Un-American Exceptionalism in the Disciplinary Field: from Unmeltable Ethnics to Flexible Citizens

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Abstract

From its beginnings in the mid-twentieth century, American Studies as a discipline has been concerned with the processes of migration and Americanization, the formation of nationhood, and foreign empire-building; since the 1970s the “New” Americanists have illuminated the complex and pervasive ways in which the ideology of Anglo-Saxon supremacy has structured U.S. national identity through patterns of immigration (and restrictions on entry to the U.S. by certain national and ethnic groups) and the discourses that name ethnic immigrant groups. This line of inquiry has taken American Studies out of the realm of domestic U.S. concerns and into the field of transnational cultural studies. In the U.S. context, transnationalism is often construed as the study of U.S. imperialism in its various guises: cultural, economic, political, and military. The relevance of the postcolonial is hard to miss. This essay addresses the role that Postcolonial Studies has to play in the re-routing of American Studies away from its nationalist roots. Postcolonialism offers an intellectual perspective that is necessarily cross-national and [...]
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From its beginnings in the mid-twentieth century with the foundational work of scholars such as R.W.B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, and Perry Miller, American Studies as a discipline has been concerned with the processes of Americanization to which predominantly European migrant communities have been subject. Migration and westward expansion provided, from the 1970s, a focus for a revisionary discourse of U.S. nationhood and foreign empire-building in the work of scholars like Richard Drinnon, Annette Kolodny, and Richard Slotkin, work which formed the basis for more recent studies of U.S. imperialism at home and abroad by Amy Kaplan, Donald Pease, John Carlos Rowe, and others. Much of this latter scholarship has illuminated the complex and pervasive ways in which the ideology of white supremacy has affected U.S. foreign policy as well as domestic politics. As Reginald Horsman shows in his study, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism* (1981), an ideology of Anglo-Saxon supremacy has structured the emergent U.S. national identity through patterns of immigration (and restrictions on entry to the U.S. by certain national and ethnic groups) and the discourses that name ethnic immigrant groups. This line of inquiry has taken American Studies out of the realm of domestic U.S. concerns and into the field of transnational cultural studies. In the U.S. context, transnationalism is often construed as the study of U.S. imperialism in its various guises: cultural, economic, political, and military. The relevance of the postcolonial is hard to miss.

This essay addresses the role that Postcolonial Studies has to play in the re-routing of American Studies away from its roots in U.S. nationalism and so complements Nirmala Menon's call (in this volume) for a more provisional, contingent and nomadic textual canon. While Menon's discussion remains largely grounded in national literatures, her argument supports a further call for disciplinary de-nationalization. Postcolonialism offers an intellectual perspective that is necessarily cross-national and comparative; thus, postcolonial scholars have developed strategies for discussing issues and concepts such as exile, displacement, diaspora, migration, nationhood, and hybridity that enable us to cut through the pervasive and obfuscating American ideology of white supremacy to see what is at stake when we study the nation on its own terms. What we see clearly from a postcolonial perspective is the ethical dimension of an academic discipline that places U.S. nationalism at its center and takes the white nation state as its fundamental organizing principle. It may be objected that in fact American Studies has grown and diversified to a point where it is no longer a single discipline, and the field of American Ethnic Studies could be invoked as evidence of this plurality. However, the organization of Ethnic Studies into hyphenated sub-disciplines, which replace nationalism as the object of study with cultural nationalisms, intensifies this ethical issue. By pursuing a “mono-hyphenated” understanding of ethnicity, the sub-disciplines of American Studies such as Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanic-American Studies replicate patterns of white supremacy by conflating identity with putative origin, affiliation with filiation, cultural difference with racially marked difference. A refusal of multiple ethnic and national identifications is structurally inscribed in the sub-
disciplines of Ethnic Studies and this refusal reproduces existing structures of power and control that are grounded in the white nation state.

It was in the latter half of the last century, as American Ethnic Studies developed out of the Civil Rights movements, that these hyphenated fields of study emerged, motivated in part by the desire for redress, for recognition of and compensation for historical injustices. American Ethnic Studies has, consequently, been organized along broadly nationalistic, though hyphenated, axes. The naming remains unchanged despite widespread consensus that these hyphenated cultural categories are dangerously misleading. The hyphenation of ethnic identity implies a double locatedness: the hyphenated subject is situated both in the U.S. and also in Asia, or Africa, or Latin America. The effect of hyphenation is to create a subject position that is split between the categories of native and foreign, “here” and “there.” This can be a perilous situation, as Chinese-Americans discovered in the wake of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act when they were refused re-entry into the US after traveling to visit their families in China, or as American citizens of Japanese descent discovered in 1942 when they were forcibly removed from their homes and detained for the duration of the war in the Pacific.

