# CHAPTER 4

# IDENTITY IN POSTCYBERPUNK AND GAMES

Although classic cyberpunk (quite controversially so), was recognized as a monolithic literary movement of the 1980s, the next decade of the genre in America was marked by cultural diffusion that encompassed a wide range of cultural-practices. This diffusion, as Leonard P. Sanders notes, is a series of concerns he identifies as:

> the representation of racial differences and the incorporation of issues of gender; global economic flows and spaces structuring the production and reception of cultural practices; the expansion of cyberpunk into an audio-visual multimedia configuration from print medium (5).

The scope of cyberpunk has expanded into cultural and social inclusivity of these cultural practices, complicating the symbolic transference of cultural anxiety from Japan to a multitude of places still considered less of a friend, less of a foe, less of an envied, or resented entity. The narratives shifted from the predictable Japan or Hong Kong or Japanized Western city to a varied, unpredictable choice of nations.

This part of the chapter focuses on the postcyberpunk works written by newer authors (authors who did not belong to the classic cyberpunk wave), or the Second-Wave cyberpunk writers, such as Maureen F. McHugh, Paolo Bacigalupi and Marge Piercy, who have been widely-read, and representative of the shift of the location from Japan to various places.

On one hand, this shift of location and cultural marker could signal the end of a Yellow Peril paranoia, despite the continued prosperity and stronghold of Japan on the cultural/economic/political nexus of the world, and usher in an era where other countries too

will be considered worthy of having their futures feature in a world that will entangle them too.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that all these writers, belonging to the USA, the First World, have replaced Japan with other Third-World countries, none of which have been a source of unmitigated paranoia for the USA the way Japan had been.

The questions I am compelled to ask, are: One, what could be the reason behind such an inexplicable shift from Japan to other Third World countries? Two, would such a shift mean moving away from a re-enactment of Techno-Orientalism, or does it renew the old strategy in new, disguised form?

The texts that I have chosen are the same as discussed in the previous chapters, i.e. *Nekropolis* and *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen F. McHugh, *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi and *He, She and It* by Marge Piercy. The settings in the books are an Islamic theocracy in Morocco, a communist China, a Thailand in political strife, and a Jewish town battling a corporation. While there is no pattern to gauge the selection of such eclectic choices, and thus, no number of texts examined can yield a singular discourse on any particular nation, the relation of all these nations with respect to America, coupled by the representation of these nations in the narratives will help contextualize such a shift, and its implications.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to examine the shift from Japan to other Third World countries as the cultural location of the future, especially since none of the writers, despite being American, have located their works in America. This is not to claim that any location outside America necessarily lends itself to a Techno-Orientalist discourse. Rather, the deluge

of all Third-World countries beckons my attention to examine if the choice of location is in any way, informed by American interests similar to those noted in Japan.

*Nekropolis*, set in a dystopian, Islamic theocracy in Morocco depicts the country in the control of a rigid society, where surprisingly, except for the names of people and places and some scattered vocabulary, the presence of Islam is only subtly hinted at. Hariba, uncomfortable at the presence of a *harni*, an android, contemplates whether it would be a sin to be in the company of a male, even though engineered,

> The Holy Injunction doesn't mean that all AI is abomination. But AI should not be biologically constructed. AI should not be made in the image of humanity… It comes over to our side sometimes-the master says that since it isn't human, it's allowed. There is no impropriety-it's never alone with the mistress (5).

Harking back to a technologically feudal society, Hariba ruminates over the nature of jessing, which indentures her to her master chemically, "The Second Koran says that just as a jessed hawk is tamed, not tied, so shall the servant be bound by affection and duty, not chains, with God's blessing" (6). The Second Koran, although not clearly postulated upon, can be guessed as a rewriting of the Koran in more technologically facile terms, to renegotiate the inevitable technological changes occurring within the society and accommodate them in the older religious framework.

The social structures are reminiscent of those in any similarly theocratic Islamic nation today – the strict separation of the unmarried male and female, unless they are family members, the punishment of flogging and jail following immediate divorce in cases of adultery, the constant reference to Koran as a religious, spiritual as well as social guide, and the general Western pity of oppression in such a state, especially for the non-males. The

eventual act of Hariba and Akhmim fleeing from Nekropolis as lovers to Spain, a free country representative of individual autonomy, and the final gradual separation of Akhmim and Hariba in Spain over a period of time as Hariba realizes that her identification and fixation with him was less a matter of love, and more of a mutual affiliation as "the marginalized", poses an alternative to a terrible Islamic future world in the form of the free West.

