

“The houses looked so much alike”: Representations of Contemporary America’s
Homogenized, Consumer Society in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and
Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*

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Richard Rhett Parker

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This thesis, “‘The houses looked so much alike’: Representations of Contemporary America’s Homogenized, Consumer Society in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*,” by Rhett Parker, is approved by:

**Thesis
Chair**



David J. Buehrer, Ph.D.
Professor of English

**Committee
Member**



Ubaraj Katawal, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English



Christine A. James, Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies

**Dean of the
Graduate School**



James T. LaPlant, Ph. D
Professor of Political Science

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ABSTRACT

Although Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985) are separated by years and general subject matter, both contain the presence of institutional and cultural forces that seek to persuade individual members of regional American subcultures to accept, whether consciously or unconsciously, the "ideologies" of a larger postmodern American society (which values wealth accumulation, mechanical reproduction, and mass consumption above all). Though some critics, like neo-Marxist Fredric Jameson, use the term "universal standardization" and others, like Russell Banks, use the term "self-colonization" to describe this process, there seems to be a common thread among these critics that an "American dread" of a patterned life, to borrow the phrasing of Tony Tanner, exists in contemporary American literature. This study, then, seeks to take these concepts, particularly Banks's notion of "self-colonization," and expand on the potential metaphorical ties between this "American dread" and the field of postcolonial research and writing. Furthermore, this thesis will chart the similarities and differences that exist within the institutional forces encouraging conformity in the larger American society between the 1960s and the 1980s. It will also attempt to discern the effects that both "colonization" and "self-colonization" had on the subcultures and their members—particularly the mentally ill and Native Americans (for Kesey) and poor, white working-class Southerners (for Mason)—as presented in these novels during their respective time periods.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country* (1985) seem completely unconnected in scope and subject matter. Set in the 1960s, Kesey's work highlights issues with mental institutions, abuses of mental and psychiatric treatments (such as using Electroshock Therapy as a means of punishment), and the poor standards established for what constitutes the mentally ill. Meanwhile, Mason's novel, set in the 1980s, focuses on the aftermath of the Vietnam War—especially in the South—and how, ten years after the war's end, both veterans and the surviving relatives of those that served have dealt with the lingering trauma instigated by the war. Yet, both novels contain the key feature of illustrating members of American subcultures (i.e., members of smaller cultures within but still distinct from the central culture of conventional America), such as poor white southerners (Mason) and the mentally ill and Native Americans (Kesey), who are constantly and often covertly pressured by government and economic institutions to submit and conform to the control and conditioning of a far more homogenized, consumer-focused society. Simply put, both *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *In Country* contain representations of America undergoing a process of “self-colonization” through which members of distinct, regional subcultures are “flattened out” to become homogenized within the larger culture of national America.

This notion of United States citizens undergoing a largely self-induced process of “auto-colonization” finds an origin point in Russell Banks’s *Dreaming up America* (2008), a critical study of American society. While Banks makes the case that America is currently in the process of colonizing itself, he also specifically points out how this process is heavily encouraged by dominant American institutions in the interests of economic power; after all, the cultural centers of the world shifted over to America (to New York and Los Angeles and away from Paris and London) after World War II due to the economic strength of the United States of America as a world superpower (Banks, 102). Focusing his attentions on the amount of television American children watch and the sheer presence of advertisements (which are blatantly economic and consumeristic) on television, Banks asserts that “We’ve colonized our own children. Having run out of people on the planet to colonize, run out of people who can’t distinguish between beads and trinkets and something of value, . . . [w]e’ve become the conquistadores of our own suburbs” (110-11). Essentially, Banks argues that the forces of control in America have decided to turn against its own people and “colonize” the minds of American children to believe that the American way of life, by nature, is consumeristic and economic—in a kind of self-perpetuating cycle keen on maintaining a level of economic dominance similar to post-World War II years.

Moreover, Banks’s concept of “self-colonization” contains important parallels to the underlying thesis of critic Tony Tanner’s seminal work *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970* (1971). In this critical study of American literature from the 1950s to the 1970s, Tanner makes the key argument that much of contemporary American fiction centers on two main preoccupations. The first preoccupation is the desire for freedom and

the self-made life. The second, the focus of this study, can be found in the idea that “there is also an abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous” (15). Although Tanner limits the scope of his work to two decades of American fiction (which excludes Mason’s novel, since it was published in 1985), the commentary he provides about American fiction in general and Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* specifically can easily extend the notion of the “American dread” of having one’s life patterned by overarching forces to novels written in the 1980s. For example, in his chapter on Kesey’s novel, Tanner argues that the presence of the “Combine”—a metaphor devised by Big Chief Bromden during his time in the mental ward that positions government, military, economic, and other such institutions as turning individuals into obedient machines—represents “another version of the notion that society is run by some secret force which controls and manipulates all its members” (373). Though Mason never refers to a metaphorical “Combine” in her novel, the use of government and popular culture as forces that manipulate, if not outright control, her rural, poor Southern characters is rather reminiscent of a dominating force like the “Combine.” It is within these instances of an “American dread” over a patterned life in the novels of Kesey and Mason that one finds parallels to Banks’s concept of “auto-colonization.”

As with Tanner and Banks, neo-Marxist critic Fredric Jameson discusses the concept of “self-colonization” and links this subsuming of individual Americans into a homogenous, mass culture to decidedly economic factors. Specifically, his critical essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1983) contains several arguments that point to

postmodernism as more than just a period of cultural shifts in literature and the arts. Rather, the label “postmodernism” can also be seen as correlating these cultural features with “the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order—what is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of media or the spectacle” (1957). Essentially, a large portion of the fiction, paintings, architecture, and other cultural productions of the postmodern period (that is, from the 1950s and onwards) reflect the modern economic order of consumer society through celebrating or simply illustrating the presence of popular culture. Yet, in this celebration of popular culture, postmodernism has allowed the once niche or outcast to become commonplace in the larger mores:

New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and country, center and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization . . . —these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older pre-war society in which high modernism was still an underground force. (Jameson, 1965)

Highlighted clearly by the removal of the division between city and country in favor of a “universal standardization,” Jameson contends that the current post-industrial (or late capitalist) society has occupied much of American civilization and has made autonomy and individuality via subcultures (especially regional subcultures) a near impossibility.

Alongside Jameson’s neo-Marxist critiques on American society exists an earlier Marxist critic, Walter Benjamin, whose essay “The Work of Art in the Age of

Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) critiques the effects that mass production and reproduction of original works of art has had on the value and authenticity of artistic objects. Taking photography and film to be the pinnacles of mass production and reproduction by the 1930s, Benjamin argues that the mechanization of art has led to a deterioration of traditional values and cultural heritage:

By making many reproductions, [mechanization] substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. . . .

Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage. (1108)

This deterioration, moreover, had led to forms of art that no longer allow its audience to absorb it and to critically reflect on the object; rather, art has become something that “absorbs” its audience while also providing either an overt or basic caption that tells the audience what to passively think (Benjamin, 1120). Essentially, Benjamin contends that as art objects have become mass produced and reproduced to a point where the dividing line between high art and popular culture becomes indistinguishable, these art objects become more of a distraction or a product that can be easily “consumed” rather than an object that an observer can deeply reflect and contemplate upon to reach their own potential aesthetic meaning.

Yet, the criticisms levied by Tony Tanner, Russell Banks, Fredric Jameson, and Walter Benjamin are just one piece of the proverbial theoretical puzzle when observing

the forms of “colonization” (both self and other) as represented in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Mason’s *In Country*. Of equal significance are the critical positions and writings of postcolonial theorists like Chinua Achebe, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Ngugi wa Thiong’o because these writers provide the foundation to further support the concept of “self-colonization” as well as tease out the metaphorical links between postcolonial theory and the novels of Kesey and Mason. Since its inception, postcolonial literary theory has provided critics with the means to seriously analyze historical, literary, and social texts from indigenous peoples subject to or once subjected to the rule of a foreign power. In particular, much of the work under postcolonial criticism focuses, rightfully so, on the texts written by the subaltern people of India, Africa, and the Caribbean during their time under rule by Western powers, particularly Britain. These texts often illustrate how the usurpation of native laws, customs, and traditions by foreign laws, customs, and traditions caused the indigenous peoples to question their sense of self and identity in a society torn between a native past and a foreign, colonial present. Yet, due to the shift in cultural imperialism from complete, physical domination to a slightly more detached, economic rule (the neo-imperialism of the United States, for instance), it seems fitting to open up the potential of postcolonial readings to a wider selection of texts. Specifically, this thesis will seek to observe the effects of economic imperialism—at least as it is reproduced in literature—through analyzing texts written from within the economic, neo-colonial power of the United States by authors who were either a part of or enmeshed within the distinct, provincial subcultures being subjugated by the institutions and customs of American society at large.

Before continuing, it seems necessary to note that the postcolonial concepts and theories used in this thesis help establish a *metaphorical* link between the distresses experienced in India and Africa due to the complete and physical dominance that resulted from colonial imperialism and the detrimental effects of economic self-colonization in contemporary America. Postcolonial theorists like Achebe and Bhabha lived through actual colonial regimes in Africa and India, respectively, in which the colonizing forces sought to forcefully suppress the mores and language of the colonized, native peoples and take over their lands. Thus, the theories and writings of such postcolonial critics often reflect the ways in which the colonizing forces have negatively impacted the customs of the natives, and these critics also tend to chart paths of resistance for the once-colonized. Therefore, aside from Native Americans and African Americans, there can be few direct correlations between the experiences of such postcolonial theorists and members of American subcultures being subsumed into mainstream American culture from the 1960s onward. However, the writings of postcolonial theorists still provide a relevant and useful framework through which to discuss a similar trope of power structures and power dynamics as they play out between national American popular culture (the dominant “colonizer”) and regional subgroups (the dominated “colonized”) in the novels of Kesey and Mason.

Alongside defining the use of postcolonial theory in this thesis as metaphorical, it also seems useful to “give the devil his due,” as Chinua Achebe writes in his critical article “English and the African Writer” (1997), and concede that American “self-colonization” did result in certain net benefits for some of the provincial subcultures. As Achebe’s essay admits, there was a great deal of destruction and disruption because of

European (specifically, British) colonization efforts throughout Africa. At the same time, he argues that there was at least one benefit of England's imperial regime to native Africans: the English language. For Achebe, the English language can be used as a valuable tool to establish a common ground for African writers to easily connect both with members of disparate African tribes and with English speakers around the world. Thus, rather than bucking the English language and the traditions associated with it, Achebe values the combination of languages that allows him to write his books in an English influenced by African traditions (which also allows him to reach a more world-wide audience). As Achebe phrases this proposed singular benefit of colonization in Africa: "Let us give the devil his due: colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before. . . . There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication" (344).

Accordingly, Achebe's article serves as a reminder that colonization as well as homogenization can sometimes bring about positive effects. In the United States, the homogenization of smaller, local cultures into the larger, national culture provided benefits like greater freedoms and economic benefits for most individuals, and especially for those that may have already been marginalized in the smaller political unit. In Mason's *In Country*, for instance, the infiltration of mass-market popular culture into the South certainly disrupts Southern traditions (as noted by a number of critics), but it also allows for the main female character, Sam, to observe and seek out life options outside of being a farmer's wife, which would have been her "traditional" role in the previous eras.

Outside of Achebe, however, most postcolonial critics tend to focus on the damages caused by imperial regimes and the ways that indigenous peoples resisted these regimes. Homi K. Bhabha, for instance, wrote two articles that cover the concept of *mimicry*. In “Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse” (1994), Bhabha seeks to define mimicry as a tool of the colonizers that was subverted and, subsequently, co-opted by the colonized as a method of resistance. This entire concept revolves around “colonial mimicry [as] the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (86). Yet, despite the attempts of the colonizers to create groups of “Others” that were more attached to the foreign powers’ mores, the incomplete education that the “Others” received regarding the relics, customs, and traditions of the group in power ultimately backfired. After all, these groups of colonized people may have spoken the same language and worshipped the same religion as the colonizers, but such recognizable “Others” were still ultimately Others and were therefore separated from the original colonizer’s supposedly superior civilization.

