Performing ManChyna:
Unmapping Promissory Exaltation, Multicultural Eugenics, and the New Whiteness
(Or, “Call Me Dr. ManChyna”)

By

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Abstract

Creating art and performing as ManChyna collectively function as my entry into an autoethnographic mapping of mobility and space within liberal multiculturalism. I introduce the research creative method of autoethnographic creatography, because creation and performance are my interventions into and tools for analyzing social space. My parody of queer Asian racialization upends liberal multiculturalism’s promise of incorporation, or promissory exaltation (invoking Sunera Thobani’s, “racial exaltation”), which instrumentally disciplines and includes putative model minorities and homonorms alike. Thus, assimilation into a queer liberal multiculturalism is my primary theoretical target. Building on José Muñoz’s idea of disidentification, I introduce the notion of disassimilation as a performative embodiment of critical analysis and theory. How can individuals articulate the current contours of liberal ideology? How can one counter an ever-shifting dominant culture from a ‘minor’ point of view when one crucial aim of the latter’s evasive energy is the incorporation of that minor gaze? And how does the minoritarian subject represent her critical navigation of majority codes when the picture is complicated by her desire to assimilate into them? The theories of disidentification and disassimilation extend to my uprooting of rural space as supposedly settler land. Using my excessive queer Asianness, I dance on the supposed whiteness of rural Canada, mocking it, and connecting my limited incorporation into queer liberal multiculturalism with ongoing histories of racial exploitation and Indigenous erasure; ultimately, the aim is recognition of rightful Indigenous belonging, existence, and authority of the land. Creatography leads me, via ManChyna’s performance, to encounter intimate modes of racial and sexual discipline within the promises of assimilation and exaltation. ManChyna’s non-Black deployment of rap and humour connects my project to cross-racial political consciousness and alliance. ManChyna serves as a
confluence of cultural pathologies, connecting maligned and (paradoxically) celebrated Asian and Black motherhoods with queer deviance. While the dichotomous construction of model and not-so-model minorities work to reiterate the instrumental opposition of minorities against each other, ManChyna’s creations and performances dialogue with other cultural texts that emerge as contradictory navigations of the inherently paradoxical “new whiteness” of queer settler multiculturalism; together, we map its evasive contours.
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Chapter 1

Introducing ManChyna

Call me ManChyna. You might call me any number of names, but ManChyna is the real mover of this project; he moves it across figurative and literal borders, aestheticizing and mapping my experiences of minoritarian mobility and assimilation. And assimilation is, to continue my literary allusion,¹ ManChyna’s very own white whale. More precisely our primary concerns are disidentification with and ‘dissing assimilation’ into the organizing principle of a new whiteness, inflected with homonationalist and multicultural impulses – the whitest of whales, thirsty for queerness and multiraciality. Cultural logics of late capitalism emerge from the conversation between my creative works and the others described in the following chapters: a silencing promise of exaltation and difference-eugenics (or what I like to call multicultural eugenics). These logics condition the incorporation of supposed model minorities into a nationalist ideology, a putatively modern liberal multiculturalism, which nominally rejects the barbarism of totalitarianism and ‘purity-eugenics.’ The cultural imperative to ‘model’ good difference has disciplinary consequences for groups and individuals beyond those modelling good deference. Although modern western² subjects may have, in many respects, become ‘multicultural’ and ‘gay-friendly,’ I am suggesting we have never really rejected the ideals of the near past, only transformed and updated them, and so have also never truly been modern.

¹ Melville, Moby Dick or The White Whale (Boston: C.H. Simonds Company, 1892 (1851)).
² To standardize my capitalization of ‘western’ in this paper, use of the lowercase form denotes the geographical direction and epistemological space of the ‘Occident,’ except in cases of direct quotation. The uppercase ‘Western’ is synonymous with the film genre ‘Hollywood Western.’
I have two modest but interrelated objectives with this project, one methodological and the other theoretical. First, as an artist, dancer, and musician, I am contributing to a conversation about cultural creation as a research practice – or, ‘research-creation.’ I present ManChyna, his movements, productions, and self-reflection, as one example of a research-creative program that materially congeals the cultural subtexts of minoritarian experience. Through ManChyna, I incite the production, dissemination, and consumption of creative texts and cultural work in their own right. I demonstrate how embodying theory can communicate theory. ManChyna’s texts act as nodes within a network of signification, tied to other texts that I suggest are similar and work together. Together, the network of texts I present outlines the otherwise invisible cultural logics of heteropatriarchal whiteness, eugenics, capitalism, and liberal multiculturalism that condition their interrelated productions. Ultimately, such cultural logics are the theoretical target of my project. Informed by experiences arising from my social and geographic locations, as a queer, Chinese-Singaporean Canadian, making art and music in and around southern Ontario, across Canada, and internationally, the theoretical component of my thesis interrogates the cultural logics of multiculturalism by drawing from scholarship on queer racialization, Asian diasporic studies, performance theory, national statism, racialized solidarity with Indigenous struggles for self-determination, and liberal multiculturalism in a settler-colonial context.

As its central problematic, my theoretical argument interrogates the fraught processes through which inclusionary statist nationalism attempts to enfranchise my minoritarian subjectivity. I am critically mapping the cultural logics that shape my creative productions and my experiences making them. The freedom of movement for some minoritarians through whitened landscapes of multiculturalism is contingent on participation in the performance of humane, multicultural capitalism within a matrix of qualified enfranchisement and promissory
‘exaltation,’ to invoke Sunera Thobani,3 into a new whiteness. Both through ManChyna’s acts and my mapping of them, my displays of disquieting complicity in processes of enfranchisement within, and in opposition to, the normativizing citizenship of the Canadian nation state, I contribute to a political project that links interrelated struggles of minoritarian subjects within a framework of U.S. and Canadian white supremacy and settler-colonialism.

   Following my own enfranchisement within liberal state nationalisms, I begin by exploring the intimacies of my movement within and imagined assimilation into them; I end by mapping a ManChyna text, which exemplifies the absurdity of ‘modeling minority’ within a white-centering ideology of multicultural eugenics. Utilizing creation and performance, I follow my body through whitened, rural landscapes to outline Canadian pioneerism. I use my own queer racialization to dislodge such landscapes’ centrality to nationalistic self-images, an Anglo Saxon veneer drawing legitimacy from the mythic strength and purity of agrarian rurality, which attempts to whitewash Indigenous territorial ties. I then contrast speech acts performed on various public stages that either denounce or consolidate such nationalistic self-images within the white-settler multicultural state. I sketch the resulting consequences for minoritarian refusal of assimilation into a narrative of nationalistic self-congratulation in liberal contexts where multicultural and homonormative incorporation of potentially docile subjects prevails. And I lastly engage in multi-textual triangulation of the conditions for minoritarian experience, beginning with my own. Such triangulation targets the ideological seeds of eugenics that connect older and newer national self-images. In my queer redeployment of the noun, “model minority,”

as a sexual imperative, I conjoin the technologies of multicultural and queer incorporation into an absurd spotlight on the exaltation of whiteness central to them.

The paradox I outline is that the shift in nationalistic ideology from white purity to white-centred multiculturalism deploys updated impulses of eugenic strength in a supposedly ‘color-blind’ and sexually exceptional state. Through ManChyna’s creative acts and my cultural mapping of them I contend that the new, white-centred liberal multiculturalism updates and reconfigures as “modern” the ideological seeds of social engineering found in eugenics. Despite the bleak theoretical articulation ManChyna evokes, he is also my methodological tool of humour and joy that resists the cultural logics of the new whiteness. By thinking with the pleasures of performance, I offer minoritarians an apparatus to imagine critical laughter and political pleasures, within and against the demands of majoritarian culture.

**Substantive Case: ManChyna, the GAY CHINESE CANADIAN RAPPER**

![Figure 1. Screen capture of Himanshu Suri's tweet regarding ManChyna. “peace to my tourmate in china @manchyna. DO I CALL THIS GAY CHINESE CANADIAN RAP?” December 6, 2012.](image-url)
Himanshu Suri\textsuperscript{4} tweeted, “peace to my tourmate in china @manchyna. DO I CALL THIS GAY CHINESE CANADIAN RAP?” (Figure 1) from a hotel room down the hall from me, which he shared with his label- and tour-mate, Lakutis, in late 2012. The three of us were put up by our common tour manager in a tiny hotel, tucked away in an alley under the shadow of Yan’an Lu, an elevated highway in Shanghai. Heems’ tweet manifests a bemused confusion at the non-localizability of my musical fusion and creative work. Rather than locate my work taxonomically, based on ever-shifting codes of hip-hop authenticity and dubious claims of ethnic or sexual categorization, I will locate ManChyna’s work temporally.

Creatively, ManChyna’s stage practice begins with dance. My body is and always has been drawn to hip-hop and dancehall, more so than European dance forms on offer at dance studios I practiced in and performed with. Interestingly, I am not alone in this cultural phenomenon. Asians are being drawn in large numbers to hip-hop dance forms, in both the diaspora and Asian countries; but the phenomenon has received very little cultural analysis to date. Ian Condry’s ethnographic analysis of Japanese localization of globalized hip-hop culture is a touchstone for cross-cultural circulation of these Black American cultural forms.\textsuperscript{5} Although Condry focuses on rap music, he also touches on aerosol art, turntablism, and hip-hop dance. In the diaspora, however, the seeming cultural domination of hip-hop dance by Asian Americans in particular has only garnered some attention among some cultural writers.\textsuperscript{6} Analysis is often

\textsuperscript{4} Also known as Heems, founding member of former rap group Das Racist.
limited, however, to the suggestion that Asian adoption of hip-hop dance ‘challenges model minority stereotypes,’ appropriating hip-hop’s allegedly hard, heterosexually virile masculinity to reimagine our meek minority cultural images. In my case, though, love of hip-hop dance led me to even gayer pastures.

In 2007, in my early twenties, I joined Canada’s first all-male burlesque troupe, BoylesqueTO. For many years prior to this, I had already been doing performance art, combining nudity, popular culture, dancehall rhythms, and hip-hop beats. My training in hip-hop dance, in retrospect, functioned as a natural accompaniment to the hip-hop beats that would remain consistent through ManChyna’s creative evolution from dancer to rapper. There was and continues to be overlap: backup dancing for artists like rapper/producers Le1f and Peaches, rapping with my burlesque troupe, while also continuing to strip, and so on. Adding parodic lyricism onstage, while only in my underwear, seemed to me a natural extension of my performance. I detail this particular moment in Chapter 2. I mimicked the stage persona of my favourite white, Jewish, Canadian, electroclash giant, Peaches. I would describe her stage show, an extension of her visual and lyrical gender bending, as witty, chaotic, and presenting a “hypersexual-caricature.”

Peaches, for instance, once pantomimed reception of fellatio from a fellow Toronto dancer, using a champagne bottle that exploded from fizzy excitement. The dancer, I found out later, lost a tooth in the chaos of fellating the bottle of Veuve. Except for some stylistic

February 1, 2014, https://mindthegapless.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/on-asian-americans-in-hip-hop-dance/ Lorenzo Perilli has also taught a class on this topic at Cornell University in 2013.

elements and her self-professed affinity with hip-hop, the performance persona that Peaches presents would not likely be identified as that of a ‘rapper.’ While Biggie and 2 Live Crew dominate my early memories of rap, Lil’ Kim, Peaches, and multi-ethnic indie rap group Das Racist – the group founded by Himanshu Suri – were (and are) my most immediate hip-hop touchstones. None of these musicians, however, neatly fit into dominant codes of Golden Age rap artists like Grand Master Flash, commercially successful gangsta rappers like NWA and Ice Cube, or even contemporary moguls like Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Lil’ Wayne. Some fit better than others because of racial, gendered, or sexual identities, but each contributes to the vital energies of difference in hip-hop’s evolution that ManChyna taps. Nevertheless, such was my circuitous route toward becoming ManChyna, the GAY CHINESE CANADIAN RAPPER (thanks, Heems).

‘ManChyna’ is a multilayered appellation. My name aggressively and playfully inverts the western racial slur, "China man," while combining multiple significations of both male and female sexual organs (‘mangina’), trans- and cis-gendered bodies, traditional masculinity, and the “female masculinity” of Chyna, the former professional wrestler. At the same time, the name borrows the phonemes “man” and “ch” from the term Mǎnzhǔ and loosely mirrors the

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9 For further explanation, see Holly Fetter, “Constructing the ‘Chinaman:’ Exploring Race and Masculinity in Crash and Chickencoop Chinaman” in *Stanford Journal of Asian American Studies*


11 “Manchu” is the local (and moderately controversial) name for the inhabitants of Manchuria (Elliott 2000). This area, now controlled by China (known internally simply ‘the northeast’), was the interstitial space between Russia, Mongolia, northeastern China, and South Korea for hundreds of years prior to China’s accession of it in the early twentieth century. According to Mark Elliot (ibid), this region is the terre natale of the Qing people. The Qing dynasty preceded Chinese communism of the twentieth century and had a culture distinct from but important to

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phonetic structure of western, white pop star/gay idol, Madonna. As the primary creative subject in this project I can speak to intentional aspects of my creation, such as the explicit antiphony between hyper-queer sexuality, aesthetics of Sino-Soviet communist nationalism, aggressive 'badman'/badwoman' sexuality,¹² North American/global Asian identity, and my campy Asian-Canadian embodiment of Orientalist fantasies. Indeed, ManChyna’s name, its aggressive foreignness, queered femininity, and objectionable familiarity as a western slur is meant to evoke reactions of anti-Chinese and sexually phobic xenophobia. My name forms one entry point for diagnosing such reactions to my art and performance.

ManChyna does not begin with my youth, but my thinking about him is shaped by my early economic and cultural conditions. I grew up with hip-hop and, like others of my generation, I fondly remember my childhood immersion in the “Golden Age of Hip Hop.” However, within my multiracial (mostly Black, South Asian, and Southeast Asian) and working class neighbourhoods of Agincourt (Scarborough) and Moss Park (a public housing community in downtown Toronto), my loving relationship with hip-hop was peculiar. As a son of local business owners, I received distinct class advantages and financial opportunities that many of my friends did not. The West Indies, a major source for Toronto immigration, played a formative role in my community's celebrations of Black culture, such as Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean diasporic forms like hip-hop and reggae/dancehall. Yet my racial, class, and sexual locations always already complicated my personal embrace of these musical and dance forms. Shifting insider/outsider positionalities shaped how I perceived my own advantages of social

Han Chinese culture. The region has a richly contested history interconnecting Jesuit missionary practice, Japanese and Russian imperialism, and serves as a basis for the construction of contemporary Chinese nationalism.

mobility. My mobility always starkly contrasted with my peers’ economic opportunities and my immediate social conditions. Still, hip-hop remains a formative cultural force shaping my wider political consciousness. I rap now because its flow and parlance are familiar, tangible links to the economic and racial subordination – an inescapably subaltern status – that was and still is present in Scarborough and Moss Park.

The Blackness of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop resonated in the places and people of my early life, but they are far removed from the culture’s socio-geographic foundations. Scholars like Tricia Rose and Jeff Chang locate the origins of hip-hop in the social spaces created by New York social policies (in particular, those of urban planner Robert Moses) of “urban renewal” and “benign neglect.” It was in these spaces, razed by the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, in which displaced communities of Black and Hispanic people in the South Bronx maintained life in difficult conditions. South Bronx inhabitants became a national symbol of, and were exploited by, the media as epitomizing “social ruin and barbarism.” Yet Rose describes the generation of Black and Hispanic youth growing up in such “ruin” as creating new cultural practices to negotiate their economic and technological conditions:

[Although these [popular media] visions of loss and futility became defining characteristics [of the neighbourhood], the youngest generation of South Bronx exiles were building creative and aggressive outlets for expression and identification. The new ethnic groups who made the South Bronx their home in the 1970s, while facing social isolation, economic fragility, truncated communication media, and shrinking social service organizations, began building their own cultural networks, which would prove to be resilient and responsive in the age of high technology. North American blacks,

14 Rose, Black Noise, 51.
Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Caribbean people with roots in other postcolonial contexts reshaped their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain. Although city leaders and the popular press had literally and figuratively condemned the South Bronx neighborhoods and their inhabitants, its youngest black and Hispanic residents answered back.\textsuperscript{15}

In a community whose institutions of older social support were “all but demolished” hip-hop emerged as an alternative space of identity and community formation.\textsuperscript{16} Hip-hop – stylistically, sonically, lyrically, and thematically – through its wide and rapid growth beyond South Bronx, became inscribed as the youthful Afro diasporic language of surviving and taking pleasures in life on the margins of postindustrial urban America.\textsuperscript{17}

The Afro diasporic language of hip-hop, ever changing, has crossed the globe vis-à-vis corporate expansion, reflecting the latter’s interests. Of course my Toronto area school grounds were not unique in being influenced by hip-hop. The incredible commercial success of hip-hop culture, and its musical iteration of rap music, represents an incredible expansion across the world. As Morgan and Bennett point out, “The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (ifpi) reported that hip-hop music represented half of the top-ten global digital songs in 2009” suggesting hip-hop’s new status as mainstream global popular music, displacing rock music as the language of youthful pleasures and politics.\textsuperscript{18} Yet Tricia Rose writes of the paradoxical contraction of themes in hip-hop that follow such corporatized expansion. Corporate interests, according to Rose, instead of expanding the “many varieties of equally positioned styles of rap – gangsta as well as party, political, Afrocentric, and avant-garde…by the late 1990s, most of the affirming, creative stories and characters that had stood at the defining core of hip

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 53-54.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 41-42.
\textsuperscript{18} Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett, “Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form,” \textit{Daedalus} 140(2) (2011): 176.
Rose is writing about the most prominent, popular forms of internationally recognized hip-hop. While the economic juggernaut of hip-hop, as Rose points out, rapidly expands internationally, the content and images disseminated by it contracts and narrows in scope. In Rose’s words,

> [a]lthough [hip hop’s] overall fortunes have risen sharply, the most commercially promoted and financially successful hip hop… has increasingly become a playground for caricatures of black gangstas, pimps, and hoess … [H]omophobia … antisocial, self-destructive, and violent portraits of black masculinity have become rap’s calling cards. Relying on an ever-narrowing range of images and themes, this commercial juggernaut has played a central role in the near-depletion of what was once a vibrant, diverse, and complex popular genre, wringing it dry by pandering to American’s racist and sexist lowest common denominator.

The problematic narrowing of hip-hop’s images may contribute to the dissemination of “controlling images” that limit opportunities available to and discipline Black people. Yet the massive spread of a seemingly vacuous commercial hip-hop culture, the “near-depletion” of its vibrance and complexity, has also arguably enabled the spread of hip-hop’s political roots and potentials.

Hip-hop’s corporate growth, fraught with problems for Black people, has also enabled global cross-pollination of hip-hop’s political consciousness, modelled on and for Blackness, as the contemporary language of youthful resistance and survival. As a distinctly Afro diasporic cultural practice, Tricia Rose notes that the enjoyment and production of hip-hop in mostly Black-identified communities, “grounds black cultural signs and codes in black culture and

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20 Ibid.
examines the polyvocal languages of rap as the ‘black noise’ of the late twentieth century.”

Imani Perry, as another example, describes hip-hop as “an iteration of black language, black music, black style, and black youth culture.” The term hip-hop generation, coined by hip-hop magazine editor Bakari Kitwana in the mid 1990s, interchanges hip-hop metonymically with Black youth. Hip-hop music remains not only historically important to Black American cultures, but is profoundly conjoined to the notion of Black identity, an intrinsic part of the ontology and epistemology of Black cultures; hip-hop is undeniably a Black cultural form.

Youth uptake and localization of hip-hop culture is widespread and varied, inspiring young people globally, but is always already rooted in American Blackness. Condry details the transnational flow of hip-hop arriving in “Japan above all as black music rather than American music, that is, with racial connotations emphasized more than national origins” such that Japanese youth have come to embody hip-hop’s Blackness, according to Condry, through dreaded and beaded “hair styles, skin tanning, rapping, body language, ideas of self-expression, clothing, musical taste, etc.” In other words, for many around the globe, hip-hop is not just historically Black made art, but if personified, is also understood widely as Black embodiment. Understandably, when other racialized communities take up hip-hop culture, be it rap or any of its other elements, it is always already marked as a non-Black derivative of the racially authentic source material – Chicana/o rappers, ‘yellow’ b-boys/girls, and so on. When “whiteness is the

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26 I focus on Asian diasporic uptake of hip-hop, yet the emerging literature of non-Black (racialized and Indigenous) hip-hop is far too wide-ranging to sufficiently index here. Further examples of hip-hop scholarship, however, include Tony Mitchell’s *Global Noise: Rap and Hip
unspoken standard of … art,” rap music is one of a select few globalized art practices that the assumed embodiment is not whiteness, but rather the notion of Blackness functions as the standard.

Cross-racial identification with hip-hop’s political consciousness, however, does not displace Blackness as the standard of racial subordination baked into the core of hip-hop. Nitasha Sharma’s ethnographic study of “hip-hop desis” establishes a framework of non-Black identification with hip-hop and Blackness, but without erasing the latter. Vivek, one desi participant in Sharma’s study, “told [Sharma], cautiously, that he was Black,” clarifying that, “he considered himself to be part of a ‘wider Black consciousness’” (added emphasis). Sharma suggests that such cross-racial identification based on a model of Blackness is “atypical” among desis, considering the constructed racial opposition between the supposed model minority status of South Asians and Black people as “not-so-model” in America. According to Sharma:

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29 “Desis” refer to South Asians in America. Ibid., loc 65-79.
these desis express their perspectives in the most popular and generationally relevant expression of Blackness at this time – hip hop. Desis borrow and expand upon Blackness by elaborating upon its possibilities as an empowering rather than denigrated identity, not limited to people of African descent… Hip hop’s desis disrupt popular and divisive discourses about model (Asian) and not-so-model (Black) minorities by connecting themselves to Black histories, thereby forming an important critique of the ‘possessive investment in Whiteness.’\textsuperscript{30}

By emphasizing \textit{connection} rather than analogy, the language of cross-racial identification vis-à-vis hip-hop in Sharma’s ethnography establishes a relationship between desi political consciousness and a racial-cultural identity modelled on Blackness. Relational analysis obviates the superficial use of comparison, metaphor, and analogy toward a cross-racial solidarity with Black people through hip-hop. As Sharma describes the phenomenon, “South Asians use hip hop to identify \textit{with} Blacks rather than \textit{as} Black”\textsuperscript{31} (original emphasis). The solidarity, for Vivik, is so deeply felt that it blurs the subjective experience of \textit{connecting with} into a state of \textit{being}. Yet Sharma underscores participant refusal to displace Blackness as the standard of racial subordination reflected in hip-hop. Desis \textit{standing with} Black people do not falsely equate desiness with Blackness. Such identification with Blackness comprises a relational analysis that foregrounds Asian complicity \textit{within} anti-Blackness and potential solidarity \textit{against} anti-Blackness.

Sharma distinguishes such cross-racial identification with hip-hop and its integral Blackness from white appropriation of the culture. From Sharma’s interviews with hip-hop practicing desis she distinguishes, “between ‘appropriation as othering’ and ‘appropriation as identification.’”\textsuperscript{32} Unlike white appropriation of Black cultural forms like hip-hop,

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., loc 95.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., loc 196.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., loc 2920.
[t]he fluctuating visibility and invisibility, belonging and otherness, of these non-White groups in the American imaginary and in the realm of hip hop play out in the dynamics of South Asian Black appropriations. How do we interpret the adoption of Blackness by non-Black minorities as well as the incorporation by American Blacks of South Asianness in their hip hop products? Shifting and ambiguous race relations spill into cross-cultural appropriations, distinguishing them from those depicted in the literature on Whites’ appropriation of Black cultural forms. Because South Asian and Black power relations appear especially unstable - they shift between being lateral (Wong 2004:189) and hierarchical - their appropriations do not fit unidirectional top-down theories. Instead, I illustrate the dual flows of cultural adoption between South Asians and Blacks.33

The instability Sharma refers to is specific to desi experiences of post 9/11 racial fault lines shifting their perceived statuses in the American imaginary from model minorities in the 1990s to terrorists in the 2000s.34 The sudden casting-off of model minority South Asians from American citizenry is a lumping “together of Middle Easterners, South Asians, and other ‘Muslim-looking’ people as enemies,” which highlights “their distinction from ‘Americans,’ including Blacks.”35

Sharma highlights the shifting relationship in a story she relates about her group of desi and Black friends returning late at night from a multiracial dancehall/Indian party in the Bay Area around 2003. Approached by a Black stranger, the group was simultaneously sexually accosted while Sharma was called a “terrorist assassin bitch” because his sexual advances were rebuffed. For Sharma, “[a]s quickly as it took us to cross the street, our temporary South Asian and Black celebration was halted in the face of the troubling racial realignments that pit these groups against one another in post-9/11 America.”36 Denigration and celebration of Blackness and Brownness flows dually within white supremacy, propping up the latter. And so, desi appropriation of hip-hop is more complicated and flexible than the top-down cultural theft that

33 Ibid., loc 2900-2907.
34 Ibid., loc 2885-2893.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., loc 2888.
white appropriation of hip-hop is often criticized for. Such flexibility in the racial lines separating Brown from Black American functions to open a space, according to Sharma, within the popular culture of hip-hop “where potential formations not yet possible in formal politics can be tested out and aired… the post 9/11 context that brings sharp relief to new, dangerous and optimistic, kinds of crossovers” between Asian and Black Americans.37 For Sharma then, desi appropriations of Blackness and hip-hop can represent more than racial denigration, fetishization, and othering of Black people. Instead, Sharma reads desi appropriations of hip-hop as a hopeful, if temporary and limited, lateral identification with the political struggles of Black people.

Of course, even lateral cross-identification with hip-hop and Blackness is not immune from criticism. Simply because Asians do not occupy the same hierarchically top-down position that is foregrounded in white appropriation of hip-hop does not mean that we cannot be complicit in white supremacist anti-Blackness. It could be argued, for example, that the famous and well-received work by historian Jeff Chang,38 which highlights the multiracial origins of hip-hop, might function to displace Black people from the centre of hip-hop.39 Appropriative acts within hip-hop by Asians, when fetishizing hip-hop for its ‘coolness,’ can function to reproduce racist images of Black inferiority, such as stereotypes of promiscuity and criminality.40 But authors like Sharma and Wong41 argue that such appropriation and complicity in shifting racial hierarchies should not foreclose connection and coalition building, vis-à-vis “a love of Black music [being] a

37 Ibid., loc 2900-2907.
38 Chang, Can’t Stop Won’t Stop.
39 Sharma, Hip Hop Desis, loc 272.
direct expression of political ties with Black people.”

My project aims to highlight such connection and coalition in the face of my own, queer and Asian, complicity in anti-Blackness.

Such complicity within white supremacy and anti-Blackness is my target in this project, a project that clearly appropriates elements of hip-hop but in service to cross-racial solidarity opposing white supremacy. The framework of white supremacy considered here takes many forms of, and thereby connects, racial and settler violence enacted on racialized and Indigenous people. Shifting complicity in anti-Blackness becomes ever more complex in liberalizing systems of multiculturalism and queer integration into a putatively modern and sexually exceptional white supremacy. Like Sharma’s hip-hop desis, my relationship to hip-hop and Blackness, being neither Black nor white and queer, must primarily be one of accountability to and solidarity in opposition to anti-Blackness. Because of the very flux of racial and sexual hierarchies, shifting perceptions of so-called “good” minorities being leveraged against supposedly “bad” minorities, ManChyna embodies a theory of hip-hop’s potential for political cross-fertilization. Yet such cross-fertilization is always already fraught with the dynamic of inter-minoritarian tension, pitted against each other within a white supremacist framework. My own queerness and Asianness relate in particular ways to systems of racial and sexual subordination within cultural tropes of model minorities and normative queers, which serve to denigrate ‘not-so-model’ minorities like Black and Indigenous people. ManChyna uses these particular relationships to undermine the fictional promises of multiculturalism and homonationalism.

My criticism of multiculturalism and homonationalism are not abstractions of performed queerness and Asianness but are connected to my own social mobility and economic uplift. To

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42 Sharma, Hip Hop Desis, loc 2914.
reiterate an earlier point, my love of hip-hop is and always was in stark contrast with the racial and economic subordination I grew up surrounded by. My love of hip-hop now represents an attachment to it in my earlier years, which voiced a greater marginality than I ever experienced then or now. Yet such marginality was obvious and immediately present, surrounding me as a young person, which would come to shape my later experiences. What I did experience, in contrast, was a trajectory of social mobility and uplift that was not inevitable. Because of my early experiences, I later encountered forms of mobility available to me as unnatural. Such contrast grew even starker as I moved through increasingly privileged educational spaces, marked by cultures of whiteness and heteronormativity, and found myself surrounded by increasing numbers of white people. Like many others, I felt the sting of foreignness. But I also felt the increasing strangeness of whiteness itself, and the contradictory demands to assimilate into the racial and sexual conditions of whiteness around me – to paradoxically be more white, whatever that means, and more gay and Asian. My journey out of spatial, economic, and educational marginality and into the pressures of ‘multy-culty’ assimilation (as I later call it), has been characterized by me negotiating the ways in which I was and am not Black – not just in a racialized sense but in a deeply structural sense within systems of white supremacy – and how my non-Black, Asian, and queer social locations accrue to the kinds of limited social uplift available to me.

