

KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR* AND *CHINA MEN*: GENDERED CONSTRUCTION OF ABJECT THROUGH GHOSTS

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ABSTRACT. The autobiographical works by Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1989) and *China Men* (1989), portray a gendered construction of the abject through the ghosts of Kingston's deceased family members in the novels. As Chinese descendants, the family should uphold a tradition of honoring their dead, feeding them food, and remembering them. However, Kingston's family in the novels rejects their ghosts instead because the dead are thought to bring shame and discomfort to the family, who are now living as Americans. We see such ambiguity where the ghosts are simultaneously seen as part of the family yet also discomforting as related to the abject. By utilizing the framework of feminist narratology and theories of abjection, we see that the family abjects them by forgetting and not acknowledging them. These ghosts are part of the family but simultaneously expelled as the abject. However, despite all of the ghosts being the abject, we argue that their individual abjections vary based on their gender where the female ghosts and male ghosts are abjected differently. We argue that the abject constructed through the female ghosts is portrayed as disobedient, disturbing borders, and traumatic, whereas through the male ghosts is portrayed as passively expelled from a place of power and silenced. Despite all of the deceased being treated as outcasts, we see that the deceased women are able to reclaim subjectivity through their abjection, whereas the abjection from the male ghosts reflects ambiguity.

Keywords: Maxine Hong Kingston; abject; ghosts; gender

THE WOMAN WARRIOR DAN CHINA MEN KARYA KINGSTON: KONSTRUKSI ABJEK BERDASARKAN GENDER MELALUI HANTU

ABSTRAK. Karya-karya autobiografis Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1989) dan *China Men* (1989), menggambarkan konstruksi abjek berdasarkan gender melalui hantu anggota keluarga Kingston yang telah meninggal dalam novel-novel tersebut. Sebagai keturunan Tionghoa, keluarga Kingston secara tradisional terikat dengan tradisi menghormati, memberi makan, dan mengenang arwah keluarga mereka. Namun, keluarga Kingston menolak hantu-hantu tersebut karena orang mati dianggap membawa rasa malu dan ketidaknyamanan bagi keluarga yang kini menjalani hidup sebagai warga negara Amerika. Kami melihat ambiguitas yang memaparkan hantu-hantu tersebut sebagai bagian dari keluarga namun sekaligus menimbulkan ketidaknyamanan terkait dengan abjeksi. Melalui kerangka naratologi feminis serta teori-teori abjek, kami melihat bahwa keluarga mengabjeksikan hantu-hantu tersebut dengan cara melupakan dan menghilangkan pengakuan terhadap mereka. Hantu-hantu ini tetap dianggap sebagai bagian dari keluarga, yang pada saat yang sama juga diusir sebagai yang terbuang. Meskipun sama-sama diabjek, kami melihat abjeksi tersebut berdasarkan sebuah konstruksi gender dengan adanya bentuk abjeksi berbeda antara hantu perempuan dan laki-laki. Kami berargumentasi bahwa abjek yang dibangun melalui hantu perempuan digambarkan sebagai tidak taat, mengganggu aturan, dan traumatis, sedangkan melalui hantu laki-laki digambarkan sebagai secara pasif diusir dari tempat kekuasaan dan didiamkan. Meskipun semua orang yang meninggal diperlakukan sebagai orang buangan, kami melihat bahwa perempuan yang meninggal mampu mendapatkan kembali subjektivitas melalui abjeksinya, sedangkan abjeksi dari yang laki-laki mencerminkan ambiguitas.

Kata kunci: Maxine Hong Kingston; abjek; hantu; gender

INTRODUCTION

The Woman Warrior (1989b) and *China Men* (1989a) are two of Maxine Hong Kingston's novels. These works are noted as autobiographical, with the former focusing on the experiences of the women in Kingston's family while the latter is on those of the men. They have been scrutinized for their peculiarity where they mix reality with fiction—autobiographies that tell the lives of Kingston's family while also incorporating myths and ghosts. For Fong, Kingston “distend[s] the traditional form of autobiography” by making sense of her own personal and familial

history (1989: 116), as “Kingston's transformation of family history into story” (1989: 123).