As Bhabha continues on to argue, colonial mimicry’s desire to shape groups of “Others” as similar to but still different from the colonizer’s culture soon turned into a form of resistance for the colonized people:

What I have called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of *dependent* colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed¹, the black man stops being an actual person for only the white man can represent his

¹ Much of Bhabha’s argument here is influenced by the critic Frantz Fanon in his seminal collection of essays entitled *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Specifically, Bhabha focuses on Fanon’s essay “The Negro and Psychopathology” and argues that the existence of mimicry presents a third option to the colonized outside of Fanon’s more binary choice of “turn white or disappear” (75).

self-esteem. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask: it is not what Césaire describes as “colonization-thingification”² behind which there stands the essence of the *présence Africaine*. The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. (88)

This form of mimicry, which would later be expanded upon in Bhabha’s essay “Signs Taken for Wonders” and given the name “hybrid resistance,” emphasizes how the colonized Others undergo a doubling that allows them to both adopt the features of the colonizer—their language, norms, etc.—without having to destroy or discard their own identity. Fittingly, characters like Randle McMurphy and Samantha Hughes exhibit a similar pattern of defiance against the forces of control and conditioning that they face in the fictions of Kesey and Mason, respectively.

Finally, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s essay “Decolonising the Mind” highlights different ways in which imperial powers control and condition conquered natives. Working partially as a counterpoint to the arguments made by Chinua Achebe in “English and the African Writer,” Thiong’o asserts that the most useful form of manipulation employed by colonizing powers comes from “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, . . . orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer” (1134-35). In a metaphorical sense, the process of American self-colonization that Russell Banks discusses in his work contains a similar devaluing of one culture (local cultures, in this case) and the elevation of the “language of the colonizer”: popular culture as observed through advertisements and

² See Aimé Césaire’s essay “Discourse on Colonialism” for more information on the ties between “colonization” and “thingification.”

marketing campaigns. In Kesey's novel, this process of destruction and elevation seems to be observable through Chief Bromden's paranoid, schizophrenic, and dystopic vision of the "Combine" terminating or undermining the various expressions of rugged individualism present throughout the novel—symbolized through the images of western cowboy heroes like The Lone Ranger—while also elevating their own customs of robotic normalcy, which is continually presented to the patients in the institution as a way back in to regular society. Similarly, the inundation of popular culture, name brands, and national companies in Mason's novel undercuts and undervalues the presence of an older, regional Southern society. This undercutting of the agricultural South in favor of a mass-consumer national culture is, perhaps, best symbolized in Mason's novel by the suburbs and strip malls of a post-agrarian South built on top of lands once reserved for cornfields.

In summation, the ideas and arguments established by critics like Tony Tanner, Fredric Jameson, Walter Benjamin, Russell Banks, Chinua Achebe, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o help to define and highlight the existence of self-colonization and patterns of conformity in contemporary American fiction, which primarily manifests in Tanner's conception of the "American dread" that the individual is controlled by some ominous, overarching power and that there is no escape from said power. Few, if any, critics have paired together the works of Kesey and Mason—perhaps due to the rather diverse premises of the novels or the critics' choice of literary theory. Moreover, many of the critics of Kesey and Mason hint at postcolonial ideas or possibilities in their texts, but these suggestions are often passing thoughts used to point out another major theme or concept, such as the representation of women in a rapidly urbanizing South. It is quite possible that the lack of postcolonial-based criticism for Kesey and Mason (especially

with regards to the concept of America's "self-colonization") results from the inherently political nature of postcolonial literary theory. Thus, some critics may not want to refocus the theories of postcolonialism and apply them to cultures within a Western, neo-colonial power like the United States of America. Furthermore, this refocusing could bring about the issue of presuming a status of undeserved victimhood, oppression, or subjugation for those in these various American subcultures. In other words, the danger of analyzing contemporary American literature through postcolonial literary theory is that it may seem as though one is establishing an uneasy correlation that members of American subgroups faced the same exact sort of oppression and colonial subjugation as the colonized peoples of Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and so forth.

However, I take works like Edward Said's essay "Jane Austen and Empire" as an archetypal example of how postcolonial theory can be refocused and applied to texts written within the heart of a colonial or neo-colonial power. In Said's essay, he focuses on a postcolonial reading of Jane Austen's texts and ultimately asserts that even if a text does not outwardly appear to be concerned about matters of colonialism, concepts such as colonial values and the presence of empires can often present themselves in subtle ways. While this thesis further shifts the focus of postcolonial theory from colonial holdings to the citizens of a neo-colonial empire being influenced and encouraged to "self-colonize" their own identity, the very idea of shifting postcolonial readings away from a rigid focus on the literature of colonized nations finds precedent in the works of critics and scholars like Said.

Having thoroughly discussed the theoretical framework to be used in this thesis, it is worthwhile to switch the focus of discussion over to the specific criticisms of Kesey's

and Mason's texts. Generally speaking, critics of Kesey's novel have often focused on the interactions between Chief Bromden, Randle McMurphy, and Big Nurse Ratched, with special regards to narrative elements (especially point of view)³, conflicts of gender, race, and disability⁴, and dark humor and the absurd.⁵ At the same time, a number of critics have tackled the subjects of how rugged individualism is expressed in the novel and how many of the characters reflect pop culture cartoon or comic book heroes. Such critics tend to discuss the opposition between individual characters (like Randle McMurphy or Chief Bromden) and the oppressive, artificial society represented by Nurse Ratched and the "Combine," and it is in this opposition that similar arguments can be drawn for the framework of this thesis.

In his essay "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress" (1969), John A. Barsness maintains that the once-celebrated American hero found in the image of the rugged frontiersman has become less and less prominent as America, as a whole, has become more and more modernized and urbanized. Thus, individualistic characters like Randle McMurphy see civilization as "the suppressor of individual freedom and the mindless slave of a material goal" (421). Moreover, this regulatory and institutionalized society becomes the force that characters like McMurphy and Chief Bromden must try to defeat

³ Elena Semino and Kate Swindlehurst's essay "Metaphor and Mind Style in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*" and John Zubizarreta's essay "The Disparity of Point of View in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*" provide further insight into the effect of narrative elements on Kesey's text.

⁴ See Robert P. Waxler's "The Mixed Heritage of the Chief: Revisiting the Problem of Manhood in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," Caroline Leach and Murray Stuart's "Disability and Gender in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," and Daniel J. Vitkus's "Madness and Misogyny in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*" for more information on how gender, race, and disability play a role in Kesey's text.

⁵ James E. Miller, Jr.'s "The Humor in the Horror," Joseph J. Waldmeir's "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey," and Stephen L. Tanner's "Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* and the Varieties of American Humor" provide in-depth discussions on how black humor and the absurd shape the meaning of Kesey's novel.

via escape. Similarly, Richard Blessing's essay, "The Moving Target: Ken Kesey's Evolving Heroes," establishes the concept that the novel's oppositional forces are Randle McMurphy (who represents life and movement) and Nurse Ratched and the "Combine" (which represent obedience and stagnation). As with Barsness, Blessing represents the struggle between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched and the "Combine" as one between the individual human and a robotic, regulatory, and eventually de-humanizing society.

Though primarily focused on issues of race and how Chief Bromden's status as a Native American both reflects and reaffirms many of the countercultural movements against authority in the 1960s, Wilson Kaiser's essay "Disability and Native American Counterculture in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *House Made of Dawn*" still contains several relevant arguments about the resistance of the individual against a controlling society. For instance, Kaiser asserts that "For Kesey, this critique [of the damage done to individuals by a State] also leaves room for the hope that the cognitive effects of modern industrial culture can open the way to new forms of resistance by the inmates of the worldwide Combine [defined here as corporate and statist structures]" (193). In other words, by noting the psychological and physical damage that overarching, authoritarian bodies like a State or the "Combine" can do to individuals from all walks of life, Kesey seems to use the struggle of McMurphy and the escape of Bromden to open up possible methods of resistance for those under the rule of these authoritarian bodies.

Like the aforementioned critics, Terry G. Sherwood's "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and the Comic Strip" helps further the analysis of Ken Kesey's use of the rugged, individualistic frontiersman character in this novel. However, Sherwood specifically sees McMurphy's rugged individualism as inspired by popular culture icons

like The Lone Ranger and television western heroes. More importantly, Sherwood is one of the few critics that seems to have a grimmer outlook on the ending of Kesey's novel. While critics like Barsness and Blessing see Chief Bromden's escape at the end of the novel as an actual escape from the clutches of the Combine, Sherwood argues that "There is little hope that the Combine can be defeated. Only limited defiance is possible" (395).

Finally, Chuck Palahniuk's foreword to the 2007 edition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* provides an interesting insight into the struggle among McMurphy and Nurse Ratched and the Combine. Essentially, Palahniuk suggests that a worthwhile focus for this novel would center on the interactions of archetypal characters known as "the rebel," "the follower," and "the witness." Continually refuting the idea that one must choose between "the rebel" or "the follower," Palahniuk shifts the focus to how characters like Randle McMurphy, Billy Bibbit, and Chief Bromden operate within the aforementioned trinity. Following a trope similar to Bhabha's conception of mimicry as a way to escape the choice of becoming the colonizer or being destroyed, Palahniuk suggests that it is possible to escape from the destructive binary of choosing to become a rebel or conformist—one of which is almost always destroyed in the struggle—by choosing, as Chief does, to become a witness to these struggles: this position as witness allows one the distance to observe and ultimately survive the struggle between these archetypal opposites.

By comparison, Mason's novel is generally analyzed in terms of gender⁶, trauma, memory, and history⁷ in relation to war and its aftermath. However, there are a number of critics working within these aforementioned theoretical camps who provide arguments relevant to the scope of this thesis. For instance, while Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. and similar critics primarily analyze if and how authors like Mason show historical roots and identification with local cultures, these critics often position the regional, Southern culture as distinct from that of the modern, post-industrial United States. In his essay "Finding One's History: Bobbie Ann Mason and Contemporary Southern Literature," Brinkmeyer, Jr. specifically focuses on how members of a new, urbanized South tend to turn away from their historical roots in diverse provincial cultures. In fact, Brinkmeyer Jr. argues that "Having grown up in an age given to suburbs and shopping malls, Mason's characters . . . fail to develop a consciousness rooted in history and irony that would add a richness to their vision" (24). For Brinkmeyer Jr., Mason stands out among her fellow southern writers because her novels, especially *In Country* (her first novel), often overlook connections between the characters and their regional identities in favor of the characters' connections with a more national consumer culture⁸. Thus, in a manner

⁶ See Milton J. Bates's "Men, Women, and Vietnam"; Ellen A. Blais's "Gender Issues in Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*"; Katherine Kinney's "Humping the Boonies: Women and the Memory of War" in *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War*; Alison M. Johnson's "Sam Hughes as a Second Generation Trauma Victim in Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*"; John Lowney's "'Homesick for Those Memories': The Gendering of Historical Memory in Women's Narratives of the Vietnam War"; and Angela K. Smith's "Chicken or Hawk? Heroism, Masculinity and Violence in Vietnam War Narratives" for further analysis on the effects of gender on Vietnam War narratives.

⁷ See June Dwyer's "New Roles, New History, and New Patriotism: Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*"; Christa Grewe-Volpp's "'Memory Attaches Itself to Sites': Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* and the Significance of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial"; Suzy Clarkson Holstein's "Into the Swamp at Oblique Angles: Mason's *In Country*"; and Sinéad McDermott's "The Ethics of Postmemory in Bobbie Ann Mason's 'In Country'" for other readings of the ways that memory and history shape Mason's text.

⁸ Owen W. Gilman, Jr.'s essay "In Which Country?" contains several arguments similar in scope to those provided by Brinkmeyer, Jr. Specifically, Gilman, Jr. reinforces the idea of a clear binary between the late capitalist culture of mass America that is "dedicated to escaping the past in order to joy ride in the present," and a local, regional Southern culture which contains a "need for history" (48-49).

reminiscent of postcolonial suppression of sub-cultures in favor of the culture of the colonizer, characters like Sam are supposedly depicted as part of the larger national American identity rather than an individual Southerner.

There are also several critics working within the field of feminist or gender theory that provide relevant arguments regarding this flattening of American subcultures. For example, while Sandra Bonilla Durham, in her essay “Women and War: Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*,” centers her discussion on the *Bildungsroman* quest undertaken by Sam in the novel that allows her to reconcile with her uncle Emmett, her father Dwayne, and a new conception of her own self, there are also references made to a South that is being rapidly changed by a national, consumer-focused culture. Correspondingly, Lisa Hinrichsen’s essay “‘I can’t believe it was really real’: Violence, Vietnam, and Bringing War Home in Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*” provides the conceptual definition of a “New South” as it is represented in Mason’s novel. Moreover, Hinrichsen argues that Sam’s initial view of her agriculturally-based grandparents aligns almost perfectly with the nationally-constructed view of the South as “anti-modern” (234). Significantly, this view of the South would have allowed for a justified “takeover” of Southern culture to bring it up to speed with the rest of America⁹.