Coming back to Said's *Orientalism*, the Morocco presented here is a homogenous mass of the Middle East – the oppressed, irrational, inhuman state in possession of imminent technology. This assumed homogeneity of an unknown mass of humanity dubbed as Islamic, or Middle East, is only one part of the problem. The other part is in the assumption that this backward society will remain absolutely unchanged, fossilized in time, unaffected by the sweeping changes brought in by technology all over the world. A third problematic aspect is the rhetoric of the "safe", "free" and "progressive" West that will be the saviour of the brave, often emphasized in media in the form of narratives of figures saved and protected by the West, such as Malala Yousufzai,

Moreover, although Spain figures on the periphery of the whole Moroccan cyberpunk drama in *Nekropolis*, it is worthwhile to inquire into the possibility of Orientalism on two grounds: one, the orientalist discourse that juggles the cultural nexus between the Christian and Islamic roots of Spain and Morocco, and the foregrounding of Spain as invaded by, yet superior than its Moor rulers.

Cordoba's City Council recently published an article where the bishop of Cordoba, Demetrio Fernandez proclaimed of the architecture of its Cathedral/Mosque that "no es musulmán, es bizantino.  Es cristiano bizantino. Los moros solo pusieron el dinero" (it is not Muslim, it's Byzantine. It's Christian Byzantine. The Moors only put up the money)

(McSweeney & Hopkins). Angering a plethora of scholars who defended the Islamic architectural origins of the structure in the February 3, 2017 article in El Pais, it opened up the old, yet ongoing complex struggle of Spain in coming to terms with its long Islamic heritage, and its modern European identity.

Within the nationalistic framework, Spain has been struggling with centering its identity between the Orientalist hierarchies of Christian/Islamic, modern/backward, civilized/uncivilized, in its efforts to reconcile its legacy of Islamic heritage to its modern place as a European country. Morocco, which simultaneously has had a considerable impact on Spanish culture, positioned as a geographical neighbour and a cultural colonial entity, has therefore, long been locked in a cultural combat with Spain.

In his prologue to the second Spanish edition of his book Orientalism, Edward Said noted that the Spanish-Islamic relationship was exceedingly dense, and while Islam had always been an external power threat to most Western cultures, Spain was a notable exception in his cultural analyses, given that Islam had been an intricate part of Spanish culture since long, unlike France, Britain, or USA (Said 9-10).

Spain's position towards its Islamic Heritage and the Western gaze can be understood in the West's framing of Spain as an Oriental land, incorporated in its own nationalist stance, while Muslim Morocco offered Spain its own 'Oriental Periphery". Thus, the paradox of Spanish Orientalism lies in a two-fold process of internalizing the Western Oriental gaze as the object, while subjecting Morocco to its own Orientalizing gaze in return.

The 1859–60 Spanish–Moroccan war opened up new conflicting attitudes towards Morocco to find expression in literature, art and other cultural forms: the glorification of Spanish Christianity, the "civilizing mission" of an enlightened Spain in a backward

Morocco, and an exotic fetishization of the Moroccan Orient as a fascinating, alien, yet dangerous place. The 1912 Protectorate that became the Spanish colonizing of Morocco on civilizing grounds, voiced by Joaquín Costa in 1884 in the phrase "blood brotherhood" hearkening to the old historical ties between the two countries, Spain nevertheless holds a predominantly Western position of superiority in contemporary politics, hence lending the Spanish-Moroccan interaction at the climax of *Nekropolis* an Orientalist gaze.

Hariba's and Akhmim's departure to Spain as they flee Moroccan fundamentalist Islamic state that has obliterated all Spanish influences from its culture, and the description of Spain as a "western" country, marking an erasure of any cultural exchange that is a prominent part of Spanish identity since 711 CE poses multiple problems: one, it presents Spain and Morocco as clean spaces, where the pastiche of the debate of Orientalist civilized/uncivilized, safe/dangerous, and so on, can be effortlessly achieved, while restricting it to two countries that currently share a very complex cultural-political tension. This political cleansing and subsequent clean demarcations of a neatly arranged, obvious cultural hierarchy in an otherwise contentious playground amounts to an Orientalist gaze just as hegemonic as the Japanese airbrushing of ruthlessness and technological superiority.

Second, Hariba's new-found independence – from the totalitarian regime, as well as her dependence on Akhmim, an unnatural being, and a seamless insertion in the White, western world of hard work, success and individualism successfully marks not only Morocco as the backward Orient, but also superimposes the American Dream on an equally whitewashed Spain. Spanish identity in the novel has been effaced, and reduced to a caricature of Western, rather, specifically American democratic freedom and Human rights.