Despite their controversy, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* have garnered significant awards and academic recognition. Their awards include the National Book Award for Nonfiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, and the National Book Critics Circle. Kingston is a renowned Chinese American author working as a Professor Emerita at the University of California (Christ et al., 2023). Her works have been the objects of numerous scholarly articles discussing topics such as gender (Chiu, 2000; Janette, 2002; Jenkins, 1994; Lee, 2004) and racial identity (Calhoun,

2013; Shapiro, 2001; Shu, 2001; Smith, 1996; Wang, 1995), amongst others.

Turning to the discussion on the appearances of ancestral ghosts in the two novels, there have been numerous academic researches about it. Lee (2004) talks about how Chinese American women writers like Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, who struggle with two cultures, use ghosts in their narratives to represent their in-betweenness, assessing this from the perspective of a “cultural translation”. Jenkins (1994) points out that such stories (stories by women and/or minorities) are deemed fantastical and supernatural by the male-dominated literary world and are therefore silenced. Jenkins (1994) posits that utilizing the supernatural in their writing, such as ghosts in literary narratives, provided these writers a voice, challenging traditions and resurrecting silenced women. In line with this, Janette (2002) claims that women can use ghostliness to reclaim power. In addition, Parrott (2012) gives another perspective where there is actually power in silence. NG (2011), comparably, states that silence has its own meaning rather than just being the opposite of language.

However, this research sees a gap in the conversation in which there is more to the ghosts besides their relativity to women and silence. Particularly, this research sees that the ghosts in Kingston’s two works pertain to abjection. Kristeva (1982) relates abjection as that which disrupts the stability of identity, opposing the “I”, and therefore deemed unclean. Moreover, it is something that “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (1982: 4). Anzaldúa (1987) says something similar where borders distinguish “us” from “them” while the borderland, which could be comparable to that of Kristeva’s abject, is vague and undetermined.

To further illustrate, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* portray the ghosts of Kingston’s deceased family members. While they are part of the family, they are also rejected and forgotten because they bring discomfort for the living family members. However, what should be noted is that there is a difference between the abjection of the female ghosts and the male ghosts. For example, the first ghost that is introduced in *The Woman Warrior* is Kingston’s nameless aunt. The aunt experiences rejection by the family, deemed shameful, her house raided by her neighbors. She kills herself, and it is thought that the mere mention of her name may bring her family, especially Kingston’s father, “mysterious harm” (Kingston, 1989b: 1). On the other hand, in *China Men*, the ghost of one of Kingston’s grandfathers appears as a quiet ghost. His death is unknown, and when his ghost appears before his brother, the ghost is told to leave, and it does without comment.

This research shows that in the two novels, Kingston’s family abjects the ghosts of their deceased family members. Abjection is a narcissistic crisis (Kristeva, 1982), as the “I” only feels abjection when it feels that its place and identity are being threatened. The “I” does not recognize the abject despite the abject being its “kin” (Kristeva, 1982: 5), and the abject is “[o]n the edge of non-existence and hallucination” (Kristeva, 1982: 2).

Bhabha discusses something akin to the abject when he assessed Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. “Unspeakable thoughts unspoken” is a term by Toni Morrison, and Bhabha (1992) uses that term to talk about the 124 house in Morrison’s *Beloved* as the unhomey. Bhabha states that the unhomey is “the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations” (1992: 141). Further, Bhabha refers to the 124 house as a “haunted site”, an “enunciation” and “the uncanny voice of memory” (1992: 146). Bhabha also refers to *Beloved*’s articulation of the unspoken with the phrase “its historical past and its narrative present” (1992, p. 150).

In relation to the unhomey, we analyse *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* by paying attention to their textual aspects such as the characterization of the ghosts and the ambiguity. The works being autobiographies that mix the reality of Kingston’s family with fictional stories also add to the ambiguity; Kingston as the narrator is dependent on what she is told by her parents, and she is left speculating what has been omitted. For example, she says, “In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt’s name; I do not know it.” (Kingston, 1989b: 13).

