

## I. Roley, *American Son*, and the Criticism

Born in the mid 1960s to a Caucasian father and a Filipino mother, Brian Ascalon Roley grew up in San Francisco, one of the multicultural states of the postmodern America. His Kiriya nominee, *American Son* is the debut and the only novel by this amateur writer. But it's a tally that his soft-spoken and erudite manners have been reflected in *American Son* to stage his posture in the American academia as if by a professional writer. Actually, Roley didn't really begin to write seriously until law school, when he desperately needed some "right brain activity" to balance out what turned out, debating the different sides of an issue. But he found law school all about sophistry, picking a side and just defending it. By the time he finished law school, the Rodney King riots of 1992 were dividing blacks and whites in Los Angeles and across the country. The riots reawakened his musings on race, and it became race, not the law, that vied hard for his attention. He decided to continue with his writing, and started studying creative writing at Cornell University.

Roley thinks that fewer and fewer young Americans are aware of the US acquisition of the Philippines, and of how President McKinley's decision to govern the country marked the entrance of America on to the world stage as a colonialist power. He says that Americans are not even familiar enough with their former territory to form any stereotype at all about it.

Ironically, some stereotypes raise the awareness about the positive things that an ethnic or racial group brings to the country - such as Chinese or Thai food or Japanese design or Filipinos' devotion to their families, especially children and the elderly known; also the complex nature of Filipino Catholicism, which is far more animalistic than the

American version. Meet people with advance degrees that aren't even aware of our history with the Philippines. (Hemon 20)

America is a country having multi-ethnic group, multinational people, religion, culture, economic background etc. America is like a salad plate where people from different political, socio-economic, geographical, cultural, religious backgrounds etc are living, working, and studying. This is why there are not any fix rules and regulations and there is not any single established value. Then certainly it creates problem due to the lack of adjustment.

Here in this debut novel *American Son*, Roley presents misunderstanding or lack of understanding between immigrants and local people. It can be said this work deals with cultural encounter leading to cultural assimilation. Gabe, the protagonist of the novel, migrates to America along with his family and he shows ambivalent characteristics for better adjustment for living. He finds difficulties to adjust there because he has been living in Philippines and the life is certainly different there in his birth place. As Gabe reaches to America, he finds radical differences. So, for the adaptation he acts in such a way so that he can make his mother happy at the beginning, but as the time advances and as challenges start to approach him, then Philippine culture becomes as if a curse to him as he can neither adopt Filipino culture nor American culture totally - he swings. Finally, it seems that he adopts the American culture but not with comfort. It is how he shows ambivalent relationship to both the cultures.

Roley's *American Son* is a brief but heartbreaking story of a young boy's descent into a hellish life. Gabe is a Los Angeles teenager with a mother desperately trying to protect him from the quasi-violent life of his older brother Tomas, as well as keeping him away from the violent, hot, humid life in the

Philippines she left so long ago. Gabe's American father, another source of violence, left them years earlier, but his absence still scars all of them. Gabe is the "good" son while Tomas breeds violent dogs for paranoid Los Angelinos and sports scary tattoos, cloths, cars, and haircuts. Gabe decides to escape it all to run away, but his running away has more dire consequences for him. All the while, his mother, whom he loves but for whom he feels a certain amount of shame, tries to ignore other family members who insist that both boys should return to the Philippines. *American Son*, as a whole, is a dark novel filled with violence without being violent itself, never depressing, only upsetting. Gabe's struggle, for who he is, coupled with life in modern Loss Angeles, makes for an interesting reading.

The story is told in narration by Gabe, the younger of the two half-Filipino, half- white brothers. They live in Santa Monica, California, with their Filipino mother who works menial jobs to help support her two boys. Their German-American father left years ago after several incidents of domestic abuse which finally terminated when Tomas, who finally grew old enough and strong enough to physically overpower his father, kicked him out of the house.

The setting is from April 1993 through September 1993. Gabe is in high school, while his older brother, Tomas, is presumed to be approximately 19 or 20 years old. Throughout the story, the complex relationship between Gabe, his brother Tomas, their relationship with their Filipino mother, and their whole family's relationship with American society is explored. But with Gabe as the narrator, one gets the feeling that he wants to say very much more than he does, but that he just can't express the feelings he has inside.

Each of the three parts of the story is prefaced by a letter from Gabe and Tomas' uncle Betino in the Philippines, who constantly exhorts his sister to send her wayward boys back to the Philippines, to learn respect and discipline. However, also in the course of those letters is the very Filipino-like trait of one-upmanship, in which the uncle proclaims all the success and happiness he and his family are experiencing, a very unsubtle rubbing-it-in which any Filipino reader would be familiar with. Gabe and Tomas' mother is portrayed as a pitiable character- one who came to the USA seeking a better life for herself and her children, but completely naïve to the ways of the real world, and thoroughly "colonized"- a woman who allows herself to get stomped on and pushed around without so much as a squeak of complaint - but who later cries in shame and anger at herself for not speaking up. Gabe at times tries to shield from this abuse, only to see his efforts unwelcome and unwanted by his mother, and at other times he is ashamed of his mother, whose dark complexion and obvious foreignness is in stark contrast to the fashionable mothers of his classmates.

It is this colonialized attitude which leads to the climax of the story, an outpouring of misplaced righteous anger at being mistreated, and where the story abruptly ends.

"I want to explore, the difficulties, faced by 'Hapas', "people of half-Asian, half-Caucasian ancestry" (*Interview 1*), explains Roley. He thinks an adolescent hero would exemplify the identity questions that loom so large for mixed race Americans. Gabe is not just going through an adolescent born identity crisis: he feels invisible as a Filipino, too. Few Americans around him know much about the country - or its people. "Our household was more Filipino; we had this extended family living with us" (1), Roley recollects his own childhood. "But

everyday I went to school in a nearly all-white student body” (1). He adds that while he was growing up, his parents didn’t seem to have much trouble melding their two cultures. But he watched his cousin’s adopting the dress and mannerisms of Latino gang culture. By high school, Roley was becoming more and more aware of his own “invisibility”. “We are different from other Asian Americans because we are easily absorbed into the U.S. culture,” notes Roley:

We are often just barely seen as general Asians. I remember standing around in a group in high school, and even though everyone knew I was Filipino, they would still tell racist jokes. I guess the good thing about being invisible is that I never heard any racist jokes about Filipinos [...] but still felt terrible. (Proquest)

Filipinos are the second largest Asian group in the United States, but, it’s hard to tell, even in Los Angeles. Some have argued that since so many professionals and skilled Filipinos come to the country, they blend seamlessly into the local workforce. Roley also thinks America’s colonial influences have permeated with the Americans, and are often just as happy to seamlessly adopt it when they arrive in the USA.

Colonization is another major theme in *American Son*. Roley remarks how the colonization attitude of his characters affects how they assimilate into American culture, “I found inspiration in post-colonial works by non-American writers such as V.S. Naipaul. Colonization is a subtext in my new book as well”. The tragicomedy, which is still in the works, follows members of Gabe’s family as they continue to spread out and assimilate, and bicker over who will get stuck caring for the matriarch. (They would have been bickering for the opposite reason in the Philippines - over who would get to take care of her.) Reflecting on his technique Roley says “I love Greek and Shakesperean tragicomedy. I sometimes think straight comedy can create

too much of an emotional distance. I'm very aware of what tragic structure can bring to a story" (3).

*American Son* ends on its own bleak note. Roley says he always envisioned that the brother's disconnection from their roots would be their tragic flaw "Racism, in a way, is its own character in the novel. Attitude jumps about from point to point. The younger brother is tempted by the same attitudes that are used against him. I suppose those choice are his tragic errors" (3).

Roley remembers that a few Filipino and Filipinos Americans apparently took offence at *American Son*. They felt that Filipino values are too strong to ever allow such tragedy to happen. Roley argues that such thinking denies the real problems that some Filipino Americans face: "Showing only the positive side of any racial community is a manipulation that ultimately hurts that same community", he argues. Besides, he adds that in that sort of restricted atmosphere good writing that the Filipinos can be proud of will never flourish.

*American Son*, The 2003 Association for Asian American Studies Book Award winning debut novel has been sufficiently criticized since it's publication in 2001. Many critics have attempted post- colonial, capitalistic, subaltern, psychological and other readings.

Envisioning the post- colonial element in the text, Jonathan Kirsch on the book blurb reads that Roley has "fused a coming of age story with a variant on the American immigrant saga, and the result is both explosive and illuminating" (book blurb).