Spain, thus, represents little of itself, mainly becoming a site for American projections, while Morocco is reduced to a homogenous stereotypical Western reference of

orthodox Islam, specifically the emerging economic leverage of the Middle East marked by its refusal to adhere to Western cultural standards. Thus, one sees neither Spanish identity in Spain, nor Moroccan identity in Morocco, and the Spanish-Moroccan intersection is erased to the point of non-existence, replaced by Orientalized images of the Middle-East pitted against, and saved by the West.

A similar tendency is reiterated in McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang*, although it is achieved in a reverse manner. While Spain and Morocco are whitewashed in *Nekropolis, China Mountain Zhang* builds up its narrative in the contemporary interdependence of China and the USA.

The oppressive nature of the communist Chinese government in its condemnation of homosexuality with rigorous punishment, coupled with an undisguised biased preference of ethnic Chinese people for a coveted entry in the country is portrayed as an inescapable source of frustration as well as the sole hope of upliftment in a future where America is reduced to a dump akin to the Third World.

With Mongloid features (the tiny slanted eyes), Mandarin, and other superficial markers of Chinese ethnicity, as well as Chinese genes becoming a fashion rage as well as necessity to flourish, it is merely a reversal of the current Chinese trend of 'double eyelid surgery', or the craze for English and emigration to the USA for better prospects. Until very recently, the USA was intolerant of homosexuality, which was a punishable offence. While the USA is yet to completely eliminate these conditions of existence, it nevertheless reiterates them as oppression, projecting them onto a communist China, an enemy on two levels – the American resistance to communism, and to China (a new economic rival) is only well known.

Offering less *jouissance* than its Gibsonian counterpart, Greta Niu's observes that, "by the mid-1990s, Science Fiction [Science Fiction] authors favored China over Japan as a setting for cyberpunk" (76). If the 80s and 90s cyberpunk projected the US-Japanese rivalry, McHugh's novel articulates US perceptions of China's post-socialist rise and the beginnings of the two countries interdependency.

China Mountain Zhang is a postcyberpunk work in the sense that it reverses the themes of classic cyberpunk, privileging the social conditions over technological conditions, whereby the reach of technology, instead of being uniform, is heavily dependent on the "irreducible material relations of social totality" (Kelly & Kessel xi).

Following the arguments of Frederic Jameson, and Morley and Robbins, if classic cyberpunk articulates US-Japanese rivalry of 1980s, then postcyberpunk, Christopher T. Fan argues, "articulates US perceptions of China's post-socialist rise and the beginnings of the two countries' interdependency" (Techno-orientalism 3).

Through Zhang's eyes, we see the interdependent exchanges between the US and China, in a series of expostulations on the neo-liberal discourses of race, sexuality and ideological stances on authoritarianism and liberal democracy, as Zhang tries to navigate his gay, Hispanic-Chinese-American identity in China. McHugh's own critical situation as a labourer in New York City in the 1980s, as well as the crises of her Chinese students as she taught them in China in 1987-88 inform much of the dynamics of the novel, as China propelled itself towards a market-driven economy from a communist economy, while still being unable to relinquish its authoritarianism on its citizens. As McHugh explains, "Zhang's tentativeness reflects not only the people I met in China, but my own tentativeness, my own sense that I've gone way out here." (Interview, with Fan).

One reason techno-Orientalist scholarship has focused so intently on what Stephen Hong Sohn calls the "re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril"— "as opposed to emergent, or at least historically variable, articulations—is because an antinomic Orientalism can be powerfully leveraged for a critique of US neoliberal imperialism" (Fan 4). Critics of Techno-orientalism have ignored the non-antinomic variations of the formation because of the focus on early 20th century and Cold War era equations, while the Chinese question is a fairly recent one.

Zhang's explanation of the toppled state of America, followed by China's emergence as a leading nation is attributed to a debts and deficits that push America into Depression, and the collapse having ramifications on global economy in the form of the breaking down of the economies" of every first-world nation . . . except for Japan, which managed to keep from total bankruptcy but lost most of its markets.", and China, whose closely guarded policies helped them "get their economic shit together" (China 291). the USA is now the "Socialist Union of American States" (6), a "backward" place where the ABC protagonist Zhang and others crave to travel to China as the most technologically advanced nation—the good China (17). Gravitating to this object of desire, Zhang's Chinese father and Hispanic mother "paid to adjust [Zhang's] genetic make up … that I look like a slope-head like my father" (2). Even the derogatory stereotype of Asian slope-heads (as opposed to Caucasian eggheads or potato heads, one presumes) becomes an ideal, allowing Zhang to pass as Chinese. Reversing the Chinese submission to a US-centric world, McHugh imagines a future where China stands truly as the "Middle Kingdom," with America in its periphery. McHugh deploys sci-fi's quintessential "cognitive estrangement," as Suvin puts it (Metamorphosis 13).