Therefore, we argue that the ghosts of these family members in the two novels portray what Kristeva calls the abject. Their partial existence as ghosts represents memories that the family desperately wants to keep hidden but, at the same time, are haunted by them. Moreover, we view that it is important to discuss the presentation of both the female and male ghosts from the two novels because we believe that the gendered difference between them gives rise to a gendered construction of the abject as well.

METHOD

This research utilizes a close reading of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* and uses narratology to identify the textual elements in the two novels that pertain to identity and ambiguity. In addition to structuralist narratology, we also employ a feminist approach in reading the texts. After a close reading, we refer to theories of abjection.

Firstly, we refer to Genette (1980) for narratology. Genette gives a number of meanings for what “narrative” is, one of them being, “an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself” (1980: 26). In narrative, there is a sort of “distance” where there is a varying degree of narrative information, reflected from how the narrative provides fewer or more details to the reader and in a more or less direct way, choosing to “regulate the information it delivers” (1980: 162). The strictly textual mimetic factors are, thus, the quantity of narrative information and the absence of the narrator who works as the informer (Genette, 1980).

However, Lanser (1986) discusses the differences between structuralist narratology and feminist criticism, stating that the former emphasizes the semiotic and overlooks the significant of characters, while the latter emphasizes the mimetic and sees characters as the most important narrative aspect. Narrative theorists may assume plot as textual actions, pertaining to the deeds of the protagonist, coming to power, possibilities, or “of anticipation and fulfillment or problem and solution” (Lanser, 1986: 356). For Lanser, this is a masculine story plot which does not align with women’s general experiences, and “finding a voice”, be it textually or otherwise, is an important issue (1992: 4). Hence, we believe Lanser’s approach is needed to talk about the importance of the characters and their abjection, as well as to take into account that the Chinese American characters, who are usually Othered, are also seeking a voice and do not fit such masculine plotlines.

Because these two novels are autobiographical books written by a woman who is also a racial minority, a traditional, masculine narratology, as discussed above, will not be fitting. Therefore, for a more fitting method, this research uses feminist narratology. We read the two novels in detail to identify the textual and narrative aspects that portray issues of identity as abject, such as from voice and the textual diction used. After inventorying the textual aspects, we analyze them further by referring to theories of abjection, mainly by Kristeva (1982), and several journal articles that are relevant to our research.

To show how the gendered construction of abject is portrayed in the two novels, we will highlight aspects such as diction, figurative meanings, ambiguity, and paradoxes utilized in the text. We will also note who speaks and who is silenced, who is portrayed as authoritative, who is submissive, and who rebels to show how the narrative portrays the way the Chinese family treats the ghosts as abject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first few pages of *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1989b), Kingston’s mother warns Kingston, “Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born.” (Kingston, 1989b: 3). Like retelling a frightening myth about a monster who eats naughty children, her mother tells her the story of a deceased aunt who was outcasted by the family because she had been impregnated by a man who was not her husband, driven to drown herself and her newborn baby in the family well. The aunt was never spoken about again. Young Kingston is expected to be the opposite of the aunt—act accordingly and never tell anyone about the incident, but, being the rebel that she is, she immediately disregards her mother’s words and does the first thing she was told not to do, which is write about the incident for the whole world to see.

Even more ironic, Kingston as the narrator of the autobiography writes that the ghost of the aunt “haunts” her (Kingston, 1989b: 13). Kingston was told to avoid being like her aunt, but the latter lingers with her. Kingston as the narrator continues by saying that the ghost of her aunt is drawn to her because “[Kingston] alone devote[s] pages of paper to her” meanwhile also “telling on her” (Kingston, 1989b: 14). The conclusion of the chapter is Kingston saying that she thinks her aunt is not wholly a benevolent spirit towards her but rather a “spite suicide” and a “drowned one” that may “pull down a substitute” (Kingston, 1989b: 14), implying that the substitute is Kingston herself.