Lastly, there exists multiple critiques regarding Mason’s work that specifically focus on representations of popular culture in the novel. For example, in his *New York Times* book review titled “Winning Her Father’s War,” Joel Connarroe discusses the

⁹ Joanna Price’s essay “‘Ten years burning down the road’: Trauma, mourning, and postmemory in Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*” provides further support for this supposed view of the South. As Price notes, Sam’s immediate response to reading her father’s diary is “to distance herself from Dwayne and his ‘ignorant and country’ parents” (83-84). Like Hinrichsen, Price’s identification of Sam initially seeing her father and his parents as ignorant and backwards reaffirms this national view of the South—a view that would have better allowed for the sweeping social and cultural changes in the South as noted by Durham.

representations of middle America, Vietnam veterans, and popular culture within the novel. Rather negatively critical in his views of Mason's use of popular culture, Connarroe suggests that its overwhelming presence creates a "Shopping Mall Realism" in the novel: "Sam is undeniably bright but her mind, in the tradition of what I call Shopping Mall Realism, is a town dump of brand names, horror movie plots, talk show one-liners, and other detritus of a mass culture" (para. 5). Extending this criticism further by separating the realms of popular culture and high art, Connarroe thinks that Sam must grow out of her fascination with video games, rock music, television programs, and so on to truly develop intellectually. Firmly in opposition to the criticisms of Connarroe's book review, Marjorie Winther's essay "M*A*S*H, Malls and meaning: Popular and corporate culture in *In Country*" defines and identifies how Mason uses various artifacts of popular culture in her novel. Additionally, from the presence of punk clothing stores in shopping malls to the use of music tours to identify the time frame and setting of the novel, Winther's article provides an in-depth analysis of the significance of these objects to show that Sam's world is "filtered" by popular culture and electronic media. Thus, Winther lends support to the idea that Sam's views on her town of Hopewell are, in large part, a reflection of the ideas she has seen on television—a national medium and one of the greatest sources of "self-colonization."

As can be seen in the discussions and arguments posed by these diverse critics and applied to the fictions of Kesey and Mason, there are certainly clear separations between society and the individual as well as the national culture of the United States (the dominant force of "colonization") and the distinct, provincial cultures that are in danger of being "flattened." Moreover, several critics have either implied (like Sandra Bonilla

Durham) or directly stated (like Fredric Jameson and Russell Banks) that there are economic causes influencing this push for homogenization. Thus, by applying the conceptual framework of postcolonial theory as a trope to contemporary American novels like Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Mason's *In Country*, it becomes possible to further highlight and discuss how these novels' depictions of the flattening out of distinct, regional subcultures represents a larger push for a homogenized, consumer culture throughout America while also critiquing the dangers implicit with the attempted subsuming of one way of life into another.

Chapter 2, then, will examine Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in light of how the novel depicts such metaphorical scenes of colonization. Specifically, the chapter will highlight the subcultures of the mentally ill and Native Americans and discuss the direct, often forceful pressure placed on these individuals via the physical Nurse Ratched and the conceptual "Combine" to conform to their ideals of a standard society. While actual scenes of colonization will also be noted, such Chief Bromden's tribe having their lands forcibly purchased by the United States Federal Government for use in urban and economic development, postcolonial theory will mainly be used in a metaphorical sense to explore the ways in which the patients of the mental hospital are persuaded into conforming to the standards established by Nurse Ratched and the Combine. After all, one of the major revelations in the novel comes from McMurphy's realization that many of the men committed to the mental ward are not strictly "mentally ill;" instead, many of the Acutes are merely self-committed. Thus, this self-commitment turns to "self-colonization" as the men willingly turn themselves into the abusive mental ward to be "fixed" or "cured" of their irregularity by Nurse Ratched and the Combine, as

the goal is always to return to so-called normal society as a functional member. Furthermore, parallels will be drawn between Randle McMurphy's various acts of defiance against Nurse Ratched as well as Chief Bromden's escape and the concepts of mimicry and "hybrid resistance" established by Bhabha. Finally, this chapter will attempt to tackle a question that has caused debate among scholars of Kesey: because Chief Bromden escapes from the hospital into an American landscape filled with traces of the Combine's influences (that is, because the Chief escapes from the microcosm of the hospital into the macrocosm of the "National Combine"), can it truly be considered an escape?

Chapter 3 will transition from Kesey and the 1960s to Mason and the post-Vietnam landscape of the 1980s through the changing societal structures framing the two fictions. This third chapter will focus on Mason's novel with specific regards to how the distinct regional customs of poor, white working-class southerners is observably being phased out by popular American culture, which is often represented in the novel through the "New South's" insistence on objects and icons from American mass culture. As a consummate consumer of television, music, and other forms of popular culture, the main female protagonist, Sam Hughes, has been conditioned (or, as Russell Banks would argue, "self-colonized") to see the society of American late capitalism as natural. This conditioning is further reinforced by Sam's mother because she desires Sam to leave behind the town of Hopewell where Sam grew up and move with her to Lexington so that Sam can attend the University of Kentucky and become a "modern" woman. At the same time, Sam is overcome with an inability to look away from the past. She reads history books focused on Vietnam, she refuses to leave behind the memory of her father who

died in Vietnam, and she is ultimately unable to completely sever herself from her connections to poor, white southerners like her grandmother, Mamaw Hughes.

Ultimately, the uncertainty of the novel's ending leaves the question open as to how successfully Sam can hybridize the identities of the Rural South and the New South to create and maintain a unique, individual identity that can potentially help others to heal and grow.

Finally, the conclusion will consider the depictions of "colonization" in the two works and evaluate how these depictions reflect the movement towards "self-colonization" in a late-stage capitalist society. By doing so, the conclusion will also seek to assert that this metaphorical use of postcolonial theory could find further potential use across a wider range of contemporary American literature.

Chapter II

“THERE WAS THE REBEL AND THERE WAS THE FOLLOWER”: THE AUTOMATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO’S NEST*

In many ways, the social turmoil of the 1960s sets the cultural background for Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962). Neo-Marxist critic Fredric Jameson clarifies this point in his essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” by noting how the 1960s were “in many ways the key transitional period, a period in which the new international order (neo-colonialism, the Green Revolution, computerization and electronic information) is at one and the same time set in place and is swept and shaken by its own internal contradictions and by external resistance” (1957). That new international order that Jameson refers to here is a post-industrial, consumer society that focuses on a mass consumption of media—especially forms of media like television that are underlined by spectacle. Certainly, this society is well represented when one considers the various technological innovations occurring in the 1960s and the resultant widespread consumption of technologies like television sets by the American public, which opened up these citizens to greater amounts of information, spectacular imagery (including the coverage of the Vietnam War), and—perhaps most importantly—advertisements. Though he is not directly replying to Jameson, Russell Banks, in his critical study *Dreaming Up America* (2008), offers an idea of what the internal contradictions and external resistances could have been to America in the 1960s: “I think we began to look a bit more cursed in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, with the Vietnam

War and the Europeans' perception of continuing racism in the United States. . . . But even so, during the period between the 1950s until the early '70s, America looked pretty good" (104). From the shining star of the world in the early '60s to a troubled nation with internal conflicts and external cracks by the late '60s (including numerous race riots, war protests, and even the creation of militant groups like the Black Panthers and The Weather Underground), the societal background of America in the 1960s seems rife with struggles for cultural authority and dominance.

Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, then, fits within this overall societal framework of conflict for authority. The apparently omnipresent and all powerful entity that Chief Bromden refers to as the "Combine," for example, initially derives from the Chief's memories—distorted by his schizophrenia-induced hallucinations—of the technology and electronics he encountered during his service in World War II. These memories attach themselves to the rigid protocols and standards of behavior set up by the mental ward and American society at large, which reflects in Chief's belief that Nurse Ratched seeks to "fix" her patients by inserting wires and replacing human parts with robotic ones. At the same time, this notion of the "Combine" functions as an appropriate metaphorical representation of the forces and institutions (like the government, the military, and mental institutions) that Kesey sees as seeking to control and condition individuals to create a homogenized, consumer-focused society filled with automated and docile citizens. This view of the "Combine" as a force of control becomes quite clear through Chief Bromden's belief that the entire purpose of the mental ward that he and other patients have been placed in is to provide a space where the "Combine," with its agents like "Big Nurse" Ratched, can "fix" faulty humans. As Chief defines it:

The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is. When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch him sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they're just now digging trenches along the street to lay pipes for city water. (36)

Chief's descriptions of the patients that have been taken in, "fixed" by the Combine, and released back out into the world create the impression that these patients are now automated machines rather than humans. In fact, Chief's view of these patients creates an eerie reflection of Walter Benjamin's assertion that "many reproductions [of art] substitute a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (1108). As Chief sees it, the technology wielded by the "Combine" results in human beings that are copies of one another (ready to fill in whatever prescribed role they are given), rather than individuals with a "unique existence."

Richard Blessing supports this reading by maintaining that the patient in the mental ward "may be altered by giving him Electro Shock Therapy or by a lobotomy, and in either case the intention is to create a smoothly shaped part to fit the social machine. . . . Such 'products' are manufactured, not grown or developed" (618). In other words, the patients that are "fixed" by the mental ward become these mechanized products whose sole purpose seems to be correctly integrating into the social machine that has been developed and maintained by the "Combine." At the same time, Chief's vision of this

robotic society provides an effective metaphor through which Kesey can explore the cold distance and detachment one faces within such a homogenized society: one where individual differences are flattened out so that everyone and everything seems so similar.

There exists, perhaps, no greater image of a processed society in Kesey's novel than the one seen by Chief Bromden later in the novel during the fishing trip that Randle McMurphy organizes for the Acutes, or those patients that commit themselves to the mental hospital largely by choice. At first glance, this fishing trip seems to be a moment of triumph in McMurphy's defiant stand against the Combine. As Blessing later notes in his essay, "Despite the warnings of high seas by the Big Nurse [a high-ranking "agent" of the Combine, according to the Chief], McMurphy and twelve of the faithful 'light out for the territory,' for that last frontier, the ocean" (617-18). Largely detached from the technological progress of civilization, the ocean represents a frontier for the men to escape into and do as they please without fear of Nurse Ratched and the Combine, though they will eventually be forced to return to the Combine-controlled land. However, despite the ocean's status as a "final frontier" of escape, there are constant and pressing reminders of the sheer prevalence and dominance of the Combine in the American society of the 1960s.

Specifically, there is a moment where Chief Bromden looks out of the car during the ride to the docks and sees a country radically changed since his initial arrival into the institution of the mental hospital twenty years ago (before the major "boom" of suburban housing developments):

Five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town All that [sic] five thousand kids lived in those five

thousand houses, owned by those guys that got off the [commuter] train. The houses looked so much alike that, time and time again, the kids went home by mistake to different houses. (206)

Essentially, Chief's observations of this countryside, perhaps a countryside once filled with the sights and sounds of nature that would have reminded Chief of his own tribe's land, show how the Combine both desired and achieved a monolithic sameness over the individual. In other words, during the Chief's time in the mental hospital, the Combine successfully flattened out any sense of distinctiveness in the natural environment and replaced it with manufactured, "cookie-cutter" houses with carbon-copied families all chasing after the same goals of normalcy and conformity that encompass the contemporary "myth" of the American Dream: two-to-three children, two cars, a well-paying job, and the latest and greatest material good or technological innovation.

As Banks speculates, this whole emphasis on conformity and consumption became the "American reality, the one that has grown out of the one strand of the American Dream¹⁰ that was the dream of wealth accumulation, the one that we said was the least transformative" (105). In Kesey's fiction, the Combine, rather than allowing for the dreams of a holy "City on the Hill" or the promise of a new life and fresh start to flourish, has fostered the dream of wealth accumulation as the only dream worth following. Furthermore, despite the success of McMurphy in organizing and carrying out

¹⁰ At the beginning of his critical study, Russell Banks divides the concept of the American Dream up into three distinct dreams that represent different ideologies and end goals for America. The first is the "religious dream of the City on the Hill, where you could live a life that was pure and uninfected by European cosmopolitanism" (6). Essentially, this dream held Europe as corrupt and unsuitable for living a holy life. The second, and the one this thesis concerns itself with, is the "dream of the City of Gold, where you discovered untold wealth" (6). The third and final dream that Banks discusses is the "dream of the Fountain of Youth . . . [which] carries within it the sense of the new, the dream of starting over, of having a New Life" (7).

the fishing trip, the escape itself is only temporary. As Blessing poignantly remarks, the sheer omnipotence and perceived inescapability of the “Combine” is highlighted as “the ‘government sponsored expedition’ [the fishing trip group] must sign in as it had signed out, and the men must return to the asylum of the Big Nurse” (618). Though Randle McMurphy, the “Good Shepherd” (and almost parodic Christ-figure), and his twelve Acutes may have escaped from Nurse Ratched and the “Combine” while they were out on the open ocean, the men must all eventually “return to the fold” and place themselves back under the supervision of the “Combine” and its archetypal “Bad Shepherdess,” Nurse Ratched. Thus, there is an emphasis placed on the concept that one can never truly “escape” the “Combine” because, even if one manages to run away to a location outside of the land controlled by the “Combine” (which is the United States at large), there must always be an eventual return.

