From Politics of Location to Its De-politicization in *One Man’s Bible* by Gao Xingjian

Farida Chishti  
Government Post Graduate Islamia College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan  
farida.chishti@gmail.com

Abstract

Drawing on the Deleuzian theory of de-territorialization of the subject from the center of power, this article picks up the controversy regarding Gao Xingjian’s misogyny with reference to his second novel *One Man’s Bible* and presents an alternative perspective on his gender treatment. With the help of textual analysis, it contends that far from being anti-feminist as is generally assumed in critical circles, Gao is gender neutral, and allows the same subjective agency to woman as man. Both male and female protagonists in the novel tend to hegemonize each other on the basis of their location in the geo-political or socio-cultural scale of power until each dislocates from his/her power base to undergo a qualitative transformation that changes their world view. It is their minority position which helps them surmount their tendency to hegemonize or minoritize the other and thus to become “minortarian.”

Keywords  
location – power – de-territorialization – becoming-minortarian

1 Introduction

This article presents an alternative version of diaspora in the fiction of Gao Xingjian 高行健, a writer from China now based in France. The study focuses on his second novel *One Man’s Bible*\(^1\) in the light of the Deleuzian concept

of diaspora as de-territorialization of the subject from the center of power. I argue that in leaving home, the male protagonist in the novel actually shifts from his “majoritarian” position in life to enter into the process of “becoming-minoritarian,” which is an important part of the trajectory from “being” to “becoming” in the diaspora theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.\(^2\) Now, both at home and abroad, an exile’s is a minority position which Deleuze terms as a position of vantage. That Gao’s subject in exile learns to relocate himself in the marginalized space of other minorities including gender is the contention of this research.

I consider the general impression of anti-feminism and misogyny about Gao as open to contestation. It necessitates a discussion of “the politics of location,” a phrase I borrow from the American feminist poet and critic Adrienne Rich.\(^3\) By location, she means one’s placement in a particular community which determines one’s world view or how one looks at oneself and others. The critic owns that her location as a white United States citizen had led her to arrogantly believe herself at the center even while addressing the issues in her multiple marginal capacities as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist. In assuming that “we” represented the whole of womankind, she created what was a replica of false male universal, thereby perpetuating Whiteman’s patriarchal cultural norms. It is only when she learned to include the invisible members of the female community that she admits she could acquire a global, human vision. In the same way, starting as a typical product of his indigenous culture, Gao’s subject in exile attains qualitative changes during his journeys which shape his revised vision of woman as a co-human.

2  **Review of Literature**

In 2000, Gao became the first writer in Chinese to win the Nobel prize for literature. Though in its announcement of the Award, the Swedish Academy specially commends Gao’s credentials as a gender-neutral author who shows rare sensitivity towards women, critics have generally labeled him as a sexist and a misogynist. Gao’s concept of a split self has intrigued a large number of critics to study his narrative technique of using pronouns in place of proper nouns from a variety of perspectives including gender. In one of the earliest


post-Award responses, Kam Louie⁴ reads woman in *Soul Mountain⁵* as the subsidiary part of the male order for both the author and the narrator. Similarly, Gao’s splitting of self into multiple pronouns of both genders leads Gary Gang Xu⁶ to present a thesis on subjectivity in Gao which is ostensibly gendered in his fiction. Gender and feminism form the basis of another probe by Carlos Rojas⁷ who studies the issues of maternity, femininity and ideology in *One Man’s Bible* in the light of a psychoanalytical/Oedipal framework. Though not her key concern, Jessica Yeung⁸ has also accused Gao of denying subjective agency to women in *One Man’s Bible*. This calls for a re-reading of the novel in which his gender position appears particularly debatable. Addressing this need, the present study hopes to be an important point of departure from the dominant critical current. Its Deleuzian framework of de-/re-territorialization as the theoretical base of argument is crucial in refuting the general assumption as presented above. The aim is to demonstrate how the rootless, homeless status of the exile protagonist and his refusal to belong to any fixed territory of belief or ideology help him resist the hegemony of land-locked notions like home and its various identity constructs such as gender, class or culture.

3 Theoretical Template

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of de-territorialization keeps a subject in diaspora perpetually on the move between “being” and “becoming.” The movement becomes symptomatic of a nomadic lifestyle in response to the fixity of all closed sedentary territories or orders. The two critics worked it out in their seminal joint venture *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,*⁹ but I shall also draw on *Nomadic Theory*¹⁰ by Rosi Braidotti, who is a key exponent

---

8 Jessica Yeung, *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian’s Writings as Cultural Translations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).
9 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
of Deleuzian nomadology in the present century. My premise is that exilic flight in Gao's fiction is a nomadic strategy to resist the power dynamics of a “majoritarian” culture. Exile is the ambivalent position of not being able to settle down anywhere. This state of “being” a minority in a dominant, collectivist order helps him reach out to other minor, disempowered groups, and thus “become” minoritarian.

