Eastern Gunslingers: Andrew Cunanan and Seung-Hui Cho in the Western Media Imaginary

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Two Asian-Americans, separated by a decade, figured prominently in the United States and global media for perpetrating acts of violence against mainly white American victims. Despite the national, social, sexual, and temporal differences between them, the two individuals were handled in strikingly similar ways by Western media: they were insistently identified as possessing characteristics of their originating national cultures, and their actions were subjected to a type of close scrutiny not applied to other cases of multiple-victim killers.

Using textual analysis, this paper will look at the media coverage expended on the cases of Andrew Cunanan and Seung-Hui Cho, using critiques of Orientalism initiated by Edward Said and developed by a number of non-Western theorists. The typical Western narrative used to explain actuations of Cunanan and Cho will be subjected to the question of whether this attitude toward Oriental Others insists on differentiating them rather than accepting their actions in the manner of their Western counterparts.

Keywords: *Orientalism; Seung-Hui Cho; Andrew Cunanan; Yellow Peril; Asianness; perpetual foreigner; model minority; race and ethnicity; heteromasculinity; the monster*

Introduction and Rationale of the Study

The strong fascination and disturbance that non-Caucasian killers exert on the public imagination have rarely been demonstrated more strikingly than in two cases in the United States (U.S.) when a homosexual half-Filipino spree killer, Andrew Cunanan, and a Korean-American gunman, Seung-Hui Cho, performed their cold-blooded executions. In the summer of 1997, Cunanan left a trail of victims ranging from a tranquil grounds-keeper to one of the fashion world's top-notch designers, Gianni Versace. Ten years later, Seung-Hui Cho gunned down a total of 32 people in a shooting rampage at the campus of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Not surprisingly, during and after the outbreak of the catastrophe, the media wasted no time in dissecting the two killers, with coverage heavily relying on a psychoanalytic approach with regard to their class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, in the process creating two kinds of impact. One would be the construction of multiple identities on the two subjects as a result of media treatment; the other would be an outburst of a combination of guilt, shame and relief among those belonging to their shared categories, mainly derived from a collective worry over possible cases of backlash and reprisal against Asian Americans.

Both the apology of Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun on behalf of South Korea to the U.S. after the rampage of Cho and the denial of the Philippines to bury Cunanan in his father's country may account for guilt and shame, while several ethnic groups hoped that the suspects would not turn out to have been members of their own ethnic group, a reaction known as "Let it be some other Asian" (Lam, 2007).

Thus, it would be worth questioning if the media had used any Orientalist logic regarding these two Asian-Americans, manifesting the image of Orientals intersected with identity-constitutive elements such as race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. And if so, in what way did the media play a role in perpetuating the Orientalist narrative in the U.S.?

Another question should address the possible explanations for such a collective response from marginalized groups in the U.S. What would it mean for people to feel guilty or shameful for something that had nothing to do with them as individuals? Was it merely rhetoric of historically rooted racial and sexual tensions or a possible presumption for the invisible existence of a structural Orientalism specific to the U.S.? And if so, how can we define this kind of Orientalism situated today?

As an individual distinguished by so-called Oriental categories and sharing concerns for the reinvigoration of Orientalist consciousness, I felt obliged to revisit the media accounts on the two Eastern gunslingers in relation to the questions I raised in the preceding paragraph. By looking at the representations of the two Asian-Americans in the media, this paper therefore aims to read the possible manifestation of Orientalism that might have re-emerged and/or been modified in the U.S.. In doing so, my paper finally aims to redefine U.S. Orientalism that embraces a more diverse set of polemics obtaining today.

Framework: Orientalism

In defining Orientalism as the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient," Edward W. Said (1979: 3) disclosed that Western perceptions on the Orient are fraught with inaccurate information based on ontological and epistemological racial differences between the Occident and the Orient. Indeed, numerous scholars have accounted for how racial difference had been constructed by European imperial powers as a way to justify the expansion of territorial sovereignty. For instance, after the

Spanish-American War in 1898, by describing Filipinos as either "half-devil or half-children," the U.S. justified its aggression by claiming as its duty the enlightenment and salvation of this supposedly inferior race at any cost, even that of war (Kim, 2004: 38-39).

In explaining how Orientalism determined the course of international power relations, Said (1979) expands his articulation to U.S. culture when he describes how "since World War II, America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did" (Said, 1979: 4). However, what distinguishes post-war Orientalism in the U.S. from that of Said's initial articulation on the colonial Orientalist narrative is the slight modification from "the idea of immutable biological difference" (Klein, 2003: 11) in order to display the cultural plurality of the U.S. as a unique national model for globalization, and yet, retain its core of cultural homogeneity and social normative structure which was accomplished by the process of ethnicization.