ManChyna, and more directly my theoretical reflection on his creations, presents critical analyses of the promises of class, racial, and sexual assimilation into these strange and contradictory conditions of belonging. As ManChyna, I theorize assimilation into whiteness, but a new kind of whiteness that is supposedly kinder and gentler in its treatment of the racially and sexually marginalized. But this is a fiction. It is a lie. I theorize the new whiteness as an ever-
present pressure shaping my experience of my racial and sexual locations. My production of ManChyna and his cultural works explores the roles of promissory exaltation through conditions of economic, sexual, and racial exaltation in the lives of minoritarians like myself. But I also theorize my own location and complicity, vis-à-vis assimilation, within a hierarchy of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Through ManChyna’s productions, I negotiate the temptation to assimilate into whiteness and my temptation to present as culturally or structurally Black, recalling Vivek’s self-description for the latter. My artistic praxis plays with both, while my analysis critiques both as indefensible. I perform and write as ManChyna especially for queers and Asians at the troubling threshold of a putative inclusion into the modern sexual regimes of anti-Black, white supremacist, settler-colonial contexts. Because such inclusion bears a relationship to both the lie of whiteness and the subordination of Blackness, I attempt to always maintain a sense of accountability and solidarity with Black life and Black struggles against racism.

**Detailed Summary of Chapters**

With ManChyna’s origins and intentions in mind, who or what is ManChyna and where can he take us? The contradictory fiction of ManChyna, which I will describe as a disidentification, is my theoretical and methodological intervention into the contradictory fictions of the new whiteness. The latter promises inclusion and citizenship to model minorities and homonormative nationals in a cynical manoeuvre of minoritarian containment, a fictional claim to its own modernity. I specify my disidentification with such fiction as “disassimilation.”

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In Chapter 1, I set up my methodological approach, autoethnographic creatography, which characterizes the subsequent chapters. I begin by establishing the theoretical resonance between model minority and homonationalist discourses. Next I describe Muñoz’ theory of disidentification and how it applies to my creative works. From disidentification, I develop my methodology of disassimilation. Disassimilation is, first, a subset of disidentification, a disidentificatory performance of assimilation, distinguished from disidentification by focusing on a fictional narrative of progress supposedly available to minoritarians. Second, it is also an analytic process that incorporates direct autoethnographic recall of my creative process and parodic engagement with processes of supplication to fictions of majority culture both on and off stage. In other words, disassimilation functions both theoretically and methodologically. I explain the impulse of multiplicity in my disidentificatory performances as responding to the contradictory fictions of majority narratives.

I describe the kind of multiplicity manifested by ManChyna’s disassimilation as a survival tactic, evading the disciplinary gaze of majoritarian culture, shared by a variety of performers. Multiplicity, in my usage of it, is situated in a lineage of thinkers spanning the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mark Anthony Neal, Gayatri Spivak, Toni Morrison, and Chela Sandoval. I reflect on two results of my polyvocal performance: seemingly dissonant political impulses and a perceived fiction of group homogeneity. I theorize the latter as producing an “ethnic excess” through enfolding minoritarian bodies into the fictions of multy-culty whiteness. Such a process of incorporation works in conjunction with the opposite exclusionary force, the normativization of whiteness that congeals minoritarian difference and exclusion on stage. I strategically use such excess in ManChyna’s works, and so do the works of people of colour I later enfold into my analysis. Our shared conditions, which enable
minoritarian existence in a state of liberal settler multiculturalism, similarly engender the congealing of excess. Considering ManChyna as a sublimation of my political consciousness, I analyze these conditions that he navigates, forming the theoretical upshot of my autoethnographic mapping – or what I will later call ‘autoethnographic creatography.’ Such mapping, in my use of it, merges the notions of “cognitive maps,” autoethnographic recall, creative production, and the disidentificatory analysis of others’ works to constitute the disassimilatory lens with which I use to analyze ManChyna.

I begin Chapter 2 by describing the process of filming the video for my song, “Brokeback That Ass Up,” the chapter and song are interventions into the putative whiteness of Canadian rurality, which attempts to erase the rightful Algonquin inhabitants of the region. Shawville, Québec’s whitened rurality provides the backdrop against which my ethnic excess becomes palpable, both in the video and for its makers. Canada’s histories of eugenics (and specifically racial purification) become illumined on this contested Algonquin land, whose reputed whiteness highlights my own ethnicity so vividly. The careful work that goes into naturalizing whiteness, connecting it with rural Canadian space, is teased apart in this chapter. I begin by describing the feelings of non-belonging we queer and ethnic artists felt when filming the video for “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012). Such ‘ethnic excess,’ difference produced in part by the normativization of whiteness and our limited incorporation, is deployed in the subsequent chapters. At the same


46 ManChyna, performance of “Brokeback That Ass Up,” by ManChyna, recorded May 2012, on Allegiance to the Fag, independent, digital LP.
time, I sketch an outline of the work of whiteness on this land by refracting the song, video, and my experiences making it through the works of performance artist Tseng Kwong Chi. Putting ethnic excess, attempted Indigenous erasure, and the active whitening of rurality into conversation with each other in “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012), I describe the construction of Canadian rurality as a reservoir of whiteness violently inscribed in a contemporary, multicultural landscape. Such conversation instrumentalizes my ethnic excess in dislocating the connection between whiteness and rurality, toward recognizing rightful Indigenous authority of the land.

In Chapter 3, I recall two publicly political speech acts, one theatrical (my burlesque troupe) and the other academic (by Sunera Thobani); I contrast these with a public cum private encounter between myself and an audience member after a ManChyna show in the United States. I put into conversation my group performance on stage and my personal encounter off stage with the reactions to and the writings of Canadian scholar Sunera Thobani. This conversation about assimilation, belonging, and the potential for banishment gestures toward conditions of dissent within Canadian multicultural modernism for a racialized subject. In my case, I refer to the conditions I corporeally index and lay bare, and in Thobani’s case, I document the consequences of her refusal of gentle supplication to dominant ideology. I especially utilize Thobani’s argument about the exaltation of white Canadian subjects via modern notions of welfare and official multiculturalism. My public cum private conversation in the U.S. (where multiculturalism is less formally enshrined but still culturally relevant) takes on a Janus-faced character. In the first setting, public conversation is characterized by my symbolic banishment from multicultural modernity and, in the second more private setting, the conversation revolves around an offer of intimacy and sexual assimilation. The latter continues a tradition of infantilizing minoritarians in the U.S. and in Canada, especially legible in the policies of the
Canadian Indian Act. I am drawing a connection between officially mandated policies of
Multiculturalism in Canada and the often celebrated, ‘everyday multiculturalism’ (as Rinaldo
Walcott distinguishes in the Canadian context)\(^{47}\) in the mundane interactions between individuals.
Describing the interactive conditions of dissent and assimilation, I extend Thobani’s analysis of
Multiculturalism in Canada at the policy level to the everyday level of informal multiculturalism.

In Chapter 4, I shift from an analysis of space that dominates Chapters 2 and 3 to a
discursive and musical analysis of my work. I triangulate my song, “Tiger Mom”\(^{48}\) with its
musical and cultural antecedents, which include Nicki Minaj’s “Did it on ‘em”\(^{49}\) and Amy
Chua’s *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*.\(^{50}\) Defining the song “Tiger Mom” vis-à-vis the
coordinates of Minaj and Chua’s works sheds light on a shared performative deployment of
maternal, ethnic, and sexual excess in purchasing access into an ideology of capitalist
multiculturalism. In the triangulation of these works, among a select range of others, I suggest at
least contiguity if not continuity of eugenic idealism, transformed in its refraction through
modern notions of welfare and multiculturalism, into a logic of hybrid vigour and multicultural
eugenics.

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\(^{47}\) Rinaldo Walcott, “Black Men in Frocks: Sexing Race in a Gay Ghetto (Toronto),” ed. Cheryl
Teelucksingh, Claiming Space: Racialization in Canadian Cities (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier
University Press, 2006).

\(^{48}\) ManChyna, performance of “Tiger Mom,” by ManChyna, recorded May 2012, on *Allegiance
to the Fag*, independent, digital LP.

\(^{49}\) Nicki Minaj, vocal performance of “Did it on em,” by Nicki Minaj and Bangladesh, recorded
December 2010, on *Pink Friday*, Cash Money/Universal, CD LP.

Chapter 2 Theory and Method

Part 1

Theoretical Orientations: “Who Will the Next Top Model Minority Be?”

It was the trans girl in me that finally forced me to understand that the dream [of full
citizenship, participation, and equality] will never come true. You can’t be an Asian boy
who wears dresses and has sex with men and still be a model minority. I broke beneath
the weight of pursuing capitalist perfection, shattered decades of my father’s dreams in
the night I came out. Still, sometimes I find myself getting caught up in the game. I
scramble to get good grades, get into grad school, win scholarships, all while putting
myself through undergrad. I smile and scrape and allow my identity to be used as a token
by institutions, all to prove what a good transgender Asian citizen I am, so that I can defy
statistics and succeed by the standards of this country ruled by whiteness, heterosexism,
capitalism. Each time, I wonder, how long until I break again? How will I be punished
when, inevitably, I scream? Who will the next top model minority be – the university-
educated Chinese who work so hard, the South Asians who make such good employees,
the white gay couples who get married and join the military? And what could we do if we
stopped playing this game, refused to chase this myth that enslaves us? What could we
bring about with our memory of ghosts, our rage and resilience and will to survive, our
unbroken strength, our hearts bright as stars?

- Kai Cheng Thom, Montreal-based writer,
artist, and community worker

Really? Sounds like the problem lies more with the fact that in trying to speak for herself,
the author puts words in the mouths and thoughts in the minds of others. Who is actually
'making' her try to prove that she's a 'good' transgender Asian citizen? Who is trying to
make her assimilate or forget her ancestral language? Is she really so paranoid that she
thinks most Canadians consider her skin 't(a)inted'? Given her confidence in declaring
a transgender identity, she probably realizes that she has nothing to prove to the majority of
people she interacts with, because she lives in a diverse, respectful society. In the end,
this just seems like an excuse to conflate historical wrongs with her individual angst and
rage against an imagined unified 'majority' race and sexual orientation.

- Commenter “Bagz,” in response to Thom’s article,
“Next Top Model Minority” (2013)

51 Kai Cheng Thom, “Next top model minority: On migration, assimilation, and resisting
colonization through solidarity,” *McGill Daily*, February 14, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015,
http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2013/02/next-top-model-minority/.
I had my dissertation’s title in the bag, but Kai Cheng Thom beat me to the punch. In the third verse of my song, “Tiger Mom”\(^{53}\) (2012), I rhyme:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I’m takin this shit to the Tyra Banksy} \\
\text{I’m the Top Model minority} \\
\text{My vogue is the shit. all 10s. no Bs} \\
\text{you can call me fucking Hermione.}
\end{align*}
\]

There is no way, I thought arrogantly, that someone else would be interested enough to merge these two cultural products: one in her twilight of cultural relevance (the show, of course, \textit{America’s Next Top Model}) and another, a tired trope of minority excellence achieved through drudgery and rote memory (as opposed to creativity and inspiration). A quick Internet search later, I had to find another title. Someone else was, in fact, interested enough to connect the two. But what other title could better connect the defiant queerness and Blackness of vogueing (a relationship I discuss later), of mimicking high fashion realness, with the boastful masculinity of hip-hop, of “top-ness,” and also subversively underlining the absurdity of the model minority stereotype?

Like the title of the article, the online exchange between Thom and Bagz outlines the parameters of my project, namely a tension between the invisible and contradictory demands of assimilation into Canadian culture. Thom’s powerful commentary speaks to the normativizing demands of modern Canadian citizenship shaping their existence. Bagz does not recognize this. Instead, the anonymous commenter conveys incredulity at Thom’s claims, rejecting the latter’s assertions of western cultural demands. Ironically, Bagz deploys the same maneuver that they accuse Thom for supposedly using. The disbelieving commenter lays claim over the minds of “the majority of people” making up, they claim, “a diverse [and] respectful society.”

\(^{52}\) Bagz, 2013, comment on Kai Cheng Thom, “Next top model minority.”

\(^{53}\) ManChyna, “Tiger Mom.”
defending the happy society that Bagz imagines, they act as a conduit for the very cultural demands of difference Thom indexes – self-congratulatory tactics of gender exceptionalism and multicultural modernity that function to update Canada’s national self-image. The commenter backhandedly praises Thom for their “confidence in declaring a transgender identity.” Buried in the commentary is an underlying assumption that Thom’s “ancestral language” can be maintained in a multicultural Canada without difficulty. At once, the commenter applies the essentializing multicultural logic of identity, based on ethnic ancestry, while simultaneously reminding readers of Thom’s foreign extraction linking their non-white body to an ancestral language and place. Bagz cannot (or will not) believe that minoritarians\(^{54}\) are forced to assimilate because they cannot see or feel such cultural demands.

Thom’s query articulates the racial and sexual codes that reinforce each other in the consolidation of a modern Canadian nationalism, vis-à-vis minority hierarchy. “Who Will the Next Top Model Minority Be?” cheekily enunciates a phrasal overlap merging the reality television competition, *America’s Next Top Model* (2003-), with the figural notion of the ‘model minority.’ The former is a television series with a cast of primarily women and gay men that centers on the fashion and modeling industries. Although a seemingly innocuous television show, *Top Model* incorporates effeminately racialized characters in a neoliberal commercialization and invisibilization of race and sexuality.\(^{55}\) The commercial incorporation of racialized queer bodies within the context of competition lays the foundation for Thom’s argument. That is to say, the process of becoming a model minority is inherently cutthroat, a competition for selection by a

\(^{54}\) I take inspiration from José Muñoz’ uncommon use of ‘minoritarian’ (instead of minority) here to prefigure a lengthier discussion of Muñoz’ work later. *Disidentifications*, 1999.

panel of catty judges. The dispute between writer and commenter lies in the existence of those judges. “Who…” Bagz demands, “Who is trying to make her assimilate… Is she really so paranoid …?” The reality show serves as an apt metaphor for the neoliberal competition that imagines a hierarchy of minorities within a multicultural Canada. In conjoining the neoliberal queerness of Top Model with the minority competition bred by capitalist multiculturalism, Thom articulates an argument I expand upon here: that the homonationalist incorporation of (certain) gays and lesbians in Canada is modeled on the racialized figure of the model minority documented in Asian American critical theory.

Model Minority, a Brief History

The model minority figure was constructed to apply to Asian Americans in a single path model of ethnic assimilation toward middle class whiteness. The idea was first made widely explicit in a January 1966 New York Times article by William Petersen entitled, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” followed in December by a U.S. News and World Report on Chinese Americans, “Success Story of One Minority in the US.” According to the model minority myth, “Asian Americans have suffered discrimination and overcome its effects by being conservative, hard-working, and well-educated, rather than through any government benefits or racial preferences.” Asian Americans are likened to white-Americans in this model by praising their

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apparent social conservativism as measured against a Protestant work ethic.\textsuperscript{58} Put more crudely, if you "Scratch a Japanese-American…you find a WASP."\textsuperscript{59} As Mia Tuan argues, however, the WASPy attribution does not signify real congruence between whites and Asians, but an imagined process of whitening:

Thanks in part to such profuse publicity, scholars and lay persons alike tout Asian-Americans as the newest additions to the American mainstream, the most recent in a long procession of ethnic groups to have climbed up the social hierarchy and ‘arrived.’ Some even argue that they may be undergoing ‘whitening’ processes similar to those experienced by southern, central, and eastern European immigrants earlier in the century…. These sentiments, in turn have earned Asian-Americans the curious designation of ‘honorary white.’\textsuperscript{60}

Through qualitative interviews with third- (and up) generation Asian Americans in California, Tuan describes a process attributing whiteness to Asian Americans through intergenerational assimilation into American mainstream culture; this is despite a collective experience of being treated as “forever foreigners” (ibid). It is a sentiment articulated in many ways: “white, by acclamation” or “New Jews,”\textsuperscript{61} “Acquisitional Amercianess,”\textsuperscript{62} or simply “becoming white.”\textsuperscript{63} The latter takes the praise of Asian Americans as model minorities to an even more audacious level, that is, ontologically transforming the heterogenous group of Asian Americans into white people; this is in spite of skin hue and epicanthic variations, which for so long served as axiomatic markers of anthropological difference. The possibility of ‘becoming white,’ either

\textsuperscript{58} Max Weber, \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism} (1905).
\textsuperscript{59} Petersen, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style.”
\textsuperscript{60} Mia Tuan, \textit{Forever foreigners or honorary whites?: the Asian ethnic experience today} (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 30-31.
individually or intergenerationally, goes beyond the scope of my project. Instead, I focus on the 
*promise* of becoming white, of racial exaltation within a white supremacist hierarchy, and the 
conditioning power of being acclaimed as ‘basically white.’

The origins of likening (or promissory transformation) Asian Americans to white 
Americans were strategic. Media praise of Asian Americans, discordant with American 
treatment and perceptions of Asians in earlier decades, was at the expense of other people of 
colour, especially Black people. As Frank Chin famously put it in 1974, “Whites love us because 
we’re not black.”64 A seminal work of Asian American cultural nationalism, Frank Chin and his 
co-editors raised critical attention to the cultural expression and political value of Asian 
American writing, directly influenced by Black radical thought and cultural revolution.65 As 
Chon-Smith explains, “the editors use the vernacular languages, performance styles, and 
oppositional consciousness of Black masculinity as a means to expose the contradictions of post– 
civil rights racial formations that disunite Asian and Black communities.”66 According to Chon-
Smith, the Asian American writing movement emerged directly from, “Afro-Asian collaboration, 
multiethnic vision, and remaking of Asian American masculinity” vis-à-vis Black masculinity.67 
Inherent in Chin’s expression of Afro-Asian unity was his recognition of the “racist love” that 
mainstream white America offered to Asians. In Chin’s writing, he distinguishes between racist 
hate, the contempt reserved for unassimilable minorities, and racist love, the kind showered on 
members of a racial minority who supplicate to white America, “semi-identifying” with

64 Frank Chin, *Aiieeeeee!: an anthology of Asian-American writers* (Washington: Howard 
University Press, 1974).
65 Chong Chon-Smith, “The Asian American Writing Movement and Black Radicalism: Race 
66 Ibid., 708.
67 Ibid., 710.
whiteness as the model minority stereotype.\(^{68}\) “No stereotype,” according to Chin, “is isolated or self-sufficient” since it is always defined in relation to “the majority group, and the other minorities” (added emphasis).\(^{69}\) Chin derisively critiques other Asian (and especially Chinese) Americans for assimilating into white society, learning to “function as a minority... to be not black. The method of being not-black is to make a lot of silence for the noise the blacks make.”\(^{70}\)

Specifically tied to the emergence of the model minority stereotype, Asian Americans were especially pitted against Black people, co-constructed as a ‘problem’ group for their increasingly effective demands for economic and social justice. In the year prior to the NY Times article introducing America to the model minority, the L.A. Watts Riots gripped national attention.\(^{71}\) Anti-Black police brutality and deteriorating inner-city conditions incited the riots.\(^{72}\)

With growing demands for political and economic equality among African Americans, Lyndon Johnson’s assistant secretary of Labor, sociologist Daniel Moynihan, published his now infamous \textit{Negro Family Report}.\(^{73}\) Robert Lee argues that Moynihan’s designation of the structure of Black families – and specifically, the strength of Black women as heads of household – as the pathological source of African American plight was pivotal in the creation of a complementary, model minority narrative.\(^{74}\) As the \textit{U.S. News} article put it, “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent on uplifting Negroes and other minorities,

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{69}\) Ibid., 73.
\item \(^{70}\) Ibid., 75.
\item \(^{72}\) Ibid.
\end{itemize}
the nation’s 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own with no help from anyone else.”75 Asian Americans were instrumentally positioned in the popular imagination as relatively successful model minorities to highlight the reputed failures of other minorities, especially Black people.76 If Asians can succeed by the virtue their own hard work, the logic posits, then the American fantasy of equal opportunity competition cannot be in doubt. ‘Failures’ of other groups must therefore be due to some fault of their own; and some “new eugenicists” were even supposing that Black children suffered from a “genetic inferiority in intelligence.”77 Emerging out of anti-Blackness, such instrumentalizing logic can and has been used against any number of marginalized people. Importantly, this includes Indigenous people who have been turned into a ‘race’ by white settler states, thereby erasing their unique claims of sovereign nationhood. In addition to internally managing racialized difference, the model minority promise also re-centers the virtues of an exalted white subject – the target of Sunera Thobani’s work – within a white supremacist racial hierarchy.

The promise of racial exclusion and inclusion also fluctuated between Asian American groups before crystallizing as a pan-Asian stereotype in the 1960s. Leading up to World War II, the primary aspersion cast upon Asians in North America was the racial nightmare of Yellow Peril. In the associated collection of stereotypes, most often Chinese men were depicted as sickly, posing a sexual threat of miscegenation to white women; also, Imperial Japan was imagined as a villainous threat from afar. The rise of such xenophobia was likely linked to the influx of mostly

77 Ibid., 27.
Chinese labour immigrating to the west coasts of both America and Canada for manual work in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Figure 2).

![Harper's Weekly Cover](image)

Figure 2. 1879 Cover of Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization. The illustration, by political cartoonist Thomas Nast, was entitled "'The Nigger Must Go' and 'The Chinese Must Go.'" The cartoon and accompanying editorial criticized and linked the violent mob rule that affected election results in Mississippi and California, respectively influenced by anti-Black panic about African American electoral inclusion and anti-Chinese hysteria about their labour presence in San Francisco. (Walfred 2014)

Yet something changed in the collective American psyche with Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. Robert Lee argues that until this point, Yellow Peril remained imaginary. With Japan’s entry into World War II, though,

> the United States found itself allied with a weak and divided China. … Japan’s plans for empire, though couched in Pan-Asian anticolonial rhetoric, met with resistance in China and elsewhere in Asia. For the first time, being able to tell one Asian group apart from another seemed important to white Americans. Two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the War, Life magazine ran a two-page pictorial entitled “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese.”

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Chinese were suddenly being described as “friendly” and instrumentally differentiated from “enemy alien Japs.”\(^79\) The shift was a significant departure from the xenophobic sentiment fueling the passages of America’s 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and, in the Canadian context, the Chinese Immigration Acts of 1885 (Head Tax) and 1923 (Exclusion). As a foreign policy gesture toward America’s war ally, “[i]n 1943, Congress voted to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had for sixty years forbidden Chinese, with few exceptions, to enter the United States…Repeal was pushed through the U.S. Congress on the grounds that it would keep the wavering Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-Shek in the war against Japan.”\(^80\) Only when politically advantageous, and not because of some sudden concern for human welfare, did the promise of immigrant inclusion extend to the Chinese. Japanese Americans, on the other hand, were unjustly rounded up and incarcerated in internment camps during the war.

In the postwar years, the categories of excluded and included again flipped. Japan became “America’s junior [economic] partner” and fear of a “Red China” ramped up.\(^81\) Development of Japan’s postwar economy through America’s “Pacific Rim economic strategy”\(^82\) was perceived as a key foil to a potential revolutionary China.\(^83\) In 1950, the People’s Republic of China joined Soviet Russia in backing North Korea in the Korean War.\(^84\) Responding to this alliance,

Congress passed the Emergency Detention Act, which vested the U.S. Attorney General with the authority to establish concentration camps for any who might be deemed a domestic threat in a national emergency. The mere authorization of such sweeping

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\(^{81}\) Ibid., 262.

\(^{82}\) For more on the presence of American military and corporate interests in Pacific Rim economies following World War II, see Wiley 1970 “America’s Pacific Rim Strategy”


\(^{84}\) Ibid., 262.
powers of detention served as a stark warning to Chinese Americans that what had been done to Japanese Americans a decade earlier could also be done to them without effort.\textsuperscript{85} The detention facilities appropriated by Congress were internment camps used in World War II, repurposed for domestic security threats of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{86} The bill’s framers modeled the new detention program after Britain’s infamous Defense Regulation 18B, which targeted “alien foreigners,” and also drew upon advice of American Justice Department officials involved with the detention of Japanese Americans less than a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{87}

The threat of detention and deportation functioned to silence political dissent among and divide the Chinese American communities. Lee argues that the threat of deportation under the Trading With The Enemy Act was used to chill political dissent and Communist sympathies among the many “paper sons” who migrated using falsified documents during America’s decades of Chinese exclusion.\textsuperscript{88} At the same time, the FBI and INS “flooded” Chinatowns “with public notices and street flyers warning of potential spies and subversives, while ‘innocent residents’ were encouraged to report suspected subversives to the FBI.”\textsuperscript{89} Following that the government used the Chinese Confession Program to encourage confessions from paper sons and “[i]n return for consideration for an appropriate (but not guaranteed) adjustment of their status, the applicant had also to make a full disclosure on every relative and friend. The information gathered in the Chinese Confession Program was used to try to deport those who were identified

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
by the FBI's informants as supporters of China or as domestic troublemakers.” In this period of hysteria and frenzied panic about “Red China,” Chinese Americans were being offered the promise of domestic inclusion at the expense of others in their community. This was not a symbolic or discursive repudiation but a literal transformation of community members into ‘innocents’ and ‘security threats.’

South Asians have more recently been a similar target of the fluctuating applications of the model minority trope, both elevating and expelling them from the American cultural imaginary. Like other Asian Americans, casting South Asians as model minorities is an anecdotal truism. But the inclusion of South Asians in the category of “Asian Americans” is contested. This is not only true within scholarly debates, but also in the everyday experiences of some Asian Americans wherein perceived racial difference marks the interpersonal exclusion of South Asian Americans from their East Asian American counterparts. However, Puar and Rai take the interchangeability of these three significations as a maxim; for them the “model minority [is] often applied to Asian American populations, with particular reference to South Asian Americans” (added emphasis). Puar and Rai argue the inclusion of South Asians in the model minority discourse can be rapidly “re-made” through cultural re-signification, suturing racial and sexual perversions through technologies of counterterrorism. In their words, “[t]he model minority status of South Asians has now been tarnished for some with an association with Osama bin Laden and other terrorist figures, leading to a shift in the racial landscape from model

90 Ibid.
minority to terrorist.” It is the production of new bodies (“terrorist-fag,” “monster,” “spy,” “alien,” “suicide-bombers,” in their lexicon) within the counter-terrorism “machine” that dovetails the regulation of racial and sexual difference. But what Puar and Rai do not yet make explicit in their description of the “re-making” of the South Asian model minority into a terrorist is that the carrot of model minority status was always already a regulatory tool of managing difference, including inter/intra-racial and sexual difference.

The model minority promise, at its roots, also served to regulate (while intermingling) sexual deviance along with racial alliance in protest. The model minority trope, Lee argues, functioned to contain the three specters of the Cold War – Communism, Black separatism, and homosexuality – within the American imaginary. As Lee points out, Moynihan would “invoke the threat of perceived separatist Black Muslim doctrines [and] the ‘attractiveness of Chinese communism’ to American Blacks.” The subterranean lives of homosexuality and Communist spies were similarly conjoined. According to Lee, homosexuality represented the “white menace” for its emergence in the white American psyche with the publication of the Kinsey Report. Kinsey “shocked America by reporting that a third of American men had engaged in some homosexual activity during the course of their lives and that a majority had experienced homoerotic desire.” Linking this new public knowledge with “the Cold War search for traitors and subversives… homosexuals were seen to have secret lives much like spies or foreign agents” thereby linking in the collective consciousness the clandestine lives of homosexuals and Communists in America. The white nuclear family was thought of as the natural division of

93 Ibid., 81.
95 Ibid., 269.
96 Ibid.
sexual labour within capitalism, and so the threat of homosexuality to it was easily linked to the threat of Communism in the American imagination. Lee argues that all three menaces were intermingled into a menacing triad of unruly dissidents; they would not be elevated to the status of model minority. Potential solidarities among these groups, meanwhile, were the real menace to white America. Political dissidents and sexual ‘deviants’ needed to be isolated and contained within the American imaginary. Exalting one group – Asian Americans, and even subdividing that group when politically useful – proved a fruitful tactic. The model minority trope then was always already an instrument of inclusion, exaltation, exclusion, and management of racial and sexual difference; the constant is its capricious instrumentality as a cultural tool to manage internal difference and dissidence.

