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THE STRANGE SPACE OF HOME OUTSIDE HOME: DIASPORA AS HETEROTOPIA IN SKY LEE'S *DISAPPEARING MOON CAFÉ* (1990)

Abstract: The notion of heterotopia – a space which simultaneously mirrors and distorts the reflection of the real world – introduced by Michel Foucault is often used in human geography and social sciences to discuss different spaces existing within multicultural societies. One of such spaces is a diaspora, a place uniting people on the basis of their ethnic identity and inhabited by those who are often perceived by the host culture as undesirable and, therefore, should be isolated. However, diaspora is not empty and idle; instead, its inhabitants use the space provided by the host society to recreate the places known to them, mirroring and, at the same time, distorting and modifying them. The aim of this paper is to discuss the depiction of diaspora as heterotopia in SKY Lee's debut novel *Disappearing Moon Café*.

Key words: diasporic literature, heterotopia, Chinese-Canadian literature, SKY Lee

Introduction

In his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Robin Cohen defines a diaspora as a community of people who "retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland including its location, history and achievements, […] believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate […] and continue in various ways to relate to that homeland" ([1997] 2008: 6). Cohen's definition highlights two aspects of diaspora which contribute significantly to the common understanding of the concept, namely the isolation from the host society and the need to recreate the elements of the abandoned homeland.

The need to isolate and separate themselves from the host society experienced by the members of diaspora can be attributed to numerous factors, including but not limited to the feelings of dislocation[1] and rootlessness[2] and immigrant trauma. Perez Foster observes that "[t]he loss of familiar social networks is especially hard on families and women, who often find themselves isolated, forced to deal on their own with the multiple demands of life in a foreign environment" (2001: 154). This feeling of isolation is fuelled by social, cultural, and personal factors such as a downturn in socioeconomic status of the family, feelings of shame and frustration caused by the lack of fluency in the host language, and inability to complete simple tasks (Perez Foster 2001: 154).

In turn, the need to recreate the abandoned homeland in the host country can be attributed to what Avtar Brah calls homing desire, "a process of constructing a place of belonging through collective memory as well as through different cultural practices, such as rituals and traditions" ([1996] 2005: 180); hence, "it is not a desire to return home, but rather a desire for home or a longing to belong" (Brah, [1996] 2005: 180) and aims at constructing a space that can – and will – become home. The recreation of the elements of the lost homeland can be also attributed to the strong feeling of place attachment which motivates the members of diaspora to maintain "physical or symbolic proximity to the important place" (Scannell and Gifford 2017: 361) through such actions as displaying photographs or other artefacts. The perception of the homeland as a place "offering a sense of safety and security" (Scannell and Gifford 2017: 361) further motivates the members of diaspora to incorporate its elements within the space provided to them by the host society.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how those two aspects of diasporic life can be used to depict diaspora and diasporic space as heterotopia. For this purpose, the depiction of the Chinese diaspora and Chinatown in SKY Lee's debut novel *Disappearing Moon Café* will be analysed.

[1] Dislocation is understood here as not only the physical movement from one place to another, but also as cultural, psychological, personal, and social experiences resulting from such an act (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007: 65).

[2] Rootlessness can be simply described as the feeling resulting from being cut off from one's cultural roots and placed in a completely different environment. However, the notion of rootlessness can be connected to that of homelessness as "home as *roots* means one's source of identity and meaningfulness, involving a sense of security which is […] not the same as emotional security; it is usually called 'ontological security' because it is concerned with one's sense of 'being-in-the-world'" (Somerville 1992: 533).

Heterotopia and diaspora

Michel Foucault introduced the concept of heterotopia in his now-(in)famous article *Of Other Spaces*. Foucault describes heterotopias as "real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sides, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites […] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" ([1967] 1986: 24). The term itself was derived from medicine where 'heterotopia' is used to refer to "tissue that develops at a place other than is usual. The tissue is not diseased or particularly dangerous, but merely placed elsewhere, a dislocation" (Johnson 2006: 77).