In *China Men*, Kingston and her family go to her great uncle Kau Goong’s funeral. On the way there, Kingston’s mother instructs the children to throw blank white paper the size of dollar bills out the moving car’s window. MaMa does not tell them why and the children take it upon themselves to speculate; maybe it is money for Kau Goong to spend in Heaven, maybe it is money for the ghosts in the streets, or maybe it is to entice Kau Goong to come with them to the cemetery. Kingston’s mother lines up food at the cemetery during the procession, and the family takes turns throwing whiskey onto the coffin. The reason for this, too, is not explained. MaMa finally gives money tucked into red paper to the children and the pallbearers to “end the death and begin the luck again” (Kingston, 1989a: 179). When they go home, the children ask their parents about the tradition of burning leaves and newspapers at the side of the road, if it is to make the ghosts not follow them home or if it is so they are no longer “contagious” (Kingston, 1989a: 179), and their parents scold them to stay silent.

Kingston as the narrator then describes how other families would go back time and again to the cemetery to give offerings to their deceased family members, but her family does not because they are “modern” (Kingston, 1989a: 180). MaMa asserts, “Nothing happens to you after you die. You just disappear. No afterlife.” (Kingston, 1989a: 180). However, Kingston later has a dream about Kau Goong, and MaMa asks what Kau Goong said, insisting that there could be a message, hence denying her own statement that there should be nothing.

There seems to be a discourse in regards to the existence—or the insistence that there is *no* existence—of the ghosts of the deceased in the novels. Kingston’s family in the novels are constantly trying to put themselves as “modern” and not like the rest of their kin (FOBs or people Fresh Off the Boat, meaning new immigrants, and/or the traditional Chinese family), in which “modern” may translate to “American”. Kingston’s mother “proudly” says that they have no such customs “with or for the dead”, and they treat their dead like “any American dead” (Kingston, 1989a: 180).

The acts of silencing and speculating display the uncertainty veiling the stories and relationships within the family. When talking about the dead aunt, Kingston writes that the aunt’s in-laws “could have sold her, mortgaged her, stoned her” but she was instead returned to her parents, “a mysterious act hinting at disgraces not told [Kingston]” (Kingston, 1989b: 5). The words of “could have”, “mysterious”, “hinting”, and “not told” reflect how the aunt’s story is revealed yet at the same time lost, the aunt’s presence in the story a guessing-game but also dependent on the information that Kingston’s parents decide to tell, redact, speculate, and also forget.

However, the family also falls under the ambiguity of the presence of the ghosts. Their prideful denial of the dead is quickly undermined when their ghosts start bothering their lives; the family rejects the presence of the ghosts but the latter disrupts their peace. We see that there is a difference between the female ghosts and the male ghosts of the family, with the women being born out of trauma and seen as disobedient, whereas the men are lowered from a place of power and silenced.

1. The Ghosts of Loud Women

Mad Sao is Kingston’s third grandfather’s son in *China Men* who is haunted by the ghost of his mother. When Mad Sao’s mother was alive, she wrote to her son, “Who will bury me if you don’t come back?” (Kingston, 1989a: 162). Mad Sao’s mother stayed in China while her son went to the States to start his new life and his new family. She wrote to him to try and coax him to come back by

bringing up fond memories of them as mother and son, but later, she also brings up how he is spending all of his money in a foreign country while she is abandoned. She wrote about their contrasts such as how she remembers him, but he has forgotten her, and how he has riches, but she is starving to death. However, his mother is not (just) a soft, frail woman; rather, she shows herself as cruel, too, yearning for her child to come home to her, but simultaneously tells him to sell his daughters for his fare.

As the problematic ghostly mother, Mad Sao’s mother echoes what Creed has notably termed the monstrous-feminine. For Creed, the monstrous mother is most often in regards to “possessive, dominant behaviour towards her offspring” (1993: 177). Additionally, Creed also describes a form of “castrating mother” that “takes back the life she once created” (1993: 99). Despite not having a particular chapter about a ghostly mother, Creed’s analysis on monstrous mothers still becomes relevant and foundational in studying how the ghosts of the women in Kingston’s family become the abject.