Central to understanding such events is the figure of the "un-American" – the individual who is in America but is not of America: the diasporic citizen of questionable national affiliation and loyalty. The following discussion is structured around the film Crash (2004) and this figure of the "un-American," the diasporic citizen of doubtful loyalties. In this film, the figure of the threatening unassimilated migrant is represented in the person of the Iranian shopkeeper, Farhad (Shaun Toub). In Crash every character is shown to be ambivalently racialist, at turns sympathetic and hostile to others, with the exception of the Iranian who is demonized in the film. Before turning to the implications of this figure of the un-American or the "unmeltible ethnic," the question must be asked concerning the ethnic group that is not included in this film portrait of multicultural Los Angeles. This question reveals a glaring absence: the absence of Native peoples. This is both a substantive and structural omission. Thematically, the plot addresses conflict and violent tensions among the "multicultures"; structurally, the film focuses on the multicultural city that is populated overwhelmingly by migrants of various kinds. So we might ask, "Are Native American Indians 'multicultural'?

Native Americans, in important respects, constitute the very first threateningly unassimilated group ("unmeltible ethnics") in U.S. history. The un-American is not necessarily a migrant to the United States but is always a discursive product of migration histories that cannot escape the here/there binary. Thus, the Native American stands as the paradigmatic un-American: a member of a community that is disrupted by mass inward migration, who occupies a geographical position that is territorially American but a subject position that is in a complex and problematic tension with the demands of the emergent multicultural settler nation. I am aware that many indigenous groups resist inclusion in the category of the "multicultural" and for good reason. But such hostility may point to the inadequacy of current understandings of the potential of multiculturalism to deliver social justice rather than the complete uselessness of the concept. One such inadequacy is the identification of the "multicultures" with immigrant cultures and a narrow understanding of what constitutes a migrant. Crash offers a useful focus for exploring some of these issues, centered as it is upon immigrants – whether they came to the U.S. voluntarily or, in the case of African-Americans, perhaps not. I say "perhaps" because increasing numbers of U.S. migrants of African descent are not descended from slaves but from more recent migrations. Think of the recent debate over the "African-Americanness" of the U.S. President Barack Obama. However, the position of Native Americans as belonging to domestic-dependent nations raises the issue of whether the move from tribal to U.S. territory (such as from the
reservation to the city) constitutes "migration."

In both his critical and creative work, the Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor has repeatedly imaged urban Indians as migrants. The poem "Family Photograph," from Vizenor's collection *Almost Ashore* (2006), reads the figure of the poet's father, Clement Vizenor, as "a native immigrant / moved to the city" (Vizenor, 2006: 9). Here, migration is the move from the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota to the city of Minneapolis. This poem brilliantly interweaves the tribal with the colonial interventions of the U.S. in a sequence of objective correlatives such as the opening images: "my father / clement vizenor / was a spruce / among the trees / a native / by totems // corded for pulp / by federal / indian agents" (ibid.: 6). The image of the totemic tree as his father raises the question of which -- the tree or the man, or indeed the totemic tribal culture -- has been pulped by federal Indian agents. But this is a question that answers itself as soon as it is expressed. The poem concludes:

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clement vizenor
holds me
in a photograph
that winter
almost a smile
a new spruce

among the bricks
paint cans
half white earth
the other
native immigrant
moved to the city
and lost at cards
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Here, the father is figured as "a new spruce," a new creation though one defeated by the evil gambler of tribal myth, now ambiguously hybrid (to continue the botanical metaphor): " half white earth / the other / native immigrant." Indeed, this hybrid quality is clear in an earlier poem entitled "The Last Photograph," also written in response to this image, included in *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (1990):