In fact, this depiction of Big Nurse Ratched as an archetypal “Bad Shepherdess” leading the patients into the maw of the “Combine” occurs throughout Kesey’s novel. Primarily, the diverse methods that Ratched employs under the guise of “fixing” her patients—including group therapy meetings, the logbook, the threat of electroshock therapy, and the threat of movement to other, more draconian wards—often create an atmosphere of oppression and regulation within the microcosm of the mental ward. For instance, the “Therapeutic Community” meetings are initially described by Chief as a way for the patients to help one another by showing “where he’s out of place; how society is what decides who’s sane and who isn’t, so you got to measure up” (44). However, the actual forms of help and aid given in these group meetings seem to be a far cry from simply pointing out where a fellow patient is deviating from “sane” society.

Rather, at least according to the Chief's fragmented vision of these events, the "help" that these meetings provide comes in the form of the patients "grilling one of their friends like he was a criminal and they were all prosecutors and judge and jury. For forty-five minutes they been chopping a man to pieces, almost as if they enjoyed it, shooting questions at him" (50). More often than not, these "Therapeutic Community" meetings entice the patients to chip away at each other under the orders and surveillance of Nurse Ratched and the Combine. Moreover, the men so readily and willingly accuse and question their fellow patients about the problems they have been unfortunate enough to have entered into a logbook because each patient wants to avoid such accusations and questions leveled against them (given the context of the 1950s and early '60s, Kesey may very well be referencing "Red Scare" tactics used during the Cold War to encourage American citizens to report on each other for any potential hint of "Communist" sympathies). Such a vicious, dystopic cycle slowly breaks the individual personalities of the patients to the point where each man becomes as withdrawn, reclusive, and "normal" (according to the Combine) as possible.

It is this very silent and stagnant society plagued by a fear of breaking conformity that McMurphy finds at the onset of his commitment in the mental ward and against which he stands in defiance throughout Kesey's novel. Opposed to the civilizing and regulatory forces of Big Nurse Ratched and the Combine, Randle McMurphy becomes highly representative of the rebellious, individualistic frontiersmen of both the early American literary tradition and pre-1960s popular culture. In fact, critic John Barsness, in his essay "Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress," describes McMurphy as a heroic frontiersman character whose enemy "is society, artificial, complex, institutionalized—

civilization, if you will Oppressive, conformist, regulatory, civilization is the suppressor of individual freedom and the mindless slave of a material goal” (421). From the regulatory oppression the mental patients face within the microcosm of the mental hospital (such as via the Therapeutic Community meetings) to the artificial suburban lifestyles that Chief Bromden observes during the fishing trip as afflicting the larger American society, the Combine exists as a suppressor of the individual in favor of robotic universalization. Therefore, McMurphy’s staunch resistance to and struggles against the Combine more explicitly paint him as a champion of the individual in opposition to this conformity.

Of further interest, Randle McMurphy is inextricably linked to characters and archetypes from a side of popular culture slowly being phased out of 1960s American society. Specifically, critics like Terry G. Sherwood note how Kesey “mines Popular culture in frequent references to McMurphy as the cowboy hero. . . . The television ‘western’ intersects the Lone Ranger and folk song references to emphasize frontier values. Kesey uses the stereotyped cowboy hero for precisely the reasons he is often attacked: unrelenting selfhood and independence” (385). In essence, McMurphy’s use of folk songs like “The Roving Gambler” and “The Wagoner” and his connections to the once nationally acclaimed comic book and radio drama character of the Lone Ranger, observable whenever Harding remarks “I’d like to stand there at the window with a silver bullet in my hand and ask ‘Who *wawz* that’er masked man?’ as you ride” (266), enmesh him within the side of 1960s American popular culture that still held individualistic Americans as ideal heroes: cowboys, perhaps, being the most notable representation of this ideal (which is, admittedly, ironic given the Native American

narrator of Kesey's novel). In fact, McMurphy is inseparably linked to the cowboy figure during the first few minutes of his commitment to the mental ward when he calls out Harding to challenge him for the position of "bull goose loony" because "'this hospital ain't big enough for the two of us'" (19). Yet, these markers of the American Old West—the cowboy heroes and the ideals they stood for—were being replaced in significance throughout the 1960s by both the economics of suburban-sprawl lifestyles and (especially during the latter half of the '60s) the communal nature of the Hippie counterculture movement. Indeed, this shift in popular culture during the 1960s ensured that "the West, as such, [was] doomed" (Sherwood 385).

Yet, for all his cowboy heroism and bravado, it is important to note that McMurphy initially struggles with his attempts at leading his fellow patients out of the mire of conformity established by Nurse Ratched and the Combine. Significantly, a majority of the patients in the mental ward have willingly submitted themselves to the control of the "Combine." This surrender, which is heavily encouraged by Nurse Ratched and the "Combine," represents a form of "self-colonization" whereby the patients assent to having their individual self "fixed" by the dominant powers. This crucial plot point is revealed after McMurphy tells Harding and the others that he "'couldn't figure it out at first, why you guys were coming to me like I was some kind of savior. Then I just happened to find out about the way the nurses have the big say as to who gets discharged and who doesn't'" (165). McMurphy believes that the other patients are trying to use him as a fall guy so that they can have their revenge on Ratched without suffering the repercussions of a longer stay in the ward. However, Harding quickly reveals that "'there are only a few men on the ward who *are* committed. Only Scanlon and—well, I guess

some of the Chronicles [like Chief]. And you. Not many commitments in the whole hospital. No, not many at all” (166).

At first, McMurphy—a tough, folklore-hero type of person—seems unable to understand why these Acutes voluntarily stay in the ward and allow themselves to be subjected to the humiliation of the logbook, Therapeutic Community meetings, and threats of the Disturbed ward and electroshock therapy. However, Acutes such as Billy Bibbit, who suffers from a speech impediment and has been babied by female figures, especially his mother, the entirety of his life, tell McMurphy why they willingly submit themselves to the mental ward:

“Sure!” It’s Billy, turned from the screen, his face boiling tears. “Sure!” he screams again. “If we had the g-guts! I could go outside today, if I had the guts. My m-m-mother is a good friend of M-Miss Ratched, and I could get an AMA signed this afternoon, if I had the guts!” . . . “You think I wuh-wuh-wuh-*want* to stay in here? You think I wouldn’t like a con-convertible and a guh-guh-girl friend? But did you ever have people l-l-laughing at you? No, because you’re so b-big and so *tough!* Well, I’m not big and tough. Neither is Harding. Neither is F-Fredrickson. Neither is Suh-Sefelt. Oh—oh, you—you t-talk like we stayed in here because we liked it!” (167)

Billy’s answer reveals that the Acutes stay within the walls of the mental hospital because they see it as a safer alternative to the outside world. Furthermore, these Acutes lack the physical strength and unfaltering “commitment” to the individual self that McMurphy exudes, which leads most of them into believing that they will always be subjected to the control of someone or something else.

After McMurphy learns the reasons behind why many of the Acutes voluntarily subject themselves to the conditioning of Nurse Ratched and the mental ward, he is unable to continue his refusal of resistance; instead, McMurphy makes serious strides towards drawing the other patients out of the mire of obedience established by Nurse Ratched and her minions (like the orderlies) and the Combine. While McMurphy does finally resist through direct, overtly violent means—such as by shattering the glass window of the Nurses’ Station and choking Nurse Ratched after she essentially shames Billy into committing suicide near the end of the novel—there is another key line of resistance that McMurphy adopts against Ratched and the Combine: Bhabha’s “hybrid resistance.” The “hybrid resistance” that McMurphy adopts is in direct opposition to the metaphorical “colonial mimicry” used by Nurse Ratched and the Combine. “Colonial mimicry,” as defined by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, created an “Other” that is “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same* [as the colonizer or dominant power], *but not quite*” (86). Thus, both Nurse Ratched and the Combine represent and repeat these forms of “colonial mimicry” due to their efforts with convincing the mental patients (especially the Acutes) that they are Others that must be “fixed” so that they can align more with the universal standards established by the Combine—here, the dominant or “colonizing” power. Yet, regardless of how “fixed” these patients may become, one must wonder whether the patients would ever be able to step outside the confines of the Other or if they could only strive as far as “almost the same” as a normal person, “but not quite” because of the perceived danger that the patient slips back into their old ways.

Thus, on one side, both Nurse Ratched and the Combine work to establish a metaphorical “colonial mimicry” that positions the Acutes as an “Other” to what could be

considered a “regular” person. At the same time, McMurphy’s plan with both the fishing trip and the road trip leading to the docks help the Acutes undertake a form of “hybrid resistance” that helps them to break out of the binary between regular and “damaged.” While both trips do allow McMurphy and his followers to temporarily break away from the mental ward, the entire concept of a road trip leading into a fishing excursion is one that seems rather ordinary as a trope—especially given that the doctor of the mental ward, a character most would consider a normal authority figure, seems rather fond of fishing himself. Yet, it is within this very performative mask of normalcy that the patients are able to undergo an experience of growth, development, and even comfort with their status as mentally ill.

Perhaps the most pointed example occurs when a bicyclist stops at a gas station to ask the fishing trip group about their uniforms, to which Harding responds, ““No, my friend. We are lunatics from the hospital up the highway, psycho-ceramics, the cracked pots of mankind”” (204). When this response drives the bicyclist away, Harding turns to McMurphy and exclaims that ““Never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power, *power*. Think of it: perhaps the more insane a man is, the more powerful he could become. Hitler an example. Fair makes the old brain reel, doesn’t it? Food for thought there”” (204). Harding’s exclamations to the bicyclist and McMurphy both show a marked change in the mindset of many of the mental patients, and it is a change that is highly reflective of the resistance via mimicry discussed by Bhabha. Specifically, patients like Harding shift away from the Combine’s (the dominant power’s) worldview of seeing the mental patient status as a defect that one must cover up with the mask of universal normalcy. Instead, the mundane fishing trip provides a space and place

through which these patients can begin to own up to their status as mentally ill Others while also observing the potential aspects of power attached to such an identity. In essence, if one allows for the construction of “Mentally ill skin/Normal mask,” then the realization that patients like Harding undergo represents a similar kind of double vision (or double-consciousness) through which the presence or identity of mentally ill need not be covered up or destroyed by a mask of normalcy, but instead can be used against the oppressors.

Even with the resistance that McMurphy stages against Nurse Ratched and the Combine, it is important to note that the actual ability of any one single figure to defeat or even ultimately escape from the Combine is left ambiguous by the novel’s end. As Terry G. Sherwood argues, “The superhero McMurphy is sacrificed to the machine culture and Big Nurse remains in the ward. There is little hope that the Combine can be defeated. Only limited defiance [like the Chief’s] is possible Moreover, such defiance is perhaps imaginary” (395). Consistently, the Combine’s general aspirations for absolute control and the suppression of individual defiance stand out as almost unbeatable obstacles. Certainly, the patients may be able to lessen the Combine’s suppression through “hybrid resistance,” but one ultimately cannot “defeat” the Combine or even “escape” from it and remove its influences from the American society of the 1960s because there is no space or place truly “outside” of the Combine. Even McMurphy, with his larger-than-life, cowboy bravado and folklore-heroic nature, winds up lobotomized and temporarily forced under the control of the Combine until Chief Bromden kills him at the end of the novel as an act of “mercy.”