The American model minority trope found resonance in Canada with the immigration patterns shaped by the liberal immigration policies adopted in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1967 implementation of the Points System and the 1971 announcement of Canada’s Multiculturalism Policy marked a period of immigration pattern reversal, from primarily European to Asian immigrants. Prior to this period, Canadian immigration laws were race based, favouring Europeans over other world regions. Still experiencing a postwar boom, however, European immigration was unable to meet Canada’s growing economic demands for skilled immigrant

\[97\] Ibid., 270.
labour. The liberal policies enabled Canada to tap into the once “undesirable” Asian labour pools. According to the last two national censuses, the extremely heterogeneous Chinese are still the largest visible minority group in Canada. With the introduction of the Points System, this created another layer of division and polarization within the Chinese Canadian community – those who came before 1923 (with the exclusionary Chinese Immigration Act) and those who came after 1967 (small numbers of Chinese immigrants did, however, arrive in the intervening years). Chinese immigrants who came in the early years of multiculturalism, “were from urban areas and well educated…predominantly from Hong Kong” followed Taiwan and China. Although there were several different “push” factors, Chinese especially from Hong Kong in the 1980s have been described as “‘yuppies’ (young, educated, middle class professionals.” The selection forces of the Point System emphasized human capital in the form of education. Additionally, the Business Immigration Program of 1985 and the government’s “higher premium on independent or economic immigrants…deemed to bring a greater economic value to Canada than those admitted under the family class or the refugee class” led to an even more explicit emphasis on financial capital. The model minority stereotype dovetails neatly with Canadian selection practices, mutually constituting each other. The practice of favouring professional classes with already higher financial and educational capital reinforces the selection of such

\[100\] Ibid., 280.
\[101\] Heterogeneity, for Guo and DeVoretz, refers to the diverse geographic sources that Chinese-identified immigrants to Canada originate from. Ibid., 275.
\[103\] Ibid., 279.
\[105\] Peter Li, Destination Canada: Immigration Debates and Issues (Don Mills, Ont: Oxford University Press, 2002).
immigrants, thereby constituting an essentialized notion of the model minority ethnic who is economically and educationally high-achieving.

The simultaneous cultural admiration and xenophobia that Asian Canadians, both migrants and their children, encounter in the decades of Canadian multiculturalism echo the consequences of educational and economic attainment found in the U.S. because of media cross-pollination. Gordon Pon argues that a significant mode of cultural transmission for the model minority stereotype north from the U.S. is the op-ed format of major Canadian media outlets echoing their American counterparts. In Canada, Pon writes, “throughout the 1980s and in the 1990s, presses like the Toronto Star, Fortune Magazine, Globe and Mail, Montreal Gazette, and Toronto Life have championed the Chinese as the ‘model minority.’ These newspaper columnists continue to perpetuate the discourse of Asians as being ‘academic giants’ …, ‘math whizzes’…, and extremely wealthy.” The import of the model minority trope into Canada is a reasonable assertion given the porous nature of English language communication between American and Canadian media and publics (although this was likely one-sided in the 1980s and 1990s). For this reason, the publication and wide circulation of two stories about model minority Asians, one in the Wall Street Journal and the other in Maclean’s (self-described, “Canada’s National Weekly”), form the starting point of my last chapter. Each article updates the dual faces of admiration and ignominy of the model minority.

Both model minority status and multiculturalism are undergirded by an essentializing notion of ethnic identity. Agreeing with the assertion that the model minority trope

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107 Ibid., 283.
“discriminate[s] and punish[es] insurgent challenges to liberal democracy,” Pon also argues that it “converges with Canadian discourses of multiculturalism to buttress Orientalist notions of Chinese Canadians.”\(^{108}\) The logic of both, model minority and multicultural identities, rely upon essentialized notions of ethnic ancestry, positing “the current status of Asian[s]… is a logical outcome of their unique cultural characteristics.”\(^{109}\) For the largest “visible minority group,” Chinese Canadians, model minority discourse resonates with multicultural logics that attribute perceived skill to ancestral culture, or a “Confucian-laden cultural upbringing that translates into academic success.”\(^{110}\)

No room exists in the happy fantasy of multiculturalism for alternative theories about the imported notion of so-called model minorities. What if, for example, we accounted for the many decades of unpredictable pendulum swings of exclusion and inclusion, the ever-present threat of deportation or detention, and the internal community divisions sewn by suspicious white governments? Could these conditions foster a collective strategy of subservience and deference to authority within a panoptic educational system? Lisa Lowe’s diagnosis of liberal democratic nation-states like the U.S. and Canada asserts that they require a process of “forgetting” their histories of racism upon which their nations were formed.\(^{111}\) Deployment of both model minority and multiculturalism discourse require such utilitarian forgetting. Instrumental memory loss then aids in reformulating difference into a tale of essential ethnic characteristics, cast either as

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 279.

\(^{109}\) Suzuki, “Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans,” 34.


assimilable or not in a framework of neoliberal multiculturalism; conveniently, such cultural amnesia morally absolves the nation-state of past and current wrongdoings.

Returning to Puar’s work, we see the extension of model minority discourse as a regulatory trope in her idea of homonationalism. Puar argues that gay or queer (white) national subjects are complicit with the American civilizational project, undergirded by “U.S. sexual exceptionalism,” which globally casts American neocolonial power over racial and sexual others.\textsuperscript{112} Domestically, Puar continues, homonationalism foregrounds “a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves… [whose] bodies [are] crucial to the deployment of nationalism … [and] reiterate heterosexuality as the norm.”\textsuperscript{113} Nationalized gays, “provide ammunition to reinforce [U.S.] nationalist projects.”\textsuperscript{114} Describing this kind of queerness as “regulatory,” “disciplining,” and “control[ling]” Puar further contends that queerness (as a subject category) folds certain “queer liberal subjects… into life” while expelling sexually and racially pathological “populations targeted for death.”\textsuperscript{115} In a more explicit parallel, Puar continues:

As with the class fraction that projects a model minority, we have here a class, race, and sexual fraction projected to the market as the homonormative gay or queer consumer. This is a consumer without kin, the best kind, projected to the state as a reproducer of heteronorms, where associations with white national hetero- and homonormative bodies trump the desire for queer alliances across class, race, and citizenship. But what of racialized immigrants or people of color who fall outside the class parameters of the model minority ethnic, of the homonormative, or who inhabit the intersection of the two: the queer (immigrant) of color?\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 28.
In this description, Puar makes explicit the similarities between the model minority and the homonormative gay or queer consumer. Each aspirational trope becomes an instrumental and regulatory sword wielded against putatively inferior minoritarians.

What I develop from Puar’s argument are the complex regulations resulting from being “folded into life” as homonationalized queer subjects and the “detention” engendered by the promise of racial exaltation for model minorities. Inclusion into full citizenship might be presupposed as a good thing, something tacitly desirable (by “citizenship” I mean both cultural assimilation as well as legal incorporation). By contrast, Amit Rai synthesizes a notion of citizenship as a form of “detention.” Puar explains Rai’s notion with respect to the 1923 Bhagat Singh Thind case, which highlighted the racial profiling of Sikh men in America vis-à-vis the turban as a marker of their exclusion from the category of whiteness:

the *Thind* case foreshadows, through its disciplinary apparatus, the proliferation of detention technologies; indeed, the spaces of citizenship inclusion offered through liberal multicultural model minority discourses operate both as spaces of dissent and extensions of hypervisible detention cells – that is to say, detention is no longer only a disciplinary apparatus of isolation but most insidiously distributed control within the public sphere.  

The space of inclusion represented by full citizenship into liberal multiculturalism offers the possibility of *limited dissent* for a model minority and, presumably also, the homonormative queer. Rai and Puar are suggesting that even these figures, while complicit in mutually constituting the apparatus of discipline for other minoritarians, are themselves held captive by “hypervisible detention cells” totally out in the open, without any identifiable captor (recalling Bagz, “Who… who?” indeed). As Foucault suggests of disciplinary power, it

is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery. … it is the apparatus as a whole that produces ‘power’ and distributes

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117 Ibid., footnote, 282-283.
individuals in this permanent and continuous field. This enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely ‘discreet’, for it functions permanently and largely in silence.  

In other words, disciplinary power emanates from everywhere and is wielded by no one in particular. Rai and Puar build on Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, describing the promise of liberal inclusion as racially and sexually regulatory. In Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, I center my analysis on these regulatory forces that contour minoritarian public dissent and the capitalist-eugenic conditions for entry into the model minority’s hypervisible cell. Despite the accompanying disciplinary regulation of this promise, social incorporation remains an enticing goal of aspirational.

The psychic desire for incorporation into western citizenship frames the issue of aspiration in Asian American scholarship since its earliest incarnations. As David Eng points out, an interest in the social psychology of Asian American desires to assimilate pre-figure many of the field’s contemporary debates about what form Asian American cultural resistances should take. In the second issue of the newly formed *Amerasia Journal* (1971-), for example, clinical psychologists Derald and Stanley Sue defined the ‘Marginal Man’ as an Asian American male subject who desires to assimilate into mainstream American society at any cost (the psychological equivalent of the sociological phenomenon of the ‘Banana’ [yellow on the outside, white on the inside])…this type of assimilation is purchased only through elaborate self-denial on the part of the minority subject of daily institutionalized acts of racism directed against him.

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120 Ibid., 22.
In the Sue brothers’ words, this figure of the Asian American “Marginal Man finds it difficult to admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he aspires to join a racist society… [and] minimizes or denies the impact of institutional racism.” ¹²¹ Eng goes on to call this an “untenable predicament of wanting to join a mainstream society that one knows clearly and systematically excludes oneself.” ¹²² Eng’s own project is a necessary articulation of Asian American studies with psychoanalysis, describing the co-constitution of racial, sexual, and gendered subordination of Asian American masculinity. Eng continues the Asian Americanist tradition of diagnosing, “the imaginary aspects of racial identification, the ways in which the more immaterial, invisible, or unconscious effects of racism are internalized by the minority subject as a social system of self-regulation and self-domination.” ¹²³ Asian American studies scholars critically point out the paradox of desiring assimilation as a self-regulating and self-defeating process of permanent exclusion for minority Asian subjects – assimilation at any cost.

I take this important work – the paradox of assimilating into an inherently exclusionary state apparatus – as an assumed starting point for my gaze at unequally available opportunities for minoritarian assimilation. Yet what are some other costs of assimilation? Not just for oneself or even one’s own community, but how are all minoritarians – non-Asian groups disparately organized within white supremacy: Black people, Indigenous people, and so on – related and complicit in each others’ subordinations in a white supremacist imaginary of settler North America? The model minority and homonormative gay cultural tropes are on the one hand so very appealing; they are desirable, even if internally contradictory. On the other hand, such

¹²² David Eng, Racial Castration, 22.
¹²³ Ibid., 24.
tropes are also instruments used to condition a silent minority and discipline unruly subjects.

Potential allegiances become fractured; and so, the desire for psychic and physical incorporation into the body politic comes at another disreputable cost.

While the temptation hailing subjects into a narrative of ‘good’ assimilation as model minorities or homonorms might be self-evident to some, the cross-minoritarian consequences of this choice must be laid bare. Chris Iijima speculates about Asian Americans’ urgent collective choice:

The carrot of political reward for political accommodation is a particular temptation for Asian Americans, for Asian Americans find themselves in a peculiar place in the developing racial hierarchy. If Asian Americans accept their model minority role, it no doubt will come with the "reward" of higher racial status. As John O. Calmore has explicitly predicted: ‘I do believe, however, that dominant America will attempt to situate Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Latinos squarely within its efforts to determine who will be "white" in the twenty-first century.’ …

On one hand, there will be a continued bottom level of subordinated people of color—particularly African Americans. On the other hand, there is a growing middle tier in which a subordinated "model minority," Asians and some Latinos, will be given some racial and class privileges in return for being used as both a buffer and a diversion.\(^{124}\)

The carrot of racial exaltation ‘up’ the chain of humanity comes at the cost of our division, within and between communities of colour. Iijima designates African Americans as the “bottom level” of racial subordination, against which the model minority status of Asian Americans is wielded as a “sword… in defense of the racial status quo.”\(^{125}\) In designating Black folk as the “bottom level” of racial subordination, Iijima draws on John Calmore’s perspective as an African


\(^{125}\) Ibid., 425.
American legal scholar, concerned with housing law as it affects racialized minorities and especially African Americans.\textsuperscript{126}

A notable elision in the cited passage is Indigenous people, who are not racialized minorities but are connected to racialized violence via settler colonial violence. Elsewhere, however, Iijima trenchantly notes the maddening irony that connects racialized minorities and Indigenous people through white supremacy and settler violence. Relating the story of Japanese-American and Native American interactions in Poston, Arizona (an internment camp site for Japanese Americans) during World War II: “One story she told me, really shows how the Native Americans got f*cked over by this country. When they first started bringing in the JAs [Japanese Americans] to Poston, the gov’t forgot to tell the tribe that they were putting them on their reservation.” Iijima goes on to note, “[t]he ironies present in these circumstances – a concentration camp for citizens imprisoned as foreign aliens built on land that served as a prison for original inhabitants created by conquering invaders, those imprisoned outside the barbed wire wanting what was inside, those inside the barbed wire wishing they were outside of it – would be poetic if not so tragic.”\textsuperscript{127} Jodi Byrd makes sense of this ironic connection by understanding “colonial discourses not only as vertical impositions between colonizer and colonized but also as horizontal interrelations between different colonized peoples within the same geographical space.”\textsuperscript{128} The ‘whitening’ of Asians through the model minority stereotype trades the barbed wire of actual detention cells for “hypervisible detention cells” in the space of inclusion. Remaining the same, however, is the deeply connected racial and settler violence enacted on

racialized and Indigenous people. With its history as a multitool of managing difference, the model minority trope does not theoretically ‘discriminate’ in its exaltation and exclusion. A promise of exaltation, and conversely the threat of exclusion, can be extended to any group – homonormative queers, for example. When the alternative is violent exclusion and barbed wires, the offer of limited inclusion is tempting and difficult to reject.

Chris Iijima’s speculative words about the evolving hierarchy of racialization in America in which Asians are ‘becoming white’ remain a controversial assertion among Asian Americans and Canadians because of its imprecision. The assertion about classification of a model minority raises many questions. Who, for instance, gets to be included in this so-called middle tier of racial privilege? Sometimes the amorphous category “Asian” includes South Asian immigrants but at other times (especially during times of heightened Islamophobia) rejects them. As Andrea Smith describes the struggle of those cast as ‘Oriental,’ “[i]t does not matter how long immigrants of color reside in the United States, they generally become targeted as foreign threats, particularly during war time.” For East Asians, regardless of time spent in North America, the spectre of yellow peril can return to public consciousness at any moment, rendering our bodies forever foreign and always ethnic. While an aura of Asianness in the contemporary west may putatively hold a promissory power in a liberal multicultural framework – a carrot of political reward – such promise continues to center whiteness in an American-centric racial hierarchy, and may be revoked at any time. In North America racial formations of far east Asians, South Asians, southeastern Asians, and so on shift with both fluctuating

immigration patterns and war imperatives. The foreign face of American Orientalism also shifts in the western cultural imagination as the loci of U.S. wars multiply and move with their participation in the World Wars, neocolonial incursions in southeast Asia, rising tensions of the Cold War, and the war on terror. Getting imagined as the foreign-threat-*du-jour* varies with the locus of war that the American empire is currently engaged in at any given time.

Similarly, homonormative appeals within a homonationalist consolidation of liberal nationhood continue to center heteropatriarchal exaltation of traditional family structures. In Puar’s words

> [f]or contemporary forms of US nationalism and patriotism, the production of gay and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects.\(^\text{130}\)

The instrumentalization of ‘certain domesticated homosexual bodies’ functions dually: producing both exalted heterosexuality and monstrous foreigners. The latter’s face depends on the face of foreignness within the U.S. national imaginary at any particular historical juncture. Such promises between inclusion are not analogous but connected. The repudiation of one South Asian model minority in the face of Orientalist justifications for war begets the figural birth of another ‘good’ minority within liberal thinking – the homonorm/homonational. Congruence of the model minority and homonational is imprecise. But the model minority has always already been imprecise. It is exactly the imprecision of Iijima’s assertion that I find useful. A promissory note of exaltation can be

shifted between groups, connected through white supremacist racial, settler, and sexual violence.

The promises of sexual and racial exaltation are neither linear nor uniaxial, but rather comprise components of a multi-pillared scheme of what Andrea Smith conjoins as heteropatriarchy and the three pillars of white supremacy.\(^ {131}\) Despite beginning my analysis with my Asian positionality, it does not take a central role. Similarly, the implicit queer critique of heteronormative patriarchy in my work does not take center stage. Instead I use each of these coordinates to map the multidimensional promises of power proffered to different groups in unique ways. I use Smith’s three pillars of white supremacy to understand my relationship to and complicity within a multidimensional system defined by injustice. In Smith’s organization, the logics of slavery, genocide, and Orientalism underwrite America’s ongoing projects of capitalism, colonialism, and war, respectively. The first, slavery, is based on the presumed “slaveability” of Black people, a logic equating Blackness with property.\(^ {132}\) Saidiya Hartman refers to the phenomenon as,

> the fungibility of the slave – that is the …. replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity – and by the extensive capacities of property…. Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel…and, as property, the dispossessed body of the slave is the surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion.\(^ {133}\)

In other words, an economic “afterlife of slavery” transforms and commodifies Blackness into property, dehumanized and “slaveable.”

\(^ {132}\) Ibid., 67.
The second and third pillars, respectively the logics of genocide and Orientalism, hold that Indigenous people and cultures must disappear in an ongoing seizure of land and that war is justified by foreign threats within and beyond American borders. All three, Smith argues, ultimately support American settler society’s white supremacist ideology. For Smith,

[i]n this model…we see that we are victims of white supremacy, but complicit in it as well. Our survival strategies and resistance to white supremacy are set by the system of white supremacy itself. What keeps us trapped within our particular pillars of white supremacy is that we are seduced with the prospect of being able to participate in the other pillars.\(^{134}\) (added emphasis)

Smith’s emphasis on seduction as an organizational tool for complicity in an unjust system, rather than (only) shared victimhood, is helpful in my analysis. Each axis of seductive promise props up a portion of heteropatriarchal white supremacy. No analogy “across difference” is needed to make sense of this interlocking framework. The offer of capitalist success, land ownership, or national security can obscure how participation in any one of these pillars leverages the subjugation of others.

Hypothetically, what if such absorption into apparatuses of power and capital is, in fact, possible both economically and socially? What choices are minoritarians facing at the precipice of mainstream assimilation and what are we losing? The political roots of Asian American liberatory protests were once intertwined with parallel and connected fights for social justice in the 1960s – Chicano, African American, Native American, Gay and Lesbian, Women’s Liberation, anti-war, education reform, and so on. Yet the politically conservative emergence of the model minority stereotype, which harmonizes with the liberal framework of multiculturalism, obscures this shared history of social solidarity. Is such obfuscation a fatal cultural choice that

\(^{134}\) Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” 69.
so-called model minorities (and now homonationals) have to face at the turn of the 21st century?

Some well-intentioned folks might attempt to analogize political struggles, seeking a ‘solidarity across difference,’ suggesting that one struggle is basically the same as another, in what Jared Sexton has recently called, “people of color blindness.”¹³⁵ Such attempts at metaphor essentialize each analogue. As Gayatri Spivak argues, the analogy “exclude[s] the fields of force that make them heterogeneous, indeed discontinuous” as well as “those relationships … that are attributive and supportive and not analogical.”¹³⁶ Alternatively, by emphasizing the relationships between racialized and sexual politics over facile attempts at false sameness we might no longer deny, as Puar and Rai assert, “unflattering relations of complicity, collision, and antagonisms.”¹³⁷ In Chapters 2 and 4, instead of succumbing to the logics of metaphoric substitution, I am using a relational analysis emphasizing connectedness and my unflattering complicity in anti-indigeneity and anti-Blackness, respectively.

In this light, I hypothetically succumb to the demands of analogizing technologies (this one time): the trite political slogan for queer liberals, “Gay is the New Black,” might then be cheekily rephrased as “Gay is the New Asian.” To reiterate, the model minority and the homonorm are not analogues, but are connected. If one were to make an analogy, however, the latter is more appropriate, not equating struggle but instrumentality. The model minority relationship between disciplinary assimilation and division is foregrounded in the latter metaphor, a homonationalist impulse of model minority inclusion. I reject the false equation of sexual marginality with Black life within and Black resistance against white supremacy. Instead,

conditional inclusion of sexual marginality, framed by capitalist terms of white queer consumption, imitates the model minority par excellence – Asians – to yet again displace Black people from an analysis of social injustice and discipline Blackness as ‘not-so-model.’ Can a select few queers be considered a new kind of model minority in our racialized and capitalist aspirations to white-supremacist homonormativity? If true, white homonormativity can become even more useful than model-minoritizing Asians as a tool for disciplining not-so-model groups.

For Asians, the process of non-Black racialization can at least act as an anchor of connection with Black life and struggle. Of course this is not always true, since individually we must often navigate and resist the internalized anti-Black racism of our own families. But we can potentially see how our literal families, under the rubric of race, are tied to broader communities of non-Black racialized peoples; and hopefully with this knowledge we can tie our struggles to Black resistance of white supremacy without displacing or eliding Blackness. With queer community ties, however, our chosen and non-normative families must be built, often as adults without any expectation of historical continuity. Critical race consciousness is not a queer birthright. We cannot rely on state sanctioned family lineage to tie our bodies to Black life and Black struggle without accounting for the specific ways that we are unequally arrayed within capitalist white supremacy. Queer communities at this historical juncture are offered partial inclusion into western citizenry, as ‘consumers without kin,’ according to Puar, engendering capitalist fracture in the absence of racialized ties. The promise of capitalist inclusion within a conservative fantasy of neoliberal success, individualism, and consumption might be too tempting for some to stand against the lie of this promise. Given the choice, will we align with the promise of power and privilege or commit to solidarity that articulates difference (rather than elides or crosses it) for a
just and equitable world? The question of whether such articulation is even possible within the confines of liberal multiculturalism is explored in chapter 4.

On the one hand, I resist a familiar impulse to rank anti-Blackness, -Asianness, -indigeneity, -Islam, or any other axis of identity as a so-called “bottom level” of white supremacy in my analysis. My resistance does not deny that each axis of marginality is unequally arrayed within white supremacy. Blackness is barred from the humanity reserved by whiteness for itself; humanity is apportioned provisionally to non-Black racialized subjects on the condition they reject Blackness. Indigenous peoplehood is expunged violently from whitened landscapes, even as indigeneity gets transmogrified, reduced to a “transit” through which non-Indigenous people may pass to supposedly become modern. And whiteness casts Asians, near east and far, as forever foreign and tyrannical terrorists, even as Asianness gets weaponized into a model minority trope to discipline and array other racialized subjects. We are all, unequally and in our own ways, denied the modernity and enlightenment of whiteness. Yet a taxonomical project of victimhood, which seeks to describe an a priori scale of static, unchanging, and separate categories of identity is an inadequate framing of women of colour or people of colour politics. I rather underscore the historical, material, and symbolic connections between particular moments of subjugation, with the hopeful intent of bridging difference, to affiliate in the dismantling of whiteness and heteronormativity as systems of domination and organizing principles for interlocking subordinations.

At the same time, however, I do not wish to displace Blackness from the center of *hip-hop*, the central creative form I think with. Hip-hop is undeniably rooted in Black life and the struggle against anti-Blackness. My relational analysis does not metaphorically analogize Asian or queer struggles with Black struggles. The relationships between these loci of subjugation and
resistance do not comprise a chain of equivalences among which Blackness is only one example. Jared Sexton calls such insistence “upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy” a blindness, a “people-of-color-blindness.” In other words, Sexton argues that drawing false equivalencies between distinct forms of racialization – such as the complex matrix rendering Asians into the many faces of Yellow/Brown terror – “misunderstands the specificity of antiblackness.” Such specificity is a fundamental eviction from humanity, which white multiculturalism proffers to non-Black racial others, a limited promise of freedom through complicity in maintaining anti-Black disenfranchisement. When I invoke minoritarian thinkers, as the less jargon-sounding ‘people of colour,’ as Muñoz equates them, I do so with the specific, unequal, and interlocking arrangements within white supremacy in mind. I sustain the hopeful project that Muñoz considered when investigating relationships among racial difference. But I work against the ‘multiracialism’ that Sexton critiques and that I repudiate as multiculturalism. Especially in my use of hip-hop, I recognize the specificity of anti-Blackness as the model on which racialized exploitation and oppression are based. Insofar as my analysis derives from and within hip-hop, it engages with the specific power relations of anti-Blackness incited by hip-hop that neither I nor other non-Black minoritarians experience. In other words, I identify with the “wider Black consciousness” that Vivek speaks of, but reject an attempt to co-opt the moral strength of Black critical thought to explain other minoritarian experiences as equivalents. I do not equate histories of violence even as I investigate opportunities for alliance within a framework that demands complicity in perpetuating racial and national violence against others to purchase my own limited freedoms. My particularly queer and Asian use of hip-hop

139 Ibid., 104.
140 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 7.
critiques the empty promise of exaltation away from Blackness as the specific site that is denied humanity within white supremacy.

In my work, I map out a relational analysis, connecting rather than analogizing Asianness, queerness, Blackness, and indigeneity. My focus is on my particular Asian and queer locations and how they interlock with anti-Blackness and anti-indigeneity. We are not variants of each other, but are rather minoritarians variably arranged under white supremacy. Our pleasures and struggles are always already interlocked with each other in historically specific ways. And we must account for these specific relationships to “reenvision a politics of solidarity that goes beyond multiculturalism, and develop more complicated strategies that can really transform the political and economic status quo.”141 By critically examining the promises of power, while offering my queer Asian body to its hungry altar, I resist the familiar narrative of assimilating “at any cost,” referring back to the Marginal Man. I am writing against the kind and gentle nature of a new kind of whiteness, which seeks to conceal its own supremacy. In doing so, I attempt to instrumentalize the always partial and conditional inclusion of my Asianness and queerness to upend the anti-Blackness on which it is based and through which it is related via hip-hop.

Disidentifications

To be clear, I am not arguing for a simple dichotomous choice between seizing privilege within an unjust system and standing with allies for social justice; ManChyna and my theoretical treatment comprise a project that criss-crosses between such polarizations in the spirit of José Muñoz’s theory of disidentification. Muñoz elaborates his theory in a study of several queer artists of colour and their creative performances of identity. Disidentification, for Muñoz, is a

141 Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” 73.
dialectical alternative to identification with a dominant culture and counteridentification against it. Uncritical cultural identification with dominant social discourses naturally reinforces such codes. Counteridentification, however, reinstalla “a structure that validates the dominant ideology by reinforcing its dominance through the controlled symmetry of ‘counterdetermination’” and "through the very routinized workings of its denouncement of dominant discourse, reinstates that same discourse.” Muñoz calibrates disidentification as kitschy and comedic resistance to ideology within the bounds of ideology. In Muñoz' words, if the terms identification and counteridentification are replaced with their rough corollaries assimilation and anti-assimilation, a position such as disidentification is open to the charge that it is merely an apolitical sidestepping, trying to avoid the trap of assimilating or adhering to different separatist or nationalist ideologies... Disidentification is not an apolitical middle ground...Its political agenda is clearly indebted to antiassimilationist thought. It departs from the antiassimilationist rhetoric for reasons that are both strategic and methodological. (original emphasis)

Such strategies of resistance, Muñoz clarifies, "negotiates... within the flux of discourse and power [in the Foucauldian sense]. Disidentification understands that counterdiscourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends and a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse.”

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142 Muñoz, Disidentifications.
143 Ibid., 11.
144 Ibid., 97.
145 Ibid., 18.
146 Foucault was equally distrustful of ‘reverse discourse’ that directly opposes dominant ideologies. For Foucault, ‘reverse discourse’ is the demand of legitimacy using the same vocabulary and categories by which something becomes disqualified. Foucault further explains, “There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.” Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 101-102.
147 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 19.
the performers and kitschy texts he describes, names a playful light-footedness with
disidentification, politically swift, ambivalent, and tactical.

For Muñoz, humour represents a hopeful way out of the impasse between power and
resistance. Disidentificatory performers and texts humorously recycle and rethink dominant
cultural codes and discourse – resistance to ideology within ideology. A strategy of scrambling
and reconstructing “the encoded message of a cultural text … both exposes the encoded
message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account
for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.”

Disidentification opens a space for complex cultural circuits to be exploded and explored, not with political impunity, but
resisting kneejerk rhetorical reduction to “good dog/bad dog criticism and instead lead[ing] to an
identification that is both mediated and immediate, a disidentification that enables politics.”

In his description, the strategy Muñoz lays out becomes hopeful, gesturing toward a novel mode of
resistance within the confines of ideology. Dominant ideologies in “a phobic majoritarian public
sphere that continuously elides or punishes … subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of
normative citizenship” are met with disidentificatory laughter – evasive, momentary, and
ambivalent. Such ambivalence, Muñoz continues, "accomplishes important cultural critique
while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of
direct confrontation with phobic reactionary ideologies.”

Minoritarian humour and
performance become tactics for survival, prodding and ‘dis-ing’ identification while (mostly)
evading its punitive reaches.