A nomad in a simple dictionary sense is someone or something that lives by wandering from place to place, defying roots or attachment to a single territory. Dwelling for nomads is not synonymous with “being housed or settled” at one place. In abandoning home, diaspora defies family roots or attachments to the native soil. Their journeys replicate an internal movement which in turn defies subjective fixity or stability. Likewise, when Gao’s exile dislocates from home, instead of settling down at one place, he symbolically relocates himself in a nomadic space. In contrast to home as a confined and bordered area, the nomadic territory in Deleuze is an open, linear space teeming with the possibility for “rhizomatic” growth in the subjects. A rhizome is the underground stem of a plant. Unlike a tree which stands fixed on the strength of a central root system, a rhizome sends out multiple roots and off-shoots from its nodes and grows horizontally. I draw on this Deleuzian trope for Gao’s subject who tends to grow non-hierarchically in multiple directions as against the static, vertical, neatly organized, tree-like growth of the humanist self.

The nomadic theory involves the subject in an on-going process of “becoming” minoritarian, i.e., moving continuously away from a solid, majoritarian to a fluid or minoritarian subjectivity which tends to float from the dominant to the dominated side of the dualist binary. In other words, the self moves away from its mainstream, majoritarian position of power towards the proverbial “others.” In the forthcoming textual analysis, I shall deploy this scale of nomadic growth to measure the distance Gao’s diaspora traverses from home and its patriarchal culture to gender inclusivity and balance in Bhabha-esque “third” spaces of the East and the West. I work on One Man’s Bible as my major source of data collection. Here the exile’s physical act of slipping away from state/societal oppression becomes synonymous with de-territorialization of the subject in the Deleuzian sense. If territory is a clearly demarcated, politically exclusive space like home/country, territorialization is the act of subjecting one to its set rules and laws. So, when an artist chooses to dislocate from this bordered territory, he de-territorializes himself from the power base of the dominant order. It gives Gao’s self-exile an opportunity to enter into a process of quali-

---

tative transformation which is visible particularly in his attitude towards the
gender “other.” Instead of fighting the forces of power in his country, when the
exile chooses to flee home, he is dodging not only the oppressive machinery of
the then communist regime but also his own innate tendency to hegemonize
women.

The majority in Deleuze refers to the dominant subject or the static collec-
tivity like society or state. In Foucault’s theory of power, those in power hege-
monize individuals to turn them into docile and compliant subjects of society
or citizens of the state. Deleuze valorizes fleeing as an act of breaking loose
from all power centers; it’s an attempt to dodge ideological arrest. Whether the
panoptic schema of a political system or the social pressure to marry and settle
down in life, Gao’s narrator resists being captured at all cost. Marriage, a state
of being captured in Deleuze, is just as closed a territory as embracing an ide-
ology: both signify a territorial arrest which is opposed to ideological fluidity
and freedom that exilic movement symptomizes. To incorporate these tenets, I
also draw on Rosi Braidotti as a critical source on Deleuze. The rationale for my
choice of a feminist critic is not only the presence of some feminist issues in
Gao’s works but also the marginalized status of his male subjects as well as that
of the author himself in China. The position seems like that of a woman writer
anywhere. That’s why for all his hetero-erotic, male/masculinist exterior, Gao
shows a sensitive attitude towards his female characters. However, when he and
his subjects dislocate from the gender or sexual terrain, it is not an anti-feminist
stance. With a slipperiness characteristic of a nomad, Gao dodges being tagged
as a feminist writer. The woman-man relationship is just one aspect of human
life along with other problematic issues of global standing which may attract
his attention with equal force. Moreover, a nomad remains in an intensive state
of subject formation in such a way as to move constantly from one frame of
thought and practice to another.

Braidotti theorizes nomadic thought as replacing “the metaphysics of being
with a process ontology bent on becoming.”12 Being refers to the center: the
fixed and the static Molar, Majoritarian subject, while process is a location of
marginality and rootlessness: a Molecular or Minority position. Some of the
social locations of minority in the contemporary world of diaspora are exiles,
migrants, refugees, itinerants, etc. who while seeking to belong to a particular
territory actually remain afloat. That allows them to remain in a fluid, formative
process. From a gender perspective, man represents the center, the overarching
majority in both the white and non-white societies. There is no possible