As the government becomes incapable of providing basic amenities, a civil war, prompted by an amateur Communist Party, breaks out, Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

repeated itself as The Great Cleansing Winds. US, by the time Zhang grows up, has become the SUAS (Socialist Union of American States), and China has replaced America as the leader. In America, shocked exclamations are no longer “Oh God!” or “Lord!” but “Lenin and Mao Zedong!”,

This has eerie parallels with the post-2008 economic crisis, the American fear of Chinese hegemony, and 2011 international Occupy Movement against economic and social inequality and the lack of “real democracy”. The world presented by the novel, then, instead of being strange, fictional or purely imaginative, extrapolates on the geopolitics of an American slowdown and the economic miracle of China’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. This is also the period in which America and China laid down the framework for interdependency - a conjuncture that economists Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick have christened “Chimerica” and describe as a “dual country” in which Chinese savings and overproduction underwrite US debt and overconsumption (215-239).

While *China Mountain Zhang* is not the first, or sole novel to depict the US-China relations in a Science Fiction setting, other notable novels being Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*, Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar*, Doctorow’s *For the Win*, and Nagata’s *The Bohr Maker*, the depiction of US-China dynamics was merely peripheral, and hence, other fictional comparisons cannot be brought into view.

The novel’s critical realism is portrayed through five first-person narratives, the characters of which share interdependent fates, much like the fate of the world during an economic crisis. According to Yoon Sun Lee, “the typical character, detail, or event stands for something larger and more real than its own particularity. The type is the opposite of a singular, isolated instance.” Universal observations are “achieved through a careful qualification, mediation, or placement that links it with other instances and gives it a social

though not purely empirical generality." (417), rather than implied in a detailed world-building.

While McHugh uses US-China relations as a historical reference point for the setting, and the world-building of the novel, a significant part of allusions come from her own experiences in China as well. Just like Zhang who arrived from NYC to Nanjing to study "organic engineering" for bettering his prospects, McHugh herself had arrived in Shijiazhuang from NYC looking for work, unsure about her prospects in NYC during the late 1980s recession. It was there she had a close-up view of China's urban reforms, leading to a spate of rapid expansion and development, and had written half of China Mountain Zhang.

Desperate to "make the transition to urban", her students, like most students of the late 20th century and early 21st century, chose economic citizenship over political citizenship – a realization that political ideologies, perspectives, whether communist or democratic, were hardly adequate to sustain them economically, and that they must "believe in money", a phrase that became a common aspiration to most Chinese of the era.

McHugh's working experiences as "a precarious laborer in New York City during the 1980s"; and her witnessing of China's "radical reorientation from Maoist to market-directed aims" in 1987–1988 when she taught English in Shijiazhuang, China (*Interview* with Fan) serve as sources of the central theme of China Mountain Zhang, as "McHugh learned firsthand how laborers fell through the cracks in the financial capital of capitalism and how a communist China gave way to a market economy in a city two hundred miles from the PRC's capital" (Ma 140).

As McHugh notes in the "Afterword," Zhang springs from the "conceit … that the People's Republic of China has become the dominant world power" (China 313).

Rather than being stereotypical descriptions of Chinese authoritarianism, China Mountain Zhang captures the transition of China to a hyper-capitalized country that ultimately feeds its socialist authoritarian structure, creating a new kind of globalization; one informed by the traditional Communist structures providing the liberty to be rich, but not free. Haitao's death, Zhang's attuning to the status-quo towards the end of the novel, and San Xiang's brutal treatment once she becomes more beautiful with cosmetic alterations, and the casual nature of death that is commodified with the Kite-flying cowboy consoles where users "sync" their consciousness with kite-riders to get a high, are representative of a contemporary Chinese life where the citizens are encouraged to be rich, at the cost of freedom.

McHugh's revisions of key cyberpunk tropes (cyberspace, console cowboys, globalization, etc.) are emblematic of post-cyberpunk's central focus on what Raymond Williams calls technology's "already existing social relations": its "particular social uses" rather than its reified features (120). Despite the revision of tropes and the focus on interdependency as the narrative string that binds the US and China together, it is necessary to note that Orientalism, as defined by Saeed, in his book, talks mainly of a Western perspective on Islam, and the orientalist discourse of the West on Islam is much diverse than on China, despite being anchored in a common 'Otherness'.