148 Ibid., 31.
149 Ibid., 9.
150 Ibid., 4.
151 Ibid., 119.
Vaginal Crème Davis’ artistic practices present one exemplary model of disidentification; her humour, like ManChyna’s, centers on her politically dubious sexual desires. The title of Muñoz’s chapter, “The White to Be Angry,” comes from one of Davis’ musical releases of the same name. Davis’ work, typified by such playful language, calibrates the sense of kitschy comedic disidentification that anticipates ManChyna. In her queer-punk drag performances Davis sometimes employs heterosexual Black militancy, or a white supremacist militiaman character, and would sometimes inhabit a Black welfare queen stereotype. The morass of masculine militancy, sexual desire, and racialized class politics at play in Davis’ drag becomes sexually and racially scrambled considering Davis’ own social coordinates. Davis identifies as neither Black nor white, but rather as half African American and half Chicana. Naming the white supremacist character ‘Clarence’ after Davis’ birth name, she subverts another layer of cultural circuitry by conjoining her ‘authentic’ name with hateful ideology anathema to Davis’ very existence. In Muñoz’s retelling of Davis’ explanation, the latter finds “white supremacist militiamen to be ‘really hot,’ so hot that she herself has had a race and gender reassignment and is now Clarence. Clarence is the artist’s own object of affection. Her voice drops as she inhabits the site of her object of desire and identifications. She imitates and becomes the object of her desire.”\textsuperscript{152} Davis transforms her performative self into the contemptible, but “really hot,” object of her desire – she becomes both subject and object on stage. The uneasiness of desire, for Muñoz, "works to confound and subvert the social fabric."\textsuperscript{153} Playfulness with authenticity, contradictions, multiplicity, phobic ideology, and identity are, for Muñoz, “ambivalent circuits of

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 103.  
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 100.
cross-racial desire … thematized and contained in one body.”

154 Muñoz describes such ambivalence elsewhere as a trope “of feeling… central to a comprehension of the inner (textual) and external (social and political) work.”

155 Understanding disidentificatory work then relies on accessing the inner and external work that goes into and is accomplished by the performer.

My performance shares an affinity with each artist Muñoz describes to outline disidentification, but the kinship is especially strong with the brand of humour represented by ‘terrorist drag superstar’ Davis. Elements of my own art parallel Davis’ terrorist drag, especially our ambivalent and contradictory uses of racialized tropes (inner/textual) specifically tied (externally/socially) to our own queer and ethnic bodies. Muñoz labels Davis’ humorous embodiment, ‘terrorist drag,’ because she invokes images of white supremacy, ‘black welfare queen hookers,’ and gay serial killer/white cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer – all terrifying figures in the contemporary U.S. imaginary. Muñoz identifies this manoeuvre as a lampooning of whiteness, magnifying negative images from the homophobic and racist popular imaginary.

Figure 3. Allegiance to the Fag (2012) mixtape cover art, illustration by Lauren Hortie.

Examples of my parallel with Davis’ include: an intrigue or terrible affinity with gay, white cannibal, Jeffrey Dahmer (“eat rap bitches/Jeffrey Dahmer,” in my song “Yellow Fever” (2012));
my inhabitation of occidental fears of a “Red China” (Figure 3); my homosexualization of presumed-to-be-straight rap artists (Tyler the Creator, WuTang, and so on), as well as the whiteness of “bro” masculinity in general. My textual parade of domestic western fears surrounding race, gender, and sexuality intentionally invokes the anti-assimilationist roots of disidentification.

What dawned on me later, though, was that I was unintentionally shaping my antagonistic performance of disidentification, both on and off stage, through themes of assimilation. When I mock queer and Asian exclusion vis-à-vis the racist stereotype of the Tiger Mother (Chapter 4), I am parodying it through themes of model minority excellence. Even as I work through the exclusion of my body from full cultural citizenship, I am also reckoning with the ways in which it gets conditionally incorporated into it. The incorporating forces shaping my choices and behaviours are so deeply engrained that my embodiment of normative citizenship is reiterated even in my performance of resistance. My performance of disidentification is always already shaped by the conditions of my assimilation.

In the next section, I build on Muñoz’ theory of disidentification as it relates to my critical analysis of assimilation. By defining the impulse of what I term, “disassimilation,” I will be able to – in my later chapters – identify similar moments of politically engaged humour exhibited by my own texts, situating them in a network of texts. Each artist manifests strategic uses of essentialism, which congeal tensions of difference resulting from assimilation into and comparison with the aggravating fictions of the new whiteness. Such discursive performances reveal underlying, often invisible, logics that control, silence, and detain minoritarians in a fantasy of progress and assimilation.
Part 2

Methodological Developments: Disassimilation

ManChyna as Disassimilation

Working from Muñoz’s theory of performative disidentification, I introduce the notion of disassimilation as an epistemological and methodological offering to counter the dichotomy of grasping for promissory privilege and/or uniting in solidarity for social justice. If identification and counteridentification are “rough corollaries” of assimilation and anti-assimilation for Muñoz, the practice and analytic lens of disidentification roughly corresponds with disassimilation. Disassimilation extends and applies Muñoz’s critical reading practice (disidentification) into a cultural creative practice from the perspective of the minoritarian doer/maker. Disassimilation is the performance of disidentification within the parameters of majoritarian culture, disidentifying with assimilation, paired with a critical analysis of the conditions shaping the performance. By describing my interactions with texts, spaces, and people as an author and performer, I extend what could be a disidentificatory reading of my texts into a disassimilatory analysis of their socially contoured emergence. In other words, as I disidentify with the codes of majoritarian culture, I simultaneously document my assimilation into them, and respond to their conditioning forces.

Disassimilation and disidentification can almost be used interchangeably, however, in that both lenses are centered on the disidentificatory performance (Figure 4).
Although Muñoz refers “to disidentification as a hermeneutic, a process of production, and a mode of performance,”\textsuperscript{156} in practice as an analytic tool it tends to emphasize the interpretive end of this chain. Such emphasis is simply a consequence of the distance between the audience and performer and/or creator. Disidentification relies on a critical gaze, one that is able to pull together resonant texts known to the viewer but may not have occurred to the performer (the blue segment of Figure 4). Alternatively, disassimilation can readily gather critical reflection on personal experiences of the performer, not reasonably known to a viewer (the yellow segment of Figure 4). Of course, neither critical reader nor reflective performer is forbidden a priori from using either lens. One must, however, alternatively access the data typically found outside of the purview of each lens. Critical audiences, for example, can access interviews with performers to gain insight into their individual experiences (although I am uncertain about the richness of information translated from experience to interview). Both must, however, engage with the contents of the creative text itself (green), which makes up most of each lens. The distinction between the analytic lenses of disidentification and disassimilation draws upon Stuart Hall’s notion of encoding/decoding.

\textsuperscript{156} Muñoz, \textit{Disidentifications}, 25.
Stuart Hall’s model of communication is asymmetrically circuitous. Hall diagrams a circuit of televisual broadcast in which frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructures shape the encoding of meaning structures, which comprise “meaningful discourse” in the televisual medium.¹⁵⁷ For the encoded message of television to be “realized,” or have a social effect (however defined), it must be decoded by audiences, themselves informed by structures of understanding, as well as social and economic structures. Yet Stuart refers to the asymmetry between production and reception as a “lack of equivalence” between meaning structures used to encode and decode cultural messages. As a cultural critic Hall, like Muñoz, of course focuses on decoding practices at the receptive end of this cycle, specifically the multiple and conflicting decoding practices on the right side of the circuit. Hall’s model has informed decades of cultural studies analyses of consumer advertising and multiple forms of media including popular music.¹⁵⁸ Though updated in later works,¹⁵⁹ the moment of production remains situated in the televisual medium dominant in the 1980s. In Hall’s words, “[t]he institutional structures of broadcasting, with their practices and networks of production, their organized relations and technical infrastructures, are required to produce a programme ... Production, here, constructs the message. In one sense, then, the circuit begins here.”¹⁶⁰

Production in many ways has expanded to include definitions of immaterial labour in the production of cultural artefacts, like digitally distributed music, which may or may not be

¹⁶⁰ Hall, “Encoding/Decoding.”
centrally organized with blurred lines between production and consumption.\footnote{For discussion about the blurring between consumer and producer, or the ‘prosumer,’ see Claudia K. Grinnell, “From Consumer to Prosumer to Produser: Who Keeps Shifting My Paradigm? (We Do!),” \textit{Public Culture} 21, no. 3 (2009): 577–98; George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital ‘prosumer,’” \textit{Journal of Consumer Culture} 10, no. 1 (2010): 13–36.} The moment of production in Hall’s framework, in contrast, is centrally institutionalized, influenced by Industrial age separation of production and consumption. This emphasis on the determinate moment of consumption, traditionally understood as separate from institutional production, makes sense since an object, for Marx, only becomes a product (and in this case, a cultural product) when it is consumed.\footnote{Karl Marx, \textit{Grundrisse} (Penguin Adult, 1993).} Thus, the practice of oppositional decoding continues to emphasize the critical \textit{reading} (or consumption) to counter the asymmetry of broadcast structures. And the circuit is asymmetrical because the latter’s determinate moment of production is aggrandized both in terms of symbolic and material importance as the circuit’s beginning.

But what happens when the critic is also the producer of the object being interpreted, located at the beginning of the circuit? By actively participating in the encoding of disidentificatory texts and simultaneously engaging in their decoding, disassimilation aims to build on Muñoz’ theory of disidentification by expanding its application from the moment of reception to the moment of cultural production. In some instances of my analysis, Chapter 4 in particular, the critical reading of my creative text is indistinguishable from a disidentificatory reading. It is when I bring in data from personal experience in making or performing creative texts (Chapters 2 and 3) that disidentification becomes disassimilation. While disidentification functions best at highlighting the cultural circuits being recycled and exploded by textual performances, disassimilation functions to recognize the conditions shaping the enunciation of
those performances. Thus, the conditions of my minoritarian experience comprise the ultimate target of my disassimilatory analysis.

Assimilation takes centre stage in my analysis. Disassimilation is the application of disidentification in diagnosing processes of assimilation into dominant cultures. Thus, my choice of ‘-assimilation’ to distinguish the concept from disidentification derives from my positionality as a queer and Asian Canadian cisgendered man. Mine is a social location at which both inclusion and exclusion from liberal frameworks of citizenship are accrued with sharp contrast. From this perspective, I acutely feel the cultural tropes of the Marginal Man or Homonormative Queer, sensitizing me to the impulses and consequences of model minority assimilation and capitalist queer participation. I am thus working within a more limited definition of mobility with disassimilation – the phantasm of normative citizenship in a modern, putatively kind, welfare nation state – rather than identification broadly. Muñoz’s textual analysis of performers of colour describes their kitschy performances of negative stereotypes, their disidentification with those stereotypes. ManChyna’s creative texts, my performances and productions, are similarly disidentificatory. My overall project, additionally, includes my on and off-stage elaboration of ManChyna. The totality describes a conversation between disidentification and assimilatory practices. Disassimilation is not only about the on-stage performative recircuiting of identity, but also the off-stage contouring of my life, which feeds back into my work. My reflections about these off stage interactions (mostly in Canada) engage with a multicultural capitalism characterizing the nation’s cultural imaginary. Because the fantasy of assimilation into such multicultural capitalism comprises the conditions shaping my disidentificatory performance, I describe my overall project of performance and analysis as disassimilation.

*ManChyna Songs in C Major, or, Disidentifying with Cultural Fictions*
Viewed from any angle, though, my creative texts themselves can still be called disidentificatory in Muñoz’ original sense. The spirit of disidentification that animates all of ManChyna’s work can be used to describe my individual texts (performances, videos, and songs) as discrete models of disidentification’s ethos. To recapitulate the previous section, I classify the formalized theoretical analysis of my songs and other performative creations as “disassimilatory” because of my inclusion of personal off stage details that form key anchors directing a sustained theoretical diagnosis of the conditions for my performance; this includes the text you are reading. Yet the performances and creations themselves can still be read as disidentifications with major cultural tropes. These works include my shows, songs, and videos. Muñoz’s disidentification describes texts like mine, full of troubling stereotypes, not only because they take on an anti-ideological stance of resistance, in the vein of Davis especially, but also for the opposite reason. My texts take on an ideological ethos of incorporation into majority culture, implicitly if not explicitly critical of it.

The way Muñoz describes disidentification’s relationship with majority culture is through the metaphor of song, my primary medium. Muñoz draws a line between the ideological codes of majority culture and the rules of western song structure. Like the Althusserian hailing of subjects into ideology, “something also hears the singer who is not the author of the song.”163 For Muñoz, “[t]he singer is the subject who stands inside – and, in the most important ways, outside of… ideology… [The singer] is not [the song’s] author and never has been.”164 The song that calls the singer into its musical framework needs to be reworked, or disidentified with, by the singer. “[U]tmost precision” Muñoz continues, “is needed to rework that song, that story, that fiction.

163 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 21.
164 Ibid.
that mastering plot. It is needed to make a self – to disidentify despite the ear-splitting hostility that the song first proposed for the singer. Another vibe is cultivated. Thus, we hear and sing disidentification” (added emphasis).165 Like minoritarians and the codes of majority culture, singers disidentify with songs, reworking them and making them their own within the confines of the scale and tempo they are written in. The relationship between a singer and song, the “reception and performance, interpretation and praxis” of majority culture, is interlaced and crisscrossed for the minoritarian creating a new “vibe,” resistant yet assimilable into majority culture.166 Aligning with Muñoz’ song metaphor, my works are disidentifications with songs written in the major scales common in western music.

Before moving on, I must clarify the relationship between the terms minority, minoritarian, and majority culture. Muñoz’ preferred disidentificatory subject is the minoritarian, not the minority subject. As Deleuze and Guattari note, the more common notions of minority and majority are “very complex, with musical, literary, linguistic, as well as juridical and political, references.”167 The opposition, they continue, “is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it,” such as whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, standard language, and so on. For Deleuze and Guattari, “[i]t is obvious that ‘man’ holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitos, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc…. Majority assumes a state of power and domination… It assumes the standard measure.”168 A minority, such as women, are “definable as a state or subset” but “they are not simply sublanguages, idiolects or dialects…

165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
[they are] potential agents of the major language’s entering into a becoming-minoritarian.”

For Deleuze and Guattari, the relationship between minority and minoritarian is one of agency. While minorities “are objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity, or sex with their own ghetto territorialities,” in the process of their “deterritorializations of the mean or majority” they become minoritarian. Instead of, “using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing,” which is not revolutionary, “by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen autonomous becoming” or, the minoritarian. With a level of agency denied the ‘minority’ subject, the minoritarian takes minority cultural elements, defined by majority culture, and remixes them to constitute a minoritarian consciousness, oppositional but also assimilable (and tactically concealable) within majority culture.

Muñoz interchanges his metaphor of ‘song’ with ‘fiction’ to stand in for ‘the mastering plot’ of majority culture. Muñoz describes “nonfiction, or, more nearly, autobiography, [as] a rehearsal for fiction.” In other words autobiography, an attempt to truly represent the self, is secondary to the fictional self, which takes epistemic priority for Muñoz. Muñoz is referring specifically to the works of James Arthur Baldwin, an openly homosexual, Black American writer from Harlem, who was influenced by poets of the Harlem Renaissance. In his semi-autobiographical works of fiction, Muñoz explains, Baldwin “did not indulge the project of camouflaging an authorial surrogate. Instead, he produced a fiction that abounded with stand-

169 Ibid., 106.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 19.
Such stand-ins were fictional proxies of Baldwin himself, his brother, his lovers, and so on. The author never attempted to hide the substitution, using their same names, as in *The Devil Finds Work*. As such, Muñoz describes

fiction as a ‘technology of the self.’ This self is a disidentificatory self whose relation to the social is not overdetermined by universalizing rhetorics of selfhood. The ‘real self’ who comes into being through fiction is not the self who produces fiction, but is instead produced by fiction. Binaries finally begin to falter and fiction becomes the real; which is to say that the truth effect of ideological grids is broken down through Baldwin’s disidentification with the notion of fiction – and it does not stop here: fiction then becomes a contested field of self-production.

Fiction, like the songs already discussed, produce the fictional self (or singer, in the song analogy). But this is not to say that the fictional self is not real. The minoritarian’s fictional self is as real as the fiction of majority culture’s mastering tale that interpellates the subject into its plot. If the construction of majority culture is just that, a fiction, then the minoritarian who stages her own self-creation engages in a resistance commensurate with that of the majority culture – i.e. in a world of fiction.

For minoritarians a tension exists between the phantasm of normative citizenship, a fiction, and their very real demands on our bodies. Returning to the epigraph that launched this chapter, I want to again draw attention to the dispute between Thom and the anonymous commenter, Bagz. The latter’s demands to know the identities of the catty judges that are ‘making’ Thom assimilate and prove their worth as a citizen target the blurry sensations of reality felt by minoritarians, calling it “paranoia.” No, we are not paranoid, but we are sometimes caught in a peculiar position of not even knowing how to perceive our own realities. Tripped up

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by this major paradox, we cannot prove that the demands of normative citizenship are real because they are, indeed, fictions. And fiction is real.

To better articulate the paradoxical assertion that fiction is real, I turn to one of the key feminists of colour whose work disidentification is based on. Muñoz dedicates disidentification as politically indebted to, among others, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1981 anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.177 In Muñoz’s words, “Bridge represented a crucial break in gender studies” in that it irrevocably challenged the “naïve positioning of gender as the primary and singular node of difference” unifying the capital ‘F’ Feminist Subject.178 For Muñoz, Bridge is itself “an example of disidentification as a political strategy.”179 Muñoz follows Norma Alarcón’s assertion, a contributor to the volume, to suggest that Bridge did not identify with the essentialized female subject, which “by default ... was the middle-class white woman” or engage in counteridentification “locked in a struggle to the death with ‘Man.’” Instead, Bridge enabled “a politics of disidentification” in that it “superseded the limits of feminism... calculat[ing] multiple antagonisms that index issues of class, gender, and race, as well as sexuality.”180 Like disidentification, Bridge acted as a dialectic resolution of feminist identification with Woman and counteridentification against Man.

In a later writing, Gloria Anzaldúa articulates a reality based in fiction and rooted in the materiality of physiology. Anzaldúa asserts that,

…everything is real. Fiction is as true as whatever happened literally to people...The body does not discern between different kinds of stimuli; the body doesn’t distinguish between what happens in the imagination and what happens in

178 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 22.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
the material world. Every time you have a nightmare or think about meeting someone, your mental/emotional scenario makes you nervous and flustered. The body responds. The body mediates these two realities; it is in the body that they coexist. There’s frustration in trying to separate the two and in making distinctions between them. We, the body, are the union, and that’s part of the frustration in trying to mediate between the two. You see yourself as a body going through these things, like in a film … your dream body (your imagined body) is actually walking on the ocean, by the hillside… It’s real. That’s what I meant about fiction not being fiction, or being real. Either that or everything is fiction, but it’s not one or the other. What happens in the imagination is not fiction.181

In this passage, Anzaldúa wedges open a space for describing fiction as a reality, rooted in the body. Anzaldúa’s insight, everything is both real and fictive, is instructive. The notion of fictional realness connects, but does not collapse, the real and the fictive through physiology, rejecting the secondary epistemic status too often ascribed to fiction and the imagination. What happens in the imagination is both fiction and reality. What marks my body in fantasy and/or reality is indiscernible from that which marks my physical body; they coexist. The frustration of being trapped by the paradox of majority culture’s fiction is, for Anzaldúa, a physiological reality. Not only are they real – the songs, the fictions, and the ‘mastering plots’ of majority culture – but so too are the minoritarian experiences of our interpellation into those fictions. The faceless conditions moulding our experiences of citizenship are specters that are as real as the ground we stand on.

And so, my fictional minoritarian consciousness – ManChyna – becomes as real as the songs he sings, or the fictional codes of normative citizenship he resists and assimilates into; such consciousness, like disidentification, is also indebted to the works of radical feminists of colour. To reiterate, my cyclic methodologies of encoding/decoding are both disidentification (performance) and disassimilation (disidentification with assimilation and the theorization of this process based on my performance). These interconnected lenses of analysis and creation are

undergirded by the performance of ManChyna as a fictive minoritarian consciousness, a fictive (and real) surrogate for myself. This disidentificatory self resonates politically with the body of scholarship that follow in the groundbreaking work of *Bridge* and its contributors. The works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Gayatri Spivak, Toni Morrison, and more recent contributions to Indigenous and anti-racist feminist literature by Andrea Smith, Sunera Thobani, Sherene Razack, and Iyko Day all guide my analysis here.

The minoritarian consciousness of ManChyna, for example, is anticipated by Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness.” In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval represents the works of major postmodern thinkers as paralleling, interconnecting with, as well as diverging from and silencing the de-colonial activities of subjugated people who comprised “the great global movements for decolonization of the twentieth century.” The latter, Sandoval asserts, are the ones who ultimately “undermined the rationality and philosophical moorings of Western man.” In other words, Sandoval argues that this important unmooring is not the sole work of hegemonic U.S. feminists or continental philosophers, but was appropriated by such allies from movements like U.S. third world feminism.

Most importantly, “differential consciousness” represents, for Sandoval, a fifth form of oppositional consciousness utilized by profoundly varying subordinated constituencies. The four

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183 Ibid., 185.
184 Ibid.
previously intelligible modes of opposition are *modernist* forms thinking within social movements: the “equal rights,” “revolutionary,” “supremacist,” and “separatist” forms of oppositional consciousness. In Sandoval’s description,

> the fifth, differential mode is utilized as a theoretical and methodological device for retroactively clarifying and giving new meaning to any other. Differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register. Its powers can be thought of as mobile—not nomadic, but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners.

Sandoval continues, the differential, “enables movement ‘between and among’ ideological positionings (the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness).” And even though for analytic purposes Sandoval describes it as a ‘fifth form,’ “[t]he differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises [among the other four]. Yet the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative.” Sandoval offers the differential as a dialectical emergence out of the other forms of oppositional consciousness to transform “each ideology-praxis, … into tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power…. [the differential is a] political revision that denied any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a tactical subjectivity with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved.” Theorizing the differential is Sandoval’s response to the postmodernist impulse of hegemonic feminism of the

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186 Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*.
187 Ibid., 43.
188 Ibid., 57.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid., 58-58.
1980s, rendering legible once again the feminist thinkers of colour whose ideas were once poached by and made invisible by white academics contributing to an apolitical postmodernism.

Differential consciousness intervenes against academic postmodernism’s perceived flattening of political hierarchies without a modernist political agenda, resonating with disidentification as a political strategy. Sandoval re-presents postmodernism’s flattened politics to articulate a disidentificatory strategy that is tied to neither postmodernity’s horizontal dispersion of power nor modernity’s vertical hierarchy of power. Take for example, Sandoval’s description of Frederic Jameson’s manifesto on the theme of ‘postmodernism.’ Jameson’s manifesto is a lament over “the death of [a] more virtuous time,” of modernism in art epitomized by Picasso and van Gogh, “a time when, although forms of oppression were more obvious, the ability to construct a moral and oppositional stance was easier to locate and defend.” For Sandoval, Jameson’s manifesto represents a binary of power:

> These two conceptions of power, the “sovereign,” pyramidal understanding, and the postmodern, horizontal understanding, structure much of the theoretical and pedagogical debate in the humanities, informing such positions as Jameson’s, who talks about an epistemic shift that figures the postmodern as inherently “superficial” or flat, and the modern as inherently deep.

Sandoval’s differential consciousness is something else altogether, a strategic third space that combines “flat with deep:”

To recognize the activity of a differential form of oppositional consciousness, [Anzaldúa’s] “la conciencia de la mestiza,” the activity of a “strategic essentialism” as Gayatri Spivak puts it, of “U.S. third world” or “third space” feminism, however, demands that power be recognized as a site of multidimensionality. To combine flat with deep deterritorializes the space of power one more time in a fashion that

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191 Ibid., 18.
192 Ibid., 75.
makes the journeys, paths, fields, and networks of differential consciousness representable.193

Vis-à-vis differential consciousness, Sandoval already articulates the minoritarian consciousness of ManChyna’s disidentifications. The fiction of majority culture’s power is described as a site of multidimensionality that must be deterritorialized, as Deleuze and Guattari might put it, on its own fictional terms. Reading Muñoz and Sandoval together, differential, or minoritarian consciousness are rendered intelligible within the fiction of majority culture (or song) by combining flat and deep politics in a strategy of disidentification with and against that same culture – a fiction within a fiction, but still resisting the latter as a politics of survival.

Differential consciousness bears on ManChyna lyrics as it describes my operation within the boundaries of majority culture and how disidentification can be used to evade its gaze. A (white) friend of mine once described my rhymes as ‘references to references to references,’ like an onion without a core. I am paraphrasing the comment, which was intended as a humorous compliment. The complimentary intention lay in the reading of my song writing as a horizontal network of signification, like Pop Art irony that challenges the notion of fine art through its recycling of popular cultural imagery. Whatever the intention, the description vexes me as a derisive characterization of my work as some postmodern play with surfaces, politically bankrupt. Yet majoritarian misrecognition is the point of minoritarian consciousness. Disidentification and disassimilation enable minoritarian evasion of cultural discipline while still allowing recognition of other minoritarians by other minoritarians, hearing the shared song that we

\[193\] Ibid., 75-76.
sing (or rap) to each other. An Asian audience member once said to me on my way to my dressing room, "as an Asian and gay person, I get it. I get what you're doing." For many, my referential torrent of lyrics, visuals, and performances might place my work in a lineage of apolitical postmodernism. “Cute kid. Typical Canadian.... love that irreverence with a layer of reverence” as one commenter puts it, describing my video for “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012). I am recognized as Canadian – for me, a rare discursive inclusion as a member of a Canadian majority – for my humorous irreverence that is still perceived as reverential of Canadian rurality and the queer cultural referents I feature. But for some minoritarians who share a differential and oppositional consciousness, through the torrent of irreverence they can still hear my swishy and evasive critique of majority culture.

Disidentifications within ManChyna texts: Multiplicity and Contradictions of Self, Whiteness, and Resistance

Disidentifying with major cultural fictions frames the pluralism and paradoxes of ManChyna. In the previous section, I described the general spirit of evasiveness-as-survival; its connections to a political spirit are often (and intentionally) opaque and seemingly apolitical by necessity. I list now the specific elements of my work as ManChyna, which directly tie into the disidentificatory spirit of disassimilation. The first is the multi-naming practices of ManChyna as a politics of survival and adaptability within the parameters set by majority culture. The second comprises the contradictions derived

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194 May 2012, Inside Out Film Festival, Local Heroes Party, Buddies in Bad Times (Toronto, Ontario).
from the multiplicity of these naming practices. Such contradictions map onto my
disassimilation with a multi-pillared framework of assimilatory promise. This ethos of
mapping takes us to the autoethnographic mapping of social spaces characterized by my
methodology.

*Rap’s Queerness, Disidentification, and Embodying Contradictions*

In the family of queer rappers/thinkers, I am not alone in my affinity with Muñoz’s
performative theory of disidentification. Tim’m West (founding member of hip-hop group
DeepDickollective (D/DC)) similarly maps disidentification onto his group’s ironic
ambivalences with socio-musical categories. West especially points to D/DC’s partial affinity
with Blackness and masculinity in hip-hop, describing an existentially dichotomous choice for
openly queer rappers making music in the 1990s and early 2000s. The false dichotomy for West
opposes the incorporation of hip-hop-associated homophobia (self-hate) with its rejection (self-
love), or as he puts it “‘hate hip-hop, or love it and hate yourself.’”\footnote{Tim’m West, “Keepin’ It Real: Disidentification and Its Discontents,” ed. Harry J. Elam and Kennell A. Jackson, Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 165.} West and D/DC aim to do
neither; they neither directly resist this kind of thinking nor do they directly assimilate into it. For
the group, West explains, “this third modality of disidentification is the gay rapper’s partial
assimilation of hip-hop ideology while she or he simultaneously works to *deconstruct* it.”\footnote{Ibid., 164.} The
false choice between loving hip-hop and one’s queer self elaborates the fiction produced within
the fiction of whiteness that hip-hop, Blackness, and masculinity are antithetical to queerness.
In a deeply historical way, hip-hop is and always was already *queer*. Calling hip-hop queer is not, as Rinaldo Walcott warns against, a revision of history or playing with language.\(^{198}\) For some, queerness and hip-hop might be considered discontinuous with each other; West hints at this. My own discontinuity with hip-hop is manifold. Yet I make sense of such discontinuity first by transiting through the queerness of Blackness as a racialized and diasporic site of queerness, a specific relationship that I will never fully be able to translate through my own body. My own performance of racialized queerness, however, bears an interconnected relationship to the Blackness of hip-hop in the form of Asian and queer complicity in anti-Blackness and an associable responsibility in fighting against the latter. I make sense of my queer and Asian relationship to this interrelated struggle by way of the contradictions and dissonances at the core of my work, the negative social images I employ that resonate with Tim’m West’s work with D/DC.

In some ways, the relationship of queerness and hip-hop follows from the conjoined nature of Black and queer politics. In “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” Cathy Cohen raises the concern of an unequal array of relationships to power within an emerging queer politics that is coded with class, race, and gender privilege;\(^{199}\) she laments that queerness in its whitened form has “lost its potential to be a politically expedient organizing tool for addressing the needs—and mobilizing the bodies—of people of color.”\(^{200}\) Cohen works through a relationship between Blackness and queerness as one that comprises multifaceted experiences of marginalization, which accrue variable material independence and access to queer resistance.