Brian Ascalon Roley himself sees *American Son* from post-colonial perspective: "the colonized attitude of my characters affect how they assimilate into American culture. I found inspiration in post-colonial works by non-American writers

such as V.S. Naipaul. Colonization is a subtext in my new book as well”. He himself too, loves “Greek and Shakespearean tragicomedy” (4). *American Son* is also tragicomic.

Eleanor Ty sees capitalistic pressures in the characters of this novel. He writes the novel “reveal[s] the ways in which global capitalism takes its toll on the young” (119). He further adds that Gabe and Tomas are compelled to compensate for their dysfunctional family situations by converting, buying, or stealing goods. And Tomas clings to the material success by hook or crook throughout the novel.

Reading it sociologically, Karen Har-Yen Chow remarks Gabriel at the beginning as “the good son, the, obedient and quiet, studious one, who always listens to his mother and acts as a character-foil to his bad older brother Tomas” (97). Here, he shows how much Gabe prefers to identifying himself with his Filipino mother to avoid the western mimicry of his brother.

Seeing from subaltern cultural perspective, Jeff Zaleski, asserts the novel as a “power house study of vulnerable strangers in a brutal, alien land” (52). He finds the Ika’s family alienated in brutal capitalistic world of Los Angeles.

Suzu Hansen gives a psychological watch to Gabe’s character. She says “Gabriel’s own self-loathing and alienation prevent him from grasping the opportunity laid out for him by his mother and lead him to a life of violence he’s known too well at the hand of Tomas” (15). She points out Gabe’s inferiority complex in the main-stream culture of America.

The research attempts to show ambivalent attitude of Gabe in Roley’s *American Son* as this issue is not yet seen by the above mentioned critics. First, Gabe says that he loves and helps his mother Ika and feels his brother Tomas’s Mixico-American life style problematic to his Filipino identity. While later, he introduces his

mother as his “maid” humiliating her dark colour and is often fascinated towards Tomas’ violent ways of fighting against poverty. This way, the protagonist Gabe both attaches and detaches to his Filipino cultural location.

To give a short preview for the research, Brian Ascalon Roley’s debut novel takes a cold, clear-eyed look at the American immigrant experience. “Come home”, urges uncle Betino in a letter from Manila at the beginning of Roley’s tale. But Betino’s sister Ika, divorced from her German husband and living in the U.S. with her two sons born in the Philippines, believes even the harsh struggle to survive in California is better than living under the strict caste system of her homeland. Her first son Tomas has assumed the persona of a young Mexican street thug and is helping her make ends meet by raising and selling guard dogs to rich clients. His brother, Gabe, the story’s narrator and the “good” son, seeks to understand the mysteries of his adopted country. The relationship between the two youths is being slowly altered by the outside forces of the alien American culture. Formerly deemed a mama’s boy, Gabe runs away, stealing his brother’s prized Oldsmobile and best dog in trying to escape his brother’s growing influence. It’s not long before he is back home ashamed and ready to submit to the will of both his brother and America. His mother looks on sadly as both of her boys are swallowed up by the American dream and the promise of the prosperous life at all costs. In other terms, the first generation attempts to guide their children by sending them to Catholic schools and giving them a vague sense of tradition. Yet it’s not always enough. What’s most memorable, and most disturbing, is how Roley subtly renders the difference between those who make the journey to America and those who are born out of their hopes.

Despite rare lulls in the plot and as occasional glitch in the novel’s overall strong structure, this is a “powerhouse story of vulnerable strangers in a brutal, alien



land told with stylish restraint, bare-knuckled realism and tender yet touch clarity”

(12) where most of the above sketched and other activities of Gabe himself and other characters are inconsistent, under-decided, and so ambivalent.

So, the following chapter will be an attempt to briefly discuss the concerned theoretical concepts such as ambivalence, hybridity and contact zone as perceived by the discourse of the present postcolonial world; so that a base could be prepared for the textual analysis of Gabe’s character as culturally ambivalent.

## II. Cultural Issues in Postcolonial Criticism

In order to effectively analyze Gabe's Cultural Ambivalence in Roley's *American Son*, the researcher in this chapter has selected and briefly discussed the theories of Postcolonialism, Cultural Encounter, Cultural Studies, Contact-Zone, Hybridity, and at last Ambivalence itself. In addition to preparing a sufficient background for the thesis, these issues more importantly highlight all necessary concepts and vocabularies that work as strong theoretical supports for the textual analysis in the next chapter.

Postcolonialism has been emerging as a distinct field of discourse only especially in Non-Western Studies. Since detailed discussion of it is not possible at the present work, a brief sketch of the thesis related areas has been attempted below.

Obviously, Postcolonialism deals with the colonial onslaught and its impacts on both groups: colonizers and colonized natives. Clearly, European colonization relied on the two inseparable phenomena: knowledge and power: The colonizers' political and economic hegemonies were accompanied by their project of knowing others. Through the implementation of the colonial educational system, they made them masters in the eyes of the natives but also disturbed the indigenous culture. Actually, the ideologies, which the colonizers created out of their fear of the things and people beyond their understanding, turned into knowledge. The Texts, therefore have, played a great role both in establishing as well as reinforcing the themes and stereotypes of colonialism before as well as after the period of decolonization. Many critics and writers claim that the ex-colonizers are still spacesharing the colonized terrains despite they are culturally and politically independent. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* appeared in 1978. The publication of *Orientalism* is still regarded as the point of departure from colonialism. Then appeared another seminal work:

Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1993), exploring the postcolonial issues. The term "Postcolonial", however, was not in use until Spivak used it in her work *The Post-Colonial Critic* published in 1991.

The term "postcolonism" is still rife with controversies. Some postcolonial critics and theorists think that Postcolonialism means a theoretical discussion on the condition after decolonization where as others claim that it deals with colonialism and its impacts right from the very beginning of the colonial onslaught. According to Bill Achroft, et al, "it does not mean post-independent or after colonialism, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Postcolonialism begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is a discourse of oppositionality which coloniality brings into being ...(117).

It, however, would be wise to talk of few tendencies and characteristics observed in various postcolonial texts. Undoubtedly, it derives theoretical strategies and characteristics especially from Derridian deconstruction and Foucauldian discourse theory. Like poststructuralism, postcolonialism debunks the coercive binarism like west/east, man/woman, primary/secondary and such other worldviews ignored by the so-called imperialist truths. Moreover, it deals with the third world people's traumatic experiences like cultural disruption, hybridity, diaspora, migration and so forth. In the beginning, it was focussed upon challenging colonial ideologies imposed on the natives. It was preoccupied with the issues concerning identity and cultural roots of the indigenous people. Cultural nationalism, therefore, came into limelight. The postcolonial writers concentrated their efforts in trying to establish the identity of the natives by highlighting their culture. They sought to construct the indigenous nationalism based on native myth and culture. The theorists like Said challenged the Western culture and attempted to construct the third-world culture and

nationalism. Or, Chinua Achebe tried to construct cultural nationalism by exploring the Nigerian indigenous myths and rituals. In the same manner, SSG, in their first three volumes, conducted researches on the culture of the subaltern people. They were attempting to construct a new nationalism made of indigenous culture of the peasants. They brought subalternity into postcolonialism.

Later on, the postcolonial writers, with the rise of postmodernism and poststructuralism, realized that the terms like cultural nationalism and indigenous culture are essentialist and coercive. They shifted their focus to the issues of cultural displacement. As we know, the colonial onslaught disrupted the indigenous culture. It turned the natives into *black skin having white mask*. It brought about hybridity with respect to identity, culture, and thoughts of the natives. They were turned into dangling people, torn between the native cultures and the imperial culture. This cultural displacement touched its peak in diaspora. Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *Location of Culture (1993)*, argues that colonialism not only disrupted the native culture but also the colonial culture. Referring to the in-between condition of the colonized subjects, Bhabha has developed the concept of mimicry. According to him, the colonised people challenge and make the imperialist truths impure through mimicry when they use the imperialist language to express their indigenous experiences.

Slowly and gradually, cultural nationalism gave a way to globalization, transnationalism, and multiculturalism. Those phenomena, at present, are valorised instead of the essentialist concepts like indigenous culture and cultural nationalism. The writers like Rushdie, Okri, and Marquez are marching on this path. They construct ambivalent space to make a room for the indigenous culture by debunking the imperialist culture. In the same manner, they heavily exploit diasporic as well as

multicultural experiences. They achieve all these through the application of magical realism in their works. Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, and Okiri's *The Famished Road* and a few examples of such texts, which have been successful in achieving what postcolonial writing are supposed to achieve. Now the postcolonial writers have realized that it is not possible to restore indigenous culture, they are trying to establish a bit less hostile relationship between the native culture and imperialist culture. Moreover, they agree that colonialization has changed both groups: This kind of ambivalence shows the possibility of the same simultaneous existence of both worldviews. Moreover, it appropriates the imperialist language and theoretical strategies to establish the identity of the third world people and their culture.