Such a transition from "racialization" to "ethnicization" in the U.S. may serve to challenge Said's binary opposition logic that dichotomizes geo-ideological positions between "the West as rational, progressive, adult, and masculine and the East as irrational, backward-looking, childish, and feminine" (Klein, 2003: 10). It also developed into the so-called "post-Orientalism/Cold War Orientalism" that obscured racial difference in order to legitimize the U.S. bid for world leadership.

One good illustration for understanding the distinction between "racialization" and "ethnicization" can be found in the book ***Cold War Orientalism*** (Klein, 2003), whose author argues that prior to the Cold War period, racialization was achieved by "separat[ing] people of color from the whites legally, physically, socially, and politically" (224), through segregation (previously the slavery system) in the case of African-Americans, and legal restrictions for Asian-Americans (i.e., the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentlemen's Agreement, and the 1924 National Origins Act). Likewise, the process of racialization somewhat validates Said's Orientalism and shows how it has rendered immigrants, mostly Asian Americans, as "perpetual foreigners" who are unassimilable strangers, regardless of their citizenship or duration of residence in America (Gotanda, 1999: 129-51).

However, during and after the Cold War, a period when the U.S. needed the integration of racial difference as a means of qualifying for world leadership in defending democracy and equality, the process of ethnicization came into play and effectively erased racial inequity (e.g., the abolition of laws restricting immigration and enforcing segregation), allowing the U.S. to accommodate

Asian-Americans with the unspoken premise of deracination via the image of the "good Asian" often invoked in literature or films.

For instance, Elaine Kim, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Berkeley, points out that:

> There are two basic kinds of stereotypes of Asians in Anglo-American literature: the "bad" Asian and the "good" Asian. The "bad" Asians are the sinister villains and brute hordes, neither of which can be controlled by the Anglos and both of which must therefore be destroyed. The "good" Asians are the helpless heathens to be saved by Anglo heroes or the loyal and lovable allies, sidekicks, and servants. In both cases, the Anglo-American portrayal of the Asian serves primarily as a foil to describe the Anglo as "not-Asian." (Kim, 1982: 4)

The element of Orientalist logic can still be found in Kim's statement where the bad Asians, usually portrayed as "faceless masses," "diabolical geniuses," or "yellow masks," need to be punished since they arouse the U.S. fear of miscegenation, inclusive of "monsters" that could potentially undermine the country's normative formations, while the image of good Asians is being promoted. This is not only the case in printed literature but also in popular media which we may witness from Hollywood films (i.e., the Charlie Chan series, ***Better Luck Tomorrow, Broken Blossoms, The Ballad of Little Jo, King and I,*** and ***Rush Hour***) and TV programs (i.e., ***Ally McBeal, All-American Girl, Redwood Curtain*** and ***Lost***) that continually depict the polarized images of Asian-Americans. Occasionally, slight modifications are utilized to cover up the negative/unfair type of goodness into a more positive or sophisticated one known as the "model minority" image.

Today, Asian-Americans are often represented as erudite, intelligent, hard-working, politically neutral, productive and inoffensive peoples, who have moved up the ladder in U.S. society, thus becoming role models for other ethnic groups to emulate. Although as Asians we may respond favorably to this image, the danger here lies not only in the fact that such images are indeterminate in reality, drawn as they are from questionable statistics that were extrapolated to compare the major racial and ethnic groups' social achievement in the U.S., but also because they constitute a brand of psychological pressure where Asian-Americans have to live up to these high expectations (Chin, 2001).

The question, therefore, would be: Has racial (and partly also, sexual) inequity been eradicated with the end of the Cold War? Many anti-Orientalism proponents often find themselves in a dilemma where the struggle against structural Orientalist discourses becomes conflated with the "color-blind rhetoric of contemporary politics" (Chong, 2008: 29), since the matter of racism in the U.S. is considered pathological by the average "rational" American citizen and is, thus, non-existent. In fact, it seems plausible if one considers that there has been no such clear anti-Asian backlash in the aftermath of Cho's and Cunanan's violent deeds, but instead what can be found have been positive indicators of Asian-Americans' social mobility in the U.S.. Furthermore, when the Virginia Tech incident occurred, the majority of U.S. citizens displayed their confused responses to the Koreans' self-blame, arguing that it was not an instance of outburst of racialized tension but of terror executed by an individual. The general response was indeed so rational that one could come to believe the racial and ethnic formations were irrelevant issues raised in these special cases of Cho and Cunanan. However, considering the fact that Orientalism has never existed in tangible or solid form but in an inconceivably ideological sense, it does not necessarily follow that no Orientalist discourse is present just because Orientalism is invisible.