12 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 7.
becoming for majority unless it undoes “its central position altogether.” To this end, nomadic thought introduces “an ethics of qualitative transformation,” possible through inducing a “privileged state of the minority consciousness.” All becomings are minoritarian in the sense that they necessitate a movement in the direction of the others of classical dualism. Braidotti counts women, children, blacks, natives, animals, insects, etc. among the empirical minorities and calls them “the privileged starting points for active and empowering processes of becoming.” This is so not only in case of men but equally for women for they too need to dissolve their molar subjectivity as a Minority, and include the sub-categories of other minorities among or within them – “the others of the Other” in Luce Irigaray’s words. A subject thus needs “constant deterritorialization and relocation into patterns of different becomings” such as becoming-minoritarian, becoming-woman, becoming-woman of a woman etc. The process of becoming-minoritarian, warns Braidotti, does not mean a simple inversion of gender or colonial roles which could repeat the master-slave pattern of the conventional power positions. Becoming-minoritarian is the acquired ability of the subject to deterritorialize from its self-centric power base, and to penetrate into the consciousness of another. It is thus “the first move in the deterritorialization of the dominant subject” and the process continues ad infinitum from human to animals and other “minor” forms of being.

4 Textual Analysis: From Minority to “Becoming-Minoritarian”

Born in the center of a patriarchal society where men enjoy a fixed position of power, the protagonist in One Man’s Bible finds himself gradually reduced to a minority in his various spatio-temporal locations: “he” in the past, a budding writer of heightened sensibility and an apolitical individual in the politically volatile mass culture of China; and “you” at present, a middle-aged Asian single man in the West, dodging everywhere long-term emotional and familial investment since divorcing his wife. Thus, in both his locations of time and place, he is an exile. A large part of One Man’s Bible is replete with the memory of how

13 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 42.
14 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 6.
15 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 36.
17 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 21.
18 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 43.
the narrator comes under the constant majoritarian gaze, be it the parental, societal or political authority. A misfit as an artist in mainstream Chinese society under the communists during the Cultural Revolution [1966–76], he feels stripped of all rights for creative self-expression. “The Party” in power subverts his dominant position as a male author, forcing him to move to the margins: it “interfered in everything from his thinking and writing to his private life.”

It is then that traditionally female attributes come to be associated with him: fear, doubt, inhibition, insecurity, and a sense of being imprisoned, gagged and silenced. Denied a voice in an over-intrusive state and society, he is an exile at home, desperately in need of a private space which he could call home. The need soon transforms into the recurrent desire for a room of his own, an independent space in which to communicate or hold a dialogue with himself and others: “He needed a sound-proof room where he could shut the door and talk loudly without being heard so that he could say whatever he wanted to say, a domain where an individual could voice his thoughts.”

Then again: “More and more he needed a room to protect his privacy.” The trope is reminiscent of a woman-writer’s need for “a room of one’s own” in Virginia Woolf’s eponymous essay (1938). Later in the novel, we find him burning scores of his manuscripts to avoid arrest and persecution at the hands of the regime. This connects him to all those women writers and poets who have been denied the opportunity for self-expression. It is like forcing an expectant mother not to give birth as in Margaret Atwood’s poem “Spelling”; or the sense of loss for “the books that are not there” in Woolf’s text.

Even when he equates writing with masturbation – “he comforted himself by masturbating, and obtained slow release by secretly writing” –, it pairs him more with Hélène Cixous rather than the majoritarian males. In “The Laugh of Medusa,” Cixous evokes sexual stimulation while inviting fellow women to experience the exhilaration of giving expression to their repressed energy as writers. It is this feminized reduction of his male as well as authorial subjectivity that helps Gao’s narrator to move into a “gyno-space” where he enters the privileged state of not only “becoming-woman of a man” but also helps his female counterpart attain “becoming-woman of a woman.”

---

19 Gao Xingjian, One Man’s Bible, 18.
20 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 17.
21 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 18.
23 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 447.
When the subject in *One Man’s Bible* chooses self-exile and leaves home, the change in his location is affirmed by a continuous shift in the narratorial voice between “you” and “he”: at first “he” as a Chinese migrant in Central France looking back to the past home; then “you” in the immediate present as a Mainlander in Hong Kong where his different accent marks him out as an outsider for the Cantonese-speaking majority. He is thus minoritized everywhere. As long as he stays in China, his Western liberal and “pro-democracy” frame of mind turns him into a suspect for the authoritarian nationalist regime. However, his constant exposure to the Western culture in the West fails to completely rid him of his native subjectivity so that “you” appears not being much different from “he,” more particularly in his dealings with women. Judged from the “masculinist” norms of their indigenous culture, both “you” and “he” get a gradual diminution in their “manly” size in gender relations. The first thing we notice about “he” is that his female lovers stand higher than him in intelligence, boldness and resourcefulness. They make him realize his shortcomings. It is they who take the subject position to initiate an affair and terminate it at will. Lin, the daughter of a high ranking cadre and already married to a military man, not only masterminds their nightly meetings at her parents’ house, but is also a “fireball of lust”\(^{25}\) in bed. Notice how his position in comparison is feminized: “Sometimes she was quite unreasonable but he needed to exercise self-restraint. Lin dared to play with fire, but he had to consider the consequences.”\(^{26}\) His masculinist mentality certainly does not let him enjoy this “degraded” position: keenly aware of his own impotence, he wonders “how to make it a relationship between equals so that he was not simply the recipient of Lin’s love.”\(^{27}\) Politically more discrete than him, she is the first one to decide and ultimately breaks off. In his present capacity as “you” the migrant in Hong Kong, he fares no better. Margarethe, his white German-Jew lover from the West, overshadows and minoritizes him.