Postcolonialism has its limitations as well. There is every possibility that it can be assimilated into the so-called mainstream of western canonical values and theories. It basically deals with the natives' resistance to and complicity with their masters. Very often it develops complicity with the imperialist values and worldviews. It has been severely thrashed by Marxist thinkers. Aijaz Ahmad, in one example, is the most vociferous among its critics. He considered postcolonialism as a branch of poststructuralism. It, as he claims, is as rootless, irresponsible and perverse as poststructuralism is. He thinks that it is a byproduct of capitalism. It is a "coffee talk" of the privileged bourgeois writers like Rushdie, Spivak and Bhabha. It has nothing to do with the socio-political realities of the third-world people. Arif Dirik has also criticized it in the same manner. He, misreading Ella Shoat's query "when exactly [...] does the postcolonial begin?" cynically answers: "when the third world intellectuals have arrived in the first world academy" (294). Sometimes, Spivak, one of the trinity of postcolonialism, expresses her irritation and fury at the way it is

turning into more essentialist and coercive. She calls it “fundamentalist postcolonialism”. She, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” analyses the relation between the knowing subject and the ignorant object, and concludes that the former can manipulate the latter the way s/he wants. The subaltern cannot speak. There can be no unrepeatable subaltern group. The Subaltern has got to appropriate language and other strategies of the elites the way postcolonialism appropriates language and theories of the west. In a way, subalternity emerges as the symbol of postcolonialism. Of course, Subaltern Studies have been also identified as postcolonial criticism by the writers like Said, Spivak and Gyanendra Pandey. “To not the ferment created by Subaltern Studies in discipline as diverse as history, anthropology and literature is, j” as Gyan Prakash claims, “to recognize the force of recent postcolonialism” (1475). Subaltern Studies is “developing into a vigorous postcolonial critique” (1476). He tries to explain how Subaltern Studies has turned into Postcolonial critique.

The term culture is ill-repute in the present socio-anthropological circles because it has multiple referents and invokes vagueness. In any case, the concept of culture discussed here neither has multiple referents nor any unusual ambiguity. It will denote to historically transmitted pattern of meaning codified in symbols. This system of inherited conceptions is expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions. Such actions then take the forms of social structure maintaining social relations among participated individuals. Cultural and social structures are then different abstractions from the same phenomena.

The idea of culture as people’s whole way of lifestyle first arose in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Culture for Mathew Arnold was ‘the best that has been thought and

known' in the world. Along Arnoldian line, E.B. Tylor defined culture in an ethnographic way. Tylor was more original in his definition of culture. For Tylor, "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"(1).

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, such ethnographic definition/concept of culture has undergone massive changes. Raymond Williams contrasts this anthropological meaning of culture. Between culture in the anthropological sense and culture in the normative sense, there emerged a third way of using the term, "one that refers neither to a people's organic way of life nor to the normative values preached by leading intellectuals but to a battleground of social conflicts and contradictions" (Graff and Bruce 421). From the theoretical perspective, one can assume a single, central culture that renders individual experience coherent and meaningful, for it is inescapably different, divisive and dissonant.

The emergence and dissemination of postcolonial criticism and the postcolonial theory of discourse, made culture a most contested space. Culture by now has borrowed the terminologies of other fields of criticism. Often cited terminologies these days are Foucauldian notion of 'Power' and 'Discourse' and Gramsci's concept of 'Hegemony.' Postcolonial perspectives have also emerged from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of political and social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. Postcolonial criticisms bear witness to these unequal and uneven forces of cultural representations. They engage us with culture as uneven, complete

production of meaning and value often composed of incommensurable demands and practices of social survival. Culture then reaches out to create a symbolic textuality to everyday aura of selfhood, and a promise of pleasure. As Bhabha rightly observes:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transitional and transnational. It is because contemporary postcolonial discourses rooted in specific histories of displacement [...] make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. (438)

The transnational dimensions of cultural transformation - migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation - main the process of culture translation, to a complex form of signification. It is from this hybrid location of cultural value - the transnational as the translational - that the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project.

Edward W. Said is interested in studying the relationship between the east and the west, which is governed by discourse, from the cultural dimension standing in a position of a cultural critic rather than a radical political theorist. On the one hand, he sees 'the scope of orientalism' as matching with 'the scope of empire.' On the other hand, he focussed on culture representing as well as functioning as a form of hegemony. Said in this connection finds Mathew Arnold as using culture as a powerful means of differentiation. For Arnold culture is an ideal, but Said argues "Culture with its superior position has the power to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, denote, interdict and validate: in short, i.e. the power to an agent of and perhaps the main agency of powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too" (9). Culture, for Said, is not only the positive doctrine of the best that is thought and known but also a differentially negative doctrine of all that is not best. This



double faceted view of culture makes one aspect of culture more powerful than the other culture, thus, becomes a powerful means of domination and appropriation.

Thus it can be said that culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Mathew Arnold put it in the 1860s. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, which differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of 'xenophobia.' Culture, in this sense, is a source of identity, and a rather combative entity. Culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of 'Apollonian gentility,' culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another.

Cultural encounter then facilitates a pattern of mutual adjustment or reciprocal give-and-take by offering a space enough for coexistence. But all the time it is not necessary that cultural encounter promotes blending or merging of perspectives. The meeting of cultures is likely to be marked by contestation, struggle, and agony that match the tensional relation between absence and presence, emptiness and affirmation. Such an encounter takes place when one culture (cultural traits) is introduced to another culture which is different from it. Such exposure to an alien culture initiates a movement of genuine self-transformation, that is, a reassessment of prevailing patterns in the light of newly experienced insights or modes of life. Cultural encounter does not take a single mode. Rather, it is a process and can be clarified on the basis of various modes it takes.

Cultural Studies, on the other hand, has become today an institutional name that ensembles the vocabularies and practices emerging in cultural criticism and theory. Cultural Studies, too, has no definite referent and so difficult to define

specifically. Arising amidst the turmoil of the 1960s, Cultural Studies is composed of loosely connected elements of Marxism, new historicism, feminism, gender studies, anthropological studies of race and ethnicity, popular cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. All these fields focus on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation. As Graff and Bruce write, within Cultural Studies, “the aim of cultural criticism is something more than preserving, transmitting, and interpreting culture or cultures. Rather, the aim is to bring together, in a common democratic space of discussion, diversities that had remained unequal largely because they had remained apart” (434-35).

Cultural Studies in this sense means a refusal to the ‘universal’ of culture and at the same time challenges the belief that ‘group particularism’ like blackness, femaleness, or Africanness are essential unchanging qualities. Like texts, cultures are seen as intermediate sites of conflict that can’t be pinned to a single totalized meaning. A cultural study is a multi- or post- disciplinary field of inquiry which blurs the boundaries between it and other subjects. It is generally seen as a route to bringing the university back into contact with the public with a counter-disciplinary breaking down of intellectual studies which lies in its attempt to “cut across diverse social and political interests and address many of the struggles within the current scene”(Grossberg 1).

Cultural Studies transcends of a particular discipline such as literary criticism. It is rather politically engaged and at the same time denies the separation of ‘high-low’ or ‘elite-popular’ culture. Taken to its extreme, it denies the autonomy of the individual whether an actual person or a work of literature. “Cultural Studies,” as Guerin and others explain, “is committed to examining the entire range of a society’s beliefs, institutions and communicative practices including arts” (77). It remains

difficult to pin down the boundaries of cultural studies as a coherent, unified, academic discipline with clear cut substantive topics, concepts, and methods which differentiate it from other disciplines. But what is crucial here, is its connections to “power” and “politics”. As argued by Chris Barker, “Cultural Studies is a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice where knowledge is never an objective phenomenon but a matter of positionality” (5).

Cultural Studies in this sense is a ‘discursive formation’ i.e. a cluster of ‘ideas, images and practices’ which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. Thus a good deal of Cultural Studies is centred on the question of ‘representation,’ that is on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us. The central strand on Cultural Studies can be understood as the study of culture as the signifying practices of representation, and demands meaning in texts to be produced in a variety of contexts.