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my father
holds me in the last photograph
the new spruce
with a wide smile
half white
half immigrant
he took up the cities and lost at cards
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Clement's mother, Alice Beaulieu, was an Anishinaabe woman of the White Earth Reservation, who took her children with her to Minneapolis; as Vizenor writes in *Interior Landscapes*, Clement was considered a “half-breed Indian” by the police officers who investigated his murder and his white “half” came from his mixed-blood father. In the poem, Clement's paternal descent is described as “half white,” leaving his maternal Anishinaabe “half” to be accounted for as “half immigrant.” Here, migration for Native peoples is clearly related to departure (whether voluntary or not) from the tribal reservation. But does this "half
white / half immigrant" status make Clement Vizenor a hyphenated American? A Native-American-American? The "unhyphen-ability" of Native Americans is suggestive of the "unmeltable" status of Native people, and hence of their marginalization in U.S. society, and is also indicative of the way in which the naming of the settler-nation, "American," functions as the foundation for all hyphenated ethnic designations. Commenting on the poem "The Last Photograph," in the context of Vizenor's autobiography, Elvira Pulitano writes: "As a 'half white,' 'half immigrant,' urban mixedblood removed to the cities at twenty three, Clement William Vizenor was imprisoned in the simulation of indianness, a misnomer, Vizenor has pointed out, that erases a native presence while affirming a logocentric absence" (Pulitano, 2008: 142). Vizenor describes, in Fugitive Poses (1998) how: "Clement and his brothers, and other natives in urban areas were indians by simulation, transethnic by separation, but native in their stories of survivance" (Vizenor, 1998: 51). "[T]ransethnic by separation" is certainly a better formulation than "hybrid" to describe the double life of a subject in exile from both the White Earth Reservation and the white city of Minneapolis but who is, at the same time, "transethnic" and a part of both worlds.

Elsewhere in Interior Landscapes Vizenor refers to a different kind of immigrant hybrid, the immigrant-Native mixedblood, such as the "Norwindians" who were left out of a 1984 historical exhibition of Norwegians in America. Presumably, these Norwegian immigrants were subsumed under the label of Norwegian-Americans. Where we might expect reference to indigenous America, the point of reference for so much in U.S. culture -- from boy scouts to Walden Pond, as scholars like Philip Deloria have pointed out, we find instead that "America-as-Europe" terminates hyphenated migrant identities. The rhetorical sleight-of-hand that substitutes Anglo-American for Native-American as the foundation of hyphenated national U.S. migrant identities is repeated every time we talk about a hyphenated-"American" and perpetuate the erasure of Native peoples. The logic of U.S. nationalism demands that America be identified with the United States and that a "Native" American should be a subject born in the United States. That is, logical priority is filtered through the lens of nationalism so that "Native" becomes synonymous with "Nativist." This entails the erasure of indigenous Native Americans who then occupy a place that is geographically in the United States but is not American.

The discursive matrix that positions and defines Native Americans offers the foundational instance of the "unmeltable ethnic." The most notorious example of this is the internment of approximately 120,000 Japanese-Americans, and some U.S. residents of German or Italian descent, during the Second World War, under Executive Order 9066. However, the first group of suspect "aliens" to be sequestered during military conflict was a group of more than 500 so-called "praying Indians" who were interned on Deer Island, in Boston Harbor, during King Philip's War. The order for their removal was passed by the General Court in Boston in October 1675; those who survived were permitted to return to the mainland in May 1677. The notion that an entire community can be deemed a security risk has particular resonance for us today, but the logic reaches far back into the colonial heritage, producing the enduring image of the threatening unassimilated "domestic alien." This logic depends upon the hyphenated naming of national affiliations: Japanese- or German- or Italo-American. The hyphen indicates that culturally such migrants remain "there" – in Japan, Germany, or Italy – even though they are physically located "here."

The exception (which proves the rule) is the discursive placement of Native Americans. When Gerald Vizenor refers to Native Americans as indians (in lowercase and italicized) he is making the claim that "Indians" do not exist. "Indians" were invented by colonizers at the time of first contact and, like the concept of "America" and "Americans," has no meaning for indigenous peoples who bear their own tribal names. Thus, the category of the indian is a simulacrum, in Jean Baudrillard's sense of the term: a copy without an
original, an invention that poses as the real. As Elvira Pulitano suggests in her comment (quoted above) on the figure of Clement Vizenor, in the poem “Family Photograph,” this simulation of the \textit{indian} is a restrictive, prescriptive stereotype. To resist the invented image is to resist the ideology of white supremacy and European cultural imperialism that it supports. In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Vizenor explained:

Practically every tribal name is a western colonial imposition: the tribes don't speak of themselves that way, but they must, in a written language, do so. Just encountering a word is a creative act in a word war. If someone says, 'Are you an American Indian?'; you have an instant word war; all you have to do is, say no. (Coltelli, 1990-91: 195)

The language of naming, and particularly the ethnic labels applied to indigenous and migrant groups alike, constitutes an invitation to collude with the powers of white supremacy. The rhetorical slippage between “Native” and “Nativist” erases Native presence and instantiates the simulacrum of the \textit{indian}. This is the exception to the rule of "mono-hyphenation," which is essential to the process of naming and categorizing the migrant communities of the U.S. We see this process at work everywhere. What we do not see is evidence of multi-hyphenation, where people of multiply-mixed descent can claim a truly plural heritage.

The film \textit{Crash} is articulated almost exclusively in terms of mono-hyphenation: Asian slaves are trafficked by a Korean man, Blacks marry Blacks; in the only instance of a mixed-race relationship, the film endorses the view of ethnic singularity. This occurs in the scene where Ria (Jennifer Esposito), the Latina detective, and her Black partner Graham (Don Cheadle), are interrupted in bed by his mother's telephone call. Ria is angry that he answers the telephone and becomes even more incensed when Graham cuts the conversation short by telling his mother that he is busy having sex with a white woman. In response to Ria's question, he confesses that he described her as white rather than Mexican because he knew it would upset his mother more. So Ria gives him a geography lesson: pointing out that her father is from Puerto Rico and her mother is from El Salvador, making her neither white nor Mexican. However, her words are obliterated by his response: he observes sarcastically that there is then a mystery how members of such remarkably diverse cultures should come to the U.S. and suddenly all start parking their cars on their lawns. His comment is represented as humorous and the audience is led to collude with this humor. The camera lingers in a medium close-up shot of Graham lighting a cigarette as Ria storms out of the scene, the slamming of the door punctuates his dialogue and endorses the validity of his view of cultural homogeneity. Mexican, Puerto Rican, El Salvadorian: these migrants all become "American" by virtue of the hyphen.

The insistence upon ethnic "mono-hyphenation," and the misrecognition it entails, is a powerful and insidious expression of racialism that is troped throughout the film by the motif of the invisible bullet-proof cloak given by the Hispanic locksmith, Daniel Ruiz, to comfort his traumatized young daughter, Lara. He comes home from work late one night to find her huddling under her bed, made afraid by the experience of street shootings in their previous home, and unable to sleep in her new home. Her father presents her with the imaginary cloak which, he persuades her, repels bullets and will keep her safe. The symbolic significance of the cloak evokes the following quotation from Audre Lorde's autobiographical \textit{Zami: A New Spelling of My Name} (1983) where she writes:

... but sometimes, I was close to crazy with believing that there was some secret thing wrong with me personally that formed \textit{an invisible barrier} between me and the rest of my friends, who were white. ... I had no words
This "invisible barrier" surrounds all the characters in *Crash*, accounting for their loneliness, violence, and desperation. As Graham, the black detective, reflects at the beginning of the film, perhaps people in Los Angeles are so atomized that they crash their cars so they can have an opportunity to touch each other. However, they do not touch each other -- the Black woman Christine Thayer (Thandie Newton) in her burning car recoils in horror from the white policeman Officer John Ryan (Matt Dillon) whom she only knows as abusive, but who risks his own life to save her -- because each person is involved in their own private process of what has become known as "racial profiling." Racial profiling, the categorizing of other people according to ethnicity on the basis of their physical somatic identity, is precisely what mono-hyphenation promotes, rendering those who are ambivalently American "unmeltable ethnics."

The term "unmeltable ethnics" comes from Michael Novak's 1972 book entitled *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies*. But Novak's "unmeltables" are not the kinds of diasporic transnational subjects we might imagine. He writes, in terms evocative of Stanley Fish's concept of "boutique multiculturalism," of "weekend Italians" who drive from the suburbs to Little Italy to stock up on "ethnic supplies" (Novak, 1972: 33). Novak is at his most powerful when reporting and condemning the kinds of racialist abuse confronted by European immigrants. For example, a New York newspaper editorial from the early twentieth century put this in words that ran, in part:

> The flood gates are open. The bars are down. The sally-ports are unguarded. The dam is washed away. The sewer is choked... the scum of immigration is viscerating upon our shores. The horde of $9.90 steerage slime is being siphoned upon us from Continental mud tanks. (quoted in Novak, 1972: 117)

This same rhetoric of threat, invasion, and inundation endures and dominates the film *Crash*.