The general response of critics to “the sex scenes” in *One Man’s Bible* is open to interrogation. Repetitiveness of these scenes and a shortfall in their quality are the most common comments. For example, Jessica Yeung complains: “The consistent Othering of the women in these scenes makes this part of the text problematic rather than attractive, quite apart from the fact that even these scenes come across as repetitive and lacking in literary appeal.”\(^{28}\) This essentialist view generates the need for a close reading of this part of the text. The

\(^{25}\) Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 88.
\(^{26}\) Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 88.
\(^{27}\) Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 170.
scenes between “you” and his foreign lover deploy the dramatic technique of running dialogues. Each time they are together, there appears room for not only negotiation between the two genders but also different historical times and places. For example, on one of the nights they are together, she suggests: “We can each sleep on our side of the bed, and we can sit up to talk.”29 A little later, she again says: “I just want to talk with you.”30 Thus, in spite of the difference between their opinions, they are able to find similarities in two events of their respective country’s history: the holocaust and the Red Terror. Parallel to the main discourse, we hear multiple other “languages” entering the text in the Bakhtinian sense: of body, gender, sexuality, feminism, colonialism, postcolonialism, culture, history, race and ethnicity, etc. The polyglot form of the narrative imbues the text with a spatio-temporal breadth and complexity outside the textual “chronotope.” Thus, their engagement is creative in that it opens fresh routes and avenues of dialogue between different cultures, histories, and geographical contexts for mutual understanding which helps them both in becoming-minoritarian. I contest Yeung’s view about an “absence of women’s subjectivity, which almost makes the text misogynist.”31

The “you”-Margarethe relationship, no doubt, is loaded with Foucaultian discourse of power and subservience. Located in their respective power positions – he a male from China and she a white woman from the West – their present position remains subtly fluid. When the novel opens, the geo-political discourse sets the time about 1997, when at the end of a century-long lease, England is to hand over Hong Kong to China in June that year. As the super-powers are negotiating their territorial rights and privileges, the two nation states have a reversal in both their historical roles and positions: the ex-master is surrendering its right to administer and the old colony is taking over, thus rising in the power scale. The status of Hong Kong, the territory in question, is not clear. However, it provides an unconventional “third space” for two persons from different genders, race, cultures and geography to “co-habit” momentarily and to hold a dialogue with each other. In a contributory chapter titled “Transcultural Negotiations: Third Spaces in Modern Times,”32 Frank Shulze-Engler identifies the third space as having largely remained confined within the “normative framework of the Western Nation-states,” and stresses the need for looking up

29 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 62.
30 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 67.
31 Yeung, Ink Dances, 137.
similar situations in the non-Western cultures as well. Hong Kong in *One Man's Bible* creates one such possibility.

The frailty of the geo-political position of the colonial outpost the British are about to surrender to China as one of its territories comments on the subjective position of “you,” the lover of women. His majority position as a man is under constant threat of being overshadowed by the gender minority, and in that it is not much different from that of “he” in the past. He reacts to it in a complex way. He would like to maintain a dominant position. In spite of his long absence from his native home and his comparatively liberal view on sexuality, “you” has a strong tendency to revert to his deep-rooted indigenous subjectivity. However, circumstances decide otherwise. The historical complex of China having been a colony of the Western powers seems to determine the attitude of “you” towards Margarethe. As a white woman from the West, she dislodges the narrator from the position of authority he has inherited from his home culture. Like Adrienne Rich, her primary location as a white Western woman carries a lot of weight for both of them. The different locations of both their identities influence the way they look at each other and themselves. Politically, she exerts the domination of a colonizer over him even though geo-historically her ethno-racial location as a German-Jew holds her permanently in the painful consciousness of her race as a holocaust victim. Margarethe inhabits a complex socio-political location as simultaneously a pathetic rape victim and a powerful, promiscuous woman from the West thereby becoming, in Braidotti's words, “a contested and contradictory site where transformation must occur.”

On his side, a Chinese male by birth and lineage, “you” has inherited an Asian psyche overwhelmed by the West and its hegemonic discourses of racial superiority and potent civilization. He seems to have internalized the orientalist view of himself as a non-white. This racial complex colors his molar vision as he subjects her “lustrous white body” to his voyeuristic gaze in the novel.

Deleuze says that “[t]here is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular.” Braidotti explains it thus: “For the majority, there is no becoming – other than in the undoing of its central position altogether. The center is void; all the action is on the margins.”