Cultural representation and meaning have certain materiality since they are produced, enacted, used, and understood in specific social contexts. Cultural Studies here take linguistic turn because it is language that gives meaning to material objects and social practices that are brought into view by language and made intelligible to us in terms of which language delimits. Culture is articulated with moments of production but not determined necessarily by that moment. The meaning of a text (a culture or set of practices) is produced in the interplay between the texts. Thus, the moment of consumption is also a moment of meaningful production.

In a sense, Cultural Studies hover round the centrality of the Foucauldian concept of power. “Power,” writes Barker, “is not simply the glue that holds the social

strands together, or the coercive force which subordinates one set of people to another [...] but the process that generate and enable any form of social action, relationship, or order” (10). Such notion of power is similar to Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’ which implies a situation where a ‘historical block’ of power groups exercise social authority and leadership over subordinate groups through the winning of consent.

These observations can perhaps be reduced to a single proposition that cultural studies refers to a multi-stranded intellectual movement that places cultural analysis in the context of social formations, seeing society and culture as historical processes rather than power, and calling attention to social inequalities - thus, always making a committed call for democratization.

Next, the idea of Contact Zone was first developed by Mary Louise Pratt in her seminal book *Imperial Eyes*. Contact Zone is a social space marked by the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects who were previously separated by geographic and historical disjuncture and whose trajectories now intersect. “Contact Zones,” writes Pratt, “are the social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination like colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4). A Contact Zone perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizer and colonized, self and other, native and non-native, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings, and practices, often within asymmetrical relation to power. Contact Zone, then, along with rage, incomprehension, and pain sometimes offers moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom. In such spaces, people

historically and geographically separated, come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict.

A number of other vocabularies are closely related to the idea of Contact Zone, like ‘transculturation,’ ‘autoethnography,’ and ‘safe houses’. Transculturation aims to replace overly reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation. The term refers to a process whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture, while subjugated peoples can’t really control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to very extents what they absorb from their own. Transculturation not only refers to the metropolitan modes of representation and its periphery but also to the formation of metropolis by the subordinated periphery. But the bitter fact is that while the imperial centre tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, the metropolis habitually blinds itself to the fact that it was constructed from outside in as much as from the inside out.

The term ‘autoethnography’ refers to the process of using the vocabularies and idioms already used by others while representing the self. To be precise, autoethnographic texts are misrepresentations in an attempt to representations. Such texts are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. They often address to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker’s own community and constitute a group’s point of entry into metropolitan culture.

Along with transculturation and autoethnography, ‘safe house’ is also a phenomenon of the Contact Zone. As Pratt writes, safe house refers to the “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal,

homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degree of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (*Mass Culture* 71). Where there is a legacy of subordination, groups need places for healing and mutual recognition, that only safe house can provide. It constructs shared understandings, knowledge, and claims between two communities suitable for Contact Zone. However, the idea of Contact Zone denies the homogenous, sovereign community embodying values like equality, fraternity, and liberty which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize.

To wind up, contact zones include identifying with the ideas, interests, and histories of the other. It involves transculturation in texts that compare between elite and vernacular cultural forms. It offers safe spaces for people to uncover, confront, and reflect on suppressed aspects of history and ways to move into and out of the rhetorics of authenticity. It provides common grounds for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy, thus maintaining mutual respect. It’s a systematic approach to the concept of ‘cultural mediation.’

Hybridity, one of the most popular terms in postcolonial writings, is a product of colonialism. As a matter of fact, colonial onslaught disrupted the culture of the colonized space. And this cultural displacement led to the hybridization or the culture of the colonized space as expressed by Aschroft et al, “colonialism inevitably leads to hybridization of culture” (129).

The ‘fair policy’ is equally responsible to bring about hybridity. The colonizers needed the native people to work for them as mediators. So, they planned not to teach the natives enough to turn into their exact replicas, but just enough to be middlemen between them and indigenous people. They designed such educational

policy which turned the natives into mediators and nothing more. It produced the dangling people with 'white masks and black skin.'

Bhabha thinks that such natives with white cultural masks tend to be rather ambivalent. Bhabha also discusses about "mimicry," "in-between position," and "ambivalence". When the colonized people, as Bhabha thinks, learn their masters' language and culture, they simultaneously imitate and mimic their masters. In short, their imitation consists of mockery as well. He brings forth the idea of mimicry, which is "the effect of hybridity" (120). So, it tends to be rather subversive. This kind of colonial text contributes to the production of the colonized as a "subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite" (86). The postcolonial texts or the theories analyze the disrupted cultures as hybrid cultures. According to Aschroft, et al, "The postcolonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation" (110). The world view of the natives tends to be ambivalent in such texts.

In the beginning, hybridity was said to have occurred in the case of the culture of the colonized people. That's why the postcolonial writers in their texts, attempted to depict the cultural disintegration resulted by colonial onslaught. Their tone was rather pessimistic. They thought that colonization disrupted the normal pattern of the existence of the colonized people thought the horrible hybridization of their culture. "This colonial bereavement," in Elleke Boehmer's words, "has many times been described by writers in terms of orphanhood or urchinhood, bastardy metaphors underscoring the loss of communal moorings, the destruction of an essential umbilical cord with history"(190) in the words like Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, and Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, to name a few.

Now a days, the concept of hybridity has been extended to the study of diaspora. In other words, the diasporic writhing is regarded as the climatic point of

hybridity. Hybridity or ambivalence, as the migrant writers argue, provides them with the world views of both the spaces: Eastern and Western. It is treated as a creative and fertile mode of expression these days. As it provides the postcolonial writers with the opportunities to clear the space for the indigenous worldview by challenging the imperialist one, its currency is growing among them. Bhabha calls the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside (116). And so is the case with Gabe in Roley's *American Son* who can't create a "third space" between his mother and his brother. That is, Gabe's hybridity makes him unable to map a middle path between their serene Filipino-family values remained in vestiges in his uncle Betino's letters and mother's lifestyle, and the encroaching Mexico-American culture always lived by his brother, Tomas.

The concept of hybridity does have a few pitfalls, though. The celebration of hybridity reinforces the destabilization of the native culture. However, "The West remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations" (Gandhi 136). In such a context, we must be aware of the fact that hybridity often becomes an enlightened response to colonial oppression. Likewise, the tendency to make the cosmopolitan or migrant writer an authentic representative of third world tends to make the postcolonial theory dangerously prescriptive. It, as Aijaz Ahmad argues, isn't rooted in a particular socio-cultural context. Nevertheless, the migrant writers tend to be rather explicit in its commitment to hybridity. It claims to open an in-between space of cultural ambivalence. Consequently, it hasn't only depicted the disrupted culture resulted by colonial onslaught but also established the indigenous worldview along with the imperialist one. In a way, it has become an integral part of postcolonial writing.



Lastly, Ambivalence is the situation of a person, group or community in which they are caught in dilemma or dual nature. They encounter confusion and dilemma which prevents them from deciding where to head, what to decide, what to do, and what not to do. Ambivalent condition is now a debatable issue in transition. It relates both to human life and their cultures. Therefore, ambivalence encompasses widespread area of studies such as psychoanalysis, culture, colonial subject, mimicry, hybridity, and history...

Psychoanalytically, ambivalence tends to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. Robert Young adds, “It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person, or action” (67). It indicates a state of mind in which there is the simultaneous existence of contradictory tendencies, attitudes, feelings concerning single object, especially the existence of two opposite ideas, concepts, beliefs, creeds, subjects, and behaviours such as love-hate, sacred-sin, good-bad, colonized-colonizer, and civilized-uncivilized. A psychoanalyst, therefore, regards ambivalence as a psychic condition in which positive and negative components of the emotional attitudes and physical actions are simultaneously in evidence and they are inseparable.

In this case, psychoanalyst Eugen Bleuser, who at first coins the term in 1911, proposes different symptoms primarily in regard to schizophrenia. He explains:

By ambivalence is to be understood the specific schizophrenia characteristics to accompany identical ideas or concepts at the same time with the positive as well as negative feeling [effective ambivalence] to will or not to will at the same time [the identical

actions/ambivalence of will], and to think the same thoughts at once negatively and positively [intellectual ambivalence]. (30)

The *Dictionary of Behavioural Science*, compiled and edited by Benjamin B. Wolman defines, “ambivalence on the co-existence of opposing emotions, attitudes towards another and as the state of being able to attend two or more aspects of an issue or to view a person in terms of more than one dimensions or values” (14). The point is that in human mind co-exist the opposite emotions, attitudes, traits, and behaviours confusing his nature to alternate rapidly from one dimension to other with respect to the time and space. In short, the human minds often occupy such kind of a co-existence of two opposing drives, desires, feelings, or emotions towards a person, a goal or an object each other.