More disheartening is the idea presented by the Chief that McMurphy was not the first, nor will he be the last, person to fight the Combine and lose: “The thing he [McMurphy] was fighting, you couldn’t whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn’t come out any more and somebody else had to take your place” (273). For all of McMurphy’s heroism and ability to draw the other patients out of their isolation and rejection of the self, his struggle was ultimately an absurd one because there was no real chance for a complete rebellion against Nurse Ratched nor complete freedom from the Combine’s conditioning due to the sheer presence that these forces hold over nearly every aspect of American society. The effects of such are manifested in the suburbs, the absorption of counterculture into popular culture, and the decay of American Old West customs that held the rugged individual as key to one’s identity. Simply put, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* suggests that the individual American has been “lobotomized,” alongside McMurphy.

Similarly, Chief Bromden’s supposed escape from the mental ward back into Native American lands seems a temporary one, at best. On one hand, critics like Chuck Palahniuk—best known for his book *Fight Club* (1996)—view the Chief leaving the mental ward as an actual escape that can be pointed to as a method of survival against the more destructive binaries of the “follower” or “rebel”:

The [followers] will die as martyrs—frightened people living in a system that constantly reminds them of their weaknesses. . . . And of course we have rebels, loud and dashing, but they’ll be silenced when they become too much of a threat. . . . Instead of reinforcing a social system by rebelling or conforming, we’ll become

the Big Chief, and escape [as a surviving witness] into some beautiful vision.

(xiii)

As Palahniuk frames it, Chief's escape represents the third option of the "witness" (an option that allows for escape and the resulting opportunity to "live to tell the tale") that lay outside of the boundaries of the "follower's" loss of self-identity and self-determination and the "rebel's" eventual silencing or destruction at the hands of the forces of control. Furthermore, Palahniuk's proposal that the "witness" retains the ability to escape into a "beautiful vision" seems to point to Chief leaving the mental ward and traveling to the more natural and familiar home of his old tribe—perhaps a "beautiful vision" because it supposedly falls outside of the realm of Nurse Ratched's mental ward and the Combine's control of American society at large. Critic Kaiser Wilson echoes a similar sentiment in his essay "Disability and Native American Counterculture in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*" when he argues that "[Chief's] break out is thus a return to a condition that the audience can recognize as originary and natural, rather than a flight into the new and unknown" (193).

Yet, these readings of Chief's escape may represent the wishful thinking that one can find a place outside of the Combine. It is true that Chief's initial destination after his escape from the mental ward is the land of his old tribe that was once ruled by the Chief's father. However, Chief's own phrasing of this intended location illustrates that this realm of the natural has been usurped by technological innovations like hydro-electric dams on old fishing sites: "I'd like to check around Portland and Hood River and The Dalles to see if there's any of the guys I used to know back in the village who haven't drunk themselves goofy. . . . I've even heard that some of the tribe have took to building their

old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over that big million-dollar hydroelectric dam, and are spearing salmon in the spillway” (280-81). Though an almost hysterically absurd and Sisyphus-like depiction of this Indian tribe operating on the advancements of technology, the existence of the Combine juxtaposed to the daily lives of Chief’s old community reveals the sheer presence of the Combine throughout the macrocosm of American society outside of the microcosm of the mental ward. In other words, despite Chief’s escape from the Combine running the mental hospital, the only choice he has after the escape is to go back into a civilization that has been irreversibly changed by the Combine. The “Wild West” no longer exists.

Furthermore, when Chief first escapes the mental ward, he frames it as “[running] across the grounds in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go, towards the highway” (280). This refers back to an earlier scene in which Chief Bromden sees a stray dog on the grounds of the mental hospital that eventually begins to take off “toward the highway, loping steady and solemn like he had an appointment. . . . I could hear a car speed up out of a turn. The headlights loomed over the rise and peered ahead down the highway. I watched the dog and the car making for the same spot of pavement” (143). Though Chief is unable to observe what eventually happens to the dog, it is safe to assume that the dog will not win out against the car. Moreover, this meeting of the dog and the car on the same spot of pavement is just one more symbolic representation of the clash between nature and technology, respectively, that occurs throughout this novel. Given the novel’s assertion that one can never hope to truly escape the technological dominance of the Combine, it seems an almost foregone conclusion that the natural dog will be killed by its collision with the technological car. Thus, Chief identifying with as

well as running to the same exact “spot of pavement” as the doomed dog ominously reflects the hopelessness of his situation. Like the dog, Chief Bromden must eventually encounter a collision with the technological encroachments of the Combine, and it will be an encounter that the Chief cannot hope to “survive” (or, at the very least, walk away from unscathed).

Referring back to Fredric Jameson, it is important to remember that the new post-industrial society that was sweeping throughout America during the 1950s and ‘60s included a “replacement of the old tension between city and country, . . . by the suburb and by universal standardization” (1965). In essence, the need of Chief’s old tribe to take to spearing salmon on the side of a hydroelectric dam—a dam that was essentially forced on the tribe by the United States Federal Government—is an image of the futility of Native Americans to distance themselves from the encroachments of white, Western civilization. As with the mentally ill patients, Chief and his old, Native American tribe become their own cautionary tale regarding the ways in which this post-modern society attempts to remove local differences in favor of a suburban standardization, a theme that will be addressed again in the next chapter on Bobbie Ann Mason’s novel.

Thus, with Randle McMurphy’s death as well as the Chief and various Acutes trading the control of one form of the Combine (the mental hospital) for another (the mass-produced society of 1960s America), it is questionable just how far one can truly rebel against or even escape from the homogenized society established by omnipresent and all-powerful forces like the Combine. Certainly, Tony Tanner’s conceptual framework of the “abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life” becomes recognizable in the destruction visited upon those characters that dare to resist

such forces in Kesey's fiction (15). McMurphy, a cowboy hero and champion of rugged individualism, does succeed in drawing his fellow mental patients out of the mire of conformity established within the microcosm of the mental ward, and he is even able to have some of the patients see their mentally ill status as potentially powerful rather than purely defective. However, McMurphy is eventually silenced through lobotomy because of his loud and brash resistance, and the patients that do leave the ward will eventually find themselves in an all-too familiar environment: an American society distorted by the Combine into a macrocosm of the mental ward they just inhabited. From the manufactured suburban developments that Chief sees during the fishing trip to the hydroelectric dam forcibly built on the lands of the Chief's old tribe, Kesey's novel is filled with depictions of the Combine's destructive influence on 1960s American society. In essence, Kesey's novel not only reflects the "American dread" discussed by Tanner, but it also seems to heavily question whether it is truly possible to escape from the homogenizing power of the Combine altogether. Instead, it appears the once natural, highly individualistic world of yesteryear is on an ultimately doomed collision course with the destructive power of technological standardization.

The next chapter will chart how Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985) mirrors many of the cultural shifts occurring in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s. Specifically, the chapter will focus on how regional identities and subcultures (especially those of poor, white Southerners) were flattened out to make room for the more post-modern consumer society established by the American popular culture of the 1980s. It is worth noting that the main protagonist of Mason's work, Samantha Hughes, has more opportunities than either McMurphy or Bromden for a successful "hybrid resistance"

against the forms of “self-colonization” she faces. While McMurphy is lobotomized and Bromden is sent down an ominous path that must eventually collide with the technologically-driven Combine due to their resistance, Sam is able to safely negotiate her own personal identity by combining aspects of her traditional, regional Southern culture and the more modern, widespread mass culture of America at large. However, despite Sam’s experience with a system of “self-colonization” that is not as forceful and destructive as that experienced by Randle McMurphy and Chief Bromden, both systems represented in these two fictions are equally driven by the same economic motivations of wealth accumulation and consumption at any expense (i.e., late-stage capitalism).

Chapter III

“THIS TOWN IS DEAD WITHOUT A MALL”: THE “COLONIZATION” OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH IN *IN COUNTRY*

If one accepts that the cultural framework informing Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was a 1960s America facing wide-spread transitions over to a post-industrial, consumer society, then it is entirely possible to see the 1980s as an accelerated continuation of that society. Specifically, the 1980s seem to mark a point in time where it was being marketed globally—especially to those with a television set in the house. As Russell Banks argues in *Dreaming Up America*, “Later in the 1980s, and certainly at an accelerated rate in the 1990s, and now [in 2008], with the globalization of the economy, it [the shift of cultural centers to America] has come to have everything to do with marketing” (107). In other words, a large part of America's success with its global presence comes from the fact that it effectively marketed its own mass culture as something everyone could and should participate in. However, as Banks continues, this marketing was not just targeted towards the global marketplace; rather, the supposed greatness of American popular culture was even marketed towards Americans (especially American children): “We've colonized our own children. . . . We've dismantled that City on the Hill that was largely spiritual and replaced it with El Dorado, the fantasized City of Gold” (110-11). Simply put, by the 1980s (and presumably onwards to present day), the consumer society of mainstream America began advertising just how great it was to be an American consumer to both global and regional American audiences.

Significantly, Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country* (1985) firmly situates itself within this cultural framework of 1980s mass marketing, primarily through the constant references to the advertising of popular culture that was sweeping through every corner of America in the 1980s. Thus, brand name products (Pepsi, Coke, Moon Pies, etc.) as well as constant references to some popular television shows or musical acts (such as *M*A*S*H* and Bruce Springsteen) can be found on nearly every page of the novel. Consequently, *In Country* heavily exemplifies just how deeply rooted the generic popular culture of American society at large has become even in the rural areas of America that were once beholden to an agrarian way of life, an agrarian economy, and a local identity (hence, the "country" of the title).

It is worth noting, then, that the presence of a consumer-focused mass culture intimately shapes the setting and landscape of Mason's novel. Similar to the physical setting of the town of Hopewell, the novel's time period is grounded in the popular culture of the 1980s. The story of *In Country* is told via a frame narrative split up into three parts. The first and third sections of the novel detail the trip that Sam, her uncle Emmett, and her grandmother Mamaw take to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the second section shows the past events that led to the trip. Significantly, rather than explicitly stating that the second section of the novel takes place in the year 1984, this year is hinted at through the opening description that "It was the summer of the Michael Jackson *Victory* tour and the Bruce Springsteen *Born in the U.S.A.* tour, neither of which Sam got to go to" (23). While these two major musical tours should instantly set the date for anyone aware of the pop culture context, others may initially miss the connection between these musical tours and the novel's setting.

Marjorie Winther argues that this connection of 1984 to the two musical tours “sets up that understanding that most of Sam’s knowledge of the world comes filtered through the massive info-systems of the electronic media. She has no first hand knowledge of anything” (197). Indeed, Sam’s worldview is largely received secondhand from television shows, documentaries, songs, and the experiences of her friends and family, and the third-person limited narrator establishing the date of 1984 through references to musical tours such as Michael Jackson’s *Victory* and Bruce Springsteen’s *Born in the U.S.A.* reflects this mindset.

Yet, time periods and dates are not the only elements tied to popular culture in Mason’s novel. In fact, there are several instances where the physical space of Hopewell, Kentucky is shown to be changing and developing to fit in more with post-industrial and, in western Kentucky, post-agrarian America. At one point in the novel, Sam goes “running through the manicured streets of the Fairview subdivision, until recently a cornfield” (75). As a rural, southern town in western Kentucky, Hopewell would have once been filled with farmlands and cornfields; however, with the widespread modernization occurring throughout America during the 1980s, the value of farming and other agricultural positions fell to the wayside in favor of more service positions—especially those service positions for fast food restaurants, department stores, and outlet malls. As Sandra Bonilla Durham accurately sums up, the town of Hopewell is “rapidly urbanizing with K-Marts and Burger Boys. This setting mirrors the social change sweeping the contemporary South and the nation and bringing a loss of traditional [Southern] values” (Durham 45). Furthermore, the observations that Fredric Jameson makes in his essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” concerning the “the

penetration of advertising, television and the media . . . throughout society” as well as the “replacement of the old tension between city and country, . . . by the suburb and by universal standardization” (1965) during the transition to a late-capitalist, consumer society become all too readily visible in the transformations occurring to the landscape of Hopewell. In essence, Sam’s observation that the cornfields and other sources of farming and agriculture have been converted into the far more consumeristic and “cookie-cutter” suburban homes clearly reflects an overarching cultural shift, as noted by both Durham and Jameson, towards late consumer capitalism (manifested in Mason’s novel as post-agriculturalism). Moreover, the fact that the very landscape of Hopewell changes from rural to suburban depicts the near stranglehold that this larger society has on the regional cultures throughout America. In many ways, then, Hopewell becomes a symbolic microcosm for the societal changes sweeping the South during the 1980s.