There are two possible meanings of heterotopia: it can be either a space in which the accepted rules and logic of the society are suspended and which allows people to do things which would not be accepted in the society, or a space which functions as a mirror for the society and its affairs showing the dissonance between what it should be and what it really is (Foucault [1967] 1986: 24-27). Hence, it is not surprising that Foucault links the concept of heterotopia with that of utopia, placing them on the opposite ends of the spectrum:

> Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case are fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also […] real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a king of effectively enacted utopia […]. […] Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. […] But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. (Foucault [1967] 1986: 24-25)

Therefore, heterotopias can be seen as realised and localisable utopias – where utopias are fantastic and fable-like, heterotopias are disturbing in their reality (Foucault, [1966] 2005: xix). Although they may seem anti-utopian in their depiction of the society and civilisation, heterotopias seem to show the possible dangers of utopian spaces (Jameson, 1982: 153) – while utopias are "holistic, imaginary, critical, normative, prescriptive and (often) future-oriented [but also contain] descriptions of the present [and can be] presented-oriented" (Levitas, 2005: 14), heterotopias are "fragmentary, concrete, value-free, descriptive, and present- and past-oriented" (Johnson, 2012).

According to Foucault, there are six principles of heterotopia describing in detail its functioning. In the first of those principles, Foucault claims that heterotopias can be found in all cultures and societies although they may take

different forms: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. The former can be found in primitive societies and are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of a crisis [such as] adolescents, menstruating [and] pregnant women, [and] elderly" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 24) while the latter exist predominantly in modern societies and are described as spaces "where individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 25), such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals.

The second principle states that the function of heterotopia can change as the time passes; this change is usually motivated by the transformation undergone by the society within which a given heterotopia exists. Foucault illustrates this principle using the example of cemeteries, the perception of which has changed from one motivated by religion to more aesthetics-motivated (Foucault [1967] 1986: 25). The third principle addresses the capability of heterotopia to "juxtapos[e] in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 25-26). This characteristic of heterotopia can be observed in theatres, cinemas, and gardens – spaces which bring together elements coming from different, often very distant and exotic places.

In the fourth principle, Foucault links heterotopias to "slices in time" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 26) which open to heterochronia. Hence, heterotopia "begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 26); in other words, the moment heterotopia is established, a normal time becomes suspended. This suspension of time can be observed in cemeteries (which interrupt time and replace it with quasi-eternity), museums and libraries (which accumulate time), and fairgrounds (which highlight the transition of time).

The fifth principle focuses on "a system of opening and closing that both isolates [heterotopias] and makes them penetrable" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 26). Foucault notes that heterotopias differ from public spaces in the regard of accessibility – heterotopias cannot be accessed freely with the entry being either compulsory or granted only after completing rites or purifications which can be religious or sanitary in nature. The last principle claims that heterotopias "have a function in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault [1967] 1986: 27) – they can create either an imaginary space exposing the illusion of every real space in the society (also known as heterotopia of illusion) or a real space that is 'other', perfect, organised, and almost utopian (heterotopia of compensation). The former can be found in brothels and the latter – in religious colonies (Foucault [1967] 1986: 27).

Taking into consideration the features of heterotopia, it is worth asking the following question: Can diaspora be therefore qualified as heterotopia? At the first sight, diasporas and their relationship with space can be described through

the notion of the in-between space – or the third space – introduced by Homi Bhabha, who defines it as the space in which cultural hybridity is formed (1994: 2). Yet, according to Johnson (2006: 85), it is possible to link Foucault's idea of heterotopia with that of the third space as both can be seen as places of resistance and subversion, albeit in the case of the former, this subversion is not explicitly stated. Similar suggestion was made by Hetherington (2002: 42) who describes heterotopias as "sites of marginality that act as postmodern spaces for resistance and transgression".

Through the perspective of space, diaspora can be understood as both a physical and imagined one: "diasporic populations live within specific locales – urban places especially – and in national and transnational spaces. […] Some of these spaces – also defined as ethnoscapes and mediascapes […] – are grounded in very specific places – such as the neighbourhood – while others exist virtually and in non-places" (Georgiou 2010: 20-21). It is, therefore, a real site and a symbolic space of cultural exchange.