Historically, when ambivalence occurs to an individual or group, they have dichotomy concerning dynamic age of the transition. The individual can perfectly burn down traditional and almost dead beliefs in which he is accustomed to. In this situation, almost dead individual is caught between the two worlds at the same time – one is traditional which is about to decay and the other is the new which is not born yet perfectly. For instance, in our context, Gabe can't throw away from his mind the original advices and warnings of uncle Betino from Philippines on the one hand and on the other, he hasn't completely adopted the lifestyle of his brother Tomas at the present. This transition period leads Gabe nowhere but in full of ambivalence. Describing this transition, P.K. Ranjan writes:

Ambivalence as a pattern of behavior is a characteristic expression of great ages of transition. The individual caught between a transitional ethos, which perplexes him toward which he aspires, finds himself in an inescapable predicament, and he is seen

wandering between two worlds, one dead and another powerful to born. (10)

Further, with respect to the situation, an individual is in great trap in-between the world. Dreads of uncertainty and anxieties follow him/her. Thus, a critic such as Homi K. Bhabha intellectually purposes the “third space of enunciation” (37) with extreme hope that leads to the hybridization as cultural process. Moreover, such hybridization has become widely discussed cultural phenomenon that clearly exposes the person’s ambivalent tendencies, attitudes, and behaviours. To clarify, Hamlet as character seems to be trapped in historical ambivalence. He is in dilemma whether ‘to be or not to be’ and ‘to act or not to act’. The self-confrontations and doubts procrastinate him to act. Contextually, Shakespeare depicts Hamlet’s mind in the transitional phase of the European Renaissance. He can’t forget or renounce the medieval beliefs in ghosts on the one side and the Renaissance obsession with finding scientific evidence on the other.

Again referring to the ideas of Bhabha, postcolonial discourse theories adopt an ambivalent attitude. He writes, “Ambivalence describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion, which characterizes the relation between colonized and colonizers. The relation is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer” (12). Both kinds of attitudes and behaviours co-exist in him. Some colonized subjects become complicit while some resistant. Now, ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist fluctuative within a colonized subject. Moreover, there is either the exploitation or nurturing situation to the colonized subject that characterizes ambivalent attitude.

However, more importantly, ambivalence is also regarded as unwelcome aspect of the colonial discourse for the colonizers because it violates the clear-cut

authority of colonial domination, and leads to the situation of dilemma. Contrarily, it is the attitude of colonized subjects who strongly tend to resist or separate that colonizer's authority, hegemonic attitude on the one hand. They also reproduce assumptions, habits, values, patterns, or tendencies of the colonizer that is the mimicry of the colonizer on the other hand. So, Bhabha extends the ideas, "instead it produces ambivalent subject whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance" (13). In this colonial discourse theory, Bhabha says that such colonial relation always generates the seeds of its own destruction.

Ambivalence, therefore, relates to culture, psychology, history, postcoloniality, etc. It is the possibility of the formation of the third space that is neither the separation and resistance, nor the integration and complicity. Rather the cultural adaptation and cultural process fill the gap between the spaces.

### III. Gabe's Cultural Ambivalence in Roley's *American Son*

To begin with, the title of the novel, *American Son* itself sounds ambivalent, observing from the location of the protagonist-narrator, Gabe. Roley's title refers to the narrator who is born in the Philippines and, at the time of the novel, has come to educate and settle in the postcolonial America. In this sense, the title hybridizes Gabe ambivalently whether his identity should have his Filipino originality or his American lifestyle. The title chooses the latter so that Gabe's mental and physical disillusionment between the two locations could be narrated dialectically. As well as, the structural organization of *American Son* also shows Gabe's dual position to cultural attractions. Each of the three parts *Balikbayan*, *American Son*, and *A Dirty Penance* begins with a letter from Uncle Betino from Manila. The letters reveal the unspoilt culture of Philippines in contrast to the pervert lifestyles of Gabe's family in America. The chapters, on the other hand, depict the decadent and confused life-struggles of immigrants living in Los Angeles. Such co-presence or interlocking of both locations have revealed Gabe's confirmation of neither of the locations and cultures. As P.K. Ranjan points out, there are neither separations nor resistance to the suggestions Uncle Betino has made to Ika nor complete integration and complicity to the American ways of living. Actually, Gabe parallels relation between letters and chapters are two equal extremes of his psychological statures where he can't take a side. Rather he's in confusion. He can't fuse them together until they stand on two separate cultural systems. Only the fourth letter has been interlocked in Part Three but only when Betino gives up the hopes of the letter of correcting Tomas and Gabe in the Asian system of upbringing.

Psychologically and corporeally, Gabe seems to be frequently changing his location between two drives and desires. He is incapable to stand "in-between"

avoiding his ambivalence. At one side, is his mother Ika who wants Gabe to study well, help her in household chores, and avoid his brother's Mexican gangster behaviours; while, at the other side, Gabe is frequently obsessed with his brother Tomas' total disruption of Filipino values and acceptance of gangster Mexico-American behaviour. Gabe's lines in each of the three parts of the novel begin with Tomas' presence in his mind: "Tomas is the son who helps pay mortgage [...] (15), "When my brother wakes up and finds his best breeding dog gone [...] (61), and "He drives through Culver City past glaring strip malls and empty store fronts [...] (139). The following paragraphs analyse in detail how Gabe's frequent attachments and detachments to these two persons make him an unbalanced and ambivalent character.

When we enter the fifteen-year old Gabe's narration, his first two sentences themselves exhibit his simultaneous attraction and repulsion to his brother Tomas' life style. Gabe says, "Tomas is the son who helps pay mortgage by selling attack dogs to rich people and celebrities. He's the son who keeps our mother up late with worry" (15). This shows both his brother's and his mother's sides pull Gabe equally - his brother who has completely adopted the Mexican gangsters' behaviour and his mother who always worries about her children's successes in academic courses that her brother Betino's letters also most importantly demand. That is, the mother Ika's concerns bear at least some of the qualities of the source culture while the brother's Mexican looks and activities stand as the other attractive business for Gabe. He is confused in ignoring the mother and embracing the brother, because some activities of Tomas have embarrassed him:

[...] his muscles [are] covered in gangster tattoos and his head shaved down to stubble and his eyes bloodshot from pot. He is really half-white, half-Filipino but dresses like a Mexican, and it troubles our

mother that he does this. She can't understand why if he wants to be something he is not he does not at least try to look white. He is also the son who says that if any girlfriend criticized our mother or treated her wrong he would knock the bitch across the house. (15)

So, Gabe often contrasts him from his brother: "I am the son who is quiet and no trouble, and I help our mother with chores around the house" (15). But it's not always, especially when there's any work Tomas asks Gabe to do together. Tomas has kept American dogs hybridizing by giving them German names, language, and training. Gabe loves the dogs perhaps more than Tomas does. He wants to see them "affectionate" rather than "serious". When Tomas stands before his film-industry customers, Gabe gets attracted to Tomas' looks: "Not too many young white people have a huge tattoo of the Virgin Mary on their back and a gold crucifix dangling from a chain against their chest" (20).

Certainly, Tomas needs to give a click to Gabe's mind to detach it from the Mom's influence to his works. And this is almost always by beating him hard once. After punishment, Gabe becomes Tomas; he can't protest but helps. Gabe knows his time at home is just boring with TV and tasteless study. So, even if he has some reservations in regard to Tomas' character, he submits: "I don't want to follow him, but I don't want to go back into the house either" (18). Tomas also humiliates Gabe's rough-looks: "If the client sees you standing there like that he's gonna think you're my houseboy" (18). Mocking his shyness in a different context, Tomas adds that none "take[s] a picture of a person with a face like yours" (42). Tomas' commands, beating, and teasing on the one hand and his much smarter living than Gabe's on the other slowly prepare Gabe to run away from home so that he would be like Tomas or

like an American son of his dream. He calls Tomas “asshole” for his frequent nagging and steals his best dog Buster and Oldsmobile to go to Oregon.