To support the assertion that the changing landscape of Hopewell and the constant references to popular culture are indicative of a cultural shift within the South during the 1980s, one can look to the large body of work from critics like Joanna Price, Owen W. Gilman, Jr., Lisa Hinrichsen, Sandra Bonilla Durham, and Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. on Mason’s fiction. Hinrichsen, for instance, makes the case that the overwhelming infiltration of brand names, television sitcoms, and other mediums of popular culture into the lives of southerners like Sam Hughes and Emmett Smith highlights the separation between the older, agrarian-focused way of life in the South and what she refers to as the “New South” of the 1980s: “Mason focuses on the impoverished, disenfranchised world of Sam Hughes and her uncle Emmett, figures who belong to a New South infiltrated by a homogenizing mass media that fills their daily life with a steady stream of middlebrow

sitcoms, brand names, and pop songs” (235). Indeed, the consistent references by Sam and Emmett to sitcoms like *M*A*S*H*, popular music from artists like Bruce Springsteen and the Beatles, and the almost endless barrage of brand name products provide a clear indication of just how far the homogenizing popular culture of America has permeated the lives of these two southerners.

Just as important is the idea that this homogenized New South starkly contrasts with the traditional southern way of life that it is taking over. Further establishing the binary between what can be referred to as the “Rural South” and the “New South,” Brinkmeyer, Jr. explains that the more old-fashioned, agrarian-based Rural South “is a Southern society of tradition and community, . . . one where a person’s consciousness is shaped and guided by a communal wisdom passed down through the generations” (22). Gilman, Jr. furthers this distinction when he details how Mason treats the character of Sam Hughes throughout the novel: “[Mason] shows the great magnetism of a culture dedicated to escaping the past in order to joy ride in the present. . . . Yet as much as Sam embodies the spirit of rebellion against the ways of the past, her character is balanced by the southern need for history” (48-49). In essence, the customs of the past are marked by an adherence to tradition, community, communal wisdom, and a connection to history, which can be clearly contrasted to the customs of the “New South” that emphasize living in the present, enmeshing oneself within the popular culture of the nation, and spending money at strip malls, department stores, and fast food joints.

Importantly, Sam struggles with the cultural conflict between the “New South” and the “Rural South.” On one hand, many of the younger citizens of Hopewell express explicit desires for a complete cultural shift from the traditional values and agrarian

society of former years to one that is more urbanized and consumer-based, which is far more reflective of American mass culture at large. Both Sam and her best friend Dawn, for example, believe that a mall—that bastion of consumerism and conspicuous consumption—is a necessary fixture of any modern town: “‘I’d be satisfied if we could just go to the mall in Paducah [the closest “city” to Hopewell].’ ‘Yeah. This town is dead without a mall,’ Dawn said, wringing out the dishrag” (43). Significantly, both Sam and Dawn are members of the poor white working-class: Sam survives with her uncle Emmett off of Emmett’s government benefits, while Dawn subsists on her minimum wage job at Burger Boy. Yet, despite the poverty that brings Dawn to live in an old house with her father and initially restricts Sam from buying a used car because she cannot afford it, the two girls desire a space where the only activities are to walk around, look, and spend money on nonessential items and objects.

To further emphasize the shopping mall as a space highly symbolic of the homogenization caused by commercial America, one can observe Sam’s reactions to the stores she sees when she is actually able to go to a mall in the third, and last, section of the novel. In this third section, which resumes Sam’s trip with Emmett and Mamaw to the Vietnam Memorial, Sam arrives at a mall in Maryland, and she “recognizes a store that sells punk clothes. The same store is in Paducah. She realizes it must be part of a chain. In the store, the punk outfits bring out that urge in her to be outlandish . . . but they are all too expensive” (236-37). From the outset, the fact that the same exact store with the same exact products can be found in a mall in Paducah, Kentucky, and Maryland shows the mass market regulation inherent in strip malls specifically and late-consumer capitalist societies generally. At the same time, the particulars of this store selling punk clothing

items holds an extra layer of significance because “Punk,” as a countercultural movement, was heavily shrouded in anti-establishment and anti-consumer rhetoric—often valuing the concept of “do it yourself” (or D.I.Y) rather than always purchasing new items of clothing. Marjorie Winther further defines and explains the dissonance that stems from having a punk clothing store in a mall:

Punk, as fashion, gets its energy by encouraging originality and individuality in clothes; in punk culture, anything goes, the more outrageous the better.

Weirdness, ugliness, and kitsch are *de rigueur*. That the same items, presumably mass produced, are available in both Paducah and Maryland is evidence of a corporate presence co-opting the high-spirited, rebellious punk world for a quick buck. That the items are too expensive for Sam underscores this point. (199)

Thus, the mall that Sam eventually goes to in *In Country* provides an observable example of the new modes of consumption and the suburban and universal standardizations that are the marks of post-industrial (and post-agrarian, in this novel) America. Rather than being a complete scene of rebellion that exists on the fringes of American society, the punk subculture of America has been brought into the fold of consumerism, branded, marketed, and sold in specialty chain stores. Yet, despite the homogenizing practices, young Americans such as Dawn and Sam have been brought up and taught to perceive shopping malls and the items that one buys there as necessary parts of their day-to-day lives.

Furthermore, there are various points throughout the novel where Sam seemingly frowns upon the idea of reusing and recycling materials rather than just buying something new because she has been “programmed” to via television advertisements. For instance,

while Sam and Dawn are in a drugstore so that Dawn can buy a pregnancy test, Sam brings up the “urban legend” that mixing urine with Drano can reveal the sex of the baby. Sam then immediately reflects on Emmett’s frugality with Drano: ““You know how the Drano can says not to put water in it when it’s empty. Emmett does it all the time. He’s so cheap he wants to get every little smidgen out of the can. But it doesn’t explode or anything”” (82). Sam’s pessimistic judgment of Emmett prescribing to older, “traditional” values by using water to reuse the Drano instead of just buying a new can underlines the same consumption-obsessed mindset behind the desire for a mall in Hopewell. The commercialized popular culture of mainstream America during the 1980s placed a high emphasis on consuming brand name products from brand name chain stores—both of which could be found in a mall. Thus, the desires of Sam and Dawn for a mall in Hopewell and for buying new products rather than reusing old products mirrors the cultural shift in rural towns like Hopewell away from the values of the agrarian and towards the values of the post-agrarian.

Alongside the instances of brand names, modernization, and consumption, there exists another significant mark of the shift towards a late-capitalist American society: the loss of regional history. Referring back to Fredric Jameson’s essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1983), he argues that late capitalism has brought about “the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social information have had . . . to preserve” (1966). In *In Country*, this loss of a distinct, Southern past and traditions as a result of homogenization by American society at large is well represented.

On one hand, the threat of the disappearance of history can be observed through the pressure that many characters place on Sam to “forget the past” and move on with her life. For example, Irene (Sam’s mother) continually talks to Sam to try and convince her to leave Hopewell and Emmett behind in favor of moving to Lexington and attending the University of Kentucky. Irene also presents herself as a female forerunner for Sam by illustrating the viability of moving away from Hopewell and leaving behind much of her past life (which Irene has very personal reason for doing so). In fact, after a heated conversation with her mother, Sam reflects that she “wanted to tell her mother about the new Beatles record, but she was afraid her mother wouldn’t be interested. Irene had left all her old records behind. She didn’t want to hear about the past” (57). Essentially, in Irene’s move to Lexington, she seems to actively sever as many ties to the past (one tainted by memories of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and the death of her husband) as possible; in doing so, she becomes more enmeshed within the commercialization of post-modern America while also losing connections with those still living in the rural town of Hopewell.

While Irene does partly serve as a female role model for Sam, Sam ultimately differs from Irene in her refusal to separate herself from the past. Rather, Sam is fascinated by events that happened in the past, especially those events pertaining to the Vietnam War because of the effects this war had on her family: her uncle, Emmett Smith, is left emotionally crippled by the war and exhibits possible side effects of exposure to the chemical Agent Orange while her father, Dwayne Hughes, is killed during his service. However, Sam’s initial approach to learning about the history of Vietnam comes through historical books and, more often than not, the fictionalized, “reel” versions of history

shown in films and televisions shows about war. Ultimately, Sam's use of such media to try to understand the Vietnam War leaves her feeling disconnected from what she believes to be the truths and the real history of Vietnam and the men, like her father, that fought in the war: "She suddenly recalled that in a made-for-TV movie about the Vietnam War she had been surprised to see soldiers marching through a field of corn. . . . She did not know . . . if in fact corn was ever in Vietnam, since the movie was filmed in Mexico. . . . It bothered her that it was so hard to find out the truth" (70). Time and time again, Sam is frustrated in her search for the reality of Vietnam by the various cultural replications of the war that she consumes: this frustration even ends up extending to her beloved television series *M*A*S*H* (which, despite being about the Korean War, served as an analogue for the experiences that many veterans faced during Vietnam). It is not until she turns back to her regional elders (including Emmett and Dwayne) that Sam can gain a satisfactory understanding of the actual experiences that the soldiers went through in Vietnam via the personal stories from these ancestors.

The first account of history that Sam receives from her elders comes in the form of a diary that Dwayne kept while "in country"¹¹. Upon reading this diary, which is filled with raw images, like Dwayne wanting to turn "gooks" into "gook pudding" for killing a friend and fellow soldier, Sam "felt sick. Her stomach churned, and she felt like throwing up. She could see and smell the corpse under the banana leaves. . . . She recalled the dead cat she dug up once in Grandma's garden, and she realized her own insensitive curiosity was just like her father's" (204-05). Sam's first connection to the reality of the Vietnam

¹¹ "In country" was a phrase used by many soldiers during the Vietnam War to specifically indicate when and how they served tours in the country of Vietnam. With this in mind, the very title of Mason's book functions as an effective double-entendre for both the country of Vietnam and the rural, "country" setting of the novel in western Kentucky.

War leaves her sickened because this reality does not match up, at all, with the media-created images depicted by her contemporary culture. In other words, Sam is initially put off by the fact that a “real,” first-hand account of the war differs from the sanitized, “Hollywood” versions of war she consumes. Furthermore, because of Sam’s submersion into the homogenized popular culture of post-industrial and post-agrarian America, she initially rejects Dwayne’s diary as a “real” depiction of Vietnam; instead, she opts to frame the words and images contained in the diary as a consequence of what she believes to be a decaying way of life, represented in her father’s parents’ lifestyle:

Maybe she should just forget about her father and the whole Hughes clan along with him. They were ignorant and country anyway. They lived in that old farmhouse with the decayed smell she always remembered it having—the smell of dirty farm clothes, soiled with cow manure. In their bathroom earlier, she had almost slipped on the sodden rug that lay rotting around the sweating commode. . . . Sam couldn’t get the sensations out of her head: the mangy dog, the ugly baby, the touch-me-nots, the blooming weeds, the rusty bucket, her dumb aunt Donna.
(206)

Hardly nostalgic, Sam essentially argues that Dwayne’s depiction of Vietnam could not possibly encapsulate the reality of the men fighting in Vietnam because Dwayne was just some backwoods, ignorant country boy who probably reveled in killing.

Yet, Sam’s use of words like “dumb,” “ignorant,” “country,” “rotten,” “decaying,” and “mangy” to describe the Hughes’s traditional southern farmhouse and family reveal a significant aspect of her initial perspective of the differences between the New South and the Rural South. As Edward Said explains in “Jane Austen and Empire,”

“Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, ‘equal,’ and fit,” and positive depictions of the culture of the colonizer often “[tend] to devalue other worlds” (1112-13). If one is to agree with Said’s arguments that “colonial schemes” begin with a view of the colonized as backwards and unable to adapt within the colonizing culture, then it seems possible to observe Sam’s initial belief that members of the Rural South like Mamaw, Pap Hughes, and Dwayne are simply dumb and ignorant country folk as reflective of this idea of “native backwardness.” Accordingly, the “colonizing culture” that Sam uses as a point of comparison would be late-capitalist America and New Southern cities like Lexington. As support for this assumption, Lisa Hinrichsen makes the case that “[t]he construction of the South as backwards, damaged and anti-modern was part of larger national interests that necessitated seeing ‘the South’ as the figure of an otherness to the nation at large, and as a site where national racist practice and ideology could be contained and localized” (234). Thus, Sam’s view of the Rural South as inherently ignorant and “damaged” reflects this view of the South as a backwards or inferior Other. Consequently, this view not only provides a positive underlining rationale for the infiltration of national mores into the region (especially in the belief that the New South would be able to fix the damages cause by past mistakes like slavery and the Ku Klux Klan), but it also seems to mimic the archetypal assumptions that Said asserts as informing the beginnings of “colonial schemes” at large.