Kingston as the narrator illustrates how Mad Sao’s mother would constrict her son: “And if she wasn’t nagging him to return, she was asking for money” (Kingston, 1989a: 162). She was very insistent with her letters and never gave up on contacting her son. Her words would constantly shift from being pitiful—“If you don’t come home now you’ll never see me again. I remember you, my baby.” (Kingston, 1989a: 162)—to accusing—“All you’re doing is having fun, aren’t you? [...] You’re spending all the money, aren’t you?” (Kingston, 1989a: 162)—to cruel—“What are you doing feeding these girls and not your mother? [...] Sell the girls, and mail the profits to Mother.” (Kingston, 1989a: 162). It comes to the point where he “wished that his mother would hurry up and die, or that he had time and money enough to pay his mortgage, raise all his children, and also give his mother plenty.” (Kingston, 1989a: 166). This reaction from Mad Sao indicates an abjection towards his mother; he wishes for her to cross the border of death to leave him alone, but he also wishes to cross the boundary of his own financial condition to meet his mother’s needs. This shows how, despite abandoning her in China, Mad Sao still cares for her, and, despite being abandoned, the mother still crosses the gap between China and America through her letters for her son, and this ambiguity in their feelings steers the mother-son relationship into abject.

However, when she finally died, her loudness did not cease. Instead, she became an abject apparition, a woman who crossed the border from the living to the dead, yet crossing it again backwards by becoming a ghost, that came from China, death,

and then to America to haunt him. “What you see before you is the inordinate hunger I had to suffer in my life,” her ghost tells him, but even in the face of horror Mad Sao replies to her by calling her “Mother” still (Kingston, 1989a: 166). The ghost continuously reminds him that she died of starvation and alone because of him, and when he desperately tries to compensate her by giving her ghost food and money, she remains an angry and hungry ghost, a dissatisfied mother.

Mad Sao’s mother’s haunting represents an abjection of facing a horrific mother – a dead entity that represents the woman who gave you life. Mad Sao’s mother is nameless; she is textually bound to the border between her son’s own subjectivity (Mad Sao) and her own motherhood (mother), hence not having her own individual subjectivity. However, at the same time, her ghost establishes itself by being disruptive to that relationship, causing discomfort for her son. Such ambiguity in her subjectivity further highlights how her ghost is the abject. Moreover, when Kristeva writes that the child can only establish themselves through the “release of maternal entity” (1982: 13), which is the separation of the child from the mother, Mad Sao’s mother rebukes it by forcing herself to stick to her son but simultaneously curse him; becoming not a mother who nurtures her baby’s life but a ghost who reminds him that he is the cause of death to the woman who gave birth to him.

As her form of punishment for the child who had forgotten her, Mad Sao’s mother keeps speaking to him until he is unable to sleep. Even while alive with her near-endless letters, her insistence on speaking, hence refusal to stay silent about her pain, can be seen as also a rebellion. In regards to this, NG (2011) illustrates that silence has different implications for Chinese men and women, where for the former it is attributed to wisdom and great achievement, but for the latter it is obedience for the sake of stabilization and harmony. Hence, Mad Sao’s mother’s verbal expression of her anger is her disrupting that harmony and stabilization of Mad Sao’s life and family in America, refusing to be an obedient and docile mother who would not dare to demand her son of anything, but rather become a loud woman who uses her motherhood against her child.

This disobedience of a mother to her family is reflected again in Kingston’s deceased aunt; again, like Mad Sao’s mother, nameless and textually bound to her familial tie as an “aunt” yet also rejected, not having her own subjectivity. In the novel, when she had been alive, she brought shame to the family by being pregnant with another man’s child. Ostracized, her home ransacked by indignant and righteous villagers, she gave birth in a pigsty in the night. A mother she became, and soon afterwards a suicide ghost.