Applying Foucault's principles of heterotopia to the features of diaspora, it is possible to notice an overlap between the two. In accordance with the first principle, diasporas constitute spaces which isolate those who do not adhere to the norms of the host society due to their ethnicity, race, national identity, denomination, or cultural norms and traditions. This isolation can be imposed either externally – by the governing agents of the host society to keep its members safe – or internally by the members of the diaspora itself to help maintain customs and traditions brought from their homeland. An example illustrating the first principle in the diasporic context is the existence of Chinatown – in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States and Canada, Chinatowns functioned as spaces isolating the Chinese immigrants who were seen as racially and morally inferior and plagued with disease (McDonogh 2013: 103); moreover, the media of the host culture "stereotyped the Chinese as gangsters and Triads, threats diametrically opposed to the model image but evoking experiences and fears associated with many poor new immigrants of diverse backgrounds" (McDonogh 2013: 104).

Just as indicated by the second principle of heterotopia, the function of diaspora can also change as the time passes: from the place of isolation, it can become a place of intercultural communication and exchange, from the seedy underbelly of a city – a vibrant cultural and artistic centre. Such a change in function can be observed on the example of Brick Lane, a street in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the heart of the London Banglatown, which changed from the safe haven for the Bengali immigrants to one of the most prominent centres of Bengali culture in the United Kingdom, famous for its curry houses.

The third principle of heterotopia seems to be reflected by the notion of the diaspora space proposed by Brah. According to Brah, diaspora space is:

> the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. Here, tradition is itself continually invented even as it may be hailed as originating from the mists of time. […] Diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited', not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* […] includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much the diasporian as the diasporian is the native*. ([1996] 2005: 208-209)

Therefore, it can be stated that the diaspora is a space in which supposedly incompatible elements – elements belonging to different cultures and traditions – are entwined, compared, and juxtaposed. Moreover, diasporas are places accumulating different exotic traditions and customs brought by their inhabitants. As noted by McDonogh, diasporas are "urban enclaves […] known for distinctive architecture/ornamentation, foodways, people and activities" (2013: 101).

The notion of diaspora also seems to follow the fourth principle of heterotopia as it is a place in which time becomes suspended, at least to a certain extent. This suspension of time which occurs within diaspora results from the idea of imaginary homeland which can be described as a home, distant both temporally and spatially, to which one can return only through an act of imagination (Rushdie 1991: 10). The sense of home recreated in diaspora and entwined within its structures is a nostalgic image created on the basis of fragmented memories. Yet, this image exists only within the shared space of diaspora and is suspended in time as it reflects the past vision of the abandoned homeland rather than the current one.

The fifth principle can be also applied to diasporas, albeit to a slightly different extent. Diasporas are spaces which are easily penetrable as usually there is nothing which would prevent or stop members of other communities from entering them, except for their own unwillingness to do so. Yet, Foucault himself notes that such an easy access of diasporic spaces is a mere illusion – "everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact we enter, excluded" ([1967] 1986: 26). Within diaspora there are places which are inaccessible to those from the outside without undergoing numerous rites; this applies mostly to religious sites, such as Hindu temples, synagogues, and mosques. Moreover, the outsiders may be excluded from places existing in diaspora without even knowing it as they do not know the intricacies of diasporic culture.

Finally, diaspora seems to be reflecting the sixth principle of heterotopia as it functions in relation to all spaces which exist outside of it; at the same time,

diaspora can also be described as a culturally definable space that is unlike any other space which functions as a microcosm reflecting larger social patters and orders. The mere moment of crossing the physical borders of diaspora often becomes synonymous with entering into another cultural reality or, in some cases, even into another country. The point of crossing can be marked by architectural features, such as gates marking entryways into Chinatowns in North American cities, or linguistic ones, such as street name signs written in two or more languages. Other features of diaspora also reflect its cultural otherness:

> The objects, commodities and symbols of the businesses have encroached onto the public space of the street, blurring the distinction between the spaces of business and the public space of the street. A walk along these streets, even without entering one of the businesses, invariably involves a visual and sensory experience of diversity and diasporic culture. The artisan gift shops, teashops, food establishments, and street traders, which are the primary businesses of the diaspora in the streets, display an overt symbolism of the orient and the non-Western. (Finlay 2017: 14)