Significantly, the valuation of the New South over the Rural South also transfers into written language. In his seminal work “Decolonising the Mind,” Ngugi wa Thiong’o makes the case that “Language carries culture To control a people’s culture is to

control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others” (1134-35). Thiong’o further clarifies this point by noting how many colonial powers sought “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a [colonized] people’s culture, . . . and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer” (1134-35). In *In Country*, Dwayne’s diary provides the most relevant, metaphorical representation of language as culture and the resulting desire of the “colonizers” to undervalue said language. Specifically, Sam’s anger and sickness towards her father’s diary seem to be triggered by the language that Dwayne uses to describe Vietnam and his role in the war, especially the detached sense of violence and the continuation of the dumb and ignorant rural ways that are expressed through Dwayne’s slang, such as the derogatory terms he uses for the Vietnamese. In fact, one of Sam’s first verbal criticisms of Dwayne’s diary focuses on the fact that he “‘couldn’t even spell ‘machete’” (221). Thus, the metaphorical undervaluing of a people’s culture can be observed in Sam’s initial revulsion at and critique of Dwayne’s writing: she despises both the simplistic style of the text as well as the “stupid” spelling mistakes, like spelling “machete” as “machetty,” because such errors do not strictly adhere to Standard American English, the de facto national language of America. Thus, if one agrees with Ngugi wa Thiong’o that language is culture, then Sam’s assessment of Dwayne’s texts can be explicated to reinforce the overall devaluation of traditional, poor white southern culture as backwards and “damaged.”

However, this initial distrust and refusal of Dwayne’s depiction of Vietnam ultimately transforms into belief and acceptance as Sam forces herself to experience a second-hand account of the Vietnam War. To achieve this mediated version of Vietnam, Sam pursues her own version of going “in country” by spending the night in Cawood’s

Pond, a place that is “so dangerous even the Boy Scouts wouldn’t camp out there, but it was the last place in western Kentucky where a person could really face the wild” (208). At the culmination of Sam’s “Vietnam-lite” experience, Emmett shows up in search of her.

After Emmett finds Sam in Cawood’s Pond, she confronts him with the depictions in Dwayne’s diary. Sam tells Emmett that, “The way he [Dwayne] talked about gooks and killing—I hated it.’ She paused. ‘I hate him. He was awful, the way he talked about gooks and killing” (221). Again, Sam accuses Dwayne of being one of the few soldiers in Vietnam that relished killing the Vietcong, and her image of Dwayne seems colored by her belief that he was just some ignorant redneck that was happy to slaughter Vietnamese soldiers in the service of his country. However, Emmett eventually breaks down and tells Sam a war story in which he remembers having to hide among the corpses of his squad following an ambush by the North Vietnamese Army (or NVA). Yet, Sam’s initial reaction is not one of connection to or reconciliation with Emmett and his lived experiences; rather, Sam immediately denies that Emmett’s memories are really his own:

“That sounds familiar. I saw something like that in a movie on TV.” Sam was shaking, scared. “I know the one you’re thinking about—that movie where the camp got overrun and the guy had to hide in that tunnel. This was completely different. It really happened,” he [Emmett] said, dragging on his cigarette. “That smell—the smell of death—was everywhere all the time. Even when you were eating, it was like you were eating death.” “I heard somebody in that documentary we saw say that,” Sam said. (223)

Within Sam's struggle to admit that Emmett's experiences and memories are really his own, it is possible to observe the flattening out of individual experiences by the national media, especially television and film. As Hinrichsen maintains, this more national and sanitized version of Vietnam is one that maintains "the 'real' [of Vietnam] through stylized means—in other words, what [Sam] does not see represented fails to feel 'real to her.' She thinks of Vietnam in terms of a set of images . . . and then realizes the source of these stock images: the movies" (242-43). By rejecting the validity of Emmett's "real" story because it is so similar to the "reel" version of the Vietnam War that Sam sees in movies, Sam reflects the pull to subsume, subordinate, and commodify the experiences and memories of individuals into a national consciousness that is "safer" or more sanitized.

Ultimately, this particular denial of individual "real" experiences in favor of national "reel" recreations does not last. Though Emmett must continually press the fact that nearly all of the former soldiers living in Hopewell experienced scenarios similar to what Sam read in her father's diary, Sam's initial rejection of the reality of Vietnam as told by her provincial ancestors only shifts to belief and understanding after Emmett tells her that, "It's the same for all of us! Tom and Pete and Jim and Buddy and all of us. You can't do what we did and then be happy about it. And nobody lets you forget it. Goddamn it, Sam! . . . 'We were out there trying to survive. It felt good when you got even'" (222-23). As a consequence of Emmett, his Vietnam War story, and his assertion that Dwayne's diary is more real than Sam wants to believe, the illusory reality behind the "Hollywood" Vietnam War shatters, and Sam is able to better accept these personal accounts of Vietnam as another potential reality.

That being said, Sam's realization of the conditioning brought about by the homogenized culture of post-agrarian America eventually leads to a somewhat ambiguous conclusion. On one hand, after her time in Cawood's Pond and her conversation with Emmett, Sam sees herself as out of place with the rest of America: "The day they came back from Cawood's Pond, she felt she was seeing [through the eyes of a just-returned Vietnam soldier] as they drove into town. . . . She didn't fit in that landscape. None of it pertained to her. . . . She couldn't see herself working at the Burger Boy again" (231). Unable to connect to either the landscape of Hopewell (the rural) or the Burger Boy (the modern), Sam seems to exist in a sort of liminal space between the two locales. In other words, while Sam has grown a greater attachment to the past through contact with her regional ancestors, she is still ultimately a member of commercialized America by virtue of her years and years of cultural programming via television and other extensions of popular culture. In many ways, this view of Sam mirrors the overwhelming technological control that Chief Bromden faces at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Whereas the Chief confronts an American society that has been distorted by the Combine to become a macrocosm of the conformity found in the mental ward, Sam encounters a national culture that pushes her to forget the past and view the South as no more than a container for the "damaged" dregs of civilization.

However, Mason's novel ultimately moves away from the type of hopelessness and inescapability present at the end of Kesey's novel because the former includes a potentially fruitful path of resistance that cannot be found in the latter. Specifically, Sam's occupation of the liminal space between the Rural South and the New South by the end of the novel allows her to take on the "more ambivalent, third choice" of "hybrid

resistance” that Bhabha discusses in his essay “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1182). Similar to those colonized people that resisted the influence of the colonizer via mimicry, Sam’s eventual status as dangling between identities provides her with a way to resist the complete homogenization of her identity via popular culture. Although Sam is still influenced by various forms of popular media (especially movies and music) and can still be seduced by the charms of shopping malls, she ultimately displays a heightened attunement with the far more personal past while also showing a suspicion of (and perhaps complete aversion to) symbols of national consciousness and national significance. Sam’s suspicion of these symbols becomes apparent when, during the arrival to the Vietnam War Memorial, she immediately notices and disapproves of the positioning of the Washington Monument and flag of the United States in relation to the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial: “If she moves slightly to the left, she sees the monument, and if she moves the other way she sees a reflection of the flag opposite the memorial. Both the monument and the flag seem like arrogant gestures, like the country giving the finger to the dead boys [and ‘country’ boys], flung in this hole in the ground” (240).

Alongside the connections to the past and the distrust of national symbols, Sam also displays greater sympathy towards Mamaw and those that adhere to “country” ways. As Sandra Bonhilla Durham notes, “although [Sam] has first been intolerant of MawMaw’s country ways, she realizes what a restricted life her grandmother has lived, and she sympathizes with the old woman’s struggle to cope with a world she has never experienced before” (51). Through the lens of Bhabha’s “hybrid resistance,” Sam’s acceptance of the past as told by her regional ancestors as well as her greater compassion for certain members of the Rural South represents a breakthrough that is a far cry from

the beliefs Sam held at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, this breakthrough allows her to create a new, hybridized identity: one that could, perhaps, best be summed up as “southern skin/national mask.” Through this hybridized identity, Sam takes advantage of certain ideas and concepts from mainstream, American culture (such as popular music, television, and movies as well as the upwards mobility of women to be more than just housewives), but she also refuses to be completely subsumed by this national consciousness, which is evident in her eventual connections to the traditions and customs of the past as well as her ultimate refusal to assert that members of the Rural South are nothing more than backwards and naïve.

Thus, while Sam does face instances of “self-colonization” similar to those experienced by Randle McMurphy and Chief Bromden in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, she is also able to find greater success with resisting complete conditioning by the mass culture of post-agrarian America. Certainly, this “hybrid resistance” that Sam undertakes becomes highly transformative because Sam is able to figure out her own personal identity as an amalgamation of the cultures of the Rural South and New South. It is also equally transformative for many characters connected to Sam. Sam’s mother, Irene, provides a fitting example because, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, she spends most of the novel actively running away from what is supposed to be her southern dependence on memories of the past. For Irene, however, these memories are tainted by the political strife of the 1960s and the devastating effects that the Vietnam War had on her life: her husband, Dwayne, is killed in Vietnam and her own brother, Emmett, is mentally and emotionally stunted by his tour in Vietnam. It is

not until Sam starts down the path and illustrates the feasibility of “hybrid resistance” that Irene is willing to face the past.

Near the end of the novel when Sam, Emmett, and Mamaw travel to see the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, the group make a stop in Lexington for a night to see Irene. While visiting Irene, Sam asks her whether things would have been different had neither Dwayne nor Emmett served in the Vietnam War. In response, Irene finally opens up about the past and tells her, ““You don’t understand how it was back then. Everything’s confusing now, looking back, but in a way everything seemed clear back then. Dwayne thought he was doing the right thing, and then Emmett went over there and thought *he* was doing the right thing”” (235). Moreover, Irene points to the sobering realization that most of the soldiers that fought and died in Vietnam were poor, rural kids that did not know any better. Unlike the well-off boys of the suburban elite who could skip the draft, these rural boys went to serve in Vietnam because they all believed that they were “doing the right thing”: ““It was country boys. When you get to that memorial, you look at the names. You’ll see all those country boy names, I bet you anything. . . . You look at those names and tell me if they’re not mostly country boy names”” (235-36).

While Irene’s memories certainly highlight the pain and trauma that she has been trying to escape from since the beginning of Mason’s fiction, the confrontation with this source of trauma by the mother and the daughter allow the two to come together and heal. This healing becomes clear when, after Irene’s story, Sam presents her mother with the gift of an eccentrically decorated cat bank: “Her mother looked at the cat bank as though it were a tiny UFO that had just zoomed in her door. Her expression changed to recognition, then to joy. . . . Then she burst into tears, and the punk maharajah cat just

smiled, staring. Sam stared too, in amazement” (236). Significantly, this cat bank used to be an item that Irene owned before leaving it behind during her move to Lexington. That Sam presents this object to Irene, which is both a reminder of the past and a parody of the present’s insistence of commercial opulence (the cat bank being gaudily decorated with a number of beads and gems), just after Irene finally faces her source of trauma and loss seems representative of Sam extending the offer of “hybrid resistance” to Irene. In other words, with the catharsis experienced by Irene through both confronting her traumatic past and accepting a gift that is an amalgam of the past and present, Sam helps Irene discover the importance of a hybridized identity that marries the cultural values of both the Rural South and the New South. That this very same hybrid identity also helps figures of the Rural South, like Emmett and Mamaw, heal and grow shows that Sam’s “hybrid resistance” benefits all. Emmett, for instance, is lifted out of the mental and emotional fog that keeps him in a limbo of listlessness, unemployment, and uncertainty with relationships. Meanwhile, Mamaw finally travels outside of the farmland and farm house she has known for most of her life to both experience more of the contemporary American landscape and see and touch her son’s name on the Vietnam War Memorial.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSION

Certainly, both Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1985) show extensions of the conceptual "American dread that someone else is patterning your life" (Tanner 15). However, as this thesis suggests, such a sense of "dread," as reflected in the fictions of Kesey and Mason, was not solely confined to the individual author, nor was it merely a feeling. Rather, this "dread" resulted from the observable forms of institutional conditioning that both Kesey and Mason saw as subsuming distinct, regional subcultures into the commercialized mass culture of America during the 1960s and the 1980s.

In many ways, the different American subgroups noted in these fictions—the mentally ill and Native Americans for Kesey, and poor, white working-class Southerners for Mason—experienced a process metaphorically resembling the forms of "colonization" discussed by prominent postcolonial writers like Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha. In Mason's novel, for example, there are instances where the South, and especially the "Rural South," is depicted as "backwards" or "anti-modern," which can be linked to the larger societal push to place the South as a "figure of an otherness to the nation at large" (Hinrichsen 234). This positioning of the South as a "backwards Other" not only provides the groundwork for the sweeping influences and changes brought about by the "New South" with the intent to "modernize" the South, but

it also imitates the assertion made by Said that “colonial schemes” include an “assumption of native backwardness” (1112-13).