How then can we visualize such invisible discourse? One effective way to foreground it would be to compare the monsters in horror film with the imaging of Cho and Cunanan, whose identities, I would argue, were mainly constructed as monstrous by the media. By parsing the horror genetic elements that define horror as a genre, feminist scholars critically look at the relationship between its monstrous characters and its originating society, and realize that the existence of the monster effectively serves as an allegory of the fear of society whose social order the monster symbolically threatens, thereby deserving destruction (Clover, 1992: 22-23). This line of speculation allows us to hypothesize that if Cho and Cunanan were constructed as monstrous Asian-Americans in print media narratives, then it might be possible to reveal any variant Orientalist discourses by comparing the monstrous character in horror films and print media. Thus, this paper investigates mainly Cunanan and Cho's similarities, in terms of narrative treatment in media of their respective characters, which would allow us to infer any thus-far invisible Orientalist discourse in the U.S.

Research Parameters

This study explores the Orientalism discourse in U.S. media by raising the following questions:

1. How are Orientals' images associated with race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality manifested in the media coverage on Cho and Cunanan?

2. What are the similarities of such images, if any, with the element of monsters in horror film?
3. How do these co-relative images play a role in perpetuating or reinforcing the Orientalist narrative in the U.S today?

In order to realize these objectives, this study used the textual analysis method on U.S. major print, broadcast, and Internet media coverage consisting of 15 articles and four programs on Cho and Cunanan from ***New York Times, New York Post, Washington Post, Chicago Sun-Times***, American Broadcasting Company (ABC), British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), and National Broadcasting Company (NBC), out of a total of 102 articles and 13 programs (including two feature films and two full-length books) from a wider variety of sources.

From Desired Orientals to Desiring Monsters

Before we look at the media presentation of Cho and Cunanan, it seems imperative to open with the question on the ambiguous emotion of "desire" in order to partly understand these Asian-Americans' enigmatic motivation of extremes. By looking at relations between Indonesian natives and their Dutch colonial masters, Ann Laura Stoler (2010) argues that one of the crucial emotions that operate in relationships between Orientalists (or Westerners) and Orientals (or Asians) seems to be an ambiguous type of desire on the part of the West, drawn from a yearning for or envy of, great ancient civilizations and the physical allure of the Oriental subject. From my experience, I notice this principle played out in American men's preference in choosing their romantic partners during their visits to the Philippines. Oddly enough, these gentlemen adhered to a different standard of beauty far from the ideal represented by Hollywood celebrities but rather generated instead from mystic and exotic qualities.

In a similar way, Andrew Cunanan was desired due to his external/exogenous Orientalist features that exhibited an ambiguous exotic beauty inherited from his Filipino father's features with the combination of Mediterranean darkness from his Italian mother. For instance, a ***New York Times*** story described him as "gregarious, generous, well-mannered, articulate, informed" (David, 1997) and thus having "a face so nondescript that it appears vaguely familiar to just about everyone who knew him" (Alvarez, 1997), while CNN similarly described him as "the chameleon-like Filipino-American" (CNN, 1997a). Considering the historical affinities between the U.S. and the Philippines and the native Filipinos' hybrid racial mix derived significantly from the influx of different colonizers throughout the country's history, it would not be difficult to see where Cunanan's chameleon-like cultural and ethnic ambiguity might have come from. One may say that he externally fits the most desired images of Orientals constructed by the discourse, thus confirming Stoler's (2010) emphasis on the status of the Oriental as an object of desire.

In contrast, the desire for Cho was confined to his inner/endogenous features, which conformed to the image of "Asianness" as intellectual, industrious, reticent and effeminate, all of which contribute to the totality of what became known as the "model minority" image. Indeed, the myth of the model minority became one of the central issues in media analyses of the Virginia Tech incident and media constantly emphasized this myth throughout their coverage. For instance, a ***New York Times*** story described him as "skinny and boyish-looking" (Fernandez & Santora, 2007a) who "was always really quiet and kind of weird, keeping to himself all the time."

Another instance would be ***The Washington Post*** embossing his intellectual quality by quoting someone who described him as "a math whiz.... He studied by himself. He got good grades; he didn't have any tutors" (Gardner & Cho, 2007). These are just portions of perceptions revealed in media but what they account for would be what Stoler (2010) asserts – the ambiguous desire for Orientals, Cho and Cunanan in these cases, due to their exogenous and endogenous attributes that were historically, culturally and politically constructed by the Western gaze.

Then the simple but crucial question becomes: Can we consider it a privilege to be desired, and if not, then how does "being desired" in relation to exogenous and endogenous features play a role in binding these two as mere "desired Orientals"? First, in regard to their exogenous features, these may have played a role in rendering them as "invisible" or "perpetual foreigners."