Finlay (2017: 14) notes that diaspora and its members highlight their cultural otherness through elements of everyday life, such as business signs, clothes, food and beverages and other cultural artefacts, and through mimicking social patterns of their abandoned homeland. Yet, the process of creating such diasporic aesthetics presents how diaspora functions in relation to other spaces:

> A right to produce the aesthetic and multi-sensory qualities of urban space is key to the formation of diasporas. The outcome of diaspora aesthetics though, is not necessarily about authenticity to a 'homeland' culture, but rather it is a merging of different ways of doing and making, emanating from varied locations, in order to achieve certain rights. Through aesthetics, diasporas can appropriate local spaces, which engender a sense of belonging to the diasporic community and the place they have settled. (Finlay 2017: 13-14)

Hence, the image of diaspora created by its members can be seen as a utopian one. This diasporic 'utopia' transforms the physical places provided by the host culture into idealised spaces within which the members of diaspora can safely cultivate their customs and traditions and follow their own rules and values.

Chinatown and café – diaspora and heterotopia in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*

SKY Lee is a Chinese-Canadian author, artist, and feminist activist born in Port Alberni, British Columbia in 1952 (Kich 2000: 197). Lee is a member of Asian Canadian Writers Workshop, an organization and activist group the main aim of which is to "challenge racial discrimination in Canadian society and the political power that endorsed it" (Chao 1995: 147). Apart from *Disappearing*

Moon Café, Lee edited the anthology of Chinese-Canadian writing *Many Mouthed Birds* (1991) and published a volume of short-fiction entitled *Bellydancer: Stories* in 1994 (Kich 2000: 201).

Published in 1990, *Disappearing Moon Café* is a memoir of the Wongs, a fictional family of Chinese immigrants living in Vancouver Chinatown. The story spans from 1892 to 1986 and is show through the eyes of numerous members of the family, starting from the patriarch, Wong Gwei Chang. All those stories are connected by the figure of Kae Ying Woo, the main narrator of the novel. In an attempt to finally establish her own identity, Kae studies the fates of four Wong women – Lee Mui Lan, Chan Fong Mei, Beatrice Wong, and Suzanne Wong – and the way the life in diaspora affected them.

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Lee refers to important events in the Chinese Canadian history which influenced the emergence and functioning of the Chinese diaspora. The first of those events is the construction of the Central Pacific Railway which took lives of many Chinese workers. The novel also mentions the introduction of the head tax forcing the Chinese migrants to pay $50 before being admitted into Canada. The tax was systematically raised: in 1900 it reached $100 and in 1903 – $500 (Chao 1996: 237). The introduction of the tax was justified by the Canadian authorities who described the Chinese migrants as nonassimilable and, therefore, perceived them as undesirable (Chao 1996: 237).

Another important event in the history of the Chinese diaspora included in *Disappearing Moon Café* is the introduction of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1923. The Act stopped Chinese immigration to Canada, drastically limiting the number of Chinese migrants allowed to settle down in the country – the official records claim that only eight Chinese immigrants entered Canada between 1924 and 1939 (Anderson 2007: 25). Apart from restricting the number of Chinese immigrants, the Act caused a significant sex ratio imbalance in the Chinese diaspora as the community consisted mostly of male labourers (Chao 1996: 237). This led to the further isolation of the Chinese community whose members were forced to turn to incestuous relations for the sake of self-preservation.

The final event described by Lee is the proposed introduction of Janet Smith Bill of 1924. A suspicious death of a young white nursemaid caused outrage in Vancouver and "The British Columbia Legislature debated whether to ban the employment of white women and 'Oriental' men as domestic servants in the same household" (Kerwin 1999: 83). The racially-motivated bill depicted "the whole race of the Chinese […] as criminals [through] legitimizing the existing racial discrimination and segregation" (Chao 1996: 243). The Janet Smith Bill was never introduced as it violated the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1911, "which protected Japanese nationals from discriminatory legislation" (Kerwin 1999: 102) and with which all the provinces in Canada had to comply; moreover, the bill also violated Canadian constitutional law.

The aforementioned historical events depicted in the novel affect the characters and shape their relationships with others, both within the Chinese diaspora and outside it. At the same time, they are also milestones which influence the development and functioning of the diaspora and place it in a complex and complicated relation with the Canadian society.