A male born to rule as per his cultural norms, Gao’s “you” is habitually inclined to hegemonize women as the weaker, inferior sex till he learns to depoliticize his vision. His discourse of power is a residue of centuries of despotic rule and

---

33 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 47.
34 Gao, *One Man's Bible*, 10.
36 Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 42.
the deeply ingrained patriarchal set up of home and family in his country. His convenient assumptions about women extend to Margarethe as well though he places her somewhere in between an average man and woman: “She is too immature to discuss politics and too intelligent to be a woman.”\(^{37}\) Ironically it is she who introduces sensitive political issues for debate like Sino-German relations after the Tiananmen events of 1989. Notice his reluctance and her protest: “‘Do you mind if we don’t discuss politics?’ you ask. ‘But you can’t escape politics,’ she says.”\(^{38}\) Later, knowing she has a sharp mind, he owns he feels safer and more comfortable in the role of a listener: “Being interrogated by a woman is stressful.”\(^{39}\) Heterosexuality, the gender norm enforced in almost all Asian societies, colors his sexual vision. Woman exists for him first of all as a body which must arouse and gratify his lust. He objectifies her, subjecting her body as the object of his gaze. When they share a memory of an earlier visit by Margarethe along with a white male friend, his hetero-erotic memory focuses exclusively on her body, making her mind, or Peter’s personality, completely absent and invisible: “There stood a very beautiful young foreign woman ... [with] very big breasts. Blushing white skin and bright red lips even with no lipstick. Really sexy.”\(^{40}\) Deeply attracted to the full breasts and incredibly white body of this woman, physically penetrating her could boost his male pride, injured through a century-long experience of Western colonial penetration of China: “You say you want her, too, but you also want to see how this body, so full of life, twists and turns.”\(^{41}\) The white female body being the most desired object must remain an object. However, she is far from the shy, essentially “oriental” woman such as the “barefoot little Beijing girl who was lovely and slender.”\(^{42}\) His hetero-eroticism gives a fixed set of meaning to both the women, white and non-white, or their bodies. “You” remembers that Chinese lover of his as a perfect woman, marginalizing her human status and foregrounding her body as the only mark of her identity. She was “... a sensitive delicate body that had let you do anything you wanted.”\(^{43}\) Margarethe in comparison poses a threat to his male pride and stature. She subverts the conventional gender positions. Instead of being coy and reluctantly submissive, she marginalizes “you” with her dominant psycho-physical thrust: “The big robust body pressing hard on you with

\(^{37}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 61.

\(^{38}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 62.

\(^{39}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 116.

\(^{40}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 14.

\(^{41}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 15.

\(^{42}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 26.

\(^{43}\) Gao, One Man’s Bible, 26.
unrestrained lust and abandonment totally exhausts you." He tries to cover up his inferior status by assuming authority to judge her on moral grounds: "The girl wanted only to be a little woman, and wasn't wanton and lustful like her." His gender bias coupled with ethno-racial stereotyping makes lustfulness sound like a male prerogative; it is immoral in women, even pathological. Similarly, he essentializes the European woman as wanton while he makes a Chinese woman indulging in sex look innocent. His conventional grooming as a man does not let him endure the humiliation of being subjugated by the gender “other” who also happens to be the ex-colonizer; it’s like a continuation of colonial rule even after decolonization. As Margarethe keeps on "straddling you," he tries locating her identity in her ethno-religious background in the West, foregrounding the historical disempowerment of the Jews in Europe, particularly their victim position in Germany. He reduces and downgrades her further in terms of maturity and sobriety by calling her a “girl.” Notice how she resists this gender-colonialism by denying, correcting and questioning him:

“A very moody German girl,” you say with a smile, trying to change the atmosphere.
“I've already told you that I'm not German.”
“Right, you are a Jewish girl.”
“Anyway I'm a woman,” she says wearily.
“That's even better,” you say.
“Why is it better?” that odd ring in her voice returns.

He feels better being reminded of their gender identity. That way he may have an opportunity to exert his male power as on one occasion “you” scrutinizes her body at whim: “You get her to part her legs so you can see clearly and have her deeply imprinted in your memory.” Now, she turns the table on him by returning his voyeuristic gaze. She commands him to sit before her with all his clothes off:

“Just sit in the chair, don’t come near” she commands.
You obey, and you confront one another naked.
“I want to look at you and feel you like this,” she says.
You say it is like exposing yourself to her.
“What’s wrong with that? A man’s body is sexy in the same way, don’t feel so aggrieved.” At this, her lips curl up and she looks wickedly pleased with herself.49

She inverts the conventional gender situation by putting a male body under her gaze and presenting her discourse on it. Against his gender bias and exclusivity, she calls for gender balance and neutrality. A man needs to strip himself off all artificial trappings such as his false pride, inflated ego, a sense of not being accountable for anything he does, his hypocrisy and his double standard of morality. That she has the agency to execute commands and force him to obey is evident at a formal level as well. She utters all direct speech in the given text, using a first-person speaking voice. He is made to feel vulnerable and allowed to speak only once and that too in the form of reported speech. We get the rest of his responses, such as his reluctance, embarrassment, protest, anger or a sense of injured pride, indirectly through her amused and ironic comments.