China Studies, as far as Western Orientalism is concerned, takes a different trajectory than that applied to countries that were in direct historical conflict with the West, such as Japan or the USSR, or countries that were British or French colonies, such as India, or other Asian/African countries. Instead of being critiqued on the lack of civilization, or for its unbridled ambition coupled with remorseless brutality, China has been Orientalized in a narrative of embracing modernity as it moves from its feudal, Maoist past. The ascendancy of

China as an economic rival, much like Japan, reshuffled the geopolitical debate, contesting the post-war US-centric dynamics.

With growing economic as well as political unrest both within China (the Uighur problem, Human Rights violations, capitalist-socialist regime shift and Tibetan problems), and without (US diplomacy negotiations in the form of diplomatic and socioeconomic initiatives like Transpacific Asia Partnership), the Sino-Anglo partnership created a storm in the American government equal to the Japanese paranoia in the '80s and the '90s.

As Tani Barlow has noted, "China materialized as an essentially noncolonial national unit at the very moment academic scholarship on Asia turned to social science" [i.e. during the Cold War] (Barlow 374). This was precisely the historical moment in the postwar political studies where the discourse of modernization ascended at the height of the Red Scare and the Cold War. Further encouraged, substantiated and underscored by intellectuals across the world, including from China itself, who asserted the veracity of Mao's horrific regime, followed by China's resounding rapid development as it accommodated a capitalist economy within its communist framework, the narrative of *becoming-sameness* (Vukovich 3) is reconstructed, where Chinese Orientalism has largely been configured in its progressive movement towards the liberal Western values.

This discourse, however, has shifted slightly – from "becoming-sameness", which implies that at one point, China would eventually become the "same" as the USA, it has shifted to "a sameness structured by a hierarchical difference" (Vukovich 4) – undermining any assumptions of Chinese equivalence. Despite what China *lacks* – lack being instrumental to locate Sinological Orientalism – i.e., freedom, it has opened its doors, in McHugh's novel, for a capitalist structure – implying that while China has not quite reached there, it has still taken the correct, Western way to civilization and development.

Vukovich argues that the discourse of anti-communism, and the lynchpin concept of totalitarianism, are part and parcel of Sinological-orientalism. “Oriental despotism” became “totalitarianism.” Passive and irrational Chinese minds were easily “brainwashed.” Orwellian oppression reigned, save for a few brave and inspiring stories of the human spirit (21). For Kennan et al., totalitarianism was “traditional Oriental despotism plus modern technology” (Pietz 58). Kennan writes in Foreign Affairs in 1947:

> [Russian] fanaticism, unmodified by any of the Anglo-Saxon traditions of compromise, was too fierce and too jealous to envisage any permanent sharing of power. From the Russian-Asiatic world out of which they had emerged they had carried with them a skepticism as to the possibilities of permanent or peaceful coexistence of rival forces. Here caution, circumspection, flexibility, and deception are the valuable qualities; and their value finds natural appreciation in the Russian or the oriental mind. (Pietz 59)

McHugh resorts to, in David M. Higgins’ words, “the alien invasion or the reverse colonization narrative”, a breakdown in democracy and human rights as China’s complex socialist-capitalist network supersedes and engulfs American democratic capitalism (American 45). Chinese communist past and its complex capitalist twist to economy has been seamlessly grafted on the American experience of downfall. Chinese Otherness, unlike Japanese Otherness, is not located in its technological prowess, but rather its economic progress and a cultural ruthlessness in Communist ideology just as natural to the Chinese as *yakuza and zaibatsu* were to the Japanese.

This Chinese orientalism locates itself in money, or *qian* (also the name of Zhang’s boss) and connections, or *guanxi* (the Chinese shrewdness of bypassing honest hard work). This manifests itself deeper as we see Zhang and San-Xiang efface themselves – their

sexuality and her ugly face – and trade it with Chinese conformity in terms of looks – as evident through cosmetic surgery, in-vitro Chinesefication, and trading individuality for an appropriate Chinese "face", or a mask.

It would be helpful to go back to the Comics Code and Cold War politics of the time, in order to understand the phenomenon. In fact, in terms of Disney and the attitude of the time period, not much has changed so far. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comics* describes the perception directed towards the mainstream Americans by Disney during the Cold War to portray Communists negatively, including anyone who challenged America openly. Disney built his vision of America, his "Disneyland palaces," with a specific slant favoring US interests "already colonized, with phantom inhabitants to conform to Disney's notions of it" (103). Each foreign country is a model within the process of invasion by Disney-nature. In particular, Communist regimes such as Cold-war era Vietnam or Cuba, which held interests directly inimical to the US, were projected as undesirable places where "the revolutionary struggle appear banal," with Disney showing "underdeveloped peoples like children, to be treated as such, and if they don't accept they should have their pants taken down and given a good spanking." (ibid).