\(^{200}\) Ibid., 449.
Cohen reminds us that such variability in material independence is always already a function of anti-Black racialization. As such, Cohen challenges the narrow understanding of ‘queer,’ as it was being constructed in the time around her essay’s publication, to be falsely inclusionary and revolutionary because of its implied exclusion of people of colour, women, and working class folks from its fluid category of political resistance. Following this challenge, Cohen envisions a different kind of cross-social solidarity that does not rely on a homo/heterosexual divide.

Working through Black and queer marginality, the figures of Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens comprise a non-literal relationship between Blackness and queerness – not as analogies but as being more deeply connected forms of marginality rooted in class and race. Through these seemingly contemptible figures, Cohen imagines a “radical politics built not exclusively on [sexual] identities, but on identities as they are invested with varying degrees of normative power.”

In a literal sense, however, the covertiness of hip-hop’s queerness is inherited from its cultural antecedents like the Harlem Renaissance. Reiland Rabaka, like other writers, ties hip hop culture to the creative movements of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, but also widens these connections through his genealogy of cultural aesthetic movements like “[the controlling images of] minstrelism, the [aesthetic radicalism of the] Harlem Renaissance, 

\[201\] Ibid., 452.

\[202\] Jeff Chang, for example, writes of the creative and educational connection between the Black Arts Movement and emerging Long Island rap crews, including a nascent Public Enemy, through the jazz drummer and African American Studies professor, Andrei Strobert. Strobert was, as Chang writes, “creatively and literally fed” by the Black Arts Movement and in turn inspired “Bill, Harry, Andre, and Chuck – usually back of the class kind of guys – [who] were in the front row for all of Strobert’s lectures” in his ‘Black Music and Musicians’ class (Chang 2005, 240). Marvin J. Gladney (1995) also connects elements of anger, black self-determination, and ‘black aesthetics’ of the Black Arts Movement with hip hop culture. See also Dr. Robert J. Price for a comparison and contrast of the Harlem Renaissance and hip hop culture’s overlapping themes (Price 2005).
the Black Arts movement, and the Feminist Art movement.” Rabaka emphasizes the erasure of the Black Women’s Club movement’s importance to the New Negro movement as well as the central role of gay and lesbian writers during the Harlem Renaissance. Rabaka argues the “centrality of bisexuality, homosexuality, and transgressive sexuality within the world of the Harlem Renaissance… was masked” and goes on to note that it “is interesting to observe the ways in which homosexuality and homoeroticism was hidden during the Harlem Renaissance, similar to the ways they are frequently hidden in rap music and contemporary hip hop culture.” Rabaka argues for a more comprehensive connection between hip-hop and its great cultural antecedents like the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to linking “the anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonialist artistry and activism of the radicals of the Renaissance” with hip-hop today, Rabaka also urges us to remember “those Renaissance radicals who embraced explicitly feminist/womanist and homosexual identities [that] have rarely been revered for their heroism and key contributions to the Renaissance and the wider struggle for civil rights and social justice.” In addition to the importance of queer contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and the Hip Hop Generation, we must also recall that hip-hop’s first forays into the popular imagination as inextricably queer.

Scott Poulson-Bryant argues that hip-hop’s first radio hit, “Rapper’s Delight” (Sugarhill Gang 1979), evinces the creative inextricability of queerness and hip-hop. Poulson-Bryant argues that while, “rap music, sonically and vocally [was] birthed from a polycultural mix of influences,

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205 Rabaka, “Hip Hop’s Inheritance,” 64-65.

206 Ibid., 70.
including the African griot tradition, Caribbean dub music, and loops of Black American percussive funk breaks,” it is also “queer, having found its commercial foothold through the aural nuances of disco, most notably, The Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight,’ [and] its music track built from a replayed break of Chic’s ‘Good Times.’”

Poulson-Bryant argues that the symbiotic relationship between “Rapper’s Delight” and “Good Times” not only linked disco and rap fans vis-à-vis radio crossover and DJ sets, but also at a deeper level of aspiration:

through this sonic linkage, “Rapper’s Delight” helped to sell rap music’s aspirational, consumerist ethos to the masses. Disco… was [also] aspirational music: it trafficked in glamour; it sold a vision of access, of high living, of escape from the mundane. It was, in many ways…a singular soundtrack of American Dreaming. And who dreamed harder, made their dreams (and nightmares) the stuff of publicly rendered fantasy better than rappers?208

Disco articulated, Poulson-Bryant continues, “a different kind of pleasure, the pleasure of marginalized bodies, female, gay, trans, Black, Latino,”209 and in so doing, found a natural ally in an emergent hip hop.210 The struggle for economic escape, of access to high living denied to so many among the multiracial, sexually diverse generations of hip hop and disco, is a site for solidarity across racial and sexual difference; but this is a fact, as Poulson-Bryant laments, too many now forget.

208 Ibid.
209 Ibid., 216.
210 As several writers point out, the marginalization of disco in the U.S. mainstream was a racially and sexually codified backlash – by largely white, masculine rock fans – against its celebration of non-heteronormative sexuality and multiracial pleasures. See Tim Lawrence’s history of 1970s disco, Love Saves the Day (2004) and Peter Shapiro’s Turn the Beat Around (2005).
The relationship between Blackness, queerness, hip-hop, and disco re-emerge in other Black cultural forms such as vogueing and ball culture, which reconnect the defiance of both the repetitive dance beats of disco and hip hop. As Poulson-Bryant describes of his own experiences:

Voguing looked, to my neophyte eyes—new to social, public ‘gayness,’ new to the rarified, hothouse intensity of gay club life—as brazen and candid as rap music had sounded. It registered as something defiant in presentation yet simple and declarative in tone; as self-making; as powerful. …I saw … the similarities in both forms, in vogueing bodies and rapping voices, and the gender-fucking and -enhancing methods they both used to self-referentialize both the experience of being a “brown body” on the public stage and the homosocial valences of that experience. \(^{211}\)

Poulson-Bryant goes on to “align hip hop with ball culture,” believing “that these brown bodies were actively theorizing through their physical and vocal aesthetic labor on the performance of race, gender, class, and sexuality by marginalized communities in American society.”\(^{212}\) Tavia Nyong’o similarly traces a genealogy between explicitly queer hip-hop musicians working today with the “fabulated queer subcultural history” of ball culture. This history, for Nyong’o, forms a “non-visible pathway in the atmosphere” along which the seemingly random path of lightning (as he describes queer hip hop) takes, “called a dark precursor.”\(^{213}\) Zebra Katz and Azealia Banks, New York hip hop acts who have produced,

[t]racks such as “Ima Read” [Zebra Katz and Njena Reddd Foxxx, 2012] and “Fierce” [Azealia Banks, 2012] are signs that a generation has come up since the 1990 release of Paris Is Burning … As a hip hop mixtape, Fantasea [Banks, 2012] plunders the idiom and attitude of the vogue ball house scene with a relish not seen since Madonna’s notorious single “Vogue.” But [while] Madonna …[turned] a black and Latino underground music and dance scene into an homage to white icons like “Dietrich and DiMaggio”… Azealia and her collaborators are immersed in the idiom of the balls—“work,” “ki ki,” “banjee,” “read,” “house,” “bitch,” “trade,” “queen,” “mop,” “miss thing,” and, of course, “fierce.” Drawing on their dark precursors, these young fabulists take fierceness as a property of black being singular plural. Sonically and lyrically,

\(^{212}\) Ibid., 215.
Banks’s beats and rhymes exhibit an open willingness, unperturbed by commercial orthodoxies, to draw on queer sonic memories and imaginaries.\(^{214}\) A similar confluence of vogue, disco, and rap exists in the works of many other queer rappers, Le1f (NYC) and AB SOTO (L.A.) for example, artists who take for granted the logical and implicit connections between these cultural forms. The relationship between Blackness, queerness, hip-hop, and disco are always already intertwined and interweaving with a specific history and ongoing cultural evolution. Thus, a growing number of scholars reject the superficial claim that hip-hop is antithetical to queerness.

To clarify, this is not a celebration of queer hip-hop as a novelty, a trend to be engulfed by the embrace of capital. Neither is the claim suggestive of the more insidious notion that the union of queerness and hip-hop represents a ‘modernization’ of a putatively pathological Black cultural form. Instead, this intellectual project represents imagining queerness and hip hop as deeply connected, creatively, historically, and presently in order to imagine a hopeful future for hip-hop while remembering its vibrant queer past. I read this rejection of traditional notions about hip-hop as a disidentification with the popular images of hip-hop culture and its participants. Such rejection strategically redeploy the circulating images of Blackness and masculinity associated with the international and capitalist force of hip-hop as something utilitarian.

Tim’m West’s disidentification with hip-hop similarly rejects and re-circuits the popular notions associated with hip-hop into a ‘counter-Lordean’ strategy of resistance. West’s explanation of the third modality of hip-hop engagement as a queer rapper resonates with my own creative practice. West speaks of the ‘double-edged sword’ of wielding negative stereotypes

\(^{214}\) Ibid.
(the “gangstas, pimps, and hoes” in Rose’s description of contracting images). The double-edge is the bidirectional pull of love and hate for hip-hop, a burden and a blessing for West. I regard these contradictions as dissonant but useful tensions. Again, my own practice contains a core of dissonant ideas – contradictory celebrations of minoritarian negations and their uses in political resistance. In the realm of queer and Asian stereotypes, I deploy and simultaneously deplore them in the vein of transgender rapper “jezebel” Katey Red, or “homo thug” Young Harith. A similar tension is central to my deployment of regressive language in my lyrics (for example, “bitches,” “fags,” etc.) and visuals. For West, hip-hop by homos, or ‘homo-hop,’ ‘makes do’ with the cultural medium of hip-hop with all its attendant associations about Black manhood. In what West refers to as a ‘counter-Lordean’ strategy, he suggests that, “[i]t is possible that the disidentificatory performances that Muñoz refers to suggest something different—that it is indeed possible to use the master's tools to construct a different kind of house, or perhaps a shelter different from a house.”

The embodiment of negative stereotypes is a double-edged sword for the minoritarian – especially racialized queer and trans – performers of hip-hop. West calls this both a burden and blessing of disidentificatory practice in hip-hop, especially among its queer constituency. It is this same double-edged sword that transgender rapper Katey Red assumes when she ‘passes’ as a codified black jezebel figure similar to Trina. It's what happens when homo thug rapper Young Harith declares, ‘I don't fuck around with simple ass people, the niggas I deal with be bustin like Rhymes, Jump in the Ranger just to load up the clip and the 9, and roll up to a spot where some haters talk shit.”

West’s explanation of his and others’ music with disidentification resonates with Vaginal Créme Davis. Davis wields the same double-edged sword when she subverts the social fabric with her

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216 Ibid., 182.
explosive embodiment of contradictory logics, both hateful and lustful. West and I each find resonance with disidentification as an inherently hopeful theoretical framework in a seemingly hopeless trap. Via this theory, we also find resonance in the space between our decidedly different aesthetics and musical projects, defined by different and unequal but related racialized masculinities and sexualities. It is a brief critical moment within a troubling framework by which we are consumed.

I understand West’s explanation, of the tension between wholeheartedly embracing hip-hop and keeping it at arm’s length, as an iteration of his double consciousness. Love and politics can pull in opposite directions. Davis, for example, ‘loves’ or at least desires both the racialized and the white supremacist ‘Clarences.’ I imagine the frustration of explaining oneself to emerge from the contradiction of love and hate for hip-hop. The explanation seeks to reconcile, if not only one’s ‘love’ for a majoritarian culture that contemptibly consumes hip-hop, at least one’s knotted involvement in it; he seeks to reconcile the tension of his double consciousness within hip-hop. W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* introduces the notion of double-consciousness as the

...sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.  

Du Bois goes on in *Souls* to describe such strife as, “a longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to *merge his double self into a better and truer self*” and yet “[i]n this merging he wishes neither

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of the older selves be lost” (emphasis added). In Du Bois’ wish to maintain plurality, he is conscious of the will to merge his twoness into a Cartesian unity of mind. The strife Du Bois names with double-consciousness identifies a fundamental battle between unity and plurality. I see in West’s explanation an urge to represent a complete picture of oneself, without contradiction. I hear a man forcefully reconciling two ‘warring ideals in one dark body.’

I similarly embrace and ambivalently disassociate from the contradictory and negative aspects of my performance as a disidentificatory tactic. I reproduce some of D/DC’s imagery and lyrics in my own work: aggressive ‘top’ masculinity that centers the phallus, abject hypersexuality of coloured and queer bodies, and other negative codes within dominant western imaginations. We disidentify with majoritarian codes of minoritarian negation to disassimilate into the fictions of its cultures. For West and myself, our disidentificatory performances open a space to build strategic shelter from phobic publics. Such shelter can come in another form of contradiction and dissonance that manifests the strife Du Bois writes about – multiplicity in service to adaptation.

Multiplicity, Names, and Adaptability

Nearly twenty years after the publication of Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, a Biomythography by Audre Lorde (1982), Jay-Z taped a performance eventually broadcast as part of MTV’s Unplugged series. Sitting on a stool, wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt and jokingly referring to the session as ‘Jay-Z’s poetry reading,’ Jay-Z begins his performance by stating that ‘I go by a couple of names … sometimes they call me Jay-Z, sometimes they call me Jigga, sometimes they call me young hov’ [Iceberg], tonight I’m ‘H to the Izzo, V to the Izza’ [sung by vocalist Jaguar Wright].’ Here Jay-Z articulates what has been a time-tested practice in hip hop – that of the multiple persona. But whereas most hip hop artists simply adopt alternative personas, often referencing underground drug lords or fictional Mafioso figures, Jay-Z created a complex ‘hip hop’ identity that speak to concepts such as fluidity, mobility, and social capital … [A]mong

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218 Ibid.
so-called hip hop moguls, including Jay-Z, a ‘major aspect of the mogul’s utopian sense of freedom is one of identity shifting, or at least, identity layering.’

Mark Anthony Neal links works by two Black poets, Audre Lorde and Jay-Z, separated by the majority of hip-hop’s existence in the popular imaginary. The first, by Lorde, fully articulates a “conceptualization of a complex black identity,” presenting Lorde’s Black and lesbian identities as fluid aspects of her transnational migrations. Neal highlights the fluidity of Lorde’s self-determination as a “dark precursor” to which Jay-Z might trace his own fluid multiplicity. Neal’s connection of these two is a specific instantiation of the queerness of Blackness and hip-hop. In this tradition, at the site of hip-hop’s queerness and Blackness, ManChyna is birthed from the poly-naming practices of both burlesque and hip-hop.

To my understanding, referring to a burlesque dancer by any name other than their chosen stage persona in media, backstage, and especially on-stage, is considered discourteous. Many such performers historically have maintained strict boundaries between personal and performing lives. Sociologists Charles McCaghy and James Skipper assert that this practice is an adaptation learned by dancers to minimize unwanted sexual attention from admirers and a “pariah label” from sexually conservative publics outside the theatre. Maria-Elena Buszek offers another reading of the tradition. According to Buszek, nineteenth century American burlesque ‘leg-show’ dancers parodied ballet, striptease, and popular Romantic stories from the mainstream stage. Within this tradition, Buszek suggests that the creation of stage names by

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220 Ibid., 156.
burlesque dancers was only part of a more sexually and politically subversive spirit among the sexually modern, self-aware white women of the burlesque stage. Such women transgressed the Victorian binary of ‘honest’ and ‘public’ women within the walls of the theatre space, offering complex and multiplicitous gender and sexual identities on and off-stage, emblematized by their playful names. In transgressing the socio-sexual mores attached to identities available to Victorian era women, burlesque dancers’ chosen names, tied to alternative identities, queered traditional identities and manifested a unique, performative navigation of the conditions of womanhood.

While different and distinct from burlesque, the naming practices in hip-hop are just as important to adapt and navigate the conditions within which one lives. One difference between the two practices is that the boundaries between on and off-stage names in hip-hop appear less strict in hip-hop. When Mark Anthony Neal refers to “the mogul’s utopian sense of freedom” in their “identity shifting” or “identity layering” using different pseudonyms, he is critically celebrating Jay-Z’s unique “collapsing of stage(d) personas and ‘real’ identities.”

It is this opposite pull toward unification of identity, rather than divergence, that distinguishes the poly-naming practices of burlesque and hip-hop. Authenticity of character in hip-hop (a topic too greatly contested to give full consideration here) demands unity of a performer’s presentation of identity. This demand seemingly works in the opposite direction of the proliferation of identities relished on the burlesque stage, upon which one performer can play with many characters at different times on different stages, without being debased as inauthentic. Taking Ronald A.T. Judy’s definition of “authenticity in hip hop as ‘adaptation to the force of commodification,’” however, Neal suggests that Jay-Z’s careful management of his many names (Hova, Jigga, S.

Carter, and so on) represents a unique navigation of the recording industry, ghetto myths, and the evolution of hip-hop. Such navigation may even be read as embodying Jay-Z’s efforts amid his capitalist successes in the hip-hop marketplace, to destabilize “essential ‘nigga’” images and to reconstruct notions of authenticity, by embracing a “post ‘nigga’” identity – one of multiple selves and utility.\(^{224}\)

In reading this self-destabilization of Jay-Z’s identity as discontinuous and non-locatable, Neal reads it through Fred Moten’s articulation of discontinuity and queerness. As Moten suggests, “Art tries to fictionalize and/or redeploy such location among other things… What one begins to consider, as a function of the nonlocalizable nature or status of discontinuity, is a special universalization of discontinuity, where discontinuity could be figured as ubiquitous minority, omnipresent queerness.”\(^{225}\) Thus, Neal suggests, “within the context of hip hop, flow … retains its utility in the service of adaptability, but this notion of adaptability is less about fluidity and more so the matter of managing discontinuity, or in this particular case, the management of Jay-Z’s queerness.”\(^{226}\) Neal does not ascribe literal queerness to Jay-Z, but rather to his management of discontinuity that destabilizes the contradictory categories assigned to him in the public eye, at the nexus of Black masculinity.

As ManChyna, I put this management of discontinuity in contrast and in conversation with the burlesque tradition. Burlesque emphasizes taking space between categories, wrenching them apart, re-imagining gender and sexual identities as fluid and multiple. The re-imagined proliferation or \textit{expansion} of possibilities, a queering practice, can also be read as an adaptation

\(^{224}\) Ibid., 160.


\(^{226}\) Neal, “Trafficking in Monikers,” 160.
to the limited possibilities available to Victorian era women. In Neal’s non-traditional reading of his multiple names, Jay-Z *collapses* his multiple identities as a discontinuous adaptation to the conflicting images of Black masculinity – a queering of the “essential ‘nigga,’” according to Neal. Both, however, are still adaptations, queer in their own ways, and utilitarian deployments of poly-naming practices.

The rapper closer to my own style, Peaches, more closely gets at the heart of ManChyna’s performance of multiplicity in service of adaptation to social demands. I once asked Peaches about the multiplicity of her name, to which she says, “I don’t think mine’s a multiple personality. I just always called it an extension of myself.” This is in response to my line of inquiry about another electroclash artist, Misty Martinez, who in later years dropped her own stage persona. Peaches suggested, “[m]aybe that’s the problem [with Misty Martinez]. Maybe it wasn’t really part of her.” In Peaches’ case, Peaches is an extension of herself. Peaches is not necessarily ‘revealing’ an aspect of her self that is usually concealed, but rather describes Peaches as a branch of her ambivalent ‘self,’ extended in service of her performance. And that performance, coupled with Peaches’ reflection on it, suggests to me something about how she navigates social terms of acceptability. Later in our conversation, Peaches tells me, “I want to be seen as mainstream” in relation to more alternative acts that we discuss whose obscene displays of sexuality exceed even her own. This desire for mainstream acceptability gets at the heart of ManChyna’s performance, more so than Jay-Z’s multimillion-dollar empire (an experience I cannot relate to). Considering Jay-Z’s authenticity as the merging of multiple identities into a self-destabilizing, queerly essentialized character, one can also describe Peaches’ ‘non-multiple’

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227 Quoted in Andrew Lee, “Peaches Has Some Advice For You”
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
multiplicity as such. In our telephone conversation Peaches insists on, what I read as, a queer unity of multiplicity – a disidentification with multiplicity. But interestingly, through Peaches’ literal and visually performed queerness, she also embodies the other sensibility of queerness I index with burlesque: making and taking space onstage for the expression of complex and multiplicitous gender and sexual identities. The polyvalent queerness of collapse and proliferation that I read in Peaches’ multiplicity gets at the heart of adaptation and assimilation into the ‘mainstream’ that ManChyna performs as well as critiques.

*Mirroring the Multiplicity and Contradictions of the New Whiteness*

ManChyna's multiplicity recycles and disidentifies with the notion of individual plurality in order to target the fictional conditions of majority culture in my disassimilatory analysis. It is the contradictory conditions of a new kind of whiteness that my strategy of disidentified multiplicity is meant to evade, assimilate into, and simultaneously resist for the very reason that those fictional conditions of majority culture are similarly evasive and tactical in their detainment of minoritarians. The multiplicity of ManChyna thus deploys a paradoxical bivalence of collapsing and proliferating identity as a strategy for survival within the contradictory conditions of a fictional majority culture. My ambivalence with both plurality and unity is meant to mimic the ambivalence of majority culture with its own fictions. My individual nonlocalizabilitiy in art points to the nonlocalizability of majoritarian conditions, holding a cracked mirror up to the evolution of its own contradictory tale of modernity.

My specific target is the contradictory multiplicity of whiteness, tactical and strategic in its transformations. The relationship between the contradictions of majority culture and minoritarian resistance cannot be understood as classical power relations. They are instead better described by the instability that Foucault ascribes to both power and resistance. As Foucault
teaches us, power is omnipresent, emanating from everywhere in a network of relations, at every point and in every moment. But it is Foucault’s description of power as a “moving substrate of force relations … [as] always local and unstable” that has implications for my understanding of the contradictions inherent in the new whiteness. One might target a “multiplicity of discursive elements” – or cultural texts like speech acts, creative productions, cultural representations, and so on – to render fragile the dominant language of culture so as to thwart it. Yet, the target is always moving, continuously changing and evolving – an “unstable process.” We might describe these processes from a resistant position, exposing it and undermining it through acts of discursive refusal. But if we are always already moving with our target – being consumed by the moving substrate of power – in order to capture its complexity and instability, what stable frame of reference can our utterances hope to use to capture it? Is it possible to articulate the contours of the ever-present yet evasive conditions of power that always already threaten to overwhelm us? If we minoritarians seem conflicted and confused – “paranoid,” or “conflating” history with individual experience, in the words of commenter Bagz – it is because the very monster that attempts to consume us is inherently contradictory.

Consider the racial marker of inclusion and exclusion in colonial states, whiteness. As I explore further in Chapter 2, white purity was and continues to be the marker par excellence of Canadian inclusion into the settler colonial state. Minoritarians might learn to navigate the hierarchy of white supremacy in our own varied ways. But, in Chapters 3 and 4, I connect my work and experiences to lessons from scholars about liberal multiculturalism, which teach us

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230 Foucault, History of Sexuality Vol. 1, 93.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid., 100-101.
233 Ibid.
about the practical economic forces that create the liberal impulse of inclusion vis-à-vis difference. This is a novel phenomenon, emerging with its own rules of belonging. Such dictates of inclusion, considered alongside the exaltation of whiteness, are exhaustingly contradictory (“be more like us, be less like us!”). As ManChyna, I am especially critical of the sacraments of whiteness as empty gestures of inclusion offered to minoritarians. Some minoritarians might shift with the demands of majority culture, to the degree that our unequal locations allow. Our navigations of these conditions may appear full of contradictions for the very reason that they mirror the dominant culture’s own contradictions of power.

My ambivalent relationship with the new whiteness’ shape shifting is exemplified by the multiple voices of *Moby Dick.*\(^{234}\) I open this text by telling you, the reader, to call me ManChyna, *or whatever.* It is an ambivalent nod to the plurality built into Melville’s opening line, “Call me Ishmael,”\(^ {235}\) introducing the enigmatic narrator. I invite you to call me ManChyna, but then again you can call me, “*whatever;*” my unity as an individual performer matters as much to me as the unity of the standard language used to represent me. It is that standard language, a lie representing the ever-shifting code of majoritarian whiteness, which is my ultimate target. And if whiteness is my whale, I disidentify with the double voice of Melville’s narrator-protagonist, Ishmael/Ahab. Melville does not open *Moby Dick* with the monomaniacal Captain Ahab obsessed with killing his white whale, but with the more curious Ishmael telling us about Ahab. So in the tradition of American fiction, I open with the monomaniacal *and* curious ManChyna to describe another fiction – the new whiteness.

\(^{234}\) Melville, *Moby Dick.*
\(^{235}\) Ibid., 7.
I connect my polyvocality and Melville’s because of Toni Morrison’s re-reading of *Moby Dick* as a critique of whiteness. In her Tanner Series lecture on Human Values, Morrison emphasizes the *whiteness* of Ahab’s whale in relation to the too often elided Afro-American presence in Melville’s exemplar of American literature. Morrison argues that Melville’s “hostility to and repugnance for slavery” emerges in a nuanced vision of whiteness in his chapter, “The Whiteness of the Whale.”

236 “I almost despair,” Melville writes, “of putting it in a comprehensive form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me.” But, as Morrison points out, “[t]he language of this chapter ranged between benevolent, beautiful images of whiteness and whiteness as sinister and shocking” suggesting “that Melville is not exploring white people, but whiteness idealized.”

238 The distinction is important because in re-examining this example of foundational American fiction, Morrison rehabilitates the captain as, “the only white male American heroic enough to try to slay the monster that was devouring the world as he knew it.”

239 Reading the focus in Ahab's mind on "one singular whale [that] transcends all others [going] beyond nature, adventure, politics, and commodity to an abstraction," Morrison suggests that the white whale can be read as a metaphor for “the moment in America when whiteness became ideology.”

240 She goes on to laud Melville for flipping the popular missionary narrative of rescuing ‘savagery,’ taking on "the very concept of whiteness as an inhuman idea.”

241 Lawrence Buell, however, suggests that Morrison also,

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239 Ibid.


241 Ibid., 141.

242 Ibid., 142.
“deletes Ishmael” when, “[i]n her account, the challenge to the baleful racist status quo is entirely Ahab’s.”243 In focusing on only two members of Melville’s triad, Buell suggests that Morrison loses something in the curious mind of Ishmael.

I retain both Ishmael and Ahab in ManChyna. Like Morrison suggests of Melville and Ahab, I am singularly focused on the monstrosity and fiction of whiteness in this project. But this whale is a new kind of liberal whiteness that contradicts its own fictions, but remains continuous with the inhumanity it purportedly rejects. ManChyna is my monomaniacal Captain Gayhab. Melville uses the Biblical Jonah to foreshadow and build literary tension around Ahab's final battle. Like Jonah (and potentially Ahab), whiteness might eventually consume and overdetermine even the indomitably ethnic ManChyna. Captain Gayhab might perish, irrespective of the perilously yellow faggotry I perform in resistance to his whale. Yet ManChyna is also like Ishmael. The white whale fascinates me. I am curious about our relationships to it. The white whale has so many faces and so many mouths that it becomes difficult to even know if one is fighting it, giving in to it, or is already in its belly. So ManChyna is Janus-faced. ManChyna is akin to Ahab in his rejection of and resistance to liberal whiteness, which seeks to silence the model minority and psychically castrate the homonorm; but he and I are also telling the tale of the white whale, like Ishmael, cataloguing its shifting faces, all the while being consumed by it.

The paradox of ManChyna’s disassimilation into the new whiteness accomplishes three goals. First, it fixes my desirous gaze on assimilation. The fetish of assimilation, with its seductive promises of privilege, could be considered akin to the single-minded obsession of

Captain Ahab – the possibility of being ingested by the white whale as an idée fixe for some minoritarians. Again, Ahab is Morrison’s unlikely anti-white warrior and, although he ultimately evades being consumed, the drama of his final battle is underwritten by the potential for consumption, portended by the story of Jonah. My story is also underwritten by the potential of being consumed by whiteness. The offer of assimilation into a new liberal whiteness that supposedly welcomes model minorities and homonormative queers is a powerful promise, an instrument used to discipline both ‘unruly’ and deferential minoritarians. Second, my disassimilation resists the new whiteness I merge into. Morrison’s recasting of Ahab as the singular resistor of whiteness emphasizes the critical aspects of assimilation, the “dis” in disassimilation, in ManChyna’s fixation on the new whiteness. Lastly, I am also curious about the nature of the new whiteness. Much like Ishmael’s taxonomical curiosity about Ahab’s whale that threatens to consume him, I seek to document the contours of my own whale.