On the contrary, some vestiges of Asian culture remained in this Filipino family attaches him to his mother. His mother still respectfully puts on the wedding ring although it’s some years now since their father has left her. The Filipinos may be angry with each other but talk cheerfully when they meet. Uncle Betino has given jewellery not to his mother Ika, the right heir but to the disrespectful Aunt Millie. However, in Betino’s trip to the Loss Angeles, they behave cheerfully with each other, with “warm eyes”. And Gabe approves how Tomas punched their German father out of home when he tries to desert the mother’s prestige: “He said [...] he only wanted to sleep with her and now he had gotten what he wanted and would leave and didn’t care if we wanted him back or not” (24-25). Gabe also loves his mother’s religious vigours. He remembers his mother giving the pet-cats’ names as Saint Elmo and Sister Teresa. He also drives Ika to Sunday church gatherings, which Tomas doesn’t entertain.

To digress a bit, Roley has also used many symbols. In this battleground of cultural clashes, Tomas’ best dog Buster is shown killing Ika’s two most-loved cats Saint Elmo and Sister Teresa. This shows the loss of Ika’s values in American land.

Yet, Gabe is never consistent. He has opposite emotions and attitudes towards his mother, again: “I don’t like having her pick me up from school, she is short and dark and wears funny looking giant purple glasses that are trendy on other people’s mother but which do not match her brown skin tone” (30) In public life, Gabe seems uncomfortable with his mother just for her Asian looks. This could be another level of the negative effect of Ika’s own hatred to Manila that according go her “smells like



cockroaches” (32). When she herself feels American, her son Gabe, being biologically, hybrid, feels it more deeply.

Towards the end of Part One, we see another Tomas being born in Gabe. The more Tomas teases him, the more Gabe feels he has to be free from his domineering brother. From the beginning, Tomas acts more and speaks less. On their drive to a celebrity in Brentwood Park to sell their baby dog Johan, Tomas teases Gabe as too shy and unlikely for a photograph. He says “Have a good look at those cloths you are wearing. One look at that and they will take the offer back for sure” (44). Against such reproaches, Gabe also speaks almost no words: “Mom has said he shouldn’t tease me like this, but I don’t remind him, I look out of my window” (42). Not being able to tolerate Tomas’ dominance, Gabe reflects: “His knuckles hit me, so fast I didn’t see it coming. My tongue prods at the shreds of my inner cheek, and salty blood floods my mouth” (53). But, behind the silent acceptances, Gabe is planning his escape, so that he could create his own self in the American style of Tomas. Earlier, Tomas was expelled from St. Dominics School for taunting Korean kids, smashing a Japanese boy’s car window, and beating others who would call him Asian. Now, Gabe does a bunk after three months in July 1993 to escape the severe beating and teasing by Tomas. Tomas’s school leaving and Gabe’s family leaving are both parallel. This is simultaneous imitation and mimicry of Tomas’ behaviours by Gabe. Happy to have quit the home in an attempt to mimic independent American lifestyle, Gabe says, “When my brother wakes up and finds his best breeding dog [Buster] gone- the one he most loves- and then steps out and finds his 1984 white Oldsmobile missing, it will be a good thing. I am out of the San Fernando basin before dawn” (61). But this becomes unsuccessful. Gabe has left his self/home and dare not to completely adopt the other/American. He rather realizes the presence of fatherly love in the tow truck

driver and submits back to his mother at last. Gabe's ambivalence doesn't help him create a "third space" between his mother or Filipino cultural residue in his mind and American or rootless way of life.

Shortly after Gabe has bunked home, he feels a strange apprehension of his new life as everything appears dark to him. "in the dark," expresses Gabe:

All I see is desert and asphalt moving beneath my headlights [...]. I don't know exactly where I am on the map. It shows a blank sketch of highway, and I'm afraid I might be in it, though probably I'm lost [...]. On the black horizon, I can't even tell the difference between the ground and the sky. (63)

Nevertheless, Gabe finds some solace in his free life. Almost comparable to Huck's adventures as characterized by Mark Twain in America's most acclaimed fiction *Huckleberry Finn*, Gabe enjoys his life of self-discovery and becomes a liar. He enjoys the tastes of a dome of light, motels, and a sandwich at a gas station, some boys talking with their girlfriends, tattoo-showing waitresses, etc on his way to Meridan in Oregon. In a way, he is happy for his life of as if an American son who isn't responsible for home, family, and culture but only for personal freedom, visits, and experiences. Gabe is ready to integrate with whatever people and lifestyles he encounters even if by being a liar. After his Brother's Oldsmobile has broken down, he meets a tow truck driver named Stone.

Before this white man, Gabe lies almost everything of his familial heritage, feeling free that he can't reach Gabe's home. Gabe cheats his Asian blood; he lies that the Oldsmobile was given to him by his grandpa, that he has visited San Pedro and San Bernardino, etc. He narrates this as,

He asks me about San Bernardino. I stiffen, knowing nothing, but then think to tell him Venice is worse. He nods and seems satisfied.

Venice is a shithole, he says.

I nod.

Bunch of fucking Mexicans. (83-84)

Until they reach Meridan towing Gabe's Oldsmobile by Stone's truck, Gabe enjoys lying after lying. The driver doesn't like the Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Laotians who neighbour him in Los Angeles. He loathes, "All those Asians won't even learn to speak English" (84). But yet, Gabe is not affected. He's happy that the driver can't notice he himself is an Asian. We see Gabe very far from his source culture here. Enjoying Stone's talk, Gabe thinks, "He must be blind. May be it's because of my clothes and the way I now cut my hair" (84). Unlike at home, Gabe doesn't have rag clothes now. He has sold Tomas' best dog and made enough money to fashion him in Tomas' way. Gabe feels completely free from tight rules of his brother and home. So much so that in a motel at Oregon, Gabe doesn't hesitate to introduce his mother to Stone as his *maid* at the end of Part Two, for her appearances don't look rich. Gabe even indebts his chatty and cheaty nature to his brother Tomas' influence: "Watching Tomas has given me plenty to talk about," Gabe adds that the gangster he describes "are just people I've seen in school" (89). From his lies, we can analyze how much repressed desires Gabe has had for being an American boy with American ways of life. At Stone's restaurant on the way, when Stone introduces Gabe with other staff, Gabe becomes very elated: "May be I even feel a little proud keeping close beside him as men reach out and shake my hand, or just nod at me" (96).

However, culture becomes a sort of theatre for Gabe where he could perform his changing roles. And with his changing mind, this postcolonial text becomes so

complex and hybridized. Gabe's change of mind begins again when the tow truck driver slowly exposes his fatherliness towards him. Stone's kind behaviour and looks remind Gabe of his childhood home environment in the protection on his father. With this, Gabe's mind slowly returns to family values back in his home. This begins when Stone shows his daughter's picture in his gold-chain locker. His daughter, the only child, has been kidnapped and probably raped before killing her. This lonely childless father wants to look Gabe as his son. "There is a quarter-sized red scar on his chest," Gabe records Stone's intimate affinity with him, "he takes my hand in his sweaty palm and leads my finger to it [...]. It's a bullet hole, he finally says" (87). His love to daughter reminds Gabe of "driving with Mom. She will worry about me like crazy" (90). Slowly, the driver's behaviour and talks in the truck psychologically pulls Gabe back to his own family from a runaway American. This deepens his cultural ambivalence further. When he happens to see the cabin mirror, Gabe seriously discovers his Asianness thus:

Suddenly I notice my reflection in the mirrored glass and it appears so obviously Asian I almost stop in my tracks. My eyes look narrow and my hair straight and coarse and black [...] I have slender Asian hips, and my cheekbones are too high [...] I might even look Mexican, but not white. (90)

Gabe now fears of his previous lies to Stone that he was a white from Los Angeles. He often avoids the tow truck guy's face and looks out of the window. He doesn't make long eye-contacts.

On the way in a restaurant where they have lunch, two Mexican busboys listen from Stone that Gabe is a Mexican white. They suspect and inquire Gabe:

He know you're Mexican?

I ain't no Mexican.

What do you mean by that?

Nothing. (101)

Gabe wishes he hadn't cheated the driver of his Filipino identity. At the fear and danger of being a false American, he reflects his mimicry symbolically as resulting in:

All birds have stopped their chirping and it's deadly quiet. No sound on the highway. In the restaurant no sound, nor in this parking lot. Something about the heat. The time of day. My hand muscles twitch. About my temples beat a nauseating pulse and a glitter of sunlight flashes up in the roof gutter and blinds me to a dark bird fluttering past. (101-102)

At one of the dishwashers' suspicious stare, Gabe feels his real identity almost naked: "[...] but the big one keeps his eyes on me. It's like I have no skin and he is looking inside me" (102). Terrified, Gabe reflects fatherly shelter in Stone's concern to him. "He half smiles upon me," reflects Gabe, "father-like, then pats my shoulder. Damned spics, he says almost gently" (103).