This section of the article discusses how Vancouver Chinatown and its central point – the eponymous Disappearing Moon – are presented by Lee as functioning heterotopias. In the novel, Chinatown is presented as a space of isolation – which is partially self-imposed and partially the consequence of the Canadian politics – separating the Chinese immigrants from the white Canadian population. When telling Kae about the chaos which erupted in Chinatown after the death of Janet Smith, Morgan describes Chinatown and its inhabitants as "a self-contained community of men" (Lee 1990: 68). This self-containment of the diaspora and the decision to separate itself spatially, culturally and socially was caused by the Canadian laws and the restrictions imposed on the Chinese immigrants, some of which had tragic consequences: "There was such a meagre number of young people—no new immigrant blood. What few there were, were native-born. Since 1923 the Chinese Exclusion Act had taken its heavy toll. The rapidly diminishing chinese-canadian community had withdrawn into itself, ripe for incest" (Lee 1990: 147). The Canadian government is shown as a force pushing the members of the Chinese diaspora into behaviours which do not adhere to the Western norms, a situation which results in even greater discrimination and stronger need for isolation, both externally and internally imposed.

This need for isolation is transferred from generation to generation of the Chinese immigrants as the interactions with the white Canadians are seen by them only as a necessity. When Suzie, the youngest of the Wong children, tells her mother that she would like to invite her white girlfriends into her house, Fong Mei reminds her how important it is to stay away from the members of the host society: "The less you see of those white girls, the better off you'll be. They don't make good friends. Just be polite enough to get along with them at school!" (Lee 1990: 151). The isolation is therefore seen as the only way to protect the utopian space of Chinatown from the corrupting influence of the Western civilization.

Yet, the isolation experienced by the members of the Chinese diaspora, especially the younger ones, can be also attributed to racial prejudice which victimises them:

> Racial prejudice helped disconnect Beatrice from the larger community outside Chinatown. […] But what Fong Mei did not understand about Beatrice was how fiercely loyal she was to the little circle of local-born friends left to her. Friends growing up in Chinatown were allies, necessary for survival; for those times they ventured out of "their place," and came back fractured. They nursed each other, offered each other protection; their comminuted humiliation not easily forgotten; their bonds against it sinewy and strong. (Lee 1990: 165)

The experiences of the members of the Chinese diaspora seem to prove that they are being isolated from the main population as they are deemed unfitting, undesirable, and nonassimilable. Yet, the restrictive laws imposed on the Chinese immigrants only fuel their need to highlight their otherness through separating themselves from the host society and limiting interactions with them to necessary minimum. Moreover, isolation contributes to the perception of the diaspora space as a utopia; it is a place which grants protection and provides the sense of belonging and understanding, three of many things which the Canadian society fails to do.

Chinatown is also portrayed as a place recreating the nostalgic image of the abandoned homeland. This recreation is achieved not only through the insistence on maintaining customs and traditions, but also through the architectural construction of Chinatown which replicates the buildings and their functions. This tendency can be observed on the example of the eponymous Disappearing Moon:

> Disappearing Moon was divided into two front sections, with the kitchen and the storeroom at the back. The dining room was the largest in Chinatown, perhaps the most beautiful in all of Vancouver, with its teak craving on the pillars and gateways. The rich dark-blood of the rosewood furniture was enhanced by the tangled emerald-green of the ivy foliage. Cultivated jade trees, with leaves like precious stones, overflowed the dragon pots. On the walls, long silk scrolls of calligraphy sang out to those patrons who could read them. It was a nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned chinese teahouse, which accounted for its popularity not only amongst its homesick chinese clientele but also outsiders who came looking for oriental exotica. (Lee 1990: 32)

The same sense of nostalgia can be seen in the interior of the building of the Chinese Benevolent Association which furnished with "the heavy chinese furniture formally and coldly arranged [and decorated with] tall, rigid scrolls of calligraphy [which] barked out messages of loyalty, filial duty, benevolence and righteousness" (Lee 1990: 73). This architectural distinctiveness has numerous functions: firstly, it clearly marks the boundaries of the heterotopia while simultaneously restricting accessibility of some of its parts to the Westerners; secondly, it highlights the otherness of diaspora and places it in the relations with the society outside its borders; finally, as the architecture of diaspora recreates the nostalgic and historical image of homeland, it not only serves as means for accumulating and suspending time, but also creates the sense of utopia.