I diagnose the new whiteness from an individual minoritarian perspective that is flawed and contradictory because my target necessitates it. How can an individual minoritarian articulate the current contours of a shape-shifting monster about to swallow her alive? How does one counter an ever-shifting, dominant culture from a critical and ‘minor’ point of view when one crucial aim of its evasive energy is the incorporation of that minoritarian gaze? And how does the minoritarian subject represent her critical navigation of majority codes when the picture is complicated by her desire to assimilate into them? It is a contradiction, but so too are the very codes and cultures into which minoritarians assimilate into and resist. Contradictions within majority codes and minoritarian reuses of them are key in outlining the new whiteness. As we enter the pursed lips of the beast, it changes its face quickly, beguiling us. In Chapter 3, the shift from racial discipline to sexual promise happens so seamlessly, I am momentarily stunned and
confused. Only later, with extensive reflection, do I begin to grasp the contradictory elements of the conversation between a representative of the new whiteness and myself. The contradictions of the white beast elicit contradictions in the minoritarian. As the shape-shifting mouths of the new whiteness attempt to consume us, we come to emulate the beast’s own confused/confusing fictions to survive within its transfiguring body. In other words, the flaws and contradictions inherent in disidentification result from the contradictory conditions that enable our assimilation into the new whiteness.

ManChyna is the flawed but mobile figure, my imaginary minoritarian consciousness, with whom I follow through literal and discursive spaces on a path of promise and potential of assimilation into the contradictory fiction of the new whiteness. We both eventually come up against limitations of the promissory note of liberal inclusion and exaltation. ManChyna exemplifies the impulses of both anti-assimilation and assimilation toward articulating the logical contradictions of the new whiteness. He is at once the excessively queer ethnic and the assimilable homonorm/model minority, embodying the paradoxical essence of disassimilation. Such paradoxical qualities, I argue, comprise different facets of disassimilation into a cult of multiculturalism and queer capitalism – the new whiteness – strategically articulated with liberal modernity in its rehabilitation as modern and gentle. A monster with soft pillowy lips will still devour you.

In my disassimilation with this multicultural and homonationalist narrative, I begin to outline the contradictions of such liberal whiteness with its own fictions of sexual modernity and racial progress. In Chapter 4, for example, I describe an incident after a show when a white man attempts to cast me as a “racist and a bigot,” eventually revealing his desire to sexually consume my body. The new whiteness is a shifty beast, changing its face with the winds of social change,
gobbling up difference through its many orifices. My disassimilatory analysis, in its
disidentification with minoritarian refusal and supplication, rejects attempts by the new
whiteness to cast its own intolerance onto the bodies of racialized others. I also attempt to cast
light on the logical continuity of such self-exalting liberalism with the history of inhumanity it
putatively rejects. I introduce the notion of purity eugenics in Chapter 3 and later, in Chapter 5, I
outline its logical continuity with difference-eugenics.

Thus, in order to resist and survive within the contradictory fictions of the new whiteness,
I employ both disassimilation into it and disidentification with its codes, resulting in my own
contradictions and paradoxes. ManChyna, in the tradition of parody, both mocks and mirrors the
majoritarian codes I participate in, which are themselves conflicting and inconsistent. In addition
to parody, I argue that the contradictions resulting from my use of both assimilation and anti-
assimilation – or, disassimilation – are conditioned by the contradictory fictions of the new
whiteness. In the next section, I connect the preceding theory and methodological approach with
my concrete methods. I elaborate particular methodologies I use as ManChyna, outlining the
ways in which my politics are rendered more or less transparent in different spaces.

Minoritarian Contradictions: Politically Explicit, Implicit, and Useful

Disidentification with multiplicity and unity become useful in my performance and
theorization of disassimilation by congealing the racial and sexual excess derived from my
performance of contradictions. To review, minoritarian disidentification with multiplicity will
invariably contain contradictions, tactically and necessarily mirroring the overarching fiction of
majority culture. In the previous section I explained that my disidentification with the demands
of multiplicity and unity are necessitated by the contradictions of the new whiteness. In the
following section I expand on the contradictions that result from this re-wiring of multiplicity –
my own conflicting politics. I index the theoretical antecedents of my use of contradictions and their explicit and implicit political valences. Finally, I theorize how, in my disassimilation into majority fictions and disidentification with its imagined minority stereotypes, my performance of such contradictory stereotypes becomes usefully congealed within the parameters of majoritarian cultural codes.

The contradictions intrinsic to disidentificatory productions are always already political, implicitly even if not explicitly; and ManChyna utilizes both. Probably the single most contradictory element of my disidentificatory texts and performance has to do with my incorporation of negative minority stereotypes, conflicting with my proposed differential or minoritarian consciousness. Yet I suggest the practice to be both explicitly and implicitly political. Throughout this text, I elaborate on the recycling of such malignant tropes in my own work and in the work of others, vis-à-vis Muñoz’s disidentification. Naturally, I agree with Muñoz in his praise of disidentificatory texts as strategies of scrambling and reconstructing encoded cultural messaging, exposing and resisting their exclusionary workings to empower minoritarians.244

The implicit disidentification and political resistance of my work resonates with the other disidentificatory texts I bring into my analysis, rendering explicit the critique of majority culture through ManChyna. Following Muñoz’ designs for disidentification, the performance of these texts expose the fictions of majoritarian culture. In chapter 5, I read the negative stereotypes used by creators like Nicki Minaj and Amy Chua through the lens of disidentification. The two women of colour disidentify with tropes of malignant motherhood associated with Black and Asian women, respectively. I read this as conforming to negative paths of minority stereotypes,

244 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 31.
adopting and embodying majoritarian expectations. While adoption of negative stereotypes offered by majority culture to minorities can be seen as conforming to the language of one’s oppressor, their mimicry is politically utilitarian. I draw Minaj and Chua’s disidentification into my disassimilatory analysis, also disidentifying with distinct but connected narratives of pathological queerness and Asianness. Minaj and Chua’s works, whether intentional or not, highlight and thus implicitly critique the conditions of their public utterances. Further, ManChyna disidentifies with both of these women’s texts in my own, “Tiger Mom” (2012). I bring the implicit critique of these texts to bear on my analysis into an explicit critique of queer liberal multiculturalism from their implicitly critical moment. However, disidentificatory texts are not limited in their political potential to revealing, via their mimicry, majoritarian codes and conditions. In order to clarify both the explicit and implicit aspects of ManChyna, and by extension those of disidentification, I must expand the scope of my disassimilatory lens beyond my performance to its planning.

ManChyna intermingles implicit and explicit critiques of majority culture and I make sense of this in different spaces, at different times speaking more or less opaquely in spaces of planning, performance, and analysis. I first look at performance, the main locus of attention in my project. As Muñoz asserts about the performance of disidentification, it “is not always an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere”\(^\text{245}\) (original emphasis). Muñoz suggests that direct and clear denouncements of majority culture and conformation, or assimilation, into it are at times necessary. For the minoritarian, however, clearly and directly

\(^{245}\) Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 5.
implicating oneself in public denouncements of majority potentially courts danger within systems in which the promise of one’s mobility is only conditional and limited. Muñoz is acutely aware of the dangers of phobic publics, sensitizing his ability to hear and see disidentification in performances where and when others may not. His reading of disidentificatory humour as a dialectic resolution of identification and counteridentification renders intelligible the safer space of kitschy laughter that disidentification can create for minoritarians. In my public performance of non-localizable humour (as Heems asked, “DO I CALL THIS GAY CHINESE CANADIAN RAP?”), I share in the “deep pleasure” that Muñoz experiences when bearing witness to such hidden, “swishy” critique and “in ‘getting’ the fantastic bitchiness” of minoritarian quips. But the cogent space of shared pleasure, where the impulse of implicit critique bubbles up into an explicit minoritarian consciousness, happens for ManChyna privately off-stage.

The most superficially contradictory aspect of ManChyna’s aesthetic is his Oriental-Communist drag; before taking the stage, I make explicit a differential or minoritarian consciousness in my planning of his aesthetic. ManChyna’s Oriental drag has its origins in a burlesque act with my fellow Asian BoylesqueTO performer, Wrong Note Rusty (Greg Wong). Our sketch, the ‘Siamese Act’ as it came to be known among BoylesqueTO members, was a slapstick comedy, three-act burlesque scene that ran in the four minute range; it was also the clearest moment in which I began in earnest to flesh out, and literally embody, my kitschy performance of queer sexuality and Asian racialization. Rusty and I conceived the act for a circus-themed Toronto Pride show and our full conversation can be found in Appendix A.

ManChyna’s Chinese communist drag, which I further discuss in Chapter 2, derives directly

246 Ibid., 4.
from the themes set out by my co-production with Rusty. In our conversation, one can witness the intentional aspects of our planning, negotiating the political limits of our creativity.

Performing the Siamese Act was both wonderful and terrible. Rusty and I, two Chinese-Canadian men who look nothing alike, appear onstage wrap-bound as if we were conjoined twins. We open the scene with a pseudo-Korean fan dance and Chinese erhu pantomime. Wearing every stereotypical pan-Asian object that we could find in Chinatown – kimonos, geisha slippers, chopsticks, and so on – Rusty and I ambivalently step out in extreme ‘Asian face.’ “We Are Siamese,” from Disney’s Lady and the Tramp (1955) plays during our brotherly bickering, which eventually includes a ramen noodle fight. In the end, after trying to saw our body/ies apart we merrily make up and make out, accompanied by the Stealers Wheel’s joyous song, “Stuck in the Middle with You” (1972). Walking off the stage, we pull a fortune out of a novelty-sized fortune cookie that reads, “No Offense, it’s Just a Preference” (NOJAP), and ravenously kiss each other. NOJAP is a phrase commonly found on gay male online dating and mobile hook-up profiles in which (often white) men explicitly discriminate against Asians (along with Black, fat, and effeminate bodies) as potential sexual partners based on race, body shape, and gender performance.247

The scene received both laughter and admonishment. Another Asian-Canadian performer in the audience, I later found out, suggested that Rusty and I “set back Asians in Canada fifty years.” For context the performer critical of us, around the same time, was performing in Japanese manga “Sailor Moon” drag around Toronto (kettle, meet pot). Rusty and I did not explicitly lay bare our implicit critique of our white audiences on this public stage. Performing for a largely white audience – commonplace in the Toronto burlesque scene – we are acutely

247 Jaime Woo, Meet Grindr (Toronto: Jaime Woo, 2013).
aware that many people cannot distinguish us from each other, even though Rusty has a beard and I do not, for instance (Figure 5). Audience confusion, to our bemusement, happens far too often to recount.

![Figure 5. Side by side comparison of Wrong Note Rusty (Left) and ManChyna (Right). Photo credit: Wrong Note Rusty/Greg Wong.](image)

We hoped the laughter would knowingly take into account our obvious differences, but most of it was likely due to our slapstick physical comedy. There are many more explicit ways performers could creatively point out the strange audience blindness to our individuality. As burlesquers, however, we silently embody audience expectations through costume, dance, and pantomime. Our seemingly scattershot, stereotype-filled imagery takes for granted our ambivalent assimilation of western stereotypes of Asian bodies. Of course we think to use a common language of Asian negation in our space-taking project. Our disidentification with these tropes is an implicit critique of our audience. The critique is not always seen or heard, but such nonlocalizability is the point of an evasive strategy.
Some minoritarians bravely engage in exercises of refusal, regardless of the consequences. Others tread more cautiously. Careful reading practices are extremely useful in deconstructing a wide range of texts, productively sketching the dynamics and outlines of power. But for some minoritarians, to challenge phobic conditions of mobility in public, and to the wrong listeners, can jeopardize one’s survival. Worse still, the burden of proof falls on the individual minoritarian, to prove not only that their experiences are real, but also that they are without contradiction. In the fictions of liberal welfare, majoritarian understandings of injustice demand a unity of our suffering. This task of proving the existence of something intangible (a feeling about something real but not legislated, like Anzaldúa’s fiction) is rendered all the more difficult within exercises of power that seek to incorporate our narratives to shore up their own legitimacy and invisibility. This requires equally evasive tactics of individual survival, disidentification, which may also appear contradictory.

The explicit goals of the Siamese Act contrast with the performers’ implicit critique of majority culture in the scene. In our planning, Rusty and I detail our concern about just such misinterpretation, not from the perspective of white eyes but from other minoritarians. Occidental goggle vision is the lens we intended to send up. Would other minoritarians get it, though? In the personal communication between Rusty and me (Appendix A), one can see the themes we want to focus on, how these come to be organized structurally, and our commitment to “do it right,” as I say. Our collaborative negotiation reveals an unspoken commitment to social justice alongside performance quality. The commitment prefigures the performance, which would later be derided as regressive by an audience member. Throughout our planning conversation, Rusty and I deliberately “hav[e] a serious discussion on how to do it right,” while being “outrageously offensive,” and ask to check in with each other if we “start crossing lines.”
The scene itself closes intentionally with us united. In spite of the Asian/brotherly antagonism we begin with, we end our hateful self-exotification on a loving note, promoting (to my mind) self-love as hyper-Orientalized, fake twins. Put differently, Rusty and I celebrate each other, disidentifying with the sexual white supremacy implicit in the common use of the phrase, “No offense, it’s just a preference,” which normally banishes our Asian bodies as undesirable. We celebrate togetherness (metaphorized by corporeal unity) despite attempts by the new whiteness to isolate and separate minoritarians from each other, physically and psychically. Yet our scene could be (and was) taken as an affront to Asian political progress - but what kind of progress? If progress means incorporation into whiteness, our performative reminders of Asian exclusion clearly reject this. Alternatively, if progress means a refusal of whiteness, our participation in a predominantly white theatrical form undermines this. Rusty and I present neither an unquestioned assimilation into white supremacy nor a rejection of it. As a result, our explicit political intentions are not transparent in the implicitly political playfulness of disidentification.

Explanations for the ‘misunderstanding’ abound. One could explain the misinterpretation as nothing more than that, a misreading of the performers’ intentions. I do not, however, believe the misunderstanding to be an accident, but rather a necessary byproduct of the contradictory fictions of majoritarian culture. The friction from my performative contradictions results from the multiplicity of both majoritarian conditions and of minoritarian adaptation to its fictions. As the new whiteness attempts to consume minoritarian bodies, we churn in the monster’s stomach, forever undigested foreign matter. The grinding friction froths into visibility the incommensurable contradictions of majoritarian fictions of modernity and its expectations for minoritarians. Minoritarian difference, in its overdetermination by the monstrous appetite of the
new whiteness, becomes both the substrate for and expulsion of our consumption. Thus, a palpable sense of difference congeals in my assimilation into the monster’s body. Disidentificatory texts and disassimilation into negative majority fictions are both implicitly and explicitly critical of majoritarian cultural conditions; but how do racialized performing bodies interact with majoritarian gaze to further constrain the cultural circuits we play with? How are we complicit in the co-production of these tropes? And how does this become useful in our disassimilation into majoritarian culture?

Another way one might explain the palpable sense of difference I speak of is via the normativization of whiteness. I so far have described a sense of difference emanating from the process of assimilation. It is a lived friction frothed out of the very contradictions minoritarians are consumed by – a residue produced by grinding into the monster’s belly. In this troubled incorporation, we can also see a congealing of difference in the standardization of whiteness in the very spaces through which minoritarians move. To better explain this, I discuss the demands of the audience’s gaze on the performing stage.

In Excess of Whiteness

For the performing body, the constraint of an audience’s gaze is crystal clear. When multiracial casting became increasingly possible in a desegregating America, for instance, the chair of The New York School of Performing Arts sympathized with the representational barriers faced by “oriental,” “negro,” and “mulatto” actors who in the near past, if offered roles at all,
were offered *exclusively* subservient or unsympathetic roles.\(^{248}\) At the time of her writing, Dycke notes about the American stage that,

> [f]or a long time now, the cliché role of the shuffling Negro servant has been out of the picture. In fact, Negros are rarely cast as servants at all. For instance, in *The Bad Seed*, Leroy, the handyman, could as easily have been played by a Negro but was cast as white. This social blessing has proved to be an economic curse. Negroes ask only that they not be offered servant roles *exclusively*. They haven't asked to be cut out of the market altogether; but this is what has actually happened, whether it has been caused by directors not thinking of Negros for any part not specifically written for a Negro or whether a higher motive has been involved. Since it is simpler to stop practices than to institute them, there has been no strong compensatory move as yet in professional theatre to employ Negros in other types of roles.\(^{249}\) (original emphasis)

A “social blessing” opening up stereotypically Black roles, Dycke suggests, becomes an “economic curse” for the individual actor when those roles get offered to whites, the universal ‘blank canvas’ of the performing arts. In other words, when roles open up that were previously the domain of racially marked actors, they end up being offered to generalizable subjects – white actors. Dycke goes on to link the ideological constraints of racialized bodies to the casting powers held by audience expectation: “One off-Broadway group tried for a short time casting Negro and white actors according too [sic] talent only and without regard to the situation in society. This proved unpopular with both Negros and whites.”\(^{250}\)

More than half a century later one could reasonably argue that roles “not specifically written for” Black people or other racialized performers go predominantly to white actors. Take for example, Korean-American actor John Cho starring in the short-lived ABC situational comedy, *Selfie* (2014). The show was a loose update of *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady*, with Cho

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\(^{249}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{250}\) Ibid.
playing the Henry Higgins-like character from the original source material. Explicitly cast “colour-blindly,” Cho calls his starring role “revolutionary” in an interview with the Toronto Star. The notion of colour-blind casting is still considered “revolutionary” and as Steve Haruch writes about Selfie, “There's a reason we still have to call it "colorblind casting" instead of just "casting."²⁵¹

But what is that reason? How do minoritarian performers come to emit this blinding light of difference that audiences must actively shield their eyes from seeing, ostensibly in the name of multicultural progress? Hypothetically, a stage or a television studio might serve as a blank slate for audiences to uncouple their imaginations from real world cultural expectations – costumes, makeup, stage sets, and scriptwriting can radically change audience perceptions of a fictionalized world. In the real world off-stage, however, racialized bodies are still perceived as being bound by such expectations, tethered to our racialization (“the situation in society,” for Dycke). I contend that such visual constraints get increasingly more limited the further afield from the stage or studio that performer bodies get. Take for instance my filming ‘on location’ in Shawville, Quebec. The culturally constructed expectations of hetero-whitened, rural space take on a significant role in both my experience of it and the perceptions of my body in it. In Chapter 2, I describe a feeling of excess – specifically “ethnic excess” – that noticeably congeals while moving through the rural, and decidedly white (or more precisely, whitened), landscape of the Ottawa Valley in Québec while filming my music video.

Excess, though, is not just a product but also an instrument of my sexual and racial difference in relation to the normativization of heteropatriarchal whiteness. This feeling of non-belonging to the symbolic space of the settled rural west can be described in any number of ways—like having a racially ‘marked’ body or ‘presence’ that are “read as signs of immigrant origin and … unnatural, anomalous place in the nation,” for example. As a performer, however, I prefer the imagery of intangible excess congealing into something visible to the audience. Such visibility can be described simply by being ‘marked’ (and I do sometimes use it), but this is insufficient for my purposes; it seems too inescapably binding, like cattle being branded. Instead, since I am describing a strategy of minoritarian survival and navigation of the conditioning structures of racial and sexual codes I am interested in ways of deploying such frictional and contradictory froth under a gaze that demands unity.

Congealing excess denotes a hardening of something, a reification of something that is indexed emotionally in the body into something tangible, sometimes useable. The connotations of gelatin in ‘congeal’ are helpful in describing something excessive that is produced from the body’s interaction with the environment, out of one’s control, like sweat or sebum or even mould; they just seem to appear against the will. And like each of those greasy secretions or grimy growth, there are necessary external conditions—excessive heat, aridity, or moisture, respectively—that must be present for one’s body to produce them (or let it grow on some medium, in the case of mould). I am not simply marked by history, but also interact with the environment around me. While one might feel dirty for handling such filthy films, they can also be useful in the right context: heat regulation, penicillin, and skin protection. To return to

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Foucault, my metaphor of congealing resistance “can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” With all the accompanying hindrances, I am interested in the idea of excess for its strategic and often objectionable instrumentality in one’s public performance of cultural difference. In addition to the stage, some queer and trans rappers of colour also make use of the contradictions and negative stereotypes in their own performances embodying disidentification.

Strategic essentialism/strategic unity in disassimilation

If the contradictory multiplicity of minoritarians gets reduced in the gaze of the audience to an essential unity – a “shuffling Negro,” a docile Asian, a gay best friend – what is the mechanism by which some minoritarians use the congealing forms of difference that arise from such reduction? Can perceived submissions to dominant codes, to stereotypes, be viewed as anything other than a capitulation to power? In chapter 5 I closely read texts by two American women of colour whose works directly influence my song, “Tiger Mom” (2012), in both substance and style. From the similar forms of parodic essentialism in each of our texts, I describe a capitalist logic of hybrid vigour that provides a specific context within which these two incredibly successful individuals perform their respective excesses. Deriving a strategic use of dominant, racist ideologies toward capitalist success might be described by some as reclaiming repugnant stereotypes, reinvesting them with different energies. Based on the metric of capital, it is easy to agree that these women’s respective inhabitations of their own forms of pathological ethnic excess seem to conditionally rescue malignant stereotypes from the collective

waste bin of culture. Yet the neoliberal logic of individual competition and capitalist accumulation is a thin foundation (literally comprising one – “me”) to support an ethos of collective resistance to power. Measured by another gauge, however, an epistemic if not ontological likeness might provide a starting point with which to ‘render fragile and ultimately thwart ideologies of power.’

My parodic redeployment of strategic unity and essentialism used by some minoritarian subjects is framed by the oppositional consciousness of strategic essentialism. “Strategic essentialism,” an idea proposed and later abandoned by literary critic Gayatri Spivak, is a “strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.” Stephen Morton further explains the phrase as accepting

that essentialist categories of human identity should be criticized, but emphasizes that one cannot avoid using such categories at times in order to make sense of the social and political world…For minority groups, in particular, the use of essentialism as a short-term strategy to affirm a political identity can be effective, as long as this identity does not then get fixed as an essential category by a dominant group.

Spivak originally intended the phrase as a short-term, context-specific tactic, not a generalizable theory, and with the specific aim of “a scrupulously visible political interest.” In other words, ‘strategic essentialism’ gestures toward the possibility of temporary, horizontal conjunctures of resistance against non-hierarchical power structures. The agential liberation implicit in the idea comes from the “‘shuttling’ between meaning systems” between a vertical hierarchies of power (sovereign power and its resistance) and a flattened respatialization of power/resistance “necessary for intervening in power on behalf of the marginalized,” as Chela Sandoval puts it.  

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254 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds (Methuen, 1987), 205.
256 Sandoval, Methodology of the Oppressed, 60.
Spivak, however, later rejected the phrase because, “[her] notion just simply became the union ticket for essentialism. As to what is meant by strategy, no one wondered about that.” So257 the implied conditions for the phrase’s use (not getting “fixed as an essential category by a dominant group”) went unheeded; to its author, this minoritarian strategy seems to ultimately get fixed by power. My emphasis, however, is explicitly about the strategy of strategic essentialism as its emancipatory potential of resistance gets, not just fixed by but also coopted by power. I refer specifically to the logics of capital and multiculturalism. Is the currency of strategic essentialism entirely irretrievable? I believe, no, and that its contradictory enunciations can begin to map an oppositional consciousness.

I must distinguish Spivak’s uses of ‘strategic essentialism’ and mine. The usual use of Spivak’s terminology relates to temporary group politics, an affirmation of group identity, in spite of noting its inherent social construction. As Kristina Wolff explains,

> [s]trategic essentialism recognizes the complexities of occupying a subject-object position, of the subaltern, whether it is a movement, group, or individual… Strategic essentialism as applied to feminism serves to utilize essentialist definitions of woman while also continually critiquing the concept itself. For example, one of the main goals of liberal feminism is the political struggle to gain equal rights for men and women.258

For many who have taken up Spivak’s idea, the possibility for group political action is appealing. The potential to operate under a temporary flag of unity, in a transnational postmodern order that sometimes renders such unity problematic, is attractive if possible. I am interested, instead, in the slippage between movement, group, and individual in the aggressive, unspoken dance between power and resistance. My focus on assimilation into multicultural ideology and the promises of

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inclusion targets the cooption of group affirmation by this “multyculty” grammar of individualistic capitalism. Strategic essentialism by individual performers, in my use of it, slips from forms of group politics within institutional (i.e. majoritarian) recognition to the performative inhabitation of stereotypical group images (constructed within and by a majoritarian gaze). The performing subjects’ deployment of (self/group) affirmation and (external) ascription of identity (essentialized and unified) lay bare the logic of difference-ascurrency. Such tactical manoeuvres may be deemed individualistic and politically regressive. Yet taken together, these tactics sketch the conditions for minoritarian mobility. Multiple performances additively map the conditions of our movement into and within the belly of the white beast.

Strong affirmations of group unity are prone to cooption by the liberal majority. To be clear, when I write of self/group affirmation, I am referring to the external, majoritarian construction of group identity and not self-determined modes of minoritarian identification. Returning to Spivak’s later re-articulations of strategic essentialism, she states the following about group identity:

So, it seems to me that the affirming of one's identity is precisely not a strategic use. It is to be utilized by the institution, only at another allegorical remove. Within the U.S. context, if you really want to affirm your identity, you would have to undo the system totally; that's not possible anymore. We have bought into, we have contractually bought into, the institution, and there is safety in recognizing that. If you want to undo the curriculum, be aware of the limits of your power rather than dramatize yourself.²⁵⁹

Strong affirmations of one’s group identity, or ‘gesture politics,’ are for Spivak ‘without the critical moment built into it.’ In other words, seemingly essentialist gesture politics, defined within the institutionalized system we buy into, are not strategic.

²⁵⁹ Danius and Jonsson, “Interview with Spivak,” 43-44.
However, playfulness with such institutionally formed affirmations of group-ness may yet evade and confound the majoritarian gaze. Diving deeper into this ineffective gesture politics, though, Spivak speaks of humour as a critical moment within it:

Gesture politics comes without the critical moment built into it. Within gesture politics, there is a wonderful critical moment that one can use without learning all of this jargon that we are talking, which is humor, humor. That political use of humor, which we know in the general African American struggle in the United States, I have looked at with incredible admiration. That I quite often don't see in university identity wallahs, that kind of robust autocritical humor within the movement.  

To clarify the paradox, this is a critical moment within a non-critical moment – the ‘making do’ with-what-we-have mentality West writes about. If group identity is in fact articulated within institutional power, the very language of gesture politics has built into it a treasure trove of ideological stereotypes, deeply understood and reviled by that group as “controlling images.” Such implicit understanding, or ideological subtext, between members of that group has little need for explicit articulation. The punch line of a joke and the implied energies of that joke (oppressive and/or resistive), are things that are shared between members, inexplicit but still understood.

The texts I collect in the following chapters revel in shared moments of autocritical humour, revealing glimpses of a shared minoritarian consciousness that strategically and self-consciously form and break ties with majoritarian culture. Returning to Chela Sandoval’s differential mode of oppositional consciousness, she explains that it requires flexible politics for survival within phobic spheres. Such consciousness depends on, according to Sandoval,

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Patricia Hill Collins, “Mammies, Matriarchs, And Other Controlling Images,” in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Routledge, 2002).}\]
the ability to read the current situation of power and of self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configuration, a survival skill well known to oppressed peoples. Differential consciousness requires grace, flexibility, and strength: enough strength to confidently commit a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self-consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power’s formation require it…to self-consciously break and reform ties to ideology, activities which are imperative for the psychological and political practices that permit the achievement of coalition across differences.262

Performing disidentification requires the differential mode of oppositional consciousness, to commit temporarily to a well-defined structure of identity, within and against ideologies, for however long one’s performance lasts. ManChyna performances last well beyond the confines of a single set or music video; my disassimilation precedes and outlasts such ephemera. Such consciousness also allows, in Sandoval’s words, “Self-conscious agents of differential consciousness [to] recognize one another as allies, country-women and men of the same psychic terrain.”263 But differential consciousness and disassimilation are, at their cores, tactics for survival; and sometimes survival within phobic ideologies requires cautious, temporary silence. Such silence, however, does not mean an inability to recognize a shared consciousness of opposition. In recognizing the covert moments of autocritical humour, we can map our shared consciousness. Recognition and temporary epistemic bridges can be made, even between explicitly political works and less obvious ones.

Minoritarian recognitions form my cartographic project. In mapping ManChyna as a display of sublimated minoritarian consciousness, this brings me to my version of creative autoethnographic mapping, or ‘autoethnographic creatography.’ I analyze the texts described throughout, and especially in Chapters 2 and 4, alongside my own. Together, such co-analysis

262 Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism,” 15.
263 Ibid.
produces a theoretical upshot, mapping the eugenic logic of hybrid vigour that condition minoritarian ‘success.’ Spivak’s economic terminology of purchase, or buying into institutional recognition, crucially frames my explanation that such logic engenders the circulation of ethnic excess as cultural currency within the grammar of multicultural capital (or, the ‘gesture politics’ utilized by institutional power). The autocritical humour exhibited by my own and others’ texts manifest strategic uses of essentialism (as I use the term), which congeal tensions of difference resulting from assimilation into and comparison with the aggravating fictions of the new whiteness. Such discursive performances reveal underlying, often invisible, logics that control, silence, and detain minoritarians in a fantasy of progress and assimilation. In Chapter 3 I expand on such silencing with respect to public pronouncements within and against liberal multiculturalism. My performative exploration of such logics constitutes the theoretical product and departure-point of autoethnographic creatography exhibited by each of the following chapters in my diagnosis of the conditions for minoritarian experience. Chapters 2 and 3, however, are examples of how I get to this theoretical space of analysis by mapping physical spaces. In the first substantive chapter, I literally drive to rural Canada, mapping my experience of it. In the next I interpret the role of promissory sexual assimilation in shaping and limiting minoritarian articulations. The real world methods I use to theoretically and psychically map socio-geographic terrain comprise the material aspect of autoethnographic creatography, which I turn to now.