For instance, the fact that Cunanan was described as white in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) "Wanted" flyer (see Figure 1) even though he was half-Filipino due to his cultural and ethnic ambiguity, and an excerpt from the ***New York Post*** recounting that, "As soon as [Cho] started reading, the whole class started laughing and pointing and saying, 'Go back to China!'" (Kretser & Gittens, 2007), may seem contradictory, but both account for how physical appearance paradoxically plays a role in making Asian-Americans essentially invisible in America. In other words, it was Cunanan's too-ambiguous exogenous features that rendered his identity as Filipino-American invisible, while the too-perceptible Asianness of Cho rendered him a mere "permanent resident, not a citizen" (Fernandez & Santora, 2007c), despite the fact that he spent most of his life in the U.S.

At the same time, endogenous attributions may also bind Asian-Americans as "model minority" members where they have to struggle to achieve the description to maintain the privilege of "being desired." Cho's family, in this regard, would be a good example since Cho was quiet and intelligent, his sister Cho Sun-Kyung was working as a contractor for the U.S. State Department after her graduation from Princeton University, and their parents worked hard in the dry-cleaning business for the sake of their children. The danger behind this myth lies in its effect of differentiating between the good Asian and the bad one. For instance, once an individual model minority member fails to fulfill the myth's promise, he or she would be subject to condemnation not only by white citizens but also by his or her own ethnic group which was described by Chong (2008: 30-37) as "the racially interpellated subject," referring to those who identify with their (white) masters.

Figure 1. The FBI's flyer on Andrew Cunanan, with the second line of description stating his race as "White."

In other words, "being desired" paradoxically entails "being restricted" in order for Asians to enjoy a relatively minor designation in exchange for assimilation in mainstream U.S. society; and considering this paradox, it would not be too much of an assumption to say that part of the motivation that drove Cho and Cunanan as monstrous Orientals was the desire to be visible and to belong.

This point may be supplemented by two media accounts. ***New York Times*** carried a story that mentioned "The killing of Mr. Versace stunned the international fashion world, where he reigned as one of its most visible, successful and influential figures" (Navarro, 1997). On the other hand, CNN revealed the following statements of Cho:

> You had everything you wanted. Your Mercedes wasn't enough, you brats. Your golden necklaces weren't enough, you snobs. Your trust fund wasn't enough.... Your vodka and cognac weren't enough. All your debaucheries weren't enough. Those weren't enough to fulfill your he-

> donistic needs. You had everything.... I can live out my miserable life as an obscure, alienated, misunderstood drone, or I can kill lots of people and be somebody! (CNN, 2007a)

With little resort to basic psychology, one may assume Cunanan's rage against Versace who belonged to a jet-set culture that Cunanan once believed he also belonged to may reflect his twisted wish to be desired and to have glamour, wealth, respect, global celebrity, and fame. Indeed, it was the combustible desire to belong and to be visible mixed with rage, resentment, and a sense of inadequacy, failure and powerlessness that might have also fueled Cho's rampage at Virginia Tech. No one might truly understand their pattern of desiring but it might be meaningful to consider the symbolic existence of a glass barrier that serves to constrain and discipline Asian Americans.

The Orientalized Monsters in Media Narrative

What would best define the monster in classical Hollywood film is "the combination of terror and disgust" (Carroll, 1990: 23) designed to elicit a congruent response from audiences. Such emotion is further dramatized by the narrative development of a monster where it is generally presented with a mixed sense of sympathy and disgust in order to justify its punishment when it symbolically threatens the normality of sex, gender, race, class and nation. As a result, the existence of a monster becomes an allegory of the fear of society to which the monster belongs.

In line with this logic, if one considers Cho and Cunanan to have failed to conform to expectations of their normality as desired Orientals and thus effectively became desiring monsters, then there might be a response from Orientalist discourse to deal with its threatening elements in order to maintain its order. With this assumption in mind, we will proceed to look into the ways that media constructed their imaginary identities in relation to the meaning and function of the monstrous.

Introduction of the Monster through Ethnicity and Sexuality

When the Virginia Tech incident was first reported on April 16, 2007, its magnitude was treated as another school rampage with the headline, "The shooting outbreak in Virginia Tech," since the exact death toll was still to be determined. However, after the confirmation that the death toll had reached over 20, all major media circuits rushed reporters to the scene and started covering the event with attention-grabbing headlines such as, "Massacre in Virginia," "32 shot dead in Virginia," and "Worst U.S. gun rampage" in the ***New York Times***; "Deadliest shooting rampage in U.S. history" in the Associated Press; "Gunman kills 32 at Virginia Tech in deadliest shooting in U.S. history" in the ***Washington Post***; and "Deadliest shooting rampage in U.S. history" at CNN.

Soon, media featured interviews with survivors with allegations that the gunman was "a 24-year-old Chinese man who arrived in the U.S. last year" (Gunman May Have Made 3 Bomb Threats, 2007) in the ***Chicago Sun-Times*** along with its visualization of an Asian-looking man in handcuffs being subdued by the police.