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Lee also depicts Chinatown as a space which accumulates exotic traditions brought by the immigrants to Canada. The accumulated beliefs and customs refer to all spheres of life, such as the treatment of the elders, the ways of conducting business, forming friendships and romantic relationship, or giving birth and taking care of the new-borns and infants:

> My aunties told me that while I'm breastfeeding I should consume as much alcohol as I can stand, implying that most women sip their drinks with their noses scrunched up and leave

> most of it behind. […] They told me never to drink cold. And not to even put my hands in cold water while establishing my milk! In the old days, chinese women and their babies weren't allowed to take a bath or leave the house until after the full-month celebrations.
>
> "So what if they got a little fishy smelling," my aunt exclaimed when I deprecated her story with my western attitudes, "that's the way they healed."
>
> They were right! I tried to go out for a walk. And I stuck my hands in cold water. These sent raw chills and shivers right through me to the tips of my nipples, and left me so full of wind that I had to chase it away with another thick, black brewed helping of raw vinegar, sweet chinese cooking wine and pickled pigs' feet. I haven't challenged any more traditions since. (Lee 1990: 123)

Although at the beginning Kae is surprised – and even appalled – by the traditions and customs still existing within the Chinese diaspora, she accepts them, following her instincts. The quotation also shows that within the heterotopia of diaspora traditions and customs are passed from generation to generation, accumulated and preserved. Moreover, this accumulation and preservation can be perceived as a way of suspending time, a feature characteristic for heterotopias.

Yet, the traditional beliefs and customs are contrasted in the novel with the modernity of the Western civilization which is represented mostly by modern goods making their way into the Chinese diaspora and into Disappearing Moon. The aforementioned depiction of the café as the nostalgic place is contrasted with its modern part, favoured by Choy Fuk, the son of Gwei Wong and Mui Lan: "Choy Fuk liked the more modern counter-and-booth section better. He loved the highly polished chrome and brightly lit glass, the checkerboard tiles on the floor, the marble countertop. And except for the customers, his mother, and perhaps the cacti, there was nothing chinese about it" (Lee 1990: 32). Similarly, in her letters to her sister, Fong Mei, Choy Fuk's wife, writes:

> Everything here is so 'ultramodern'. You don't know what that means, but everyone here likes that ghost word. It means the best and the newest. Nye Nye and Lo Yeh have a refrigerator to cool their food. I hear say that it cost $47.95, canadian currency. That's more than enough to buy tice for your family for several years in China. It may sound incredible to you, but people are like this here. (Lee 1990: 42)

Hence, it can be stated that diaspora – as any heterotopia – is a real space in which elements from two completely different cultures and coming from two completely different times (the past and the present) are juxtaposed and contrasted.

Finally, the function of Chinatown – as presented in *Disappearing Moon Café* – changes as the time passes. As Chinatown gained a more prominent presence in the landscape of Vancouver through becoming "quite the thriving, respectable little establishment" with paved and clean streets and street lamps (Lee 1990: 68), the attitudes of the white Canadians towards this part of the city also started to change. Instead of avoiding the district, they had turned Chinatown into a tourist attraction, a fashionable place providing unique services and selling exotic goods.

Yet, Chinatown had also changed its meaning for the members of diaspora. As has been discussed earlier in this section, Chinatown served initially as a safe space in which the members of the Chinese diaspora could still cultivate their values and follow their traditions. It was a utopia protecting them from the discriminatory politics of the Canadian government and functioning independently from the host society – "[it] sold its own suspenders [and] had everything from its own water pipes to its own power elite" (Lee 1990: 68). However, the young Canadians of Chinese origin, like Kae, begun to perceive Chinatown as a relic of the past, a dangerous place they should avoid: "I […] chose not to tell him that I didn't ever go to Chinatown except for the very occasional family banquet. And I certainly wouldn't ever let any dirty old man touch me! Those little old men were everywhere in Chinatown, leaning in doorways, sitting at bus stops, squatting on sidewalks. The very thought gave me the creeps" (Lee 1990: 67).