Methods: Autoethnographic Creatography

Autoethnographic creatography builds on the notion of autoethnographic mapping. Hager et al have theorized autoethnographic mapping as, “a compound tool for raising consciousness
and nurturing resistance, comprising both cognitive or mental maps and autoethnographies.\(^{264}\) In interviewing a group of Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel, the researchers could trace “the details of their concrete embodiment in the individual lives of students.”\(^ {265} \) Such traces allow the researchers to elicit participant-driven connections between their lived experiences and power structures, which shape their lives through continued conflict. Combining open-ended interviews with minimally standardized political maps of the areas that participants live in, the researchers could elicit fluid pictures of self and identity. The authors assert that drawing out personalized narratives of political maps depicting ‘contact zones’ can expose hidden ideologies and even re-form personally held views that resist politically and socially hegemonic narratives.\(^ {266} \) I distinguish the neologism, autoethnographic creatography, as *creative* autoethnographic mapping; it is similar in its focus but functions differently than Hager et al’s term. Similar to Hager et al, I conjoin the notions of autoethnography and cognitive mapping; but as I will explain, I situate these methods in literature and cultural production rather than literal geographies and direct personal narrative. Before explaining the ‘autoethnographic’ and ‘mapping’ functions of my methods, however, I must explain the functions of my creative texts.

The first function of my creation-as-method emphasizes the experiences of producing culture, both making and performing my texts, within spaces conditioned by liberal capitalist multiculturalism. Reflection on the latitudes and limitations I experience in these spaces spurs my analysis of the latter’s contouring of minoritarian experience. My methods include collecting and interpreting my experiences on and off stage, writing music, and making videos. As of this


\(^{265}\) Ibid.

\(^{266}\) Ibid., 46-47.
writing, my creative outputs as ManChyna include two mixtapes, four music videos (with 30,926 views on YouTube), international performances (China), cross-Canadian tours, and film festival exhibitions across North America (L.A., Vancouver, New York, Toronto, Boston). They are the real world tools I use to map physical terrain in my cartography (hence, creatography). My cultural products serve as a practical tool, moving ManChyna through physical spaces I otherwise might not have any reason to access; they allow me access to the various spaces I theoretically chart. While my creative texts may draw on my personal life, my analysis of them primarily focuses on their place in public life, my physical and digital performances, and act as a compass for my theoretical map.

I take a shotgun approach to creation and collection, seeing what emerges from my scattershot art production. Some outputs are easier to archive than others, such as songs and videos. As these texts circulate publicly, they incite engagement with wider audiences, eliciting reactions from a wider swath of the public than just my performances of them. I chronicle my work and the reactions they elicit where I can, archiving online articles in which I am mentioned. Experiences I cannot easily archive, such as during and after performances, I compile as field notes. Given the circumstances, I take better notes than at other times. If I have time after a performance, for instance, I can take notes in the form of voice memos recorded on my phone for later analysis. I outline notable experiences in the following chapters, making no claims of objectively knowing the spaces I chart. I chose to focus on the events and conversations that did not, on their face, make sense to me. Simply, the experiences felt strange at the time and for days after. My own surprise and feelings of disorientation act as a magnetic North for my creative compass, pointing to moments that deserve more attention. Following Anzaldúa’s lead, I trust my physical sensation of stimuli, trusting my imagination and frustration to lead my analysis.
The compass of my cartographic project is composed of my body working together with the texts I create. Suzanne Cusick proposes a theory of musical bodies that centers the performer’s body at the locus of musical research.\textsuperscript{267} The trouble with a traditional notion of music, which frames musical interaction between two minds – the composer and “listener-as-mental-performer” – is that it elides the body of the performer.\textsuperscript{268} With ManChyna, I am both composer and performer. My texts are both something I create and something I do. My performances and the social interaction they engender simply cannot exist without my body. Thus, by using my creative texts to bring me into different social spaces, I must acknowledge and emphasize my body as a primary tool of investigation alongside my texts. My body and texts work together in directing my journey through space.

The second function of my creative texts is that they forge, allowing me to think through, theoretical kinship. So far I have delineated a shared minoritarian consciousness expressed in disidentificatory texts that exhibit moments of autocritical humour about assimilation into majority fictions of liberal homonormative multiculturalism. The auto is critical and necessary but not sufficient for making theoretical assertions. My own texts, songs and videos, contain elements of autobiography. Yet both in my art and in the following chapters I respond to the works of other minoritarians whose bodies and lives become central to the disidentificatory humour they engage in. I map the underlying connections between my productions of queer and ethnic excess with those of others whose works share a Wittgensteinian family resemblance, which I interpret as a shared minoritarian consciousness. Family resemblances refer not to an essential commonality but crisscrossing similarities. In Wittgenstein's words, family

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 18.
resemblances comprise a, "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."269 Throughout this project, I identify an eccentric range of artists whom I reference, take inspiration from, parallel, and so on. These include rappers, authors, performance artists, photographers, and so on. I draw attention to our sometimes overlapping and criss-crossing details and overall similarities. I am not claiming literal similarity with such artists, nor am I asserting that any of our works can or should be taxonomically categorized together due to an essence of similarity. Instead, I highlight the direct and indirect criss-crossing between our works. The family resemblances are made clear not to affix an explanation onto their or my works, nor are they analogies. Rather, resemblances make visible otherwise unspoken conditions of majority culture that contour their emergences. Taken together our creative texts map the faceless conditions that mould minoritarian experiences of incorporation into (and rejection from) citizenship. Additionally, I contextualize each of our texts with other data from historical, economic, and government sources. Scholarly rigour over my autoethnographic map is cultivated through citational dialogue with such sources, thereby sustaining my extended argument deriving from creative texts.

My dissertation acts as a companion to my other creative output, working against the burden of representation for minoritarian subjects. I do not mean ‘burden’ in the way that art historian Kobena Mercer describes it – the pressure to tell the whole story of one’s entire community when, after years of struggle, you are collectively at “the threshold of enunciation”270 – although this is not far from my mind. Instead, the burden I speak of is a conditioning insistence on the minoritarian to tell the story of struggle as a sort of currency to purchase into

multicultural assimilation. The story ‘should be’ an edgeless one of ethnic suffering that exalts the self-image and does not implicate majoritarians. Such storytelling must be done in a particular way that registers within a framework of liberal multiculturalism, locating wrongdoing elsewhere – other countries, on the bodies and cultures of minoritarians, or even individual ‘bad apples.’ The consequences of enunciating dissatisfaction with liberal multiculturalism are outlined in Chapter 3. In contrast, Chapter 4 outlines successful narrations of such storytelling. By focusing my attention on fictions of minoritarian success within our shared framework (Chapter 4), I outline the act of parading difference for a faceless panel of majoritarian judges. Approved exhibition, which supposedly purchases access into citizenship and a proffered promise of racial-sexual exaltation, is allowable on the grounds that it simultaneously exalts the audience’s modernity. Although playing with these cultural codes, neither my creative work nor this paper tells such a story. Instead, my fictions and creations work against the burden of coherent representation. Both my creations and this paper, which collects and catalogues my theoretico-creative kin, outline the very conditions for our minoritarian enunciations and supposed pathways to success – the fictions of a new whiteness.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be defined as the narration of one's experiences in a social context. As José Muñoz describes it, “[t]he movement of personal histories into a public sphere is typical of autoethnography.” Autoethnography has also been used in multiple ways that are sometimes contradictory. Reed-Danahay weaves together a short history of the different approaches this method crystallizes as, which she explains accent either the autobiographical or

271 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 81.
272 Deborah Reed-Danahay, Auto/ethnography, Explorations in Anthropology (Berg, 1997).
the ethnographic senses of the methodology. Some, like Alice Deck and Philippe Lejeune, are increasingly sceptical of the outsider ethnographer, suggesting that the ‘true’ autoethnographer is the ‘native’ ethnographer, writing with an emphasis on biography.

Others disagree that ‘insider status’ should be granted without scepticism. Pnina Motzafi-Haller, for example, confronts her own authenticity as a Mizrahi-ethnic Jew when lending her ‘native’ voice to a colleague’s anthropological project about women in Israel. Motzafi-Haller traces her complex reservations through her fieldwork trajectory as a Jewish woman moving in and out of whiteness and blackness in Israel, Botswana, Apartheid South Africa, and her graduate student office at Harvard University. Throughout her career, Motzafi-Haller’s perceived ethnicity shifts in different contexts due to her national identity and her embodiment as “a ‘Schwarze’ (black) Mizrahi woman,” denied access to whites-only spaces in South Africa until she presents her Israeli government documents; she comes to “reject the claim that a native voice is necessarily more ‘authentic’ or ‘true’ in order to argue, instead for a greater awareness of the ways in which the positioning of the anthropologist will influence his or her scholarship.”

In Motzafi-Haller’s words, 

…the binary categories of ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ are themselves superfluous and misleading. A researcher who had experienced in her own life oppression and had become conscious of it in ways that significantly inform her scholarship is

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273 Ibid., 8.
276 Ibid., 209.
277 Reed-Danahay, Auto/ethnography, 16.
more likely, I suggest, to write critically – to write from a position of social and political engagement.\(^{278}\) (original emphasis)

My version of creative autoethnographic mapping takes lessons from both strains of autoethnography, emphasizing both autobiographical and ethnographical information. Alongside my autobiographical details and own creative work, I employ social science research and the creative works of other minoritarians.

I view my creative autoethnography as collaborative and social, exceeding individual efforts. Like other autoethnographic works, my project is neither autobiography nor memoir, the latter constituting a life history written out of social context. My mode of analysis is also not captured by 'self-study,' a method in education that focuses more narrowly on improving the practices of, for example, a music teacher as a music teacher.\(^{279}\) I am not only interested in the quotidian practices of being a musician/artist. Instead, several aspects of my creative texts explicitly exceed my individual efforts. They are explicitly social. I list as examples my beat production and other multimedia content, as well as those who have made my touring as ManChyna possible. Friends and colleagues include (in no particular order): Amanda Balsys, Lauren Hortie, Matt Rogalsky, Alex Da Costa, Sonya Reynolds, Linda Gallant, Mike LeSage, Mark Streeter, Arnaud Baudry, Greg Wong, Paul Saulnier; and all the performers, party promoters, and filmmakers who have invited me on their stages and festivals like Rae Spoon, Ivan Coyote, Ryan G. Hinds, Erica Cho, Leeroy Kun Young Kang, and countless others. Even if I wanted to make auteurist claims over my creative texts as stylized biography, the collaborative production that made them possible has deeply influenced their creation and my performances of

them. As is evident in Chapter 2, the presence of my collaborators (white women friends with family ties in the area) influences both my access to and interaction with the white rurality of Shawville, Québec.

Beyond the effort of producing my creative texts, my creative autoethnography also exceeds my individual experience. Firstly, the disco, pop, and hip-hop forms of my musical beats reference both racialized and gay-related musical histories in America. My sampling practice in “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012), for instance, draws on both queer film canon and commercial rap, fitting in the queer hip-hop genealogy that Scott Poulson-Bryant suggests descends directly from the cultural dovetailing of “Rapper’s Delight” (1979) and “Good Times” (1979). The struggle for economic escape, of access to high living denied to so many among the multiracial, manifested in the sexually diverse generations of hip hop and disco. Even if I were to perfectly document the construction of my beat, which also revels in the queer pleasures of marginalized and racialized bodies, such detail could not capture how its discursive production exceeds my own experience of writing and collaboratively producing it. In other words, sociality defines both the mechanical production and presentation of my work as well as its aesthetic. My songs, music videos, posters, and photos all situate my autoethnographic writing within literal and cognitive spaces that exceed my personal experiences: Canadianized Indigenous landscapes, Orientalist encounters, and queered-masculine tropes. My body and my art interact with these spaces to transcend ‘the self.’

Such transcendence beyond one's self is a distinction that Butz and Besio describe as an important characteristic of autoethnography: autoethnography incorporates, but does not solely rely on, autobiographical data to elaborate sociality. My creations arise explicitly from collaboration, from the cultural exchanges between myself and other musicians, illustrators,
videographers, show promoters and so on. My performances, my music, and my creative practice are from their very inception not entirely my own, responsible to the creative labour of others through sampling, remixing, and so forth. The same assertion holds for my theoretical analysis of the conditions for minoritarian experience. Paralleling the music, illustration, photography, and performance that are produced under the banner of ManChyna, the imagery I produce and respond to do not emanate entirely from some internal muse. As Muñoz says, referencing Françoise Lionnet, autoethnography functions as a “scepticism about writing the self, the autobiography, turning it into the allegory of the ethnographic project that self-consciously moves from the general to the particular to the general.”

In this spirit, shifting between general and particular, I return to Anzaldúa’s notion that everything in the mind and in the world is both real and fictional. Rooted in my bodily experience of the world, my autoethnographic tale about the social world exists in my mind and the cultural imaginary around me.

Mapping

I use autoethnography’s ability to ‘trace the flows’ of social complexity, cognitively mapping my body’s situation within and relation to social space. Butz and Besio suggest that it may be useful to employ an explicitly autoethnographic mode to "understand spatiality and specific spatial processes (such as globalisation) in terms of networks, flows, assemblages, lines of flight, and the like ... to trace the intimacies of these flows and formations from the inside out, so to speak." I am using autoethnographic practices to, as Butz and Besio say, better ‘understand spatiality’ and the socio-physical ground I stand on. My autoethnographic

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280 Muñoz, Disidentifications, 81.
creatography captures the mundane interactions resulting from ManChyna’s multiple incursions into the on- and offline worlds. Sexual encounters, conversations in beer tents or backstage, and so on, constitute my ‘narrow framework of daily life,’ which I map to vaster social totalities. As Frederic Jameson calls it, such a map constitutes a cartographic process called ‘cognitive mapping.’ Such cognitive maps are, for Jameson, “the representation of the subject’s Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence.”282 As such, Jameson directs us to create new conceptual spaces, called “cognitive maps,” linking the two Lacanian realms toward regaining a social totality of geographic space, “to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality.”283 By following ManChyna into and out of social spaces, literally and figuratively, he constitutes a cartographic project. ManChyna is my minoritarian consciousness that maps the spaces I move within, assimilate into, and that contain me.

The cognitive map charted by ManChyna utilizes my body in geographic space to sketch conditions of the new whiteness that seek to contain and order minoritarian experience. Geographical imagination has been defined as “sensitivity towards the significance of place, space, and landscape in the constitution and conduct of social life.”284 In *Race, Space, and the Law,*285 the authors demonstrate “how place becomes race through the law” (original emphasis), how European entitlement to land becomes codified through law,286 and how “we

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282 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* 90.
283 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 1.
287 Ibid., 3.
[people of colour] experience the spatiality of the racial order in which we live.”288 My autoethnography maps the latter, the way in which we experience and move through space, ordered and contained by white supremacy. In my disassimilation and autoethnographic creatography, I explore both the materiality and symbolism of the spaces I move through while I simultaneously re-signify it with my disidentificatory creations. Beginning with my own body, I follow Razack’s approach, “[t]o interrogate bodies travelling in spaces … engag[ing] in a complex historical mapping of spaces and bodies in relation, … a tracking of multiple systems of domination and the ways in which they come into existence in and through each other”289 (original emphasis). Throughout the next chapters, and especially in Chapters 2 and 3, I reflect on the conditions that both permit and contain minoritarian movement and speech. In mapping and “un-mapping” these regulatory conditions, I also implicate my own complicity in their mutual constitution as a homonormative model minority. This mutual constitution crystallizes in the last chapter, a textual denaturalization of the persistent model minority trope, mapping it as a re-articulation of eugenic logic in a multicultural modernity – or, multicultural eugenics.

Especially as I outline discursive similarities between ManChyna texts and others, I engage with a variety of texts, framed by the parameters of ManChyna creations. As is apparent in the musical and lyrical content of ManChyna texts, I recycle and re-signify myriad cultural references. Such elements define the parameters of my discursive analysis. Some tropes I recycle are meant to invoke occidental fears of racial others and cultural anxieties about homosexuality. Such tropes allow me to contrast the promise of model minority and homonationalist belonging with a discordant cultural imaginary that co-exists within this liberal multicultural framework.

288 Ibid., 6.
289 Ibid., 15.
Others fill in gaps between the two. When, for example, I use the world of *Harry Potter* (in “Tiger Mom,” 2012) to lyrically slide between discussions of racial purity, class hierarchy, queer cultural sport, and anal sex, it is not a poetic flourish. These lyrics aid in contextualizing my diagnosis of the logics of liberal multicultural capitalism as being contiguous with a regrettable and supposedly historic past. As I extract these tropes for analysis here, I expand their connections to the social totality of the spaces I map. And so, the creative elements of ManChyna define the scope of my cognitive map’s discursive aspect.

I also define the scope of my mapping analysis at the scale of my body. I track my individual movements and my personal creative output, my literal body and body of work. My analysis is not limited to a textual reading of my creations. Instead, I am equally interested in the people and places that my work brings me into contact with. But this is not to say I disregard my own texts. To better explain this, I turn to a website I use as a hermeneutical jump-off in Chapters 2 and 4, RapGenius.com.

I started casually reading RapGenius in 2010, when that was still its name, to corroborate and challenge my own interpretations of other artists’ rap lyrics. RapGenius ranks contributors based on their accumulated IQ score (a measure of a user’s contributions to the website). Individual users accumulate points for separate artist pages to which they contribute (“Nicki Minaj IQ,” “Drake IQ,” and so on), which then add to an individual user’s overall IQ score. One acquires IQ points, according to the community guidelines, by annotating lyrics, having annotations upvoted or downvoted (negative score), and so on.

The site is now known simply as Genius.com and has since expanded its scope of annotation. Its lofty goal is to ‘annotate the world’ (annotations are known as “glosses,” or even “‘tates”), from the Abraham Lincoln speeches to the back of a Tylenol bottle. According to Katy Waldman,

Genius circa 2015 appears somewhere between Wikipedia and Urban Dictionary in the pantheon of crowdsourced reference giants. All three companies ‘democratize knowledge production,’ but unlike the former, with its suspicion of original contributions, Genius encourages interpretation and analysis. And unlike the latter, the hipness it aspires to is mature and cerebral, not juvenile…. If the site is democratizing close-reading, it’s doing it in two directions—by treating all texts as worthy of explication, but also by claiming that we are all explicators: that the critical impulse thrives outside the ivory tower.

The site’s 2009 origins, however, as a “would-be hip-hop authority ironically run by white Yale grads” and its more recent venture capital investment of $50 million shed a darker light on its current status as a digital start-up darling, ostensibly interested in raising the bar of public discourse. Nevertheless, while the site was “once accused of ‘exploiting black culture for commercial gain,’ ‘slumming,’ and ‘white-washing,’ [it is] now hosting digital salons in which luminaries like Junot Diaz, Michael Chabon, and 50 Cent lift the veil on their own work.”

With 1.5 million “Internet geese” engaged daily in symbol hunting and linguistic nitpicking, “[the site] excels at providing context, defining terms, sniffing out half-buried references. In the best case scenario, it will track down a fact that explodes or radically ventilates your understanding of a lyric.” The site is particularly useful in parsing contemporary rap lyrics, with the strength of “a big enough group of Internet fans, and their mingled expertise [that] will

292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
congeal into a nerdy bloodhound.” On the other hand, it is less interesting when used to decipher Chipotle’s menu items, most pop confections, or even – sadly – older rap songs that do not have a large fan base among the site’s younger users. Waldman also points out that the democratic nature of “upvoting” and “downvoting” crowd-approved interpretations creates a “bias toward blandness,” suggesting that explanation by agreement weeds out interestingly idiosyncratic analyses. Still, I use the site for the user-generated interpretations of contemporary lyrics by Nicki Minaj and the now defunct group Das Racist, to “check-in” with the (sometimes bland) interpretations offered by others.

I expand the parameter of my viewfinder, however, from the myopic scope that the annotation site promotes. My methodological choice of a wider scope is practical. It allows me to use my visual and lyrical content as an anchor to connect with others’ work, explaining the seemingly discombobulated distribution of cultural references I make. For example, I go beyond hip-hop references like Jay-Z, Nicki Minaj, and Das Racist, to the works of the Group of Seven, speeches by Canadian Prime Ministers, and the Harry Potter fantasy world. Each ties back to my own work either lyrically or vis-à-vis my physical travels. In Chapter 2, for instance, I shift between lyrical analysis, visual analysis, and spatial analysis, reaching into the cultural connective tissue articulating my work and body with others. In both Chapters 2 and 3, additionally, it is my performance of texts that brings me into contact with unfamiliar strangers and strange conversations. Instead of annotating lyrics, turns of phrases, and single words in the microscopic vein of Genius.com, my theoretical treatment expands my viewfinder to roughly the size of my oeuvre and slightly beyond, using my body and body of work as anchors. Waldman

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296 Ibid.  
297 Ibid.
laments about “a churning sense of data overload… [that] can make your final understanding of a song feel high but not deep, intricate but not meaningful … as if each comment were another encrustation over an elusive center … [that] would rather inform and demystify than interpret.”

My mapping method comprises both my performative body and simultaneous discursive analysis in an autoethnographic interpretation of works and spaces. Put differently, my viewfinder gives my self-reflective ‘tates’ a multidimensional understanding beyond an interpretation of the texts themselves. Each cartographic tool begins with the individual (my experiences and my writings) and extends the interpretation to the horizon of social totality that I can reasonably reach.

The unreachable horizon, though, means that there are always larger and smaller fields of interpretation. Just as I am not parsing individual lyrics, neither am I depicting the social totality. A higher level of social analysis exists, which my creative autoethnographic mapping cannot and does not attempt to operate on. As Genius.com shows us, one can engage in an even smaller scale of hermeneutics. Other’s interpretations of either my works or the works I call upon may come to different conclusions. Others might take a broader or even more microscopic view than I do. Each approach potentially brings in different tools of analysis that I do not focus on – different historical, economic, literary, or statistical data. The picture I paint is of my social totality, or my situated knowledge.

My autoethnographic creatography is limited, mapping where I go, my target of analysis, and with whom I think.

Concluding Remarks

298 Ibid.
The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, it serves as a theoretical orientation for the three chapters that follow. I lay out the primary concepts relevant to the subsequent chapters, namely the “model minority” stereotype and the theory of disidentification. The former I introduce by reviewing it as a confluence of racial, sexual, and political forces. The model minority stereotype is my primary entry point for diagnosing assimilation and national belonging, both a desire for and the conditioning forces that shape their processes. The latter, disidentification, is the theoretical lens with which to read my creative texts.

Disidentification also serves as the basis for my methodological extension in the second half of this chapter, an analytic of “disassimilation.” Disassimilation is the result of putting into conversation the performance of José Muñoz’s disidentification with the theme of assimilation fuelled by a fantasy of inclusion promised by the model minority trope. For this reason, the chapter both anticipates and is the consequence of the analyses in subsequent chapters. My movements through space, detailed in chapters 3 and 4, along with the parody of assimilation documented in chapter 5 fuel the contradictory, parodic, and theoretically productive nature of disassimilation.

I call my mapping of minoritarian disassimilation, autoethnographic creatography. The term merges the methods I bring together under ManChyna – autoethnographic recall, the production of creative texts, and cognitive mapping of social spaces. The fabric of my “creatography” interweaves each of the methods. Biographical recall informs my art. My art provides the basis for new experiences as ManChyna. I chart these experiences as autoethnography. And these elements of ManChyna collectively inform a cognitive map of the theoretical argument I advance about the regulatory effects of the new whiteness, and its queer liberal settler multiculturalism.
Chapter 3

Chinese Brokeback: Unsettling White Eugenic Rurality

“GAY RURAL CHINESE RAPPER IS LITERALLY ALL OF TEA PARTY’S WORST FEARS”
- Xander Redd, outreagedc.com, 2012

Video for “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPfjFN1aVH0

Online reactions to my work as ManChyna range from “a world of suck. And not the good kind” to “kind of awesome.”300 Reacting to my ‘bad-but-charming’ video for “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012),301 an OutrageDC writer suggests, “[it] is sure to unsettle kindly palefaced midwesterners, spook immigrant grandparents of all flavors, and can actually be used to banish Andrew Breitbart’s ghost. A tip of the hat to you Man Chyna, but just the tip”302 (added emphasis) (Figure 6).

301 Moving forward my song, “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012), will be written as “Brokeback” while the motion picture, Brokeback Mountain (2005), will be denoted by Brokeback Mountain.
The manifold cultural registers activated by Redd’s summary are meaningful. In one flavourful description, “Brokeback” is implicated in a convergence of Middle American whiteness, diasporic family inheritance, and the conservative ideology of political commentators like the late Andrew Breitbart. I could not have more perfectly planned such a reaction. But I certainly hoped to position my work at this intersection of occidental fears and cultural anxieties. Employing parodic extremes of Asian-ness and gay sexuality in public is, for the keen observer, meant to elicit reactions of nationalist xenophobia. An unanticipated line of inquiry arising from making this video and its reception, however, is my implication in the aesthetics of rurality and whitened, non-urban geographies. My dialogue with whiteness was unanticipated because the latter is so deeply implicit in rural, Shawville, Québec, our filming location. Whiteness has simply become the wallpaper of rustic rurality. “Brokeback” parodies and disidentifies with homonormative appeals to white eugenic rejuvenation of Hollywood Westerns. In the Canadian context of the Ottawa Valley, my queer ethnic excess “unsettles” (as Redd says) the work involved in constructing normative white rurality and the attempted erasure of indigeneity from the land. By unsettling the constructed connection between whiteness and rurality through my particular racialized sexuality, “Brokeback” and my analysis of making it upends the white-knuckled grip over the area and resituates rightful Indigenous claims to it. Put another way by one Tumblr user, “Toronto’s Man Chyna [sic] wants to stick it in your cracker ass.”

First, I begin with a brief history of the song, “Brokeback,” and the making of its video. My recollection of the video’s making and my sense of alienness are entry points for diagnosing the white eugenics of Canadian rurality. Next, I place the work and my experience of it in

conversation with other creative texts. These include the photography of Hong Kong/Canadian/New York performance artist Tseng Kwong Chi and the film *Brokeback Mountain*. Tseng’s work, depictions of his own “Oriental Excess,” takes us into Canadian and U.S. histories of what literary scholar Iyko Day calls the eugenic landscapes of settler-colonialism.³⁰⁴ Meanwhile, I trace the lineage of *Brokeback Mountain* through a history of Hollywood Westerns and cinematic cowboys, opening a space to discuss my own, animated, Oriental Excess set against a moving eugenic landscape. A closer reading of my text, both lyrically and visually, articulates the unspoken impulse and impossible limits of racialized assimilation into the rural whiteness of “Brokeback.” I challenge the assumed ease of whiteness’ conjoined relationship with rurality by first genealogically tracing the Algonquin indigeneity in these eugenics landscapes. I next articulate the centrality of the Ottawa Valley to the federalization of Canada vis-à-vis the interconnected struggle of Chinese indentured labour and the fracturing of Algonquin nationhood. The implication of disjoining whiteness and Canadian rurality with my Oriental body, while foregrounding the attempted settler erasure of indigeneity, gestures toward a moment of commensurability between indigenous and subaltern studies that is urgently needed.³⁰⁵

“Brokeback That Ass Up:” A brief history

I used the phrasal portmanteau “Brokeback That Ass Up” in performance before I ever took the stage as a rapper. In 2007 at the inaugural, queer, honkytonk dance party, “Steers and Queers” (still going strong as an underground Toronto institution in 2015), I staged a

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performance piece in which I, a Chinese cowboy, stripped my clothes and devoured my romantic interest for the evening, a cob of corn (Figure 7).

Figure 7. A.W. Lee performing the original burlesque scene, “Brokeback That Ass Up” under the name “Male Gayze” at Steers and Queers, Toronto, 2007. Photo by Sonya Reynolds.

Set to my own mashup of Juvenile’s “Back That Ass Up” (1999) and Beenie Man’s “King of the Dancehall” (2004), I ‘booty bounced’ for four minutes with an enthusiastic crowd in a Toronto basement bar, the Dakota Tavern. At the end of the scene, I was wearing nothing but fringed underwear, and the crowd happily wiped my partially chewed corn off their faces. I titled this piece, “Brokeback That Ass Up.” The spirit of irreverence, grotesqueness, and comedic absurdity of the evening remained central years later (circa 2011) when I wrote a song sharing the same name, parodying the canonical LGBT film Brokeback Mountain (2005).