While she did not make verbal noise during her moments of pain, when she jumped into the family well, it can be considered as another form of violent disobedience – killing herself is not an act of weakness but an abject rebellion against her family. Suicide eliminates herself from the mortal world, but it also reclaims her power against her family. Janette states that the aunt, by committing suicide, “moves from abjection into power” because the Chinese people feared the ghosts of women who drowned themselves (2002: 2). Even the mention of her brings the family great discomfort.

Moreover, she brought her newborn baby when she jumped into the well. This act of killing her child makes her an abject mother where she gives life to her child the very same night she takes it away. However, Kingston as the narrator provides an interesting take when she claims that “[c]arrying the baby to the well shows loving” (Kingston, 1989b: 12). The baby girl would not be loved in the family; it would be scorned and treated as a curse like they had done to the no-name aunt. In the story, bringing her along in the suicide was not an act of cruelty but an act of mercy for the child. In a way, bringing life was her first act as a mother, and killing it was her first act of nurturing it.

In a sense, we believe that the disobedient act of purposefully committing suicide in the family well, right in the heart of the family’s day-to-day, is indeed about power. The family claims that they hold more standing against the no-name aunt by forgetting her, even using that threat against the adolescent Kingston in the story. However, the aunt makes sure that they will *never* forget her; she ensures that they will forever feel fear and discomfort by making them *remember* her as the *no-name aunt*. This, too, shows a form of abjection. She is both a family figure, an outcast, an unacknowledged aunt, and an ominous ghost haunting the family. The family delights in their act of forgetting her but at the same time shows their fascination with her story by secretly retelling it to their young girls.

Therefore, we believe that the aunt, and in extension Mad Sao’s mother, may not simply move *from* abjection *to* power, but perhaps she moves *to* power *because* of her abjection. The no-name aunt can take back control from her family by becoming an uncomfortable ghost-aunt they tell their children as a warning. Similarly, Mad Sao’s mother gets what she wants for her son to come home by becoming a ghost that haunts him.

2. The Silent Ghosts of Men

In *China Men*, Uncle Bun is Kingston’s uncle who left America to go back to China. He frequently comes to Kingston’s family’s house, appearing as

if he is close to them, but actually the family finds his presence uncomfortable. This can be seen in how Kingston's mother instructs Kingston and her siblings to not open the door for him when Kingston's parents are not home. Uncle Bun is overbearing with his constant talk of wheat germ and later of his paranoia of the American government poisoning him under the assumption that he is a Communist. His paranoia eventually leads him to the decision to go back to China, even though the family tells him not to go. Determined, Uncle Bun sets off, but he requests Kingston's youngest sister to remember him before he goes. As years go on, the family never hears of him again, like a figurative death. When Kingston asks her sister if she remembers him, it turns out she does not even recall who he is. Uncle Bun, like the ghosts of the women, is forgotten.

Even though Uncle Bun disrupts the peace of Kingston's home when he comes over, he is not ostracised or abandoned the way Mad Sao's mother and Kingston's aunt were. He is still let in, however reluctantly, and when he wishes to leave, the family tries to stop him. On the other hand, when he does leave, the family unconsciously gives him the same punishment they have warned young Kingston about if she ever acted out of turn, which is being forgotten after death.

Another death of a male family member is reflected in Kingston's fourth grandfather, Say Goong. As described in *China Men*, Kingston's grandfathers live in a lot in Stockton, some ways away from the rest of the family. They live secluded, but the family visits them from time to time. Say Goong's death, like Uncle Bun's, is not explained nor clear; the text only says that one day Sahn Goong, Say Goong's brother, comes to Kingston's house and tells them that Say Goong is in the stable and Kingston's mother replies, "No [...] He's dead." (Kingston, 1989a: 158).

When Say Goong was alive, he didn't speak much. Completely different from Uncle Bun, Say Goong's dialogue is short, consisting mainly of two or three words in each speech. Kingston mostly recalls the way he had shown her around the lot, pointing at objects and laughing together, and the way he would encourage her imagination by pointing at regular animals and calling them "heavenly chicken" and "sky toad" along with her (Kingston, 1989a: 156).