To return to the figure invoked at the beginning of this essay: the Iranian "terrorist" -- the shopkeeper Farhad (who is not given a surname) turned would-be murderer who terrorizes the locksmith's family, and the audience, in the most emotional and disturbing scene of the film. After the vandalism of his shop, and the refusal of the insurance company to compensate him, he discovers in the trash a receipt disclosing the name of the locksmith, whose work failed to keep out the vandals. Daniel's house has already, through the motif of the invisible bullet-roof cloak, been associated with gun-related violence. All of these elements work to create a sense of suspenseful foreboding. The camera follows the gun in Farhad's hand Daniel's car pulls into his driveway and then cuts to the interior of the house, where Lara hears her father's car and peers out of the window. While the camera cuts between interior and exterior shots, the scene is focalized through Lara and, as she sees the gun pointed at her father, she runs out the front door calling to her mother that he does not have the cloak that he needs for protection. As she leaps to cover her father, the gun is fired and Lara is shot in the back. The viewer's worst foreboding is realized. In slow motion, and with the human voices silenced, the reactions of each figure in the drama are registered : her screaming father, holding her; her weeping mother on the steps; Farhad, recoiling from the gun and the horror of what he has done. We are returned from slow motion to real time by Lara's voice and at that point we realize that she is miraculously alive. The family retreat behind their front door and we see in an overhead crane shot Farhad standing bewildered on the street, a shot that balances the opening shot into the sun, where the camera looks up at Farhad and then cuts to the gun in his hand. The scene ends with the powerful symbol of a U.S. flag stirring in the
breeze as Farhad stands immobile: the importance of this iconography is emphasized by the
director's commentary on the DVD version of the film.

In this scene, the Iranian is represented unambiguously as the "bad" immigrant, in
contrast to the "good" immigrant locksmith. The scene depicts an act of revenge for the
racialist attack on his shop; however, the locksmith has withstood the racialist abuse of the
district attorney's wife, Jean (Sandra Bullock), without betraying any desire for vengeance.
This motivating incident, the attack on the shop, with the anti-Islamic graffiti daubed on the
walls, is incomprehensible to the shopkeeper's wife, Shereen, who wonders aloud "They think
we're Arab. When did Persian become Arab?" Here we have another case of the "invisible
barrier" of racialism obscuring the recognition of what individuals actually are.

This issue of mis/recognition is especially important in relation to the role of Dorri,
their Americanized adult daughter, who represents a key ambiguity. She is associated with
death (she is shown in the mortuary, presenting the body of Graham's brother Peter for
identification) but also with the angelic preservation of Lara's life. After his attempt to kill is
thwarted by the blank bullet, Farhad claims this is a miracle, brought about by the intervention
of an angel. However, it is his daughter who is responsible for the blank bullets in his gun.
Dorri's purchase of blank bullets for her father's gun is ironically contextualized: the racist
gun-store owner demands that she choose bullets and, when she expresses her choice by the
color of the box, asks sneeringly, "You know what those are?" He appears to take pleasure in
selling her blank bullets, but does she know this? Does Dorri knowingly choose blanks but
disdains to say so in order to keep her dignity? Or does she in fact choose according to the
most appealingly colored packaging? The interpretation of this incident -- whether Dorri is
duped because she is "foreign" or whether she chooses knowingly because she is "American"
-- is left to the audience, who must confront their own assumptions and prejudices in order to
construct an interpretation. We must decide where the emphasis falls in Dorri's hyphenated
identity: Iranian or American? Is she assimilated as an American or is she a perpetual
foreigner? This is the question addressed to all potentially un-American immigrants who can
be seen as "flexible citizens" of both "here" and "there."