Essentially, the Third World, and the political opponents of the USA were depicted as incapable of civilization, or, in other words, the maturity to be self-governing, and therefore in need of submitting themselves to the modern, democratic USA, which was a "replica of the empire and colony."

Disney, therefore, was synonymous with the voice of the nation for many years, with, as Napier asserts, "a distinct U.S. style and tone" that enabled it to be massively successful, with its ideology frequently attracting criticism from "commentators such as Scott Schaffer."

who “suggest’ a pattern behind Disney’s use of local stories or histories...the expansion of American political, economic, and cultural imperialistic power in the second half of the twentieth century” (Confronting 469).

This, Schaffer suggests, also legitimizes a particular American “worldview upbeat and centered on individual action and initiative, and—while it acknowledges Otherness—often ends up erasing difference through its joyously inclusive finales the “group hug” ending of Aladdin or...uniting of mermaid and human in The Little Mermaid” (ibid).American cinema, then, became profoundly obsessed with the idea of “reassurance”, which, according to Robin Wood is where “all problems are solved and harmony is restored under the aegis of U.S. ideology and values” (ibid).

Disney, thus, was symbolic of the idea of being a representative, distinctively American voice, one that furthered American ideals of civilization, capitalism and democracy by making a caricature of its opponents, mostly ending in narratives where the opponents found themselves saved by American idealism.

*The Windup Girl* is set in Thailand, in a postcyberpunk/biopunk universe that locates Thailand as the only safe place in a world ravaged by reckless Monsantoesque genetic modification of agriculture. As the location shifts to yet another Asian country with important economic links to the US, where the author is an American who has spent a considerable chunk of his life in Thailand, I find it necessary to situate race back in the Techno-orientalist discourse. Morley and Robins argued that race, far from disappearing, becomes integrated with technology itself with advancements in science. Thus, “as the dynamism of technological innovation has appeared to move eastwards, so have these postmodern technologies become structured in the discourse of Orientalism” (169). Worthy of extending this analysis to Thailand, one might assume safely that Techno-orientalism may be

understood as "the desire to conceptualize the East through a technocratic framework within cultural production [that] leads to a re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril" (Sohn 10).

In an interview, Bacigalupi states his resentment against GM foods being in the hands of corporates, and the act of profiteering through patenting, which, under the masquerade of science as the betterment of humankind, reduces it to a profit-loss equation. Growing up on Colorado farms, witnessing first-hand the devastating effects of consumerist agriculture, and having spent life in Thailand observing, as an American, the widespread impact of global policies on emerging economies, he has used Thailand as a setting for *The Windup Girl*.

Historically, Thailand has never been a colony, although it has emerged as a growing economy, opening up its economy to information revolution and foreign investment, yet never risen to a stature enough to capture Western imagination/paranoia. Bacigalupi's novel opens up what Isiah Lavender III calls "ethnoscapes" (191). Lavender contends,

> While Science Fiction's conventional estrangements populate the fictional environment with, or structure it around, the presence of science, technology, mythology, aliens, androids, humanity, natural and artificial phenomena, politics, culture, language, religion, and so on, the ethnoscape reformulates that construction so as to create an alternative image that enables us to rethink the intersections of technology and race as well as their political, social and cultural implications" (163).

Race, in the novel, or in Thailand, cannot be reduced an East-West binary, the West representing safety and enlightenment, and the East representing a chaotic backwardness. Thailand, in the proximity of its own South-East Asian neighbours, has a complex racial history, one that makes way in the novel as well. Rather than a reversal to 'Occidentalism'

(Robertson 192), the novel depicts the racial, cultural, religious and ethnic racial tensions within Thailand itself.

The conflict along the Thai-Malaysian border is reflected in Hock-Seng, a Buddhist and Chinese Malay, who flees to Bangkok when "the brown people turn on the yellow people in Malaya" (202), the brown people being "the Green Headbands of Malaya", who persecuted Chinese-Malays, forcing Hock-Seng to seek refuge in Thailand. His escape to Thailand mirrors the relocation of Buddhist migrants from South/border Thailand to central Thailand to escape the atrocities of Malay Muslims, a conflict that emerged from Thailand's annexure of the southern tips of provinces to merge it into its own territory in 1902. Despite continuous conflicts between separatists and the Thai government over the last century, tensions have escalated owing to the complexities of Thai military atrocities, poverty, lack of representation of minorities, and so on. "Yellow card", a reference to Hock Seng in the novel, is a derogatory term for Malaysian refugees of Chinese descent who have fled to Thailand, derived from the yellow-card Chinese-Malays are required to carry in Thailand. While Hock Seng's escape saves him from persecution and death, Thailand is not offered as a haven from racist attitudes of native Thais, aptly reflected in Jaidee's resentment of the race and the insistence on assimilation:

> Jaidee has a certain respect for the Chaozhou Chinese. Their factories are large and well-run. They have generations rooted in the Kingdom, and they are intensely loyal to Her Majesty the Child Queen. They are utterly unlike the pathetic Chinese refugees who have flooded in from Malaya, fleeing to his country in hopes of succor after they alienated the natives of their own.. The Chaozhou are smart, where the Malayan-Chinese are stupid. They are practically Thai themselves. They speak Thai. They took

> Thai names. They may have Chinese roots somewhere in their distant past, but they are Thai (111).

On the other hand, Hock Seng equally despises the Thai workers, and he constantly "curses that he works with Thais. They simply lack the entrepreneurship that a Chinese would throw into the work" (132), "They are all incompetent" (14). Reflected in much of popular belief, Syed H. Alatas' critique of imperialism, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* analyses the caricature of the Malays as "dependent" (8), leading to "discriminatory practices [where] a number of because they believe them to be lazy [and] not endowed with the capacity to do business. All these ideas derive their origin from the colonial image of the Malays" (17). This analysis, for the purpose of the novel, can easily be extended to Thailand, and Hock Seng's attitudes towards the Malays.

The other important characters are the sole completely villainous character Gibbons, and the titular windup girl Emiko. As a "generipper" (357), Gibbons is one of the few who accepts the New People, and yet, the acceptance is driven by intellectual and scientific interests, rather than as a product of humanitarian sentiment. While New People are people whose bodies are marked by racial difference, Gibbons' sole interest in Emiko is for the genetic design, with which he is familiar (357). Chow-White calls this "informationalization of race", where advancements of science have caused race to be configured in terms of coded information, rather than a lived social reality (1181). Chow-White elucidates,

> Where conventional conceptions of race have been articulated in terms of culture, or phenotype, in the digital age, information is the material by which we work on racial meaning… however, race as information does not replace the dependency on racialization on ethnicity or skin color. Rather, as the paradigm of race as culture emerged from the paradigm of race as biology, I would argue that the paradigm of

> race as information has emerged from both to create a new racial formation – the informationalization of race (1171).

Even as an objective scientist whose primary object of study is science, and not social constructions, his utter failure in seeing the socio-cultural implications of technology is the exact critique that cyberpunk, as a subgenre as a whole, has been trying to negotiate – placing the science in context with the society.

If Gibbons reduces race to information, Emiko highlights the impact of information on a racialized body, bearing the triple marginalization of being female, being Japanese, and being "an illegal piece of genetic trash" (122).

Moreover, Emiko's state as an abused prostitute, far from being merely attributable to her sex, and the exoticization of her unnaturalness, is also located in Thailand's notoriety as a destination for sex tourism, a hub for all kinds of exotic fantasies considered to be perversity even in the most liberal human discourses. The explicit scene of Emiko's public display of sexual encounter and humiliation is reminiscent of much of South-Asian porn orgies freely available on the internet.

> She forces Emiko down on the table. The men gather round as Kannika begins her abuse. Slowly, it builds, first playing at her nipples, then sliding the jadeite cock between her legs, encouraging the reactions that have been designed into her and which she cannot control, no matter how much her soul fights against it.
>
> The men cheer at Emiko's degradation, encouraging escalation, and Kannika, flushed with excitement, begins to devise new tortures. She squats over Emiko. Parts the cheeks of her ass and encourages Emiko to plumb her depths. The men laugh as Emiko obeys and Kannika narrates:

"Ah yes, I feel her tongue now."

Then: "Do you like it with your tongue there, dirty windup?"

To the men: "She likes it. All these dirty windups like it”

Emiko hears Kannika speaking again. "You want to see her? Go ahead." Hands on Emiko's thighs, pushing them apart so that she is completely exposed. Fingers play at her folds, penetrate her. Kannika laughs. "You want to fuck her? Fuck the windup girl? Here. Give me her legs." Her hands close on Emiko's ankles, pull them up, exposing her completely. "No." Emiko whispers, but Kannika is implacable.

Emiko moans a protest. The pressure lets up for a moment, but then Kannika says, "You call yourselves men? Fuck her! Look how she jerks. Look at her arms and legs when you push! Make her do her heechy-keechy dance." And then the pressure comes back and the men are holding her down more tightly, and she can't get up and the cold thing presses again against her ass, penetrates her, spreads her wide, splits her open, fills her and she is crying out.