Say Goong is depicted as vastly different from the rest of the male and/or elder family members. The others would scold and curse the children, especially the girls whom they think are useless compared to the boys. Say Goong, in contrast, is shown as gentle and nurturing, bringing his granddaughter – Kingston – around the dirty lot while retaining whimsical musings about the nature in it. Though

he is an elder and a man in the family, he seems to hold a completely different role compared to the other patriarchs. But because he is still a grandfather, the family shows respect to him and his brothers by being the ones who come to the far-away lot instead of having the grandfathers come to them in the city, and also not scolding him like they have with the other members of the family.

His softer and quieter demeanour is yet again reflected in his ghost. While in the shed, Say Goong's ghost is completely silent and does not respond when his brother, Sahn Goong, tries to speak to him. As the opposite of the loud ghost women and the talkative Uncle Bun who are all thought to be disruptive, it should be thought that Say Goong's silent presence would finally be seen as peaceful and obedient. However, this is not the case. After consulting with the family, Sahn Goong finally stops entertaining his one-way conversation with the ghost and tells him to "Go home" and "Go back to China" (Kingston, 1989a: 161), insinuating that the plot of land that Say Goong used to live is no longer his home once he has become a ghost.

Relating back to silence, it is only seen as obedient and a way to keep peace when a woman does it. When alive, Say Goong is respected as a patriarch along with his brothers, but he acts like a nurturing mother to young Kingston, when his fellow patriarchs (and matriarchs) would think her and her sisters as lowly. When dead, Say Goong is silenced completely, doing nothing and yet still seen as a bother, and made to leave.

Both Uncle Bun and Say Goong are not abused nor abandoned by the family at their time of death. They are both patriarchs of the family, but their descent to becoming the abject is silent and passive. The event of their death is not told, left ambiguous. As ghosts, they do not incite fear in the family but rather are just small inconveniences. They die silently, the family not having a comment or another about their end, and when they become abject ghosts, they are also simply withdrawn from the family's collective memory, no longer patriarchs with influence on the family.

CONCLUSION

Looking back, Kingston's mother's assertion that those who die simply "disappear" is not completely true; the family attempts to *make sure* that their outcast family members are forgotten and, hence, are made to disappear from the family's lives. Due to this, the family contradicts itself by stating that ghosts do not exist but simultaneously shows that they are suffering when they are haunted. The way that they treat the ghosts of the deceased also represents a gendered construction of abject.

The female ghosts of the family die in a painful and traumatic death where their family has abandoned them. They are nameless, textually bound to their familial tie to the family (as just “mother” and “aunt”) thus denied a subjectivity of their own. However, the ghosts of these women persist, inflicting fear and discomfort for the living. They transcend the boundary of the living to the dead, but disrespect it by going backwards through it as haunting ghosts. They disrupt the stability of the boundary and inflict an unhomely discomfort upon their family, becoming a source of fear for them. The no-name aunt and Mad Sao’s mother become the abject by being disobedient mothers and being loud women amidst their tightly traditional family. The women who have become loud ghosts use being the abject to their advantage; it is precisely because they are the abject that disrupts the peace of the family that they can take back control. Their abjection allows them to reclaim their subjectivity.

On the other hand, unlike the ghosts of the female family members, the male ghosts are treated with less violence – they are just silenced. While the events leading up to the deaths of the women were extensively described, the deaths of the men were left ambiguous, unknown, their reasons for dying left unsaid. Uncle Bun and Say Goong, at their death, merely fade away silently with no trauma or violence from the family. Their abjection, being forgotten, come as a descent from being patriarchs to becoming outsiders that no longer served the living family. They are not forced out like the women, but merely overlooked as unimportant. In this, the male ghosts do not thrive from being the abject but rather “disappear” as Kingston’s mother claimed in the beginning. While the female ghosts may reclaim power by being the abject, the men do not find such pleasure in their abjection; for the men, their abjection reflects ambiguity.

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