This term is taken from Aihwa Ong's influential book, *Flexible Citizenship: The
Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), where she discusses the kinds of belonging
available in the contemporary global economy. For example, she describes how:

> Many Hong Kongers opted to work in China while seeking citizenship
elsewhere. Caught between British disciplinary racism and China’s
opportunistic claims of racial loyalty, between declining economic power in
Britain and surging capitalism in Asia, they sought a flexible position
among the myriad possibilities (and problems) found in the global economy
(Ong, 1999: 123)

In contrast to this representation of transnationality, the *San Francisco Chronicle* has
reported, in upbeat terms, about the increasing incidence of "reverse migration" from the U.S.
to China. According to this report, wealthy Chinese-Americans are retiring to the Westernized
cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing, or are choosing to spend part of the year in China
and part in the U.S. The reason for this return is represented as a response, not to white
supremacy or racial hostility in the U.S., but to residual "ethnocentrism" on the part of some
"Chinese immigrants" (Hua, 2006). What is not clear from the report is for how long these
Chinese immigrants have lived in the U.S. and, indeed, whether they were born in China. The
implication of the rhetoric, however, is that these Chinese are perpetual foreigners in the U.S.,
just waiting for a chance to "go home" – even if their descendants arrived in America in the
1850s.
Given these kinds of developments, Arjun Appadurai, in his essay "Patriotism and its Futures" (1993), claims for us a utopian era of postnationalism, of free international mobility, describing the U.S. as no longer a nation in itself but as a place of intersection, where deterritorialized transnational citizens come together in diasporic communities. In some ways, Appadurai's claims might be seen as echoing the sentiments expressed by Randolph Bourne in his 1916 essay, "Trans-National America." Where Bourne proposes an America that permits multiple citizenship, with individuals living part-time in the U.S. and elsewhere, Appadurai sees not multiple national affiliations but no nationalism at all in this new era of delocalized transnationalism. He writes:

For every nation-state that has exported significant numbers of its populations to the United States as refugees, tourists, or students, there is now a delocalized transnation, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity. No existing conception of Americaness can contain this large variety of transnations (Appadurai, 1993: 424).

However, the very impulse that brings these diasporic subjects to the U.S. in order to seek their fortunes, even if they are unwilling to sever cultural connections with the homeland, is evidence of the longevity of American exceptionalism and particularly of the economic dimension of exceptionalism, "the American Dream." As Appadurai rightly points out, "No existing conception of Americaness can contain this large variety of transnations." But the concept of the “un-American,” the threatening diasporic subject who is eternally foreign because he or she "retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin," is grounded in an awareness of these “transnations” and, in part through the strategy of hyphenation, uses this awareness to strengthen the ideology of American white supremacy.

In a direct response to Appadurai's claims, Kandice Chuh points to the availability of racialist discourses that impose upon migrants "unmeltable" status, excluding them even as they are rendered "perpetual foreigners." The metaphor of the foreigner who refuses to "melt" into the multicultural "pot" is a dangerous one. Chuh highlights the example of Japanese-Americans who were literally "excluded" from designated geographical areas in the Pacific Northwest because of the perception that they inhabited a "cultural Japan" that extended across the Pacific to the U.S. This is not a phenomenon specific to the U.S.: commentators on the global Chinese diaspora, such as Ien Ang and Wang Gungwu, point to historical instances of pogroms against peranakan Chinese communities in Malaysia and Indonesia as examples of the very real dangers of being perceived as "diasporic"; that is, of sustaining a cultural nationalism that is hostile to the domestic culture of the nation of residence.

The racialist discourse of the "unmeltable ethnic" or the subversive alien seems to dominate the post 9/11 world, supporting a powerful regime of nationalistic belonging and ethnic exclusion. The soundtrack to the film Crash emphasizes the unavailability of belonging that is the consequence of mono-hyphenation. Throughout, the abstract music gives the action an air of unreality which shifts abruptly as a helicopter shot distances us from an arguing crowd, and the Stereophonics song “Maybe Tomorrow” plays as the final credits roll. With the refrain, "Maybe tomorrow / I'll find my way home," this song expresses a yearning for "home" which is denied by the film's refusal to acknowledge, let alone endorse, the possibility of multiple homes or forms of multiple transnational belonging. While the song addresses “tomorrow,” the film narrative is largely retrospective, showing the audience what happened "yesterday," with the sense of ontological finality that the past carries. The failure of the liberal multicultural "experiment" represented in the film therefore acquires an epistemological reality that the audience carries outside the cinema. At the same time,
American exceptionalism does offer a kind of belonging to those few who are able to revise their "ethnic-ness" and become complicit in the ideology of American white supremacy. Nation-based academic disciplines remain ethically complicit with this exclusionary regime of nationalistic identification, so long as these disciplines do the following: replicate the discourse of mono-hyphenation; privilege subjects, textual canons, and educational courses that collude with the interests of the racialized white nation state; and refuse to engage in what Gerald Vizenor calls the "word wars" against western colonial impositions.

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