Margarethe remains in a commanding position and has a compelling influence to not only reduce him to a minority but also assist his becoming-minoritarian. Lest this sounds one-sided, “you,” too, has a role in helping her confront her repressed past and become minoritarian. Thus together, through a dialogic move, the nature of their relationship registers a growth: from “flesh only,”50 it acquires a deeper and more sensitive, symbiotic involvement; from not knowing, they move towards knowing and understanding each other’s psychological and geo-political situations. Initially they both are skeptical about building bridges through dialogue: he refuses to talk about his past experience: “It is impossible for her to understand. It was China …. Things in China can’t be explained by language alone.”51 Similarly, she exclaims that it is impossible for a man to comprehend a rape victim’s predicament. Still, she is the first one to coax and prompt him to come out of his self-induced amnesia about his traumatic past: “ ‘To understand your suffering is to understand you, can’t you see?’ her voice is gentle, she wants to comfort you.”52 He has long resisted this cathartic move on the grounds that “Memories are depressing.”53 However, “you” soon finds himself telling her all about the excesses of Cultural Revolution.

49 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 121.
50 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 12.
51 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 29.
52 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 79.
53 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 58.
“You” carries a cartload of what Braidotti calls “negative capital,” the traumatic memories of being an exile at home which he seems to have forcibly and diligently repressed. On her side, Margarethe carries the burden of her personal trauma which she has not shared with anyone. This is crucial to the process of becoming minoritarian. We have seen how selective “you” has been in the beginning while sharing his past with us or his White lover: home, family, Margarethe’s visit, his Chinese lovers; most of the details remembered could boost his ego to pose as majority. He has to undo this posture if he wants to cross over to the other side of the gender divide. Moreover, becoming-minoritarian is a state of becoming-intense in one’s sensibilities towards others. In Deleuzian theory, it is equivalent to the acquired ability to “transcend external resemblances to arrive at internal homologies .... It is a question of ordering differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations.” Deleuze draws on the “structural order of understanding” in Levi Strauss which seeks resemblances between different groups or species. Following the structuralist model “lung is to human what gill is to fish,” Deleuze argues: “A man can never say: ‘I am a bull, a wolf ...’ but he can say: ‘I am to a woman what the bull is to the cow.’ ” This is how Margarethe builds up a relation of mutuality of dialogue as “you” starts recounting his micro narrative of the Cultural Revolution. She stitches together the parallel discourses of psycho-physical and intellectual genocide when she remarks: “That’s how it was with the Nazis.” Reasoning in this way, “you” is led to view a closer connection between the two of them in spite of the obvious differences in their geo-political placements: the holocaust is to the Jews what the Cultural Revolution is to the Chinese; rape is to Margarethe what intellectual harassment has been to the narrator-artist. He who had been trapped in the personal trauma of his own national history comes in contact with another person traumatized in another part of the world. The common nature of both their sufferings removes the gender, racial and national barriers. The narrator owns that “[s]he has deeply penetrated your feelings and thoughts. When you took possession of her body, she took possession of both your body and mind.” Later he discovers that through her story “She compels you, not just to enter her physically but also to enter deep into the secret recesses of her mind.” For a man to understand a woman as a minority requires delving deep

57 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 79.
58 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 120.
59 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 120.
into the female psyche. From his masculine, molar complacency, he needs to come down to a molecular level of sensitivity. It is when she has led him to that level that she confides to him the traumatic memory of how her art teacher subjected her to rape for two years when she was just 13. Step by step “you” comes to understand and empathize with the battered psyche of a raped girl from a human perspective. Forming thus a symbiotic alliance, they are now related by “empathy and affective affinity” rather than any common ideological goal or agenda. Deleuze places becoming “in the domain of symbiosis that brings into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation.”

Like “you,” Margarethe too requires a molecular dispersion of her molar, consolidated identity as a powerful white woman from the West. Just as Adrienne Rich learns to depoliticize her majoritarian location as an American White woman by including “the others of the Other” to embrace a broad based feminism, so the power Margarethe exudes as a white majority requires her to undergo “becoming-woman of a woman.” This contests Yeung’s view about “absence of women’s subjectivity [in One Man’s Bible] which makes the text misogynist.”

