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Global Chinese Fraternity and the Indonesian Riots of May 1998:
The Online Gathering of Dispersed Chinese

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1. From June 1998, email messages describing rapes and violence against ethnic Chinese women in Indonesia were passed around the Internet. Sometimes, these messages included first-hand accounts, image-file attachments and/or links to photographs and other texts supporting the claims. Existing and new web sites incorporated images that purported to be of the raped women and often hailed the Internet user as ethnic Chinese, calling upon their sympathies as fellow Chinese of the victims. It was through these email messages and the web pages they alluded to that I first heard of the rape of ethnic Chinese women in the riots, although I am neither from Indonesia nor living there.

2. A variety of readings can be made of this case, in part due to the reach of its email and web dissemination, the variances in tone and perspective in print and press radio coverage in Indonesia and overseas, the actions of local and international activists, the intersecting racial, state and gender politics, and the context of general confusion and chaos in which these rapes took place. At least three texts have been written on the case of the May 1998 rapes: Ariel Heryanto's 'Rape, Race and Reporting',[1] Ien Ang's 'Indonesia on My Mind: Subjects in History and the Contradictions of Diaspora'[2] and Laura Lochore's 'Virtual Rape: Vivian's Story'.[3] Each of these authors works through the complexities of the events carefully, and, for reasons of brevity, the following summary cannot adequately capture the subtleties of their analyses. Heryanto discusses the Indonesian social and political environment before, during and after these events and the difficulties in speaking about the topic of rape and violence in general, and the May 1998 case specifically. Ang's chapter deals with the question of the diasporic intellectual in analysing the website, *Huaren*, and the way it addresses and tries to construct a diasporic Chinese community. Finally, Lochore's article discusses the violence of the print media's appropriation of the story of one of the victims that had been told on the net.

3. This paper addresses a topic that the above analyses necessarily refer to briefly - the medium of the Internet itself and the implications in developments in the way this technology is being used in cultural politics, in particular, diasporic community formation. Similar to Ang, the broader concern of this article is the concept of a 'global Chinese community', and how the Internet is being used to facilitate this communal formation and consolidation. More specifically, I focus upon the Internet as a medium and the distribution of images through email, web and newsgroups. The discursive violence done to the images under discussion on the Internet can be said to be part of a mobilising strategy. However, this paper argues that this activism led to a form of 'long distance nationalism' that allowed the activist to play a 'national hero on the other side of the planet'.[4]

4. Some of the reactions to these images, and, in general, to the political and social turmoil in Indonesia in May 1998 triggered by the Asian economic crisis, bring to the fore reservations

about virtual community and the Internet. This article begins with a critique of the use and development of technologies of the Internet for the creation and growth of online transnational communal formations. This critique is augmented by a discussion of the changes undergone in the meanings and deployment of the term 'diaspora' in diasporic activist politics. With the 'quilting'[5] of dispersed Chinese ethno-communities into a Chinese virtual community come refreshed hegemonic formations. The discourses used in descriptions of related issues and events in web pages by and for ethnic Chinese raise concerns about how to narrate, and counter, oppression whilst dodging the homogenising and universalising discourses which accompany strategic alliances based upon ethnicity.

5. I want to deal with the wider implications of Internet technology for diasporic Chinese formation and to demonstrate how the meanings attached to the images of women's bodies which were distributed via the internet contributed to the development of diasporic consciousness. The latter argument requires a brief description of the local context of these images and events in Indonesia. At the same time, there are special meanings attached to rape in general and to this particular case that also affect reactions to the images. I also want to address how these images of women's bodies are involved in the transnational production of meanings to support calls for global solidarity amongst ethnic Chinese. Further, how do contemporary technological developments in imaging and photography affect how these images are consumed? Because my primary concern is with diasporic politics, I will turn to the role and agency of diasporic intellectuals in the context of ethnocidal violence and globalised politics.

6. Firstly, I consider the applicability of the term, 'diaspora' to ethnic Chinese outside China, including the US and Southeast Asia. The phrase, '[w]here once were dispersions, there is now diaspora,' cryptically sums up Tölölyan's observation that the term, diaspora, has been broadened to encompass the dispersed communities outside the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diasporas.[6] For Tölölyan, diaspora, once a term 'saturated with the meanings of exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain became a useful, even desirable way to describe a range of dispersions.' The Chinese dispersal occurred over a long period of time and for a variety of reasons, rather than as the result of a single catastrophe or pogrom.

7. In contrast to the 'traditional' diasporas, the dispersal of Chinese was often the result, not of a crisis or exile, but of poverty and the demand for labour and capital by transnational capitalism. Ethnic Chinese were sometimes abducted to work as indentured labourers or chose to migrate in search of a better life, with the dream of returning to China rich.[7] The Chinese diaspora can be said to illustrate the reconceptualisation of diaspora described by Tölölyan; it cannot be said to be wholly due to exile and loss, nor is there always a strong tie to a motherland, although, as can be seen in this discussion, a sense of duty seems common.

8. In the contemporary world, the distinction between an ethnic community and a diasporic one lies in the diasporic community's effort to retain and build ties to the homeland and kindred communities in other nations and states. As Tölölyan argues, 'a diaspora is never merely an accident of birth,' it is not merely something defined by 'being' but also by 'doing' and 'feeling'.[8] This implies that the boundary between ethnic and diasporic communities is not distinct. It is possible for a whole community, and even individuals, in one day, to shift between diasporan and ethnic behaviour. Therefore, the Chinese websites featuring the Indonesian riots can be viewed in the context of raising diasporic consciousness amongst globally-dispersed ethnic Chinese. In these sites, it is possible to understand the ways in which the dispersed individuals and communities of ethnic Chinese can be named and understood as diasporic through Internet links formed across national boundaries and distances.

9. The renaming of dispersed ethnic Chinese as the Chinese diaspora is significant when we consider the questions relating to the identity of the (Indonesian) Chinese and the 'diasporic activists'. This is where the homogenising claims of the aforementioned 'consciousness raising diasporans' meet with popular notions of chineseness. They both tend to assume a stable ethnic Chinese collectivity with cultural practices and beliefs that cut across localities, nations, dialects and histories.[9] The process of renaming as a diaspora may acknowledge the different histories and cultures of the various collectivities, but, in the end, these differences are obscured in favour of solidarity based upon shared Chinese 'characteristics' and 'stateless' power.

10. The productive sharing of oppression, exile and loss of diasporic awareness and activism in reality obscures other aspects of diaspora. For instance, it becomes difficult to incorporate into this picture the complicity of some mobile diasporans in transnational capitalism and its accompanying 'scattered hegemonies'.[10] Tölölyan claims, 'the new meanings of diaspora have often been coupled with a larger project of re-articulating the nation-state and the concepts of national identity, indeed of identity as such.'[11] He describes this shift of emphasis to 'diaspora', as favouring the interests of transnational elites and the diasporists. These mutual interests lie in the decline of both 'the nation's aspiration to normative homogeneity' and 'the state's hegemony'.[12] The renaming of dispersions into diasporas allows the assumption of local and transnational stateless power, based upon multiple and transnational belonging and loyalties, that could sustain both the homeland and the ethno-diasporan community.

11. One of the factors leading to the rise of diasporic consciousness in some communities, identified by Tölölyan, is the ease and speed of communication and travel in comparison to earlier dispersions, when immigration often led to isolation from homeland and kin. The relationship between the Internet as a media technology and the diasporic groups can be understood via Appadurai's conceptualisation of global cultural flows and how 'they occur in and through the growing disjunctures between ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes.'[13] Disjunctures between the mediascape, technoscape and ethnoscape are reflected in ethnic politics and diaspora specifically. Feelings of community that used to be localised are now global, as Appadurai writes: 'ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large) has now become a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and borders.'[14]

12. Today, web pages, news groups, chat and email on the Internet, together with the declining cost and increasing reach of older technologies like the telephone and television, provide people with increased opportunities to 'feel' and enact a sense of belonging to a larger, transnational diasporic community. This is a form of transnational communication, where several of the audience are subjects that are removed from the events described, yet relocated as members of a diasporic community, in this case as a member of an imaginary transnational Chinese community. These web pages enact the particular snarl of gender, racial and diasporic politics that can complicate the study of ethno-diasporic Chinese formations. Most importantly, this case of the images and messages sent via the internet illustrates the part that Internet communication plays in articulating these complex collisions.

13. Research on the transnational Hakka community and the *Hakka Global Network* (HGN) email list provides an example of the formation of transnational communities via computer-mediated communication. Eriberto Lozada conducted systematic discourse analysis on a sample of email messages in the HGN in order to identify the part played by the Internet in defining Hakka identity.[15] His research demonstrated that the 'production of locality ... and neighborhoods'[16] across great distances can be seen in various characteristics of the email list. Lozada found that members use the first-person in their messages, messages

were direct and intimate, and 'offline' meetings and activities were arranged.

14. Such Internet communication does not eradicate the association of pain and loss with the 'diasporic condition'. Wanning Sun describes how the Nanjing Massacre websites demonstrate the power of reviving cultural memories, of ritualistic pleasure in sharing outrage and pain, resulting in a feeling of communal belonging.[17] This process cuts across and works through national boundaries and subjectivities and it is my contention that the websites discussed in this paper featuring the photos of abused women, also produce similar feelings.

15. The problems of long distance nationalism are compounded by the unequal access, of different members of the 'Chinese diaspora', to Internet technology. The Internet is not equally accessible to everyone and is a technology that requires a large investment both financially and in training. Writing on the Internet frequently employs a liberal discourse which exaggerates its role as a medium allowing the postmodern play of identity, including escape from one's skin colouring, sex, age and other visual markers of difference.[18] Diametrically opposed to this are those who see the Internet as a resource of disproportionate access and its technology, content and 'netiquette' as reflecting certain class, gender and racial inequalities. Bosah Ebo calls the first of these two extreme positions, 'cybertopia', the Internet as a 'great equalizer', and the second one, 'cyberghetto'. [19] The power to define the experience of members of the diaspora, in the Internet context, lies in the hands of ethnic Chinese positioned differently in terms of their income and geographic location. In the final section of this article, I address the implications of this situation for the handling of the ethnic violence during the May 1998 riots by certain diasporic Chinese web sites.

16. To describe briefly the context of this article: the rapes occurred in the midst of the riots in Jakarta in May 1998, preceded by Indonesia's economic crisis beginning in mid-1997.[20] Extensive demonstrations against Suharto were held, which escalated after the shooting of four Trisakti University students on 12 May 1998. The three days after were marked by wholesale looting in Jakarta and other cities, and the main targets of these acts were Chinese Indonesians in recognisably Chinese areas.

17. It was only in the beginning of June that the rapes reached public awareness. Accounts of the rape, along with the location and details of the incidents, were compiled by Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan [the Volunteers Team for Humanity]. I cite the findings of the Team with the qualification that of the 168 rapes reported by the Volunteers Team for Humanity, out of which there were twenty deaths, only fifty-two cases were confirmed by the government team. Neither of these figures can be said to represent the real numbers, however. The Team compared the rape locations to the location of the riots, and the conclusion of the early report was that the rapes occurred in areas of Chinese concentration.[21] The rapes happened at the same time as the riots, and in the more violent areas of destruction, burning and death.

18. From certain common aspects in the modes of operation of the various cases, the Team concluded that the rapes were organised and the Team members raised questions as to the identity of the planners. According to their data, many of the main instigators and perpetuators were unknown to the victims and their families. Also, the Team amassed material which seemed to indicate that rumours of the imminent rioting and rapes were spread prior to their actual occurrence. If this is true, the riots and rapes of 1998 could have been a preplanned event. The Team is careful to list a range of possibilities rather than single out members of the military, which the report seemed to hint at: 'whether they are of government body, of the armed forces (ABRI), of any exclusive syndicate, of groups of

bandit or hired gangsters or any other group of society'.[22]

19. In the context of the deployment of these images and narratives on the Internet, it is also necessary to consider another aspect of the violence-gender politics. Rape is more than just another version of violence, and to treat it as such would be to ignore the pattern of domination and submission that defines and directs female sexuality - and who controls it. [23]

20. Sexual violence against women in warfare is not new, and it is debatable whether it is a recent phenomenon in term of ethnic violence. It is, most commonly, a matter surrounded by silence, or naturalised as an 'unfortunate' side-effect of war or violent conflict. The silence is paralleled in academia; for instance, there is a dearth of research on the mass rapes in Berlin at the close of World War II.[24] While acknowledging the differences between the two cases, amongst Siefert's explanations for rape drawn from the violence against women in the Bosnia-Hersegovina conflict, those most applicable to the present context are of rape as an attack on the culture of the opponent and rape as an 'element of male communication'. [25] During times of war, women are raped to communicate to other men that they are not masculine and competent enough to 'protect "their" women'. This is qualified by Heryanto's observation that the May 1998 rapes did not occur in the context of war or explicit military manoeuvres, as in Siefert's study:

> In most of these troubled areas there was usually an official articulation of goals to be achieved, or rewards to be gained after or beyond the destruction of female bodies.[26]

He comments that the context of the May 1998 rapes, in contrast, was distinguished by the absence of these goals and rewards and he hesitantly uses the term of 'political rapes'.

21. However, the negative message contained in communication via rape still exists, but in a different sense. Heryanto explains that it was a stock practice amongst police and military officers to force other victims to watch or take part in the violence, and thus to victimise on a greater scale. The victims, in fact, also included NGO activists who suffered emotionally when seeking out and hearing accounts of the rapes, as well as the audience of the media accounts and images. Coupled with the selection of ethnic Chinese women as the targets of rape, racialised accounts of the violence were encouraged. This racialised account, in gaining ground, obscured the other forces at work during the riots, for instance the strained relations between the military, the state and the Indonesian public, and instead pinned the blame on racism and economic envy, and latterly, religious differences.

22. The above process, described by Heryanto, had repercussions overseas in the way the images of the abused women were read. Sun points out how 'the images of violated female bodies may also be used as a metonym in representing the traumatised nation in anti-imperialist discourse'.[27] Rather than a representation of assault on the nation, the assault, in Chinese bulletin messages and web sites, is represented as being against the transnational Chinese (imagined) community. The images are mobilised in speed and forms made possible by the convergence of Internet and digital imaging technologies. The compression of space and time has permitted long-distance nationalism, so much so that diasporas can begin to create transnational communal networks.

23. An ethical problem to do with representation is raised in Laura Lochore's analysis of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* appropriation and retelling of the story of one of the victims of the May 1998 riots (Vivian) that was passed around the Internet.[28] Lochore's conclusion that the voice of the subaltern, Vivian, was appropriated to suit 'neo-(post)colonial ends' applies also to the specific images used in accounts of the rapes. The women in the images I discuss, like Vivian's story, have been virtually raped in the process involved in recovering

their bodies and their violation from invisibility. The stories and experiences of these women, having been silenced, are recovered and reshaped and used for political ends. In this way, images of abused women are stripped of context and then re-contextualised to suit particular regional issues. The women are renamed - by firstly losing their names and identity and then by being re-identified as victims. Images of their bodies are then re-re-labelled yet again as victims in a different context.

24. Digital technologies enable the creation and storage of photographs that will not decay with time. This 'manufactures a present that will forever be new and clear and always conveniently available'.[29] Postmodernist visions of creative liberation from realism are implicit in progressivist claims about the convergence of technologies - in this case, of digital imaging, photography and computers.[30] This is significant in terms of the diaspora, as photographs are often sent as attachments or placed on a web page to be seen by relatives and friends in other countries and states.[31] The mobility and continued importance of images are paradoxically possible through the very technologies that make their 'authenticity' (as referents to reality) even more questionable than before.

25. Staff reporters for the *Asian Wall Street Journal* wrote an article identifying the sources of some of the photographs of purported rape victims used in a variety of websites, including print media:

> Newspapers in Hong Kong and elsewhere ran the pictures, describing them as photos of rape victims.
>
> That the pictures have been accepted so readily illustrates the growing power of computers and the Internet. At least some of the pictures circulating - there are at least fifteen - were culled from an Asian pornography web site, a gruesome U.S.-based exhibition of gory photos, and an East Timorese exile homepage on the Internet.[32]

Through the technologies of digital photography and the online media, pictures on the Internet can be downloaded and pasted up somewhere else, as can photographs sent as file attachments in email and to newsgroups. To attribute this redeployment of images to the 'growing power of computers and the Internet' would be to make the mistake of assuming that technology is an autonomous entity. In fact, the Internet, like other media technologies, is influenced by the variety of institutions and organisations and the ideological motives of individuals that surround it. Even after the publication of the above report, several sites did not remove these photographs; instead, some captioned them as 'fake' and linked them to pages specifically about the Indonesian riots, even though they may not have originated in that context.[33]

26. The responses from people on web pages such as *Huaren* and *Indonesia Online* to these images, do not give the sense that these participants are conscious of the issue of authenticity. The claim that we are witnessing the 'death of photography', so dear to those writing on the 'visual age',[34] oversimplifies the complex ways in which we interact with images. The force and impact of images remain regardless of the knowledge that images can be edited, manipulated, created and, hence, no longer to be considered as 'evidence' of events that occur far away. For instance, a woman describing herself as a Catholic, Chinese woman who spent her school years in Jakarta,[35] now residing in San Francisco, posts her reaction to the photographs:

> This evening, an Indonesian friend visited me at my home here in bay area. He showed me pictures about the raping of Chinese women by pribumi men recently. On the street, in the market, on the sidewalk, in a broad day light. I saw those horrendous pictures for fifteen seconds then closed my eyes and sobed and sobed [*sic*].[36]

27. The continued inclusion of these photographs in the websites, may be motivated by a desire to enable web surfers to distinguish between the falsely identified (that is, relabelled) and the

'real' photographs. The possibilities provided by the combined media of digital photography and the Internet enable a substitution of meaning whereby these photographs come to represent the atrocities conducted against ethnic Chinese women in the May 1998 riots *symbolically*, rather than referentially. The motives of producers of sites such as *Huaren* can be discerned in proclamations on their web pages:

> **Chinese Diaspora** had existed for many centuries and spread far and wide. Early mistreatments had caused many descendents to feel confused, indifferent, or ambivalent towards their heritage. With modern communication technology, this is the right time to bring us together and to promote the sense of kinship [as in original].[37]

28. There is an unevenness in the relationship between the 'kin' here, that is, between the author and the scattered people with their unique personal histories for whom he is speaking. Of the 'ethnic Chinese', who has access to this technology? Who is writing here? The organisation behind the *Huaren* website, World Huaren Federation, is based in San Francisco and yet claims to speak for the ethnic Chinese as a whole. This is the dark side of the picture presented by liberal discourses about the Internet and new 'postmodern' communication technologies. The technology is being used to arouse feelings of solidarity amongst ethnic Chinese around the world in a way that accentuates racial distinctions to the detriment of locally-grounded activism that is sensitive to the regional politics of race - a danger of 'long distance nationalism' that Anderson warned against.

29. The meanings of rape in the context of extreme ethnocidal violence, that is, rape as an assault on the ethnic Chinese and rape as an aspect of men communicating to other men, have gone online. Witness this post to an Indonesian online forum from Nigel Ng:

> Subject: Chinese-Indonesian Men are A Bunch of Cowards
>
> The first thing that came to my mind when reading the rape reports was: 'Where were the men?' There were no mention whatsoever of any resistance put up by Indonesian-Chinese men to protect the safety and honour of their women. They seem to always rely on their money to 'buy' some soldiers or security guards for their protection....
>
> What a bunch of cowards!! You gave bad name to all Chinese [as in original].[38]

30. The general sentiments in this post are not commonly expressed, but it is typical of many of the posts in that it utilises the patriarchal discourses of masculinity, male honour, and women and their bodies as property to be protected. The last sentence, 'You gave bad name to all Chinese', can be read as an instance of *negative* feelings about the diasporic ties between Chinese communities, especially when he refers to their reliance on money to perform their 'masculine' task of protecting 'their women'. Even so, these ties between different ethnic Chinese communities have been naturalised and felt keenly. Just as Nigel Ng sees a connection between the 'name' (or 'face') of all Chinese and what he perceives as cowardice of the Indonesian Chinese men, the ethnic Chinese online activists and respondents echo this connection. The atrocities conducted on these women have become atrocities against Chinese as a whole.

31. The images under discussion were photographs converted to digital information that allowed them to be displayed on web sites and attached to email and newsgroup messages. One photograph (Figure 1) showed the bruised and bloody body of a woman, her back towards the viewer, in a building scrawled with Bahasa Indonesian words. This photo, along with a variety of other images, was seen in many of the sites I visited.[39] Another photo presented a naked woman being penetrated by one man, with another behind him. There were other photographs of battered bodies of women: some with men wearing army uniforms; some without; many displayed extreme acts of violence and were of seemingly dead women, as in the case of one photo where the body of a woman was apparently impaled through her

private parts by a broomstick. All these images, either accompanying email or newsgroup messages, or on web sites, were identified as being of Chinese women who were raped by either Indonesian army personnel or by *pribumi* men.

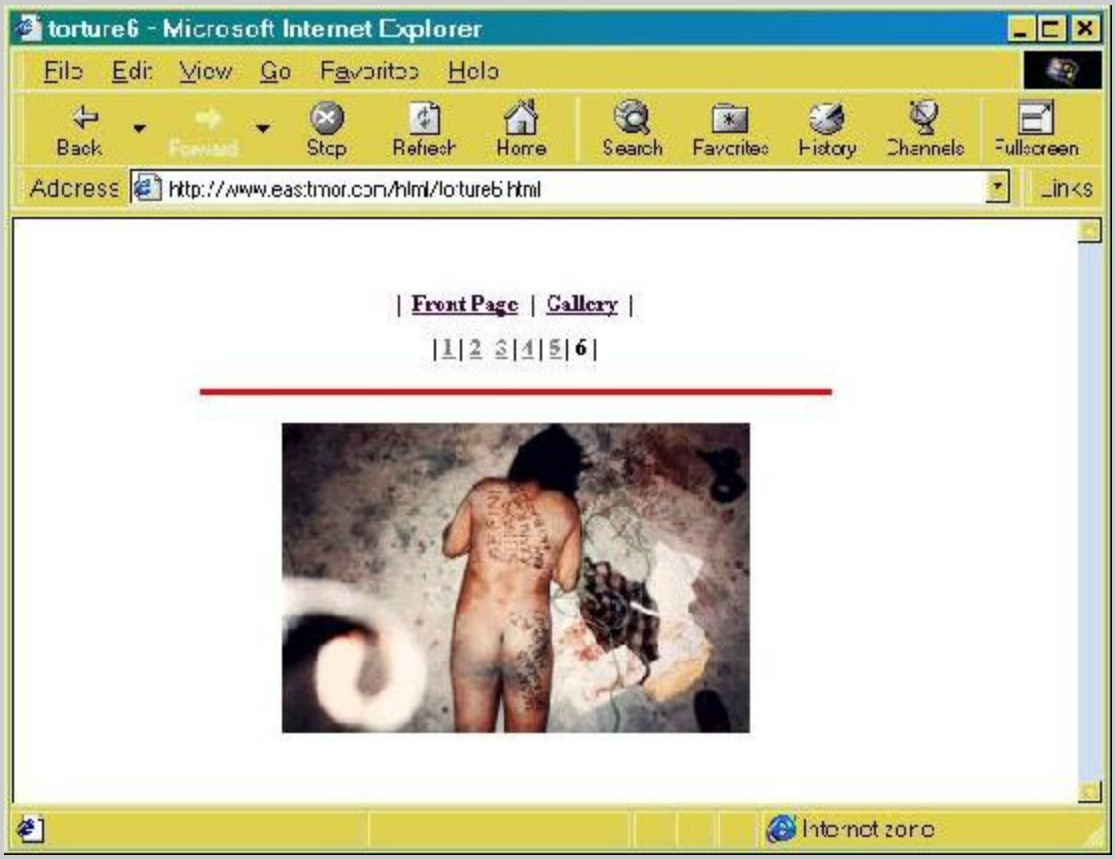


Figure 1. One of the photographs from the East Timor International Support Center (ETISC) web site which were appropriated by a number of web sites addressing the rape of Chinese women in the May 1998 riots in Indonesia, including *Huaren*.[40]

Photographs like this were relabelled as showing raped and/or murdered ethnic Chinese women. The ETISC web site claims that the pictures depict the torture of women in East Timor by the Indonesian military and paramilitary stationed there, and this picture is one of forty photographs that can be downloaded from the site.[41] These forty photographs are apparently a selection from two hundred photos that were smuggled to the ETISC in late 1997. The words on the woman's body are written in Bahasa Indonesian. The words written on her back right leg and buttock are, 'Champion cat shit Dead like a rat.' On her back are the words, 'Like this, so that you get to feel the consequences.' In a couple of the photographs, soldiers hold a sign, inscribed with the words, '*Hidup hadia Nobel*' [Bahasa Indonesian for 'Long live the Nobel award'], over her body. The ETISC explains that the text that accompanied the two hundred photos surmises that the sign was probably hers and that this indicates she was one of the crowd welcoming Bishop Belo back after he received the Nobel Peace Prize. This might mean she was tortured and killed in December 1996.

32. As explained earlier, the origin of many of the other photographs used in activist sites was also called into question, that is the photographs were not from the May 1998 riots in Jakarta, and this in turn affected how the rape issue was addressed by the media and people in power. Rape, especially on the scale of May 1998, is a difficult enough thing to prove without the added tag of 'false' or 'inauthentic'. In the process of establishing communality amongst Chinese online, the diasporic activists have unwittingly complicated the investigation into this issue. A pro-Habibie Jakarta newspaper, *Republika*, in an article headlined, 'Is it True that Mass Rape Took Place', 2 August 1998, questions whether the mass rapes actually occurred.[42] In a climate where the Indonesian state and the military

were eager to deny the rapes, the questionable authenticity of the images circulated was seized upon by pro-government press and individuals in Indonesia.

33. In terms of reactions outside Indonesia, however, while the narratives included in these emails were powerful in themselves, including horrific accounts of violence and hostility towards Chinese, burning of buildings, invasion of homes and businesses and so forth, the 'rape' images provoked a visceral reflex in the people to whom I showed them. The reaction was one of revulsion and, in turn, anger, often leading to the expression that 'something should be done'.

34. This reflex, together with the representation of the assaults as being the result of racial discord and economic disparity, made for a powerful means of drawing together Chinese around the world. As the email 'forwards' increased and the topic entered current affairs, some ethnic Chinese and some of the media, addressed the rapes as crimes against ethnic Chinese as a whole. On web bulletin boards, people presenting themselves as ethnic Chinese called for greater Chinese solidarity around the globe.[43] Such forms of diasporic communality are open to a similar criticism to that of a feminism based on a universalising discourse of global sisterhood. This is a universalisation that uses the politics of location as an 'instrument of hegemony',[44] reiterating boundaries and performing its own marginalising, homogenisation that ultimately subsumes a myriad different identities and injustices under one banner.

35. In the calls for greater Chinese solidarity, patriarchal discourses of honour and protection (read ownership) of women are employed to feed into the sense of outrage felt by readers - a paternalistic attitude that applies not only to women, but also to the 'less fortunate' in the Chinese ethno-diaspora. As one poster protests:

> I've got a message for all of you who sent fake photos. Do you know that what you're doing will only worsen things in Indonesia??? Sure, rich chinese in Indonesia can just pack up and leave right away. But how about the middle-class chinese??? They're trapped in Indonesia. The more you try to divide the pribumis from the Chinese, another riot is more likely to happen. DON'T MISLEAD PEOPLE!! I'm a chinese in Indonesia, and I'm only thinking logically and practically [as in original].[45]

This post highlights the dangers in the way diasporic sites like *Huaren* have taken up the issue: in their eagerness to establish wrongs done to ethnic Chinese elsewhere, issues of class, transnationality and mobility (and lack thereof) become subsumed under all-encompassing collectivities.

36. Despite frustration expressed on the *Huaren* site,[46] the online furore has had an impact 'offline' or, in Internet parlance, IRL (in real life), demonstrating the potency of the distributed images and accounts, as well as the refiguring of the Chinese dispersion into diaspora, for transnational politics. In Singapore, Philippines, China, Thailand, the United States and elsewhere, exhibitions and protests were held and the governments of these countries were compelled to at the very least demand an investigation into the rape cases. In Singapore, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) put up an exhibition that included photographs culled from these diasporic Chinese web sites.[47] Forty thousand Singaporeans signed the AWARE statement calling for sanctions should there be a re-occurrence of the rapes.[48]

37. The use of images of women's bodies is problematical, not least because the victims are not in a position to protest the way their experience is represented and used. It is a reminder of how the plundering of bloodied body images has always been a feature of exoticism, patriotism, pornography, journalism, history and horror - and how these discourses merge and procreate with each other. The use of photographs from East Timor is an example of this plundering. The complexities of the local politics in East Timor itself were obscured in

the dissemination of the photographs. While similar claims were made, that is, that the Indonesian army was complicit and actively took part in the violence and rapes there, the knowledge that some of these images originated from East Timor combined with the captioning and the context provided in the emails and web sites, did not dispel anger. In fact, some were aggravated further, race and racism were seen as the primary cause (sometimes accompanied by the economic) of the violence, and a simplistic opposition of 'good/victimised Chinese' and 'bad pribumis' was employed. This opposition took on a global dimension, that is, 'pribumis' was substituted with 'non-chinese oppressor', and incorporated grievances against the way diasporic Chinese were treated in various parts of the world.

38. One message to the *Indonesia Online forum*, entitled 'This is a small group of Indonesians. Not the entire Indonesia!', reads:

> It seems the most debate on the news board is either 'Indonesians are the bad guys' or 'It might not be the Indonesians!' It is almost certainly the Indonesians, but in these revolting rape photos, it seems the most offenders are dressed in Army Uniform. Should you not shout your protest upon the Indonesian Army and not the Indonesians themselves? [as in original].[49]

This is followed by a response entitled *Shut Up Aussie*!, 'Australians are racists too, they also party [*sic*] from queen hanson.racist have no right to speak here [*sic*]'.[50] The posters of email and newsgroup messages responding to and distributing the images and narratives, began to refer to a global alliance, a solidarity amongst all Chinese against oppression of Chinese. In the midst of this, the plight of the East Timorese was ignored, because it did not fit the binary.

39. Another theme that emerges in both the kinds of reactions online and the violence against the Chinese is the perspective of Chinese as transnational elites. This view of 'parachute Chinese' sees them as without loyalty to the nation they reside in and with a mobility suited to the logic of flexible accumulation that presides in this age of transnational capitalism.[51] The culpability of transnational diasporic practices in contributing towards or at least enlarging existing social problems, including the social stratification in Indonesia cannot be ignored. What practices can diasporic intellectuals adopt in order to avoid replicating the 'scattered hegemonies' of transnational cultural flows today?

40. In her discussion of the *Huaren* web site and the rape of Chinese women during the riots, Ien Ang reveals that the *Huaren* producers contacted her for support and her permission for the site to reproduce some of her articles on Chinese identity.[52] She was being asked to speak on behalf of the Chinese diasporic community. In her own words, 'I felt interpellated directly and straight forwardly as a diasporic Chinese intellectual, and asked to speak up as a member of this group, to speak on behalf of it and for it'.[53]

41. Ang declined this invitation. In this instance, Rey Chow's reference to de Certeau's definition of strategy and tactic is useful in considering the agency of diasporic intellectuals.[54] Diasporic intellectuals themselves are involved in the development of diasporic consciousness via the intellectualisation of the everyday realities of dispersal.[55] Their texts 'become weapons'[56] in this reproduction of scattered hegemonies that accompany the formation of transnational solidarities. Rey Chow describes the diasporic intellectual's dilemma thus:

> Going far beyond the responsibility any individual bears for belonging to a community, 'Chineseness'... lies at the root of a violence which works by the most deeply ingrained feelings of 'bonding' and which - even at the cost of social alienation - diasporic intellectuals must collectively resist.[57]

42. Bearing this in mind, Ang's refusal is an instance of preserving that play between location and detachment that has traditionally cast cosmopolitans under suspicion by nationalists. It

is instead, a positive tactic that avoids the seductive lure of solidarity based on ethnic affiliation. In addition, she enacts and proposes hybridity as a resistive tactic that does not rule out other avenues of going against the grain of these transnational imaginary communities and their attendant hegemonies. Hybridity's smudging of borders, fluidity and mutability should not be considered redundant but as ongoing tactics that work on a micro-scale, a process of erosion rather than a systematic centralised strategy that installs new marginalising discourses and habitats.

43. Ang points out that some Chinese Indonesians started to protest against the unthinking appropriation of these issues to generate Chinese solidarity and thus deepening the trench between Chinese and pribumi Indonesians. An interesting development in relation to these issues of cosmopolitan championing of local causes and the attendant problems is in the independent spin-off of *Huaren, the Southeast Asian Hanren Network*. The site also attempts to gather overseas Chinese under one umbrella, 'Southeast Asian Chinese', 'Hanren' literally meaning 'Han' people, descendants of Emperor Shih Huang-Ti. However, there is some recognition that global solidarity has its problems:

> I was inspired to create this site by the need for a venue where the Chinese people in this region can speak out on issues specific to us. The recent troubles in Indonesia attracted a lot of attention. People all over the world were touched by the plight of the Chinese Indonesians and many tried to help. Many were also speaking on our behalf. Although the intentions were noble, I believe nobody understands our problems better than we do. Hence this site. I see myself first and foremost as Southeast Asian, not a Chinese who just happen [*sic*] to be living in Southeast Asia. I am deeply concerned about the destiny of my country and feel responsible for it. I'm sure many other Southeast Asian Chinese feel the same way.[58]

44. The author informs visitors that he is Malaysian Chinese with a Malay grandmother, and a girlfriend in Jakarta. In a way, this site points towards the space provided in the hybrid, detached-reattached facet of overseas Chinese coupled with an obvious, recently challenged, yet crucial aspect of the Internet - its mutability and vastness.

45. This article is not advocating against all forms of online activism, nor against the involvement of relatively well-positioned elites in regional issues. The online activism at the very least did draw attention to the rapes, raised awareness and kept the issue in the public spotlight internationally. This international attention compelled the then-new Habibie government, which took office after Suharto's resignation, to set up a government team to investigate the accounts.

46. The concern here is, however, with the homogenising effect of the practices and discourses that this case illustrates. The case of the online dissemination of stories and images of raped ethnic Chinese women indicates how the particularities of a local situation can get buried in a politics that emphasises ethnic solidarity and homogeneity. The indications that the riots and rapes could have been planned and instigated by people outside the local community were ignored in favour of a position that preferred to emphasise an oppositional relationship between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese. This is partly a consequence of the emphasis on diasporic identification and solidarity.

47. The emphasis on race in directing the responses of readers and viewers of these stories and images online repeated the totalising process behind the violence in Indonesia. The web bulletin boards of sites like Huaren included the occasional post that reminded readers not to draw all pribumi Indonesians with a broad brush stroke, but these messages were often drowned out by heated responses that reasserted the bipolar image of Chinese pitted against pribumi and other non-Chinese. A hegemonic formation was established in the process, whereby ethnic Chinese were aligned globally within the 'Chinese diaspora'.

48. At the same time, the very same technologies that allow these totalising formations and strategies can provide avenues for tactics of resistance. The key is to tread between cybertopia and cyberghetto, to recognise the dangers, limitations (structurally inherent or otherwise), as well as find the potential, of this technology, and employ tactics which resist these universalising discourses of solidarity. This medium is employed increasingly to address social inequality and crises, such as violence directed against ethnic communities. These developments of online activism and extremism, of increasing polarisation in interaction certainly need closer examination. Generally, this research has to take into account how the Internet as a technology is structured, how software developments, Internet conventions and practices, and so forth, are not neutral technologies but are quite likely to be affected by the particular economies that produced them. More specifically, we also have to be aware of the hazards of transnational diasporans that have the luxury of playing national heroes on the other side of the world. Within the study of diaspora, and the area of race and cultural studies, there needs to be research into the interface (or lack thereof) between the local, the global, and how these recent developments in communication technology affect and are affected by practices and tactics of online activists.

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Endnotes

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[3] Laura Lochore, 'Virtual Rape: Vivian"s Story,' *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian context*, 3 (2000), http://wwwsshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue3/laura3.html

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[5] Andrew F. Wood and Tyrone L. Adams, 'Embracing the Machine: Quilt and Quilting as Community-Building Architecture,' in *Cyberghetto or Cybertopia? Race, Class, and Gender on the Internet*, ed. Bosah Ebo Westport: Praeger, 1998, pp. 1-12.

[6] Khachig Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,' *Diaspora* 5, 1 (1996): 3-36, this quote p. 9.

[7] Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: The Story of the Overseas Chinese*, London: Mandarin, 1991.

[8] Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s),' p. 30.

[9] Charles A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, vol. 8, Southeast Asia publications series, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983. An illustration of this is the way Guanxi has been characterised as an essentialised collection of traditional traits of the Chinese but is actually a set of practices that developed in response to the conditions of colonialism, migration and postcolonialism in Aihwa Ong, 'Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans,' in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp. 134-62.

[10] Inderpal Grewan and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

[11] Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s),' p. 5.

[12] Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s),' p. 4.

[13] Appadurai dismisses these traditional approaches to the topic of globalisation: centre-periphery, push and pull migration theory, consumers and producers (and other Marxist models); they do not account for complexities introduced by disjunctures between economy, culture and politics. The different 'scapes' introduced are to indicate the different types of agents involved (nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, sub-national groups, face-to-face groups), the fluidity and irregular structures of these scapes, and the multiplicity of positions and 'worlds' that people and groups inhabit now. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

[14] Appadurai, *Modernity*, p. 306.

[15] Eriberto P. Lozada Jr., 'What it means to be Hakka in Cyberspace: Diasporic Ethnicity and the Internet,' in *Third International Conference on Hakkaology*, Singapore, 1996.

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[17] Wanning Sun, 'Internet, Memory, and the Chinese Diaspora: the Case of the Nanjing Massacre Websites,' in *Postcoloniality/Cultural Studies: Representing Difference*, Cultural Studies Association of Australia Conference, 2-6 December, Adelaide: University of South Australia, 1998.

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[21] Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan, *The Rapes in the Series of Riots: the Climax of an Uncivilized Act of the Nation Life* Email, 13 July 1998 cited 1 August 1998; available from email: galih@indo.net.id.

[22] Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan, n.p.

[23] Neil Websdale and Meda Chesney-Lind, 'Doing Violence to Women: Research Synthesis on the Victimization of Women,' in *Masculinities and Violence*, ed. Lee H Bowker, Research on Men and Masculinities, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 55-81.

[24] Ruth Siefert, 'War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis,' in *Mass Rape: the War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, pp. 54-72; Arjun Appadurai, 'Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization,' *Public Culture* 10, 2 (1998): 227-47, this quote p. 231.

[25] Siefert, 'War and Rape,' p. 59.

[26] Heryanto, 'Rape, Race and Reporting,' p. 309.

[27] Sun, 'Internet, Memory, and the Chinese Diaspora,' p. 17.

[28] Lochore, 'Virtual Rape: Vivian's Story.'

[29] Kevin Robins, 'Will Images Move Us Still?,' in *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 149-87.

[30] Rey Chow, 'Media, Matter, Migrants,' in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1993, pp. 165-80, this quote p. 169.

[31] This is from my own personal experience and observation of relatives and friends.

[32] Jeremy Wagstaff and Jay Solomon, *Some Indonesia Rape Photos on the Internet Are Frauds* web, Asia Wall Street Journal, republished online by Huaren, 1998 cited 24 August 1998; available from http://turbo.orient-

group.com/ihcc/false.html.

[33] World Huaren Federation, *World Huaren Federation* web page 1998 cited 1 May to August 1998, available from http://www.huaren.org.

[34] The identification of a 'visual age' is a major response to the previously mentioned technological convergence, and has been outlined and critiqued by Kevin Robins, 'Cyberspace and the World We Live In,' in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, Theory, Culture and Society, London: Sage, 1995, pp. 135-55.

[35] It is quite hard to verify the race and gender of people on the Internet, so when I refer to a poster as belonging to a certain ethnic group etc, I am referring to how they present themselves through certain cues, quite often, the surname, although Indonesian Chinese generally don't have 'Chinese' surnames, through such phrases such as 'we Chinese,' or through more overt declarations as in the unquoted part of this message.

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[37] World Huaren Federation.

[38] Nigel Ng, *Chinese-Indonesian Men are A Bunch of Cowards*, Web email list, Indonesian Newsgroup, 1998 cited 8 August 1998, available from http://www.egroups.com/list/indo_newsgroup/250.html.

[39] Indonesian Free Press, Special issue: Indonesia Crisis (Riot Rapes: Evidence) (1998 cited 8 August 1998); available from http://www.asiadragons.com/indonesia/news/special/riot_rapes/ and World Huaren Federation.

[40] World Huaren Federation.

[41] East Timor International Support Center, *East Timor International Support Center* web, November 1997 cited 18 October 1999, available from http://www.easttimor.com/html/gal_women.html.

[42] Human Rights Watch, *Update on Rapes of Ethnic Chinese Women in Jakarta* web, Human Rights Watch, 1998 cited 31 August 1998, available from http://www.hrw.org/hrw/campaigns/indonesia/update.htm.

[43] Presentation of identity can occur unconsciously or consciously through markers such as the names used and references in the body of messages.

[44] Caren Kaplan, 'The Politics of Location,' in Grewal and Kaplan.

[45] 'Uchoks,' *Don't Make Things Worse* web bulletin message, 24 August 1998 cited 24 August 1998, available from http://www.asiadragons.com/indonesia/forum/messages/3086.html.

[46] Documented by Ang. She discusses the various messages on the bulletin board expressing frustration and cynicism about the online discourse being divorced from making an actual impact in Indonesia itself. She also describes briefly the various schemes thought up online, for instance, assisting Indonesian Chinese to emigrate en-masse through sponsorships and funding.

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[50] 'freeman,' *Shut Up Aussie!* web bulletin message, July 31 1998, cited 24 August 1998, available from http://www.asiadragons.com/indonesia/forum/messages/702.html.

[51] Ong, 'Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans.'

[52] Ang, 'Indonesia on My Mind.'

[53] Ang, 'Indonesia on My Mind,' p. 59.

[54] Chow, 'Media, Matter, Migrants.'

[55] Chow, 'Media, Matter, Migrants.'

[56] Chow, 'Media, Matter, Migrants.'

[57] Chow, 'Media, Matter, Migrants.'

[58] Richard Ooi, *Welcome* web page, 1998 cited 11 February 1999, available from http://members.spree.com/sip/hanren/, own emphases.

MAIN

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