As they cross the border of California to the area of Oregon, the sun changes from afternoon blue to early evening orange ready to set down the west horizon, fading the highway scenes. The sunset is also the sunset to Gabe's short single-day life of being an American son. After this, Gabe more deeply feels the fatherly care of Stone who has already called Ika to take the immature teenager back to home. Stone's slow drive in the Oregon belts reminds Gabe of the past when "Tomas and I were

little and my father would bring us to the highway that runs along Lax to sit on his Corvette hood and watch the underbellies of landing planes” (105).

The events that follow surprise Gabe one after another. Stone takes him to his familiar hotel, pays the night-booking bill himself, introduces Gabe as his nephew, and to the greatest surprise says that Gabe’s mother has already come there to take him. Now, Gabe has a fear he will get everything exposed to Stone that he has yet cheated. “My mother appears really dark- very Filipino - even though she avoids the Sun,” fears Gabe, “I can’t imagine Stone meeting her and mistaking her for being white” (113). Rather, if only Stone would leave without meeting her. In Denny’s, Gabe not only sees his mother having dinner but also his aunt Jessica. He contrasts Ika’s poverty with Jessica’s rich-looks: “Even beneath the light, Mom’s face appears dark as a shadow [...] and she wears the enormous glasses I hate. Aunt Jessica [...] a very pale woman with correct posture [. . .] with her silk blue scarf wrapped stylishly about her neck” (115).

Stone also expects Jessica to be Gabe’s mother, so, for his earlier lies, Gabe is forced to introduce Jessica as his mother and Ika “*our maid*” (116). This results due to his gap between dream of being white and reality of being Asian. This results due to his mistake of mimicking the whites, which later troubles Ika very much when she learns. Gabe can’t bear when his mother, full of tears, asks “Did you tell him I was your maid?” (128). At last, he has nothing comfortable but to renounce his mimicry and lies and submit himself to his loving mother: “I lift my arm and wrap it awkwardly over her shoulder [...] I let it stay there for a moment, limp like a fish” (129). Stone leaves Gabe shocked of his lies and false life.

This way, we find Gabe in Part-II continuously coexisting opposite emotions, attitudes, and dimensions that confuse his nature. He becomes a tragic theatrical

character who fails in making him an American son, and not happy to come back to the tasteless life at home, either.

Back home in Part Three, Gabe is once again in the grip of his brother Tomas. Now, he has to pay with work the price of Buster, Tomas' best dog that Gabe has sold while running away. Tomas involves Gabe in all sorts of activities: training and bathing dogs, taking them to clients, stealing anything they see in celebrities' houses, etc. He wouldn't tell his mother for the fear of Tomas: "Our mother thinks he has taken me to a movie; she didn't ask me about it [...]. Like always, it is best not to think about how she would feel if we got caught" (141).

Now, we find Gabe in simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from his brother's lifestyle that has the dream of fulfilling American success by any means possible: stealing other's properties; beating and even killing the intruders in his path, taking girlfriends home without marriage, selling training guard dogs in LAPD techniques, and selling them in high prices, etc.; but defending their mother at all costs. Gabe is psychologically and physically ambivalent of accepting or protesting his brother. Actually, he can't do either of them completely.

Since Gabe has stolen Tomas' own dog, it becomes very easy for Tomas to involve Gabe in further thefts. Gabe regrets of his past mistake. But due to that mistake, he can't yet protest his brother by saying that stealing is wrong. Gabe expresses this as:

The more I work, the more he wants me to do. Recently he has said that since I stole from him I should not mind stealing, and since my transgression was a crime, that is what I must do to pay him back. Each time we go out, my stomach clutches and I have to step aside and lean

over, palming my hands on my knees. I try not to vomit and make

Tomas angry, so today I went without food since breakfast. (144)

Gabe feels his hands tremble and blood freeze while robbing. But yet he goes.

One afternoon, Tomas forces him to enter the stash of Gabe's four years senior at Saint Dominic's named Eddy Mormon. They have also taken Greta the attack dog. As Gabe has entered breaking the windows, Eddy catches him red-handed. Eddy tries to stab Gabe with his knife. But then comes Tomas and beats him with spear-shoes to death at last.

Such influences of Tomas to Gabe continuously deteriorate Gabe's performance at Saint Dominic's. He can't at all concentrate in study. Once father Ryan calls him and says "Now you've had a C in English, and a D in religion. And now this is F. And I, Gabe [...]. Is there anything you would like to tell me Gabe?" (162). Gabe has failed the exam. Father Ryan becomes very serious and asks Gabe to call Aunt Jessica. On the way to Saint Dominic's, Jessica reminds Gabe the hopes of his mother. This really touches Gabe:

Look Gabe. Your mother had hopes when she came to this country.

In America you can become successful. You can rise above. You can get education [...]. I don't think she hopes for anything for herself anymore. She does everything for you [...]. Her brother, Betino your uncle has been nagging her to send you and your brother to the Philippines. To stay with him and go to school over there [...]. How much it hurts her. Are you listening to me, *Gabe? Gabe? Do you understand?* [...] because she had dreams that her kids could have a better life than the cast-driven slum you come from [...] and so I'm trying to get you into Westward. (166-68)



This long lesson by Aunt Jessica impresses Gabe. It changes his negative behaviour and he vows never to trouble his mother. Actually, Aunt Jessica - Gabe's father's half-sister - always seems to have managed to live in hybridity, as in a 'safe house.' She has been able to create a "third space" between two cultures and settled well in America. From her, Gabe also hopes to achieve a middle cultural ground where he could respect his mother and her values on the one hand and the successful life of America on the other. But this realization is too late as he has been denied for new admission at the school due to his very poor performance. Despite all these, Gabe starts assisting Ika in parties, shopping, and church-going which Tomas doesn't listen: "I'll let mama's boy keep you company" (170). Tomas denies driving mom to church. Gabe now dislikes Tomas' "undershirt with no sleeves and you can see the tattoo in Spanish on his shoulder" (169).

Notwithstanding, Gabe still has some stinks at his mother's appearances at school and in public. He always waits Ika at the school corner to come to pick him up, so that others couldn't see and tease "how she wears her huge sunglasses" (174). Besides, Ika hits a Land Cruiser with her car one day at Gabe's school. The owner, Ben Feinstein's mother, makes a big fuss for a tiny scratch on her car that "people who can't afford insurance should ride the bus" (178). Seeing Ika a dark-skinned non-white Asian, the Yoga Mom (Ben's mother) expresses her anger this way: "You know? You know and you still hit me? God, can you understand? I'm going to have to bring the truck in, deal with the fucks at the dealership, rental cars" (177). Gabe can't defend his mother but just becomes a mute observer. Then she very often nags Ika to pay her eight hundred dollar for the repair. It is really intolerable/ unbearable for such a tiny, unnoticeable scratch like that. Gabe can't voice against. In another incident, at a make-up shop, a white salesgirl ignores Ika as a customer for her simple

Filipino looks. Ika is waiting for attention while the cosmetic girl continues her chats across the aisle to a pharmacist woman. Here, Gabe makes a feeble protest though: “You should not serve somebody just because they look different” (182).

From that incident on, Gabe seems valuing his mother’s emotions over Tomas’ negligence. Tomas has recklessly piled up stolen stereos in the living room in everyone’s easy sight. He doesn’t help the mother in doing the washing up and in keeping the house clean. He indignantly invites his girlfriends and does sexy chats at the presence of the mother. Gabe wants to end all such activities of Tomas. He says:

I want tell him about Oregon about how hard it has been to our mother; so maybe he’ll treat her better. But I can’t get myself to do it. He stays out many nights a week not bothering to tell he will not need dinner. Some times he brings over girlfriends, even though our mother is religious and it bothers her that they are unmarried. He does nothing around house and messes up in the kitchen [...]. (190)

In another instance, Gabe remembers how much his mother loves cheerful gatherings and parties with her cousins and relatives. At one of the parties, Gabe listens they talk about children’s study and jobs. There the dress-up of Tomas pulls the eyes of everybody: “Tomas had come in wearing a sleeveless undershirt that showed off his tattoos and got food from the kitchen and ate in a corner without smiling at anyone” (193). Such unsocial character of Tomas gives Gabe anger and hatred towards him.

Some days later, the Mom and Gabe see Tomas walking with the Mom’s little niece Veronica on a lawn. Tomas teaches her how to use the Colt and shoot bullets. Veronica’s mother scolds her daughter for learning the gangster’s habits, and stares at Tomas, who is totally indifferent to her. It’s extremely serious for Ika that Tomas is

openly defying her. Ika walks up to Tomas with a gun that she couldn't tolerate this. Ika is very angry with "wide and almost watery" (196) eyes. Tomas first panics and feels very sorry.