This shift in the approach towards the diaspora – towards Chinatown – and the meaning it holds is the result of the cultural and social changes which occur as time flows and people's mentality and attitudes change. As a result, the meaning of diaspora transforms from that of the communal safe space into that of a place providing opportunities for potential economic gain:

> Wong Gwei Chang […] realized that the old ways in Chinatown were fast disappearing. He played a so-called prominent role in the associations now, because the old-timers had agreed to give him big face. In the old days, they'd had to band together to survive. Share a little more during good times, share a little less during bad. Years ago, the game had been deadlier; protection was sought. Everybody needed to play the rules, abide by a leader. But Chinatown had grown. He had no real say in this motley social order anymore. More and more, the patriarch came face to face with young, hostile loners like Wong Foon Sing, who'd just as soon tell you to go die! […] They had no respect. […] As soon as they got off the boat, they were all out for a good time and easy money. Like wild beasts, they'd eat their own kind for it too. (Lee 1990: 79-80)

Gwei seems to be the only character who is fully aware of the changing role and function of Chinatown. He sees that Chinatown does not longer fulfil the role of "the tight watchful community" (Lee 1990: 94) ready to help its members; instead, it is a space for following the American dream in which the community spirit is replaced with selfishness, self-serving, and the pursuit of financial gain.

Conclusions

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, the diasporic space of Chinatown is presented as slightly utopianized in nature. This utopian quality of diaspora seems to be born out of – and later maintained through – isolation. As the Chinese diaspora was isolated from the Canadian society by discriminatory laws, its members started

to perceive Chinatown as a utopian safe space in which they can not only cultivate their traditions and customs, but also live according to values brought from their homeland. Later, despite the subsequent abolition of the said laws, the diaspora and its members continued their isolation, this time to prevent their utopian space from being contaminated by the disruptive Western culture.

This utopian perception of diaspora is intertwined with its function as a cultural space. In her novel, Lee depicts Chinatown as the place reconstructing the sense of homeland through cultural resources – mainly language and religion – and cultural artefacts, such as customs, traditions, and architecture. Yet, those cultural artefacts already belong to the past at the moment of their implementation. The recreation of China observed in Chinatown is, therefore, outdated and historical – in the eyes of Kae, the representative of the youngest generation of the Chinese-Canadians, Chinatown is nothing more than a relic of the past.

Yet, despite its isolation and need to preserve – and, in some cases, highlight – Chineseness, Chinatown and its inhabitants cannot completely eliminate the influences of the Canadian society. As a result, Chinatown becomes a space within which elements of two completely different cultures interact and juxtapose each other. This influx of Canadian culture into the diaspora space is also the symptom of the changing function of Chinatown. At the beginning and under the pressure of the Canadian law, it served as a space for isolating those who did not adhere to the norms of the society. Later, its function shifted to that of a safe community space of mutual support only to become a place for potential financial gain and economic development.

Thus, taking into consideration all those features, it can be stated that Chinatown, as depicted in *Disappearing Moon Café*, fits into the idea of heterotopia. Firstly, at least at the beginning, it functions as a place of isolation for those – namely, the Chinese migrants – who do not adhere to social rules of the Canadian society; it is, in a sense, heterotopia of deviation. Secondly, the function of Chinatown – like the function of any heterotopia – has been changing over time as it transformed from the place of isolation into the space of communal support and, later, that of economic and social improvement. Like other heterotopias, Chinatown, as a seat of the Chinese diaspora, becomes the space within which elements of two cultures – Chinese and Canadian – are entwined and juxtaposed with each other. Furthermore, the same cultural elements which constitute Chinatown also suspend it in time as at the moment of its establishment, it is already the relic of the past.

Lee's depiction of Chinatown also touches upon the notion of accessibility of the diasporic space – despite the fact that its boundaries are clearly marked and that the white Canadians can enter it freely, there are parts of Chinatown which remain inaccessible to them. Finally, Chinatown in *Disappearing Moon Café* – and diasporic space in general – bears some characteristics of utopia. It is, after all, a nostalgic recreation of the no longer existing place which functions according to its

own rules and traditions and is perceived by its inhabitants as perfect in the adverse and harsh conditions of the Canadian society. This utopian value makes the diasporic space of Chinatown heterotopia of compensation for the immigrants.

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