Kannika laughs. "That's right windup; earn your keep. You can get up when you make me come."

And then Emiko is licking again, slobbering and lapping like a dog, desperate, as the champagne bottle penetrates her again, as it withdraws and shoves deep into her, burning. The men all laugh. "Look at how she moves!" Tears jewel in her eyes. Kannika encourages her to greater effort and the falcon if there is any falcon in Emiko at all, if it ever existed, is a dead thing, dangling. (241-242).

As Bacigalupi concludes on his vision for humanity in the future in an interview with Rain Taxi, "We could actually start planning and preserving and living as if we've got a long-term interest in the planet – as if we're embedded and part of a much larger web – but we haven't shown any signs of change so far. I'm betting we're going to stay selfish, and hand our kids a shitstorm" (Vorda).

Moreover, regarding the clear streak of anger against the Western corporations who have ruined the world agriculture and therefore, the economy, it is important to note that the novel steers clear of being Occidentalist, or forming a unified narrative of a homogenous West. When Hock Seng states in an apparently anti-*farang* slant, "We're working for ourselves now. No more foreign influence, yes?", Bacigalupi explains in the same interview that rather than such expressions being representations of anti-West ideology of either the novel or Thailand in particular, he locates such nationalistic sentiment in the context of resistance to foreign forces. Refusing to reduce it to a case of superiority, Bacigalupi posits it as survivalism, where necessity precedes any intrinsic moral constructions.

Another recurring cultural marker in *The Windup Girl* is the imagery of megodonts, or elephants, used for the purpose of industrial production in the conflict-ridden Thailand. While apparently similar to the employment of *geisha* or *yakuza* in classic cyberpunk, the use of megodonts cannot be reduced to a mere caricature of Thailand's exotic offerings, in view of the fact that Thailand has a long history of employing pachyderms against the Lao, Khmers and Burmese during wars, apart from elephants being an intricate part of Thailand's already-existent economy.

*The Windup Girl*, then, explores multiple racial concerns locating it within contemporary Thailand, in its complex tensions with a fragile economy and border contentions, appropriately situating it in a futuristic context where this multitude of conflicts

would play out in a complex form of circumstances, instead of engaging in a simplistic East-West binary of racial difference and representation.

While it seems that the removal of Japan would usher out techno-orientalism from cyberpunk texts, it can be observed that in most fictional works, the locations that have displaced Japan are either those locked in some kind of ideological-economic battle with the USA, or scattered as superficial markers of another racial seasoning over what is originally a banal background.

While postcyberpunk has been inclusive in its efforts to address gender and ecological issues, it has been mute on racial fronts, emerging only in its refusal to engage with Japan, and consequently replace it with other places picked up somewhere along their way.

In a very similar, or even more restricted way, my engagement with games suggests that either the location is clearly American, or peppered with an exotic Japanese seasoning in the form of spatial imagery, and is still stuck in the classic cyberpunk phase. To take a quick glance at the cityscapes of all the games mentioned in the chapters elaborating on gender, it is notable that Oriental motifs are scattered in every game.



Figure 4.1: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* Cityscape


The above cityscapes of Deus Ex: Human Revolution are reminiscent of Blade Runner in the golden-swathed hyper-urbanized spaces littered with Oriental languages.


Figure 4.3 & 4.4: Shadowrun Returns

The above two images are of Shadowrun Returns, again marking the cityscape prominently with Asian motifs reminiscent of classic cyberpunk. An eerily similar landscape is used for Syndicate, as shown below:


Figure 4.4: Syndicate cityscape


Figure 4.5: Syndicate cityscape

Unfortunately, the case seems to be the same for *cyberpunk 2077* too, although race is marked in three ways in the below images:



(Clockwise) Figure 4.6 Cyberpunk 2077; Figure 4.7: Japanese girl in holograms; Figure 4.8: Afro-American girl

The first marker is that of an Asian landscape littered with Oriental lamps and signboards. The second image is of a seemingly Japanese girl sitting nude in a hologram, while the third image is of a black woman against the backdrop of an Oriental cityscape.

With no referential frame for Asia beyond its superficial location as the future, it is clear that games have reiterated the Techno-orientalist stance upheld by classic cyberpunk as the only plausible location of future, without ever inquiring into the cultural aspect of that locatedness. These games, then, are a problematic area, given that billions of people play games on a regular basis, and while games are produced keenly keeping in mind the demand,

the cultural architecture in these games is no coincidence. While other media have shown shifts and transitions, no matter how flawed, cyberpunk games, despite the improvement in graphic quality and player engagement, have not moved beyond the narrow confines of classic cyberpunk.

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