On the other hand, Gabe finds his uncle Betino's letter to Ika in her drawer that she must have read many times repeatedly. From the letter, Gabe learns how much important his good moral behaviours and good study are to their family. Uncle Betino from Manila has written:

With Gabe I think it may be possible to instil in him some of the Asian virtues of our family heritage, of discipline and education and respect for elders and history, as well as some of the European virtues of our Spanish and German heritage, of culture and learning [...].

However, with Tomas, I fear you have waited too long and not listened to me, and that it's too late. He has become a gangster and is in my mind no longer a Filipino or a Laurel. (201-202)

All of these perverted activities of Tomas and growing worries of Ika and Betino must be distancing Gabe away from his brother. Gabe must be boldly speaking against all such bad behaviours of Tomas and himself but not completely. Despite all degraded behaviours of Tomas, Gabe can't totally leave him. He rather submits to Tomas when Tomas asks an outing for dog-sale, theft, beating someone, or any secret unsaid plans of Tomas. In particular, the Yoga Mom is frequently calling their Mom to pay her eight hundred dollars. Otherwise she would tell the authorities that Ika hasn't insured her car. Worried to pay such high amount for almost no damage done to the woman's car, Ika goes for night jobs busying herself most of the hours. This is intolerable for Tomas.

In one afternoon, with their mother watching the boys from inside the house, Tomas asks Gabe to sit in their car. Gabe asks where they are going but Tomas commands in usual way: “what do you mean where? Don’t you worry about that” (203). From Tomas’ way, Gabe guesses he’s taking him to a sort of robbery again, so he doesn’t move. But, Tomas shuts Greta and beats Gabe for not obeying him, “He comes over and hits me in the face [...]. In the car I pretend not to feel any pain. I taste the salty blood in my mouth and my tongue traces the folds of flesh that have torn against my teeth” (204).

After beating, Gabe falls in Tomas like a trapped mouse. He’s hurt physically - mentally, too - but he says he is not. He sits almost mute in the car. He warns Tomas, “You know you embarrass Mom” (206) sensing possible theft or murder by Tomas again. When Tomas swerves his car into Rustic Canyon, Gabe sees “a glimpse of a modern house made of glass and white concrete, in a sunny clearing” (208) before which Tomas stops the car. Then, Tomas opens the task, “You know that Yoga mother who keeps nagging Mom about that stupid dent in her car? [...]. That’s the truck that bitch humiliated Mom in front of school about, right?”(209-210). Tomas calls Ben Feintain, the son of Yoga Mom, out to the Land Cruiser garage. Gabe knows the intention of Tomas now. He knows Tomas will severely beat Ben so that he will tell his mother not to trouble their Mom. That Tomas may even threaten to attack Ben’s mother, otherwise. At this moment, Gabe is ambivalent. He knows beating and injuring others is moralless gangster’s behaviour. But yet he can’t say no to it because it is the only way that Mom will be safe. Although Gabe has read uncle Betino’s letter, and although it’s time now he really needs to prove he’s “good son” of Mom, he doesn’t stop Tomas from beating Ben to almost death. “As my brother punches his stomach, I can feel the blows through his back” writes Gabe, “and his

body slouching as his legs give way. I let him fall to the ground” (213). Gabe rather feels good that Ben, who had earlier laughed at him, has first bowed before him now.

Gabe puts on:

A couple of times in the past I have been with a small group of People when someone said a few smart-aleck things about me and Ben laughed even though I was older. But now he’s respectful, his head bowed.

Although my stomach wrenches, I feel a rush not of anxiety but of confidence. (124-25)

Gabe feels confident that it’s beating the whites when they attempt to dominate that gives the non-whites security. That not noticing their humiliation and superior complex, as their mom Ika is doing whether in supermarket or in society as with the Yoga mother and the salesgirl, is wrong because it lets them dominate. Feeling relief after punishing Ben for eagerly willing to get money from Tomas, Gabe sees Tomas like his father: “He sets his hand on me [...] Then it dawns on me that this is probably something that my father used to do to both of us” (216). At Tomas’ offer, Gabe is ready to celebrate the successful control of Yoga Mom’s and Ben’s inferior treatment to them:

How is your appetite?

Actually I have none, but I don’t want to admit this.

It’s strong, I say. (216)

In these ways, in Part Three, we see Gabe not having his own stand but oscillating between his mother’s socio-religious virtues and his brother’s gangster advantages. Gabe constantly changes his cultural position between the two. Gabe is not himself but at times Ika and at times Tomas. Gabe is ambivalent.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In summing up the analysis, we can say that Gabe's mid-teenagehood in the postcolonial America in the fiction is spending in cultural ambivalence. He encounters, contests, struggles, and looks bewildered and often confused between two ways of living in California in the US. On the one side, he feels at times responsible to the Filipino heritage carried on in parts by his mother Ika. This cultural terrain demands that Gabe be good at study, correct in morals, helpful and loving to his mother, and build noticeable personality and progress. When Gabe is with the mother, he becomes sincere, and honest. While, on the other hand, he moves at times wilful to shape his career in the mould of his brother Tomas. Except love to mother, Tomas has completely discarded his Asian values of good moral character and successful study. Rather, he's involved in maintaining and raising his family status to meet the dream of American success. For this, he has become a gangster with Mexican looks in dresses and tattoos on his body. He trains American dogs in German styles and earns a fortune, selling them as guard dogs to American celebrities. He, at will, takes Gabe to selling dogs, stealing other's properties, and beating the offenders like Eddy and the Yoga Mom. Gabe gets attracted to him because of his impressive mimicry and interesting life. His way of free life with no socio-historical ties forms in Gabe's mind an individual life with a business of own choice. Gabe is at times attracted to and at times detracted from either of these two sides of life. He frequently changes his role from one side to the other and is never able to balance in-between them creating a safe third space. This indecisive condition of Gabe prevails in all three parts of the fiction.

In Part One (Balikbayan), we see Gabe attached more to the mother. He enjoys to help her at home and be known as the "good son". But Tomas' profession, especially his contacts with the celebrities attracts Gabe. While the celebrities visit

their home or while Tomas takes Gabe to great people's houses for the sale of his dogs, Tomas often beats and teases Gabe for his boring house everyday with unclean dress-ups. This opens the repressed dream of Gabe of Freeing himself from home and be even more successful and attractive than Tomas is. So, he makes up his mind to do a bunk.

Planning a life of a successful American son in Part Two (American Son), we see Gabe out of home towards another state, Oregon. On the way, he lies the tow truck driver named Stone with his fictional stories. He says he's a white's son, come out to experience the states most of which he has already visited. But such cheatings don't last longer than a day as the driver knows Gabe is a runaway immature youngster who must be shown parental love. Till the evening at Oregon, Gabe almost sufficiently takes Stone like his father. When he meets Ika in a hotel there, arranged by Stone, he regretfully submits back to his mother. By this time, Gabe has once seen the dark uncertain future of mimicking the lifestyle of the whites, which he is not.

But Gabe can't prevent him from pervasive influences of his brother Tomas, again in Part Three (A Dirty Penance). Although Mom's worries, Aunt Jessica's suggestions, uncle Betino's letters try to bind him in the Asian virtues of living, he can't remain fixed. He has a stink of his mother's dark face. Moreover, Tomas' forceful involvements of Gabe in stealing and justifiable cum unjustifiable beating, to him and to others, make Gabe's study fall and life pervert. He can't judge for example Tomas' punishment to Ben Fentain is wrong. It has ended their Mom's worry of unnecessarily paying eight hundred dollars for slightly hitting a white lady's Land Cruiser.

Thus, Gabe frequently shifts his character towards both brother and mother - proving himself undecided and unsuccessful. He is in the tensional relation of absence

and presence, or emptiness and affirmation amidst the encounters of two cultures: Filipino and American; traditional and new. These two ways of life are concurrently appearing in him making his feeling towards them negative as well as positive. With mother, he sees Tomas' moralless behaviours disapproving; while with Tomas, he forgets the Filipino virtues expected in him by Mom, uncle, and aunt. Gabe is really confused of what side to take or how he could have a balanced way of common-ground living. The novel itself, too, alternates between two disparate cultures depicted by three of uncle Betino's letters from Manila and three narrative parts of Gabe's life in America. These two cultures co-present but clash a lot throughout the novel and Gabe's life. Culturally, Gabe's character in *American Son* is ambivalent.



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