Like “you” concealing “he” as a minority under a confident exterior, she, too, conceals within her a repressed, minoritized self which evokes painful memories. One cannot eliminate this minority within the Minority by silencing it. One needs to own and embrace a rape victim or a guilty self for achieving self-individuation. At first, Margarethe is reluctant to talk about this entity trapped within. In relating “his-story,” he has realized the change in the nature of their relationship; so now he insists to hear her story. He tells her repeatedly that he really wants to understand her as a person. He comes out of his male complacency and begs her confidence: “Margarethe if you want mutual understanding, not just a sexual relationship, then it isn’t a matter of what you want. We should be able to talk about anything.” So in the end she promises that one day she will tell “you,” as she really wants to communicate with him, not just sexually. And when she does, it is difficult for him in the beginning to relate to her position. When she says, “Rape is rape,” he bluntly admits, “I’ve never experienced it.” As she recounts the details of the incident, his reactions are important: “You shudder”; then, “You have a drink and try hard to think about something else,” and then, “Left speechless, you light

60 Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 32.
61 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 238.
62 Yeung, Ink Dances, 137.
63 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 117.
64 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 118.
a cigarette.” Soon he is able to transfer the image of a young bruised female body to his own budding intellect battered and brutalized in the street frenzy during the Cultural Revolution. Her experience is located in body, his in mind:

You say that you have experienced the feeling of being raped, of being raped by the political authorities, and it has clogged up your heart. You can understand her, and can understand the anxiety, frustration, and oppression that she can’t rid herself of. Rape is not a sex game. It was the same for you, and it was long afterwards ... that you realized it had been a form of rape.

Mere transference of the image, however, is not sufficient to make “you” realize the complex sense of torture suffered by a female psyche. His claim that he understands her is inadequate to comfort her; she bursts out in agony: “No, you don’t understand, it’s impossible for a man to understand ....” He needs to empathize more intensely with the female situation; to realize what it feels like being a frightened woman; to know and understand the whole truth from a female perspective. So she re-enacts the scene of violence by re-living the pain, enforcing on him the role of the rapist. My premise is that through this inter-subjective, gender-subversive role-play, she ultimately leads both of them towards becoming-woman. “What she wants for you is to suffer,” to let him penetrate the anguish of the female soul under distress. Then again, “What she wanted to convey to you was the feeling that after rape, the betrayed and alienated body no longer belonged to her.” What she feels here is more than a sense of having been wronged. Could the victim in any way have been responsible for the wrong perpetrated on her?

While exploring the moral implications inherent in pronouns and gendered subjectivity in Gao’s novels, Gary Gang Xu discusses this sadomasochistic scene in the light of Freudian theory of sadomasochism and trauma. Also drawing on Slavoj Zizek’s concept of the theatricality of masochism, Gary argues how the traumatized self splits into two, one directing the play and the other acting it out; the super-ego presiding over the infliction of punishment and the ego undergoing it. The whole procedure, the critic demonstrates, affirms moral rectification which goes in line with moral masochism as one of the three forms.

---

65 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 118.
66 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 122.
67 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 122.
68 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 83.
69 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 134.
Freud has categorized in his theory of trauma. This self-inflicted punishment points towards a sense of guilt underlining Margarethe's sense of having been wronged. So the situation she wants to appraise “you” is not all that simple. The main thrust of my argument is towards tracing a certain moral purposefulness inherent in it. I mean to re-direct Gary’s contention by relating it to the concept of a majoritarian's becoming-minoritarian and a woman's becoming-woman of a rape-victim.

A textual analysis of the extract from *One Man's Bible* reveals a variation of the theme of inverting the gender binaries: “On the last night she got you to rape her. It was not sex play, she really had you tie her up, got you to tie up her hands, got you to beat her with a leather belt, got you to beat the body that she hated.” The description subverts colonial as well as inter-gender power dynamics of dominance and subservience. The third person narrative voice creates a distancing effect corresponding to the sense of alienation Margarethe mentions between herself and her battered body. Repetition of “she got you” symptomizes the agency the female acquires and exerts on the male. However, the wielding of this power is void of any triumphant show of strength in a gender/colonial contest. The sadness of the enactment belies it being a game for erotogenic excitement or thrill in celebrating the victory of one contender over another. The situation is complicated as it is informed by a moral dimension of sadomasochism such as that which Gary debates in relation to *One Man’s Bible*. Here a European woman is exerting control over an ex-colonized male from her dual position of being a White majoritarian, and a woman doubly minoritized by the memory of a personal and collective history of victimization.

Obviously traumatized, and just like “you,” Margarethe needs courage to re-write the history of violence inscribed on her body as well as memory. As a girl she comes under tremendous social pressure, and dares not tell it to anybody: “At first I was frightened, frightened all others would find out. He kept asking me to his studio and I didn’t dare tell my mother, because she wasn’t well. At that time we were very poor, my parents had separated and my father had gone back to Germany, and I didn’t want to stay at home.” What problematizes the situation here is the fact that of the many options, she chooses being raped for two years by her teacher. “You” takes the role of a conventional society and protests why she had not resisted. She tries to sublimate her non-resistance or the secrecy she attached to her affair under multiple covers: considerateness for her ailing mother, their poverty, the broken family and her need for

---

70 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 134.
71 Gao, *One Man’s Bible*, 118.
escaping the drudgery of home, all of which, according to her, forced her into this compromising position. What belies Margarethe’s projection of herself as a victim, however, is her choice of a continuously victim or marginal position. Self-justification hides the sense of guilt. What started initially as a rape by force appears a rape by consent on all subsequent occasions. She carries the guilt and the torment of having consented to the oppressor. In line with Gary’s contention, I also notice a tension between ego and superego. Margarethe’s narration of how she ran into her doppelgänger at his studio affirms this. Freud would call this identical alter ego or split personality as a personality disorder, an aberration, or an uncanny phenomenon. However, the concept of a divided self recurs in an anti-Oedipus, affirmative context in Deleuze and Guattari who use “Schizophrenia” in the subtitle of A Thousand Plateaus as a positive sign of subjective multiplicity. The presence of a “double” that appears at Margarethe’s continuous violation of the moral code suggests a socially conditioned, molar part of herself as against another which remains resistant to social subjectification: “It’s impossible for you to understand that look! I’m talking about the way that girl looked me over. I hated myself, not just that girl. It was only through her eyes that I was able to see myself ....”72 The morally attuned self generates a sense of guilt which transmits itself into a hatred for “the body that had prematurely become a woman’s,”73 hence the self-imposed punishment through an artificially induced violence. She may revert to her majoritarian position of a white woman in Asia, but she knows she is bound to remain a minority: it is impossible for her “to live the life of a normal woman, because she could never be satisfied.”74

In the beginning “you” tries to dispel the sting of bitterness by taking it all as a game, a fun activity for sexual arousal. But that was not what she wanted; what she actually wanted was for him to beat her. The sense of guilt requires punishment. And when she finally brings this terrible enactment to an end, he immediately throws down the belt and caresses her: “You apologized … Then as you felt her tears wetting your face, your own tears began to flow .... She said she wanted you to cry, that when you cry, you are more real.”75 In a patriarchal society with its cultural constraints for men not to cry in public lest they appear effeminate, Margarethe brings “you” down from his high pedestal of a macho man to that of a “raped” woman.

72 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 119.
73 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 119.
74 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 135.
75 Gao, One Man’s Bible, 134–5.
5  Conclusion: Landing in a Depoliticized Space

Through mutual sharing of their past, we have witnessed a two-way drive for a positively transformed subjectivity. When their tears mingle, boundaries blur and contraries interfuse; the barriers erected by majority/phallocentric conventions are pulled down and the two genders enter into a mutually beneficial, symbiotic alliance. This is a moment of transformation, of becoming-woman of a man as well as becoming-woman of a woman. “You” gets an “other-than-man’s perspective”; he is able to see what Margarethe wants him to see. He relates to her at the human level where it is not difficult to see that a woman is as likely to succumb to nature as a man. What “you” had heard from a distance, he is now made to feel in all its complexity and suffers almost first-hand like a woman. He is led to move in a feminine or gyno-space where he comes to realize what it feels like to be a rape-victim by choice. The intellectual violence that “he” was subjected to aligns “you” to a raped girl-woman: wronged first for having been a victim of adult male violence, and then for being judged on strict moral grounds. This is coming a long way from his erstwhile judgmental stance on Margarethe, and the question about her “character” which he raises from time to time. Notice the change wrought by understanding: “A one hundred per cent woman, you said. No, a wanton woman, she said. You said, no. She was a good woman.”76 A little later comes the moral recognition: “Margarethe does not need to purify herself, there is no need for her to repent, and moreover rebirth is impossible. She is, she is just like you ....”77 So far he was trapped in the trauma of his personal and Chinese history. Co-habiting with Margarethe has enabled him to open out, cross the gender and cultural borders and relate to her on human grounds. This is what Braidotti means by nomadic memories being affirmative; they lead to transformation and transversality of self: “Remembering is consequently not about being equal to yourself, but rather in differing as much as possible from all you had been before.”78 The experience of diaspora thus has been enriching to both the genders. Their symbiotic alliance has influenced both their personal visions of the other. Though all male narrators in Gao happen to be avowed heterosexuals, they end up being re-formed subjects or “subjects-as-space,”79 to quote JanMohamed. Negotiation with one woman has

76  Gao, One Man’s Bible, 134.
77  Gao, One Man’s Bible, 137.
78  Braidotti, Nomadic Theory, 33.
enabled him to give way, to share space with the gender as well as other others, an area which this study has opened for future researchers to explore.

Works Cited


