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## Meridians 10:1

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PAULA J. GIDDINGS

# Introduction

## *Transnational Trans(formations)*

One of the missions of *Meridians* is to hold up a mirror to reflect the workings of identity as they shape and are shaped by transnational contexts. For this issue, the journal's discursive project includes essays that examine identity implications of the Asian American "model minority" idea; the relationship of queerness and ethnic/class privilege in a popular if controversial novel set in Hawaii; how transnational identity in a Demetria Martínez novel complicates identification; a revisionist reading of the subjectivity of Japanese War brides; the cultural signification of Indo-Trinidadian women; and a historical perspective on Harlem Renaissance writer Nella Larsen's literary form as one of social struggle and revolutionary potential.

In "Passing-as-if: Model-Minority Subjectivity and Women of Color Identification," Shireen Roshanravan analyzes the impact of the Asian model minority discourse on both the sociopolitical and intellectual process of identifying as women of color. The author acknowledges the literature that stipulates that the stereotype has isolated Asian American women and, in many cases, absented them from women-of-color coalitions. But Roshanravan goes further to explore how "passing-as-if" becomes a trope for those who become racialized while still remaining unidentified with those groups that have a history of struggling against color oppression in the U.S.

The exegesis of three novels illuminates different identity discourses within their pages. Cynthia Wu, in "Revisiting Blu's Hanging: A Critique of Queer Transgression in the Lois-Ann Yamanaka Controversy," analyzes

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Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging*, a best-selling and award-winning novel set in Hawaii that drew fervid protests in some quarters over its racist representations of Filipino masculinity and queer sexuality. The opposing sides, representing advocates of social justice on one side and creative freedom on the other, did not strictly divide along ethnic lines. The controversy brought to the surface intra-racial and class conflicts within Asian Pacific America—conflicts, Wu notes, that are reconstructed through non-normative sexualities in the novel.

Ariana Vigil, in "Transnational Community in Demetria Martínez's *Mother Tongue*," looks at how the characters in *Mother Tongue*, by El Salvadoran writer Demetria Martínez, manage to create transnational identities without ignoring national, racial, or sexual differences. This process, undertaken by fictional figures who belong to imagined communities of resistance and who seek global change, gives us insight into the literary methodologies—and possibilities—of transnational communities.

According to Jessica Labbé, Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, often critically cast as a "black bourgeoisie" novel of the Harlem Renaissance, actually signifies something else: a radical critique of the narrow and denigrating life chances of educated black women of the period. In this essay, "Too High a Price: The 'Terrible Honesty' of Black Women's work in *Quicksand*," the author uses a historical lens to demonstrate how the labor of the protagonist, Helga Crane, a "new" black, both allowed and subordinated her aspirations toward becoming a modern woman.

"Hello, War Brides': Heteroglossia, Counter-Memory, and the Auto/biographical Work of Japanese War Brides," by Ayaka Yoshimizu is an examination of a series of autobiographical essays written by Japanese women taken as spouses by American servicemen after World War II. A reading of these texts, which the author calls "counter-memories," undermines the stereotypical and often low opinion of these immigrants propagated mostly by the Japanese mainstream media, and re-evaluates the significance of their transnational movement and community of remembrance.

Soca, a form of music whose roots are in the traditional Carnival genre of calypso and chutney soca, an Indo-Trinidadian music founded in traditional South Asian music as well as in Carnival culture, serves as a foundational metaphor for Samantha Pinto's essay, "'Why Must All Girls Want to be Flag Women?': Postcolonial Sexualities, National Reception, and Caribbean Soca Performance." The intersection of the two musical

forms, personified by the performance of Trinidadian women of African and South Asian descent at Carnival—a highly nationalistic as well as cultural expression—leads the author to ruminate about nationalism, colonialism, and the circulation of Indian and black women’s bodies in local and global productions.

As only poems can do, these by Miliann Kang, “Two Birthdays” and “Airport Checkout,” make palpable the scents, sounds, and feelings of bodies as they transgress all sorts of borders.