“Brokeback” irreverently disidentifies sonically and lyrically with its musical and filmic referents. I set lyrics to a friend’s and collaborator’s pop beat, constructed from Gustavo Santaolalla’s instrumental composition, “The Wings” (2005), which was featured on the soundtrack of the Oscar winning film. “Brokeback” begins with “The Wings” 3/4 time signature,

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306 Hip-hop head and scholar of race, ethnicity, and Latin American studies, Dr. Alex Da Costa, Department of Global Development Studies, Queen’s University
opening with the calming rhythm of a waltz (3/4) or a lullaby (6/8). But the ‘3-feel’ time
signatures can also be interpreted as “whimsical.” The whimsy of “The Wings” introduces a
leitmotif of lightness. Where the sense of lightness will land, though, is unresolved because the
driving 4/4 beat of “Brokeback” interrupts the last three count of the “Wings” introduction. It is
the comical slap bass line sampled and sped up from Modest Mouse’s sex-themed “All Night
Diner” (1996) that sonically establishes the parodic remix of the song. Combining Juvenile’s
infectious hook and twisting the meaning of its gendered call to ‘back one’s ass up’ on top of
Santaolalla’s chords, two friends and I set out in a borrowed SUV to the Ottawa Valley to film
a YouTube video for this song.

Figure 8. YouTube comment left on ManChyna’s video for “Brokeback That Ass Up.” Retrieved
February, 2014.

In the traditional Algonquin territory on which Shawville, Québec now stands, two white
lesbians and a gay Chinese man walk into the beer tent of the Shawville Fall Fair. The
transparent gawking and finger pointing we experienced were, in the end, harmless and friendly.
In the moment, though, given the sea of rural white faces and the beer tent’s local reputation for
drunken disorder, our presence felt dangerously queer. Contrary to the positive sentiment later
expressed by YouTube commenter MeganBell123 (Figure 8), Lauren Hortie (the Lesbi-Andy
Warhol to the Steers and Queers ‘Factory’) jokingly described it at the time as not feeling like a

307 Kevin O’Toole, “Phoenix Flight,” 2014 AHS Capstone Projects, October 1, 2014,
308 Director/filmographer, Sonya Reynolds and stylist/artist/Shawville descendant, Lauren Hortie.
309 MeganBell123, comment on “Brokeback That Ass Up,” March 16, 2012,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPfjFN1aVH0
‘safe space’ for us. The awkward alien-ness of our presence in a rural setting is one familiar to many – self-identified urbanites, queers, racialized folk, and so on.

This chapter centers on the sense of being out-of-place, a corporeal index of alien-ness, felt by bodies in spaces coded as “not for them,” and the curdling of such invisible cultural codes when mixed with alien ingredients. I am here reminded of Razack’s anthology, wherein the authors define the legal strategies that space becomes racially codified. I am also reminded of cultural representations of minoritarian experience of such spaces. Himanshu Suri’s verse, for example, on the Das Racist song, “Rainbow in the Dark” (2010) exemplifies such experience:

Like a tree or the tears of a clown/
Yo, I’m afraid of clowns, I’m afraid of small towns

An expression of racialized dread, “I’m afraid of small towns,” Suri’s admission speaks to an anticipatory fear of white rurality he feels about such spaces. As another person of colour who has spent the majority of his adult life living in and around small to mid-sized cities, I share Suri’s sentiment.

Suri’s work in Das Racist is subject to manifold interpretations that contextualize his fear of small towns. The crowd-sourced website for hip-hop hermeneutics, RapGenius.com, provides the following analysis:

Small towns are thought to be havens of rampant racism, which may not serve these fine brown gentlemen well…Also, this line as a whole is a reference to Stephen King’s It which is partially about a killer clown. Of course, being a King book, it takes place in a small town in Maine.

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310 Razack ed., Race Space and the Law,
311 Himanshu Suri, or Heems, is one third of former Brooklyn based rap group, Das Racist. In December 2012, shortly after the group broke up, I toured with Himanshu as his opening act in China. Das Racist’s existing body of work is an important practical and theoretical touchstone for my work as ManChyna.
The interpretation is consonant with the hyper-referential, obliquely anti-racist criticism of western culture associated with the now defunct rap group. Until their breakup in 2012, Das Racist’s cultural significance as one of the few popular (if largely independent) American rap groups composed of non-Black performers situates their voices as poignantly racialized. In relation to the line that immediately follows it, “Positive energy, something like I’m afraid of all frowns,” Das Racist’s seemingly nonsensical, associative flow often resists interpretation. A disjointed analysis on RapGenius.com, though, is helpful here: “Heems [Himanshu Suri] is a notable exponent of positive vibes.” The nameless contributor to the website, which Das Racist have described elsewhere as “white devil sophistry,” associates positive energy with the celebrity of Himanshu Suri, apropos of no other interpretation on the webpage. The positivity that Suri projects alongside a fear of small towns I read as disidentificatory multiplicity; it can be read as dissonant impulses of alien exclusion and a desire for incorporation, eliciting reactions of sadness, violence, and happiness.

A similar sentiment of fear and positivity imbues “Brokeback That Ass Up,” from its inception in a basement bar to the homemade music video my friends and I shot at a rural fair. MeganBell123’s agreeable reading of the video’s context and the song gleans the positive vibes, the fun, we-three-queers were transparently enjoying at the same time as feeling a heightened

sense of alien-ness and non-belonging. I do not suggest that we were actively discriminated against or excluded from participation. To be clear, I am not speaking of legislative projects like American segregation, South African Apartheid, Japanese internment in America and Canada, school segregation of Chinese-Canadians\(^ {314} \) in Vancouver, or the Canadian Indian Act’s “carefully controlled segregation” across Canada.\(^ {315} \) Despite their recentness, such juridical exercises of white colonial power continue to be dismissed by self-reputed liberal moderns as regrettable artefacts of history, different in kind from the contemporary feelings of non-belonging experienced by racialized and Indigenous bodies in a putatively modern Canadian national fabric. I am saying, instead, that this is a difference of degree.

![Screen cap of “Brokeback That Ass Up” (2012) showing ManChyna rapping in an empty corner of the Shawville Fall Fair beer tent, discreetly lip-syncing to music in my earbud.](image)

We were still notable, as MeganBell123 noted, in spite of our discreet point-and-shoot camera (Figure 9) and whiteness of my companions that might have rendered their lesbian sexuality invisible in another context. I suggest that my racial difference, an inauthentic rural body in clothing that is not quite ‘country,’ was the only marker of difference that could have been

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visually notable. The embossment of my racialized body in the pallid rurality sets into relief my group’s excessive exoticieness.

**Oriental Excess of Tseng Kwong Chi’s Eugenic Landscapes**

My dancing and rapping in the settler space of the fall fair animates what Iyko Day calls the tension of racial excess, contrasting sharply against a eugenic landscape of settler-colonialism. Day suggests the photographic series, ‘Expeditionary Series,’ by Hong Kong-born, Canadian-raised, and New York-based artist Tseng Kwong Chi is an example of queer disidentification with Anglo-Saxon narratives of western exploration as a site for whiteness’ eugenic re-purification.

![Image of Victoria Peak, Alberta, Canada](image)

**Figure 10. Victoria Peak, Alberta, Canada, in “Expedition Series,” by Tseng Kwong Chi, 1986. Silver Gelatin Prints, 36 x 36 inches, 91.4 x 91.4 cm. Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.**

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316 Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
317 Ibid.
318 Further examples can be found at www.tsengkwongchi.com.
In “Expeditionary Series,” (Figure 10) Tseng dresses his queer, Asian-Canadian/Asian-American body in ‘Chinese drag’ and sets it against the landscapes of Alberta (Stoney Nakoda territory, or Banff National Park), British Columbia (Aseniwuche Winewak territory, or the Rocky Mountains), and the American Dakotas (Lakota territory). Day reads these photographed landscapes as “settler-colonial” (as opposed to being read as “Indigenous”) to underscore the western conventions of Canadian and American landscape art that she reads as being Tseng’s parodic target. Tseng, according to Day, evokes Group of Seven-era imagery of Canada and Ansel Adam’s nature photography of America.\textsuperscript{319} Day argues that Tseng’s still photos underscore and unsettles the settler logic of white, racial re-purification tied to the Canadian landscape. The logic of eugenic purity, Day suggests, hinges on the return to a pure, Canadian land built on Indigenous erasure and racial exploitation.

The spatial refashioning of Canadian wilderness is a cultural project of whitening wilderness. Richard Phillips explores and troubles (or “map” and “unmaps”) popular adventure literature of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{320} For Richards,

Adventure stories constructed a concrete (rather than purely abstract) cultural space that, like the cognitive maps advocated by Jameson, mapped a social totality in a manner that was imaginatively accessible and appealing… motivated by a clear political agenda: broadly speaking, imperialism. Adventure stories constructed cultural space in which imperial geographies and imperial masculinities were conceived.\textsuperscript{321}

As Sherene Razack explains, Phillips denaturalizes the whiteness and masculinity inscribed into Indigenous land that was mapped by Europeans. European mapping enabled them to “imagine

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{320} Richard Phillips, \textit{Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure} (Psychology Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 12.
and legally claim that they had discovered and therefore owned the lands.\textsuperscript{322} Vis-à-vis the cultural work of adventure stories, Canada’s wilderness serves to consolidate national self-images of masculine strength, racial purity, and white ownership of rural landscapes. The white consolidation of colonial nationhood, centering white masculinity, also served to banish Indigenous people to an anachronistic space and time. The whitening of land also served to connect Indigenous and racialized people through this renaming of wilderness:

If Aboriginal peoples are consigned forever to an earlier space and time, people of colour are scripted as late arrivals, coming to the shores of North America long after much of the development has occurred. In this way, slavery, indentureship, and labour exploitation—for example, the Chinese who built the railway or the Sikhs who worked in the lumber industry in nineteenth-century Canada—are all handily forgotten in an official national story of European enterprise\textsuperscript{323}

Such cultural refashioning of rural wilderness as a manly European conquest forgets that the nation-building project was built on racialized labour and theft of Indigenous land. Such forgetting was especially necessary to contrast against the space of cities, which were imagined as overcrowded with immigrants.

In Britain, America, Canada, and Scandinavia simultaneously, Daniel Kevles suggests that white Anglo-Saxons attributed moral degeneration of the cities with the biological inferiority of racialized immigrants. If inferior genes were to blame for social problems, eugenicists believed, “biology might be used to eliminate these discordances of modern, urban, industrial society.”\textsuperscript{324} In Canada, eugenics philosophies took legal form as the Sexual Sterilization Acts of

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 3
Alberta (1928-1972) and British Columbia (1933-1973),\textsuperscript{325} disproportionately targeting the poor, racialized minorities, Indigenous people, and single mothers.\textsuperscript{326} Day connects the scientific racism and xenophobia in the eugenics movement with iconic Canadian art:

> Fears over the degeneration of Anglo-Saxon stock were present in the art world ... The Canadian Group of Seven painters reflected these anxieties over the diminishing strength of the white Nordic race in their painting, believing that the Canadian landscape held ‘replenishing power’ that could disinfect what one member called a ‘low receptive reservoir into which pours the chaos of ages, the mixed concord and discord of many varied peoples.’ Employing tropes associated with hygiene and mental health, they put forward a mission to ‘clean this reservoir ... or we will remain a confused people.’\textsuperscript{327}

Tseng’s photos, Day argues, parody the landscape imagery of the Group of Seven (and Ansel Adams’ black and white photography in the US context), whose artistic mission centers on the construction of a Northern, Canadian identity, based on the myth of Nordic possession of Canada.

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\textsuperscript{325} It is believed that Alberta’s sterilization of 2,832 people far outpaced British Columbia’s, since fewer records from the latter province have been recovered. Douglas Wahlsten, “Leilani Muir versus the Philosopher King: Eugenics on Trial in Alberta,” \textit{Genetica} 99, no. 2 (1997): 185–98; Moyra Lang, \textit{Living Archive on Eugenics in Western Canada}, vol. 2014, 02/23, 2013.

\textsuperscript{326} Steven Selden describes the development of eugenics-infused government policies in the US during the first half of the twentieth century a ‘crust of conventionalized consciousness.’ These conventions profoundly entangled both the government and academic institutions like the University of Alberta. In 1995, Leilani Muir became the first person to successfully challenge the Alberta government in court with respect to her forced sterilization in 1955. Dr. Douglas Wahlsten (a neuroscientist at the U of A department, which had in the past deemed Muir feeble-minded and approved her coerced sterilization at the age of fourteen) later interviewed Muir. Wahlsten suggests that western Canada was profoundly influenced by America’s virulent strain of racial purity and strength during the interwar period. This period of the North American eugenics movement, which served as inspiration for the administratively efficient genocide committed by Nazi Germany. G. E. Allen, “Eugenics Comes to America,” ed. Russell Jacoby, Naomi Glauberman, and Richard J. Herrnstein, \textit{The Bell Curve Debate: History, Documents, Opinions} (New York: Times Books, 1995); Allan Chase, \textit{The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism} (New York: Knopf, 1977); Bernie Devlin et al., “Galton Redux: Eugenics, Intelligence, Race, and Society: A Review of The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life,” \textit{J Am Stat Assoc} 90 (1995): 1483–88; Wahlsten, “Leilani Muir versus the Philosopher King: Eugenics on Trial in Alberta.”

\textsuperscript{327} Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
as a white man’s land. “Brokeback” animates this parodic vision of rural landscape, referencing the Hollywood Westerns to which *Brokeback Mountain* is indebted.

Hollywood Westerns and Brokeback That Ass Up

Hollywood Westerns share the same rejuvenating, eugenic power, which Day argues shapes the landscapes of Group Of Seven paintings and other iconography of settler colonial pioneerism that Tseng’s work incorporates. In addition to Banff National Park, Tseng’s photographs also depict more southerly, U.S. backdrops paralleling Banff’s pioneer fantasy, such as Mount Rushmore (Figure 11) and the Grand Canyon.

![Figure 11. Mount Rushmore, South Dakota, Tseng Kwong Chi, 1986. Gelatin on silver, 36x36 in. Tseng, in the foreground, facing Mount Rushmore. Muna Tseng Dance Projects, Inc.

Etching the faces of slave-owner Thomas Jefferson and three other “Great White Fathers” of America into the land, white patriarchy and racist xenophobia are implicitly allegorized in
Borglum’s Mount Rushmore.\textsuperscript{328} With the advent of the National Origins Act of 1924 and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan to its zenith of popularity in the 1920s, Albert Boime argues, “Borglum's nationalist project could not have been better timed. The post-World War I era was marked by a social narrowness and growing intolerance of foreigners, with white, Protestant Americans of older stock displaying overt hostility against Asians, African Americans, Catholics, and Jews.”\textsuperscript{329}

Hollywood Westerns, according to Martin Lefebvre, parallel the landscape painting in the cinematic tradition.\textsuperscript{330} In their nostalgic use of Jefferson-era rhetoric, Westerns evoke the same social Darwinism implicit in the Manifest Destiny belief of settler colonial pioneerism. Ang Lee’s \textit{Brokeback Mountain} recalls such myths of settling the American West in its use of Western cinematic tropes like the rolling fields of Wyoming. An irony inherent in such a display is its relative contemporaneousness (set between 1963 and 1981) and actual film location (Alberta, Canada). John White points out the elasticity of Western films’ historical timeframes, including \textit{Brokeback Mountain} as a contemporary Western for its utility of the genre’s typical iconography.\textsuperscript{331} \textit{Brokeback Mountain}’s function as a modern Hollywood Western and cultural repository for the same sentiments of racial purity is instructive in focusing on Alberta – not only as an iconic exemplar of Canadian rurality, but also for its specific history of eugenics policy.

“Brokeback” calls forth similar imagery, explicitly panning across the rolling fields of Canadian farmland, often with my body dwarfed by the pastoral landscape (Figure 12). A directorial decision, we intentionally emphasized the landscape as a figurative character in

“Brokeback.”

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{330} Martin Lefebvre, \textit{Landscape and Film} (New York: Routledge, 2006).
\textsuperscript{331} John White, \textit{Westerns} (Routledge, 2010).
Cultivated nature, in the form of bucolic farmland and domesticated chattel, is the only character I interact with outside of the Shawville beer tent. In the beer tent, I necessarily contrast against and interact with people; the whiteness against which I am set in these scenes is glaringly obvious. Outdoors, however, my yellow body continues to contrast with the white masculinity of agrarian landscapes. While Tseng calls forth the myth of phallic masculinity in western Canada’s grand landscapes, with mountains and trees piercing the sky like a penis, “Brokeback That Ass Up” calls forth a homier, more intimate pastoralism.

One difference between “Brokeback” and Expedition Series (1992) lies in the contrasting geology of western and eastern/central settlement. Tseng displays the newly formed, and thus soaring, geology of the Rocky Mountains in western Canada. We filmed “Brokeback” between the older, and thus flatter, Canadian Shield and Appalachians in the former Boreal Forest turned farmland. The older geological age of the region parallels the older age of European settlements of central Canada compared to the frontier settlements in the west. The vanilla flatness of

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332 Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
Ontario and Québec tourism campaigns is often featured as a highlight of the provinces, displaying peaceful agrarian landscapes and serene lake water, disturbed only by a single loon. Tseng’s frontier backdrop parodies the rugged individualism of white pioneer men settling the nation. In contrast, the more serene backdrop of Ontario and eastern Québec recalls the result of this process, the settled nation. Like the quiet country life displayed in the first half of Brokeback Mountain, the rusticity of rural farmland recalls nostalgia for the fantasy of a simpler time, for a White Man’s Nation. John White suggests Brokeback Mountain is intimately concerned with the myth of the west, with “romanticized notions of the cowboy and the pioneering life” and reflecting “the sudden physical violence of the historical American West … [as] the slow psychological violence of small-town, rural America.”

The serenity of settled farmland then has a Janus-faced quality – while calm and restful for some, the same stillness can evoke periods of horrific violence for others.

Western films represent a rejuvenation of heterosexual masculinity along with the whiteness of settler colonial pioneerism. The rural life on display in Westerns re-imagines pioneer simplicity, recalling a settler-colonialism, coloured as white and marked as heterosexual and masculine. The claim that Westerns and their primary characters appeal to an old-fashioned masculinity characterized by strength, rational ingenuity, unemotional stoicism, and moral character is not new. John Wayne, who has been described as “the almost perfect father figure” by literary scholar Max Westbrook, has had arguably more of a hegemonic influence on notions of white American masculinity outside the Western genre than any of its other stars. Sue

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333 White, Westerns, 154.
Matheson, a scholar of Western films, points out the discursive impact ‘The Duke’ has had on millions of Americans, as one of cinema’s (and not just Westerns) top ten stars with commercial appeal:

As a boy, Newt Gingrich, future Speaker of the House of Representatives, tried to walk like John Wayne; this was his way of ‘being a man.’ Even protest folk singer-songwriter Phil Ochs, and Ron Kovic, a Vietnam paraplegic who sacrificed his ‘dead dick for John Wayne,’ regarded the Duke as an icon of American manhood. Richard Nixon believed that his country’s domestic problems could be straightened out if the American people would only model their behavior on Wayne’s performance in *Chisum* (1970). And during his 1984 reelection campaign, Ronald Reagan made a pilgrimage to Wayne’s birthplace, Winterset, Iowa.  

Reagan’s own film star past, which affirmed his American cowboy manhood, was modeled after Wayne’s persona. Since the 1980s the phrase, “Reagan’s Cowboy Capitalism” circulated widely to refer to Reagan’s economic policies, or Reaganomics, that advanced an unregulated wild west of neoliberal capitalism. John Wayne, the genre’s primary masculine hegemon, becomes symbolic of America; if Kovic offered his ‘dead dick’ up as sacrifice to Wayne, he also did so for the nation. Not only do Western films, vis-à-vis their star cowboys, act as a reservoir for anxious appeals to old-fashioned masculinity, but also play a role in shaping economic and political visions of America and become symbolically conflated with America itself.

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337 Several of Reagan’s film credits included cowboy Westerns like *The Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *The Cattle Queen of Montana* (1954), *Tennessee’s Partner* (1955), and *Law and Order* (1953). Reagan’s dramaturgical portrayal of American manhood, which comprised a six month stay on a dude ranch, played a significant role in his public image overhaul and eventual ascendance to the American presidency.

Heterosexuality acts as a necessary component to the Western genre, an implicit aspect of its masculine image. Heterosexuality works to acceptably offset the homosocial bonding between protagonists; wives and female conquests serve to differentiate male homosociality between ‘good guys’ (brotherly love, in the Greek sense, philia) and ‘bad guys’ (with effete homosexual overtones).  

Brokeback Mountain is a transformative film that marks a contemporary triumph for empathetic displays of complex gay characters in mainstream Hollywood. Even so, Brokeback Mountain invokes the idyllic virtues of heteronormative unions in, what Lisa Duggan would call, its “homonormative” aspiration to normalcy and acceptability.  

Duggan theorizes homonormativity in America as a “new neo-liberal sexual politics… that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”  

Contemporary consumption of the gay domesticity romanticized in Brokeback Mountain all but applauds the bliss of gay union, perfectly calibrated to tap into inclusionary projects for mainstreaming gays and lesbians into the institution of marriage. White notes that Brokeback Mountain’s main protagonists play “at being a ‘married’ couple” while herding sheep on the eponymous mountain.  

The two characters, Del Mar and Twist, perform domestic chores, commute to their work, and live “in a rural idyll that, with its flowing river and background mountain scenery, resemble[s] the Eden-like homestead of

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341 Ibid., 179.  
342 White, Westerns.
the Starretts in *Shane.*"343 *Brokeback Mountain*, in displaying rural domesticity to functionally extract audience empathy (the empty invocation of unity: ‘they’re just like us!’), affirms an updated image of normative roles for gays in what amounts symbolically to a heterosexual marriage. Further, the white male couple approximates so closely an ideal American romance, save for one minor deviation, the tragedy of the film’s climax is rendered all the more devastating. *Brokeback Mountain* then is not just another Hollywood Western. The film taps into the genre’s reservoir of white pioneer masculinity to functionally legitimate gay sexuality in an America that is implicitly defined as a nation of and for white cowboys.

Western films in the twentieth century play a role in discursively imagining North America as a “White Man’s Land,” through the mythic erasure of Indigenous people and reaffirming the subordination of racialized people in frontier landscapes as emasculated servants. Like the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven, the idyll of rural life represents a pure, regenerative respite from urban life. As Scott Herring describes it, reactionary anti-urbanism that idealizes non-urban agrarianism has an “embarrassing social history” of racist xenophobia aimed at immigrants taking up residence in western cities. Citing Thomas Jefferson’s rhetoric about the moral degeneracy of metropolises Herring suggests,

> The term [cities] was often used in the later nineteenth century to describe a politically bankrupt regionalism that functioned as nostalgic code speak for Anglo-Saxon supremacy and anti-urbanization, or what Southern Renaissance writer and fervid Ku Klux Klan apologist Thomas Dixon Jr. referred to as the ‘horrors of city life’ … praising ‘Old Tidewater Virginia’ over the new brownstones of New York City.344

By the time Westerns arrived in cinemas as one of film’s pioneering genres at the turn of the twentieth century, the anti-urbanist nostalgia for eighteenth century pioneer life and, especially, a

343 Ibid.
connection to nature through Indigenous bodies is implicit in its inception. In the first silent Westerns, Indigenous people are shown as noble ‘men of nature,’ who help white settlers; the films are akin to “anthropology-as-entertainment.” Whether imagined as a helpful, ‘noble savage’ in the lush forests of northeastern states or as a dangerous, faceless horde in the arid Arizona desert, Indigenous people were depicted as ‘vanishing,’ an anachronistic figure belonging to the past. The ideological construction of a White Man’s Nation required both the real and imagined erasure of Native Americans as well as the naturalization of America’s ‘Manifest Destiny,’ both of which were usefully depicted in popular Western films.

Western films were invented during America’s second wave of expansionist popularity during the Spanish-American War, visually displaying the myth of Manifest Destiny for cinematic audiences. While images of “Noble Savages” existed in the early years of Hollywood Westerns, the Indian-as-threat to the white man’s destiny of blazing westward returned with Cecil B. Demille’s *Plainsman* (1937) to dominate the cowboy-Indian formula of

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345 Such as The Red Girl (1908), The Aborigine’s Devotion (1909), Her Indian Mother (1910), and so on.
347 Prior to the formation of ‘Hollywood,’ Westerns used the woodsy forests of northeastern states as the site for displaying both helpful and antagonistic confrontations with Native people. The movement of major motion picture studios from New York and New Jersey to Los Angeles, the birth of Hollywood, precipitated the use of the Arizona and Nevada deserts in most Westerns thereafter. White, *Westerns*.
349 Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century*. 
American Westerns.\textsuperscript{350} Scott Simmon suggests that Western film’s biggest star cowboy, John Wayne, physically manifested this westward expansionism.\textsuperscript{351} Wayne, Simmon says, had a “larger-than-life, all-American” presence in his films, never originating in any particular region of North America or Europe, with a “vague impression that he brings an Anglo-Saxon heritage … reinforced by his one statement about origins [in the film \textit{The Big Trail}]: ‘We’re blazing a trail that started in England.’”\textsuperscript{352} Wayne’s ‘all-American’ presence is in spite of his own ethnic heritage, which gets elided through cinema magic. John Wayne (née Marion Morrison), the all American cowboy, ironically descends from Irish immigrants, a group whose white status is far from ‘natural’ as Noel Ignatiev reminds us.\textsuperscript{353} One of Wayne’s grandfathers was an Irish revolutionary and his maternal grandmother fled Ireland during the England-colonial genocide of the potato famine.\textsuperscript{354} The work involved in Wayne’s becoming-white and his synecdoche, America, also becoming a white nation is similarly omitted. The whiteness of Western films and the pioneer settler-colonialism they re-imagine becomes unmarked and invisible,\textsuperscript{355} yet thoroughly colours the imagined community of the new world as a white one.

As noted earlier, a distinction must be made between the agrarian pastoralism idealized in the political rhetoric of eighteenth and nineteenth century America and the rurality on display in “Brokeback.” The farmland of classic Westerns, most often depicted as a rugged taming of the

\textsuperscript{350} Angela Aleiss, \textit{Making the White Man’s Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies} (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005).
\textsuperscript{351} Simmon, \textit{The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century}.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{353} Noel Ignatiev, \textit{How the Irish Became White} (New York: Routledge, 1995).
arid frontier, represents the idealized creation of civilization, the *settling* of America. The contemporary image of a *settled community*, however, re-affirms the whiteness of a settler nation state. Jefferson’s agrarian pastoralism is set in opposition to his view of the morally degenerate cities (especially those of Europe). The sentiment was a promise proffered to colonial America: “only in America could the ideal be realized in practice, because here city workers could never be permanently impoverished so long as they had the option ‘to quit their trades and go to laboring in the earth.’”

But this ideal applies only to frontier farming and not a settled community where, Simmon suggests, “cultivated fields and log-cabin homes appear with the magic ease of four overlapping dissolves” in John Wayne’s first major Western, *The Big Trail* (1930). Although Simmon calls such a distinction between the action and adverb of settlement a contradiction, I see this contrast as a necessary manoeuvre, concealing the work involved in creating the settler colonial state. In nineteenth century rhetorical calls for European colonialists to settle the west and ‘claim their destiny,’ the work involved is foregrounded. When communities are settled, however, the magical ease of rural pastoralism and bucolic imagery elides its own construction. For frontier idealists like Thomas Jefferson, such complacency would be anathema to the fighting spirit of conquest. But for the beneficiaries of such conquest, comfortably settled settlers, the ontological security of ownership is usefully re-imagined as easy and natural – it just *is*. Our parody of peaceful pastoralism in “Brokeback” draws on these two competing and complementary images of rurality: at once it calls forth the idealized Jeffersonian settlement of the nation that is typically depicted in Hollywood Westerns and, simultaneously, it

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356 Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century*.  
357 Ibid.
taps into the pre-existing derision of settled comfort to parodic effect. In “Brokeback” my alien body is literally dancing on the figurative complacency of the colonial settlers’ white nation.

Oriental Excess in Motion

Day reads the body of Tseng Kwong Chi as alien excess, separate from the land. Importantly, this separateness is not like that of the white pioneer, an individual agent who ruggedly tames the Wild West in settler mythology. Rather, Tseng appears separate from the land as a racially charged object incongruous with the whiteness of the settler colonial landscape evoked by his photos. My racialized alien body is similarly mismatched with the agrarian landscape of the Ottawa Valley, coded by colonial settlement as implicitly white. My Asian excess impedes my authentic belonging to the visual scape, defined by a whiteness that violently drapes itself over Indigenous lands through Western/western fantasy. But instead of viewing my alienation from whitened land as grievous, my joyful movements disidentify with it. ManChyna’s oriental excess unsettles the whiteness of agrarian rurality in service to the emplacement of Indigenous relationships with these so-called settler-colonial lands.

Similarly, such excess prohibits my authentic inhabitation of white cowboy characters, like Twist and Del Mar, in spite of our shared queerness. Instead, I comically hail the white, every-gay-man’s body represented by Twist and Del Mar:

    camping on that hill
    just ain't as fun
    without you grilling my sausage
    in your white ass bun

    - ManChyna “Brokeback That Ass Up” 2012

358 Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
In psychoanalytic terms, separation necessarily precedes a longing to reunite my brown sausage with the white buns of these cowboys. Beenash Jafri, in her analysis of the film Indian Cowboy (2004), suggests that the convergence of non-white bodies and