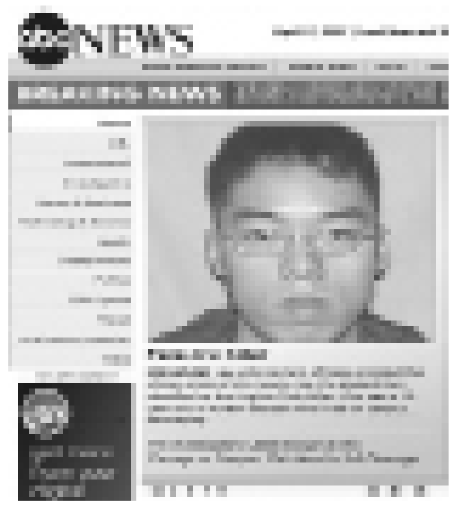

Figure 2. ABC News' web coverage of Cho Seung-Hui's identification (2007, April 17). Note how this report provided his name in the East Asian style where the family name comes first, further signifying his ethnicity.

The next day, when the suspect was officially identified as a Korean immigrant student, media coverage immediately shifted focus on the suspect's nationality, such as "U.S. university killer was S[outh] Korean; or "Face of a killer" (see Figure 2), "Cho Seung-Hui, a 23-year-old from South Korea" in ABC.

The questions arising here would be, from the most minor to most crucial: 1) Was it indeed the worst shooting rampage in U.S. history?; 2) Was the treatment of the subject similar to that of the monster in the horror film genre?; and 3) What would be the impact of such media treatment pinpointing the suspect's national identity after having sensationalized the magnitude of the event? The first charge that the massacre was "worst" would not be accurate,[1] but critical media observers might read in the Virginia Tech coverage an attempt by media outlets to attract the attention of more consumers by sensationalizing the event, consequently drawing public attention to the issue of the identity of the gunman.

Interestingly, the way that Cho's specific ethnicity was announced is strikingly similar to the filmic strategy of introducing monsters, where these are hidden in closets or everyday places – that is, with their omnipresence and synecdoche. For instance, a horror thriller such as James Mangold's ***Identity*** (2003) gives the audience few hints in guessing who the killer is among the characters introduced in the beginning, thus directing their attention to the issue of the identity of the monster as a conventional technique for a mystery where everyone would potentially be monstrous.

Likewise, the revelation of who committed the "worst" massacre in U.S. history could have identified any Asian ethnic group, which would consequently create the effect of associating an individual member's action with her or his entire ethnic group and condemning the group to notoriety, a sort of racial synecdoche that "fuse[s] all people of [common] descent into a single group united by an ascription of their vicious characters" (Rael, 2002: 179).

If the case of Cho was an incitation of racial synecdoche, then it would be a sexual synecdoche that was exploited for the media coverage on Andrew Cunanan, where the media spotlighted his sexual orientation as a possible explanation for his excessive acts. During the media scrutiny, almost every possible negative stereotype on homosexuality was steered out of the closet as mainstream media purveyed prurient speculations about Cunanan's preferences by variously labeling him "callboy," "gold-digger," "gigolo," and most notably "high-class homosexual prostitute," a label proffered by his own mother.

The media also hypothesized that Cunanan's alleged HIV-positive condition made him embark on his killing spree (cf. the ***New York Post*'s** feature story titled "AIDS fuels his frenzy"), a premise that later turned out wrong after the autopsy of Cunanan's body revealed he was HIV-negative. Rather than admitting their reliance on inaccurate information, the major media outlets continued to cater to base public interest by moralistically featuring gay underworld or ghetto lifestyles as well as sensationalizing the issue of Cunanan's sadomasochistic practice and relating his predilection as a possible source of his murderous inclinations.

Interestingly, this kind of accusation derived from a homosexual-lifestyle subtext even extended to the victims, creating two different types of fatalities: the guilty, who were homosexual, comprising Jeff Trail, David Madson, and Gianni Versace; and the innocent, who were heterosexual, comprising Lee Miglin and William Reese. For instance, John Walsh, host of ***America's Most Wanted***, implied in his July 24, 1997 broadcast that the lives of gay men were of less importance than those of heterosexuals by claiming that Cunanan "crossed the line from killing gay people for revenge and started killing innocent bystanders" (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 1997). Thus, by continually portraying Andrew Cunanan as a "gay serial killer" or "homicidal homosexual" and linking his sexual orientation to violent action, media played a crucial role in opening up a version of gay-baiting where any homosexual is potentially capable of committing a bloody crime spree.

The Evolution of the Monster

The next development following sensationalism would be the intensification of disgust. At this stage, media began to shift their focus on private matters (mental illness/madness/lifestyle) rather than sensationalizing race and sexuality. As a result, everything about Cho and Cunanan from birth to death – their socio-cultural background, family environment, school performance, relationships with peers and neighborhood, etc. – was gathered to find out what had made a member of a hard-working South Korean immigrant family as well as a seemingly well-adjusted Filipino-American turn into a monster. In the images projected by media, they became monsters who committed acts that would have been normally associated with potential terrorist groups but not from the so-called model minority group of Asians.

One of the most obvious elements of disgust introduced by media on Cho can be first found in his contrasting visual images. Kathleen points out that "the picture invited sympathy as well as horror" (2009: 70). In other words, if sympathy was triggered from Cho's typically shy Asian (see Figure 2) which confirms the image of the model minority, then terror/disgust would have been generated from when an ordinary figure, believed to be quiet, feminine, and non-violent, turned into a lethal monster (see Figure 3). As a result of this radical transformation, Cho's identity as a monster was incarnated as "a quite ordinary Asian who secretly abhors the White people," functioning as a jump-off monstrous persona that would further evolve as the media unveiled his story.

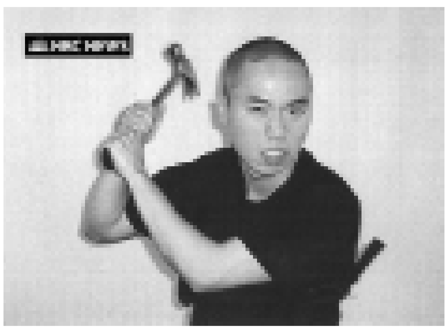

Figure 3. An image sent by Seung-Hui Cho to NBC: Cho holding a hammer as if ready to attack.

Indeed, what follows next was his "emasculated" image as the media started focusing on his abnormal and perverse behavior in relating to women. For instance, media featured stories like his imaginary supermodel girlfriend "Jelly" from outer space, his stalking tendencies along with his attempts to take photos of female students' body parts under his desk, and his frustration from repeatedly failing to attract girls in school (Vatz & Weinberg, 2007).

These examples, in fact, partly served to explain Cho's motivation in killing people in the context of the hetero-normative type of masculinity prevalent in the U.S., a theory that was formulated to understand the former murderous incident known as the Columbine massacre. According to this school of thought, it was compulsory hetero-normative masculinity that made the underprivileged individual use violence "as a legitimate response to a perceived humiliation" (Kathleen, 2009: 72).

This may be true in the sense that Cho was frequently bullied due to his inability to access the hetero-normative masculinity ideal (mainly owing to his classmates' insistence on the historical feminizing stereotype of Asians). However, what particularly interests me is how such stories reinforced his monstrous image as a result of media coverage. It would have been the "emasculated image" that helped to add to his already conjured image of an ordinary psycho killer, further reshaping him as a sort of pervert who satisfies his sexual impotence by threatening and voyeuristically gazing at helpless female objects in order to symbolically fill his castrated masculinity, a typical psychological baseline for Hollywood psychotic monsters.[2]

In a similar fashion, another trait that was endowed on Cho was his "foreignness" which was emphasized during the early media coverage by referring to him as "a resident alien from South Korea" (CNN, 2007b) or "a legal permanent resident, not a citizen" (Fernandez & Santora, 2007c). I explained earlier how exogenous features render Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners" unable to assimilate in relation to the concept of desire. However, if one combines this stereotype with the image of the monster, we would have an interesting type of monstrosity, that is, the "invader" or "predator" from another world as in John McTiernan's ***Predator*** (1987) or Ridley Scott's ***Alien*** (1979), where the creature uses human hosts as its surrogate female womb in order to reproduce its species. What this image may possibly suggest is reminiscent of the classic stereotype, that is, the Yellow Peril drawn from the fear of contamination of American whiteness during the mass immigration of Asians in the 19th century and the possible anxiety regarding racial and cultural miscegenation from then up to today in the U.S..

Likewise, during this stage, the intensity of disgust gradually increased as the media unwound Cho's story, metamorphosing his image from an ordinary psycho killer, through an emasculated psycho, and finally to a disgusting, possibly non-human form of monster that preys on human beings (configured in this case as white citizens). Furthermore, it is worth noting that most of these traits may be associated with the already given stereotypes of Asian Americans such as the myth of the model minority, Asian reticence, perpetual foreignness, and Yellow Peril.

Cunanan was also not an exception as the media had constructed and reconstructed his image in manifold ways from his original incarnation as "gay serial killer." One of the noticeable traits endowed on his monstrous image was his invisibility, derived from his biracial identity and his queer sexuality, which rendered him ambiguous in terms of gender. As a result, he was portrayed as a chameleon-like person who could easily blend into any group even in an opposite-sex circle, in the manner of a shape-shifter, as these excerpts suggest:

- CNN – As police continue their intensive hunt for Andrew Cunanan, the prime suspect in a four-state murder spree, they "are exploring the possibility" that he may be eluding them by dressing as a woman. (CNN, 1997b)
- CNN (***Larry King Live***) – Cunanan "is part-Asian," Ramirez-Murray surmised, and "some of the best cross-dressers are Asian." (In Hays, 1997)
- ***New York Times*** – For one thing, Mr. Cunanan, a 27-year-old native of San Diego, has a face so nondescript that it appears vaguely familiar to just about everyone (Alvarez, 1997).

Such invisibility or undetectability reconstructs his image as a sort of specter, like Freddy Krueger of the ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** series who haunts and terrorizes innocent normal people from the edge of reality. Another interesting point that could be inferred from the drag-queen killer persona is the heterosexual fear and fantasy of the lethal woman, a *femme fatale* who lures her victims before turning on them.

By analyzing the Adrian Lyne film ***Fatal Attraction*** (1987), James Conlon argues in his article, "The Place of Passion" (1996) how, as in a regular horror text, the femme fatale figure is in effect transformed into a monster which threatens the domestic order.[3] According to Conlon (1996), Western civilization has traditionally idealized Plato's prescription to banish passion from human existence in order to achieve true happiness. This rational, Apollonian prescription was critiqued by Friedrich Nietzsche in ***Will to Power*** (1968), as he proposed instead the ideal of the Greek god of wine, Dionysus, who inspires ritual madness and ecstasy, as replacement. ***Fatal Attraction*** provides Alex, the femme fatale, with Dionysian energy, so that the audience is able to appreciate how wonderful it must be for a woman to have so much professional success, physical attractiveness, and personal freedom. But when she challenges the domestic values of Dan and Beth, the audience is forced to adopt Plato's position, that for the sake of a successful domestic life, passion has to be dismissed, even killed off, if necessary.

It is clear how Alex shares many qualities with Andrew Cunanan – she has beauty, culture (Andrew Cunanan was constantly described by media as a gregarious, well-mannered, articulate, and informed half-Filipino who always dined with the social elite and craved attention at parties), but also danger (as in Cunanan turning into a homicidal homosexual). The movie points out how Alex, the Oriental manqué, has access to this kind of pagan, Dionysian, pre-Christian, anti-Platonic passion, while Dan and Beth do not.

So, Alex's violence achieves an irrational element and threatens domestic stability, just as Cunanan's victims were all domesticated – first, his ex-lover and his ex-lover's new boyfriend; then a married family man who may have been closeted; then a stranger who had his own steady job; then finally, Gianni Versace, a gay man who enjoyed Dionysian revelry, but only because he was extremely successful in his art (high fashion), unlike Cunanan, who also desired Dionysian pleasure but did not have the "right" to it because he had neither wealth nor a stable relationship. In strikingly similar fashion, the media narrative seemingly recapitulates the story of Alex through the image of Cunanan as a femme fatale (male but gay, white-looking but Oriental, attractive but fatal) whose passion spins out of control and monstrously seeks to destroy pre-existing domestic order.

This fact leads me to the final question: In the resolution of the relevant media narratives, have these Oriental figures been punished for being deviant against U.S. cultural/racial/sexual normativity? Unlike what one may expect, there has not been such an obvious punishment the way that Alex was handled in ***Fatal Attraction***. Rather, in Cho's case alone, the narrative re-humanized Cho by eliciting a measure of sympathy derived from his mental illness, wherein he was diagnosed as suffering from "selective mutism" and "social anxiety disorder" (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007).

Another instance would be the most recent news accounts criticizing the state's mental health care system and, at other points, Cho's family's and church's religious fanaticism that tried to cure his mental condition (and probably aggravated it) through the application of prayer. But then again, does this really mean that Cho and Cunanan were forgiven and thus there may be no longer any real Orientalist discourses in the U.S.?

If we speak of the media as a representation of social agency and the audience as embodying society, then, ironically, the monstrous Oriental has to be contained, not punished, because punishment of the bad Oriental would mean the acknowledgment of Orientalism when U.S. culture is already in denial of its existence. Even without resorting to such deductive reasoning, it becomes questionable if we note the bases that were used to construct their monstrous images, consisting of long-held perceptions based on ethnicity and sexuality on Asian-Americans.

In addition, if we look at the following results and conclusions of the Virginia Tech review panel that was commissioned to seek answers to questions regarding the tragedy, these clearly suggest that certain binaristic principles still operate in the U.S. (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007):

- Physically: "Cho was average to below average. He was frail and sick as an infant/toddler. Even the autopsy report remarked about his lack of muscle for the body of a 23-year-old male."
- Emotionally: "His growth was stunted as a result of his 'selective mutism.'"
- Spiritually: "He showed little interest and dropped out of his church before experiencing a growth in faith."
- Socially: "He could not function at all. He was virtually devoid of social skills due to his extreme social anxiety disorder."
- Intellectually: "[This was] his strongest attribute.… He was average to above-average in his academic pursuits, but even these afforded him little or no consistent or positive sense of achievement based on the feedback from his peers or others."

What can be inferred from these data would be an immediately discernible property, namely the evaluators' reliance on binaristic principles – Asian physical slightness vs. Caucasian bulkiness; Asian reticence vs. Western loquacity; Eastern non-theism vs. Christian monotheism; Asian diffidence vs. American confidence – along with an acknowledgment, also stereotypical, of Cho's perspicacity.

All things considered, we may be in a position to argue that the old Orientalist classification based on ethnicity and sexuality still dominated the thinking processes of media analysts and thus, Cho and Cunanan became "Orientalized monsters" who ironically played an incidental role in revealing the state of Orientalism in the U.S. today.

Conclusion

We have explored so far how media have constructed the imaginary identities of Cho and Cunanan in relation to the meaning and function of the monstrous. It was observed that, despite the media ethics where coverage should remain fact-based, fair and objective, the coverage of these two Asian-Americans manifested certain levels of Orientalist discourse, particularly in relation to ethnicity and sexuality.

In general, their respective media imaginaries were gendered, racialized, sexualized, and thus Orientalized, as the stories on them unfolded, incarnating the equivalent of real-life monsters that threatened normativity in the U.S.. As a consequence, the media managed to calcify Orientalist discourse and reinvigorated Orientalist narratives through the trope of monsters in horror films where audiences may identify themselves with a hero (representing

normality or the natural order) who punishes the threatening element in order to derive dramatic catharsis.

Implication

There was no clear sign of the presence of the hero and her or his meting out of punishment in these horrific media narratives; rather, these two monsters tended to be re-humanized with elements that elicited sympathy. But considering the ideological materials that were used to indict them as monstrous (i.e., the myth of the model minority, Asian reticence, perpetual foreignness, Yellow Peril, emasculation and queerness), the absence of punishment without the presence of a hero ironically provided us with the possibility of speculating that it is a way to keep the discourse seemingly invisible while calcifying its core at the same time. This is much like what Michel Foucault had articulated in his ***Discipline and Punish*** (1995) where he redefined the nature of power as micro-omnipotent – that is, as scattered and diffused on the level of everyday life and thus becoming even more effective in maintaining its order. This partly accounts for the aftermath of the Virginia Tech massacre, where the mixed sense of guilt and relief among the other ethnic groups might have originated. Earlier, I mentioned the existence of the monster as an allegory of the fear of whichever society the monster had sprung from. If Cho was presented as a monster in media, then what U.S. culture holds in fear would be a form of cultural miscegenation as a result of a long-standing and still-remembered Cold-War policy, where the U.S. needed integration of racial difference as a way of solidifying its claim to world leadership. However, the triumph of integration did not necessarily herald the end of racialization or ethnicization but the start of a deracination process for the valorization of whiteness that transformed the Asian American subject from the condition of facelessness to that of racelessness.

As a result, the U.S. would have created a possible atmosphere where only Asian Americans themselves would be able to unconsciously perceive the hidden discourse of Orientalism in their everyday life.

Notes

1 An enumeration of cases would include attacks at Wounded Knee in 1890 that resulted in more than 300 men, women, and children of the Lakota Sioux being killed by the 7th U.S. Cavalry; the Colfax Massacre where the White Supremacist League, a radical offshoot of the Ku Klux Klan, stormed the town and left hundreds of African-Americans either shot or burned alive in the parish courthouse on April 13, 1873; and, more recently, the military operations in foreign locales, notably Vietnam and Iraq (cf. Kaplan & Pease, 1993).

2 In Hitchcock's ***Psycho*** (1960), it was Norman Bates whose masculine identity had been castrated by his mother. Being possessed by Mrs. Bates' persona, Norman becomes a castrator murdering helpless subjects in order to arouse and fulfill his castrated identity.

3 In ***Fatal Attraction*** (1987), the femme fatale is an editor, played by Glenn Close, with a man's name, Alex Forrest. She, a single female professional, initiates a weekend fling with Dan Gallagher, a married man, but she has different expectations of the affair. When Dan says that his wife, Beth, is desirable, Alex points out that if that were the case, he would not be having an affair with her. After Dan rejects Alex's attempt to have a long-term affair, she tries to commit suicide but later she discovers she is pregnant. From this point onward, she begins increasingly violent attacks on Dan and his family, until she is destroyed by Beth.

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