced people and wanderers, that everyone is an exile. The whole concept of nations is becoming, no matter whether one likes it or nor, obsolete before our eyes. It doesn't make any difference anymore whether you were born in Germany or Switzerland or France. Everyone has been hounded all over the world from pillar to post. Everyone's become an exile" (*A Rap on Race*, 59). These words are reminiscent of Maria's speech in *Garakuta hakubutsukan*. Another comment by Baldwin which Ōba repeats in her essay is "A new kind of human, one that has begun to raise suspicions about nation and race, has begun to appear" (*OMZ* 252). Ōba's essays show that she was deeply influenced by the process of translating this book, which occurred around the same time as she was writing *Garakuta hakubutsukan*. I think that in *Garakuta hakubutsukan* Ōba was trying to write a new space, a third space, for these new humans that Baldwin mentions. Ōba's third space is not inflated to become the realm of the universalized, nor is it an expression of general alienation and homelessness, nor yet is it a utopian space. It may perhaps be that *Garakuta hakubutsukan*'s third space is just another point on an endless journey for Ōba's wanderers.

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