Additionally, the fictions of Kesey and Mason continually depict individual members of these subcultures as facing either direct or subtle persuasion to, as critic Russell Banks phrases it, “self-colonize” and accept the ideals of post-industrialism, post-agrarianism, wealth accumulation, and mass consumption. At the same time, characters like Randle McMurphy, Chief Bromden, and Samantha Hughes struggle against the encouragement to “self-colonize” through methods that seem metaphorically similar to Bhabha’s path of “hybrid resistance.” Though some characters, like Sam Hughes, are far more successful in their efforts, each character eventually blends their individual or regional self with the identity that they are being conditioned to accept—either through the “Combine” (for Kesey) or television advertisements and brand names (for Mason)—to create a new space that generally allows for growth, healing, and power. Thus, the overarching purpose of this study has been to chart the similarities and differences between the institutional forces (especially the government and the military) encouraging conformity between the 1960s and the 1980s to discern the effects that both “colonization” and “self-colonization” had on the subcultures and its members in the respective times.

In Chapter 2, I have demonstrated how Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* depicts “colonizing” forces like the “Combine” and Nurse Ratched as ultimately forceful and highly destructive in their mission to uphold normalcy and universal standardization. From the very beginning of the novel, Chief Bromden makes the acute, though paranoia-laced, observation that the mental ward that contains him and the other mentally ill

patients is a “factory for the Combine” whose ultimate goal is to release “a completed product . . . back out into society” (36). Indeed, the “Combine’s” and Nurse Ratched’s obsession with normalization becomes quite apparent in the Chief’s thinking that the ward sends reproduced “products,” not people, back out into society. In other words, the entire concept of a mental ward taking in patients and then “fixing” their faults, regardless of how innocuous their supposed faults may be (such as Harding’s homosexuality), clearly establishes the same valuation of soulless, mechanical reproduction over the unique existence of an individual that Walter Benjamin warns about in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Moreover, this valuation is easily extrapolated to the American society at large in the 1960s because there are constant reminders throughout Kesey’s fiction that the mental ward is a microcosm of the outside world, both of which are controlled by the “Combine.” The reality of a Combine-controlled America is presented whenever Chief sees “Five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town” during a road trip to some fishing docks (206). Similar to the image of the mental ward sending out “fixed products” rather than people, the figure of a once natural environment “flattened out” to make room for manufactured houses clustered together into a suburb reflects the Combine’s desire to “flatten out” individuality in favor of an American public that was mass-produced and ventriloquized—like robots programmed to carry out a standard ideal of life.

Consequently, there seems to be little hope by the end of Kesey’s fiction for any definitive escape from or resistance to the influences of what the “Combine” and Nurse Ratched (who is one of its chief enforcers) represent. Those that do try to escape or resist,

like Chief Bromden and Randle McMurphy, either end up destroyed, silenced, or bound to the “Combine.” For instance, the rugged individualism and cowboy nature of Randle McMurphy presents a clear threat to the dominance of the Combine from the very first moments of McMurphy’s stay in the mental ward. Moreover, McMurphy’s metaphorical recreation of Bhabha’s “hybrid resistance” against Nurse Ratched and the “Combine” provides a potential pattern whereby the mentally ill patients can co-exist within so-called “normal” society. By allowing the Acutes to experience glimpses of “normal” life (playing basketball games, watching the World Series, and going on a fishing trip), McMurphy not only hints at the idea that the patients are not as “damaged” as Nurse Ratched and the “Combine” assert, but he also allows the Acutes a space and a place to realize that, as Harding exclaims, “mental illness could have the aspect of power, *power*” (204). The end result of McMurphy leading this resistance against the “Combine’s” control is his lobotomy. In other words, McMurphy is silenced by the “Combine” via lobotomy because he represents too much of a threat to their goal of a mechanically-reproduced society.

Chief Bromden, on the other hand, represents the overall inescapability of the Combine due to its sheer prevalence in the 1960s American society at large. Certainly, Chief literally escapes from the mental ward and is able to travel back to the lands of his old tribe. However, his escape ultimately turns out to be from the microcosm of the mental ward and into the macrocosm of Combine-controlled America. Thus, Chief Bromden is unable to truly escape from the “Combine” because there does not seem to be either a space or a place that is actually “outside” of the Combine. The lack of a real “outside” to the Combine is explicitly shown in the technological advancements and

encroachments made upon the lands of Chief's tribe that force these tribesmen to "[spear] salmon in the spillway" of a hydroelectric dam built for a nearby town (280-81). Due to the grim fate of both McMurphy and Chief Bromden, the entire notion presented by critics like Chuck Palahniuk of a third option—the "witness"—that allows one to escape the silencing or destruction caused by the binaries of the "follower" and the "rebel" may be nothing more than wishful thinking. Rather, Kesey's novel asserts how the once natural, highly individualistic world of the past is on an ultimately doomed collision course with the destructive power of technological homogenization.

By comparison, Chapter 3 focused on the degree to which popular culture as represented in Mason's *In Country* acts as an extension of the same type of economically driven "self-colonization" as the "Combine" in Kesey's fiction. It is quite clear that Mason's novel is set during a period of rapid urbanization for the western Kentucky town of Hopewell, which serves as an adequate microcosm for the larger region of the South. Similar to the "Combine," popular culture during the 1980s stressed the post-agrarian and consumption-obsessed mindset of late capitalism. This, in turn, led to a cultural division in the South that can be thought of as the traditional "Rural South" against the far more modern "New South." In Mason's novel, the "Rural South" is initially linked to those characters that are seen by Sam as "backwards" or "damaged," and thus need to be "brought up to speed" with modern America. Comparatively, the mindset of the "New South" is partly reflected in the near overwhelming amounts of advertisements and brand names that populate Mason's fiction. Furthermore, the desires of youths like Sam and Dawn for a mall in their town, despite their status as members of the poor white working-class and the mechanically-reproduced nature of strip malls (the same product can be

found in the same chain stores in different malls), symbolizes the deeply-rooted influences that this consumer-focused mindset of late capitalism had in the 1980s.

However, the major difference between the “Combine” of the 1960s and the pop culture influences of the 1980s can be witnessed in Sam’s ability to undertake a more successful form of “hybrid resistance” that does not leave her silenced or destroyed. In many ways, it is possible to see Sam’s success as the result of those institutional forces of control (which include, primarily, the government and the military) becoming more passive. While brand names and popular media certainly dot the landscape and background of Mason’s 1980s western Kentucky setting, there seem to be no direct “agents” that force the characters in Mason’s novel to either accept the mores of American society at large or be destroyed outright. After all, members of the Rural South like Sam’s uncle Emmett, her father Dwayne, and her grandmother Mamaw are able to continue adhering to their traditional, agrarian values without facing disruptive technological encroachments or forced conversion to the post-agrarian ways of the New South. Perhaps this relaxed insistence on intensive methods of conversion from the 1960s to the 1980s implies that the “Combine” was successful in disseminating its cultural norms throughout America. In other words, by the 1980s, the “Combine’s” values of technological progress, wealth accumulation, and consumption had become an unconsciously accepted “ideology” throughout American society, which means that there was no need to force others to change. Instead, the “Combine” could passively disseminate its message through the various forms of media (television and films) that it controlled and assume that every American would eventually be persuaded to convert to the mass culture of America because of this passive pressure. It seems fitting, then, that

many characters in *In Country* either completely refuse to remember the 1960s or refer to it as a sort of “Dark Ages.”

Regardless, this study has shown that both Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country* contain instances of distinct, regional American subgroups being “colonized” by the larger late capitalist America society of the 1960s and the 1980s. Furthermore, the struggles of characters like Randle McMurphy, Chief Bromden, and Samantha Hughes illustrate both the forceful and passive pressures placed on members of regional subcultures to “self-colonize” and accept, whether consciously or unconsciously, the far more commercialized “ideologies” of mechanical reproduction, technological innovation, and national identity (which were meant to replace the uniquely individual, the natural, and the regional). While Kesey’s “Combine” may be far more destructive than Mason’s representations of 1980s pop culture, which makes sense given the social upheavals and riots occurring throughout the ‘60s, it still stands to reason that these two forces of control and conditioning are symbolic of the type of “flattening out” of unique subcultures that Kesey and Mason witnessed in their respective decades.

There are many opportunities for additional research using the framework of this thesis. In terms of both Ken Kesey and Bobbie Ann Mason, several critics have made some links to other works that could potentially be traced through the “colonization” of regional subcultures by late capitalist America and the resultant “self-colonization” carried out by members of those subcultures. For instance, in John A. Barsness’s essay “Ken Kesey: The Hero in Modern Dress,” Barsness makes a number of connections between Randle McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Hank Stamper in

Sometimes a Great Notion (1964). Stamper, a logger that works for a mill in opposition to a union strike, is described by Barsness as “almost identical to McMurphy, big, lusty, physically and personally so vibrant as to dominate his surroundings . . . his quarrel is even more clearly with civilization” (423). Depending on Stamper’s interactions with civilization and his eventual fate, Kesey’s *Sometimes a Great Notion* may be a valuable text to draw in to show Kesey’s concern with the encroachments of oppressive and stifling forces of control and conditioning as spanning multiple works. Similarly, critic Leslie White’s essay, “The Function of Popular Culture in Bobbie Ann Mason’s *Shiloh and Other Stories* and *In Country*,” presents the idea that, much like *In Country*, Mason’s *Shiloh and Other Stories* (1982) contains stories that “surrender the hallowed southern sense of place to a deadly blanketing of popular culture” (71). Thus, Mason’s first collection may be a fruitful collection of stories to analyze to see if and how Mason’s use of popular culture across multiple works reflects the sense of worry displayed in *In Country* at the traditions and customs of the “Rural South” being infiltrated by a “New South.”

At the same time, it may prove beneficial to analyze different works of contemporary American fiction through the framework of this thesis. Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977) seems to be an almost obvious potential candidate for analysis because of the conflicts that the main character, Milkman Dead, experiences in navigating his identity between white and black America. On one hand, Milkman is pulled towards the late capitalist realm of “white America” by his father, Macon Dead, Jr. While this identity does present the attraction of economic gain and is clearly representative of the “City of Gold” version of the “American Dream” discussed by

Russell Banks, it is ultimately an identity mired in violence, abuse, and hatred. On the other hand, Milkman is equally pulled towards the realm of “black America” by several different characters. While characters like Pilate Dead display the healing and growth that can be achieved by reconnecting with one’s roots and identity, characters like Guitar Bains balance this out by depicting the dangers of militant violence that can result from becoming too far entrenched in a singular identity.

As a less obvious, more recent example, Ben Fountain’s *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2012) may be useful as a continuation of the points made by Mason in *In Country*. As an Iraq soldier being, essentially, pimped out by various media outlets in order to revive support for the war effort, Billy Lynn, with his experiences in the stadium of the Dallas Cowboys, highlights how average U.S. citizens have come close to parroting whatever talking point is heard on television. Furthermore, the commodification of these Iraq veterans (who must eventually return to the war) by both the media generally and the Dallas Cowboys specifically shows a similar valuation of the mechanically-reproduced and the nationally-identified over the unique individual as can be seen in *In Country*. Yet, these are only two examples from a larger body of contemporary fictions.

Finally, this thesis could potentially be applied to genres outside of contemporary American literature. For instance, the often academically-overlooked genre of graphic novels contains Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen* (1987). This graphic novel depicts a group of superheroes (many without superpowers that struggle to balance their human and superhero identities) operating within an America that won the Vietnam War. As a result of America’s victory in Vietnam, tensions between America and Russia

skyrocket, and the threat of nuclear annihilation becomes more and more possible. In response to these tensions, the character Ozymandias decides that he is the only individual that can save the world, which leads him to use the wealth he has accumulated from commercializing and commodifying himself and other heroes to, essentially, forcefully and violently colonize the world under his own image. While certainly on the extreme end of the kind of “colonization” that can also be found in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Bobbie Ann Mason’s *In Country*, the presence of such forces in graphic novels from the 1980s proves that writers and artists of all genres were aware of the cultural shift towards a post-industrial American society that threatened to pattern the lives of all individuals. Moreover, these authors were also highly conscious of the ways in which these structural forces were eventually “resisted” or “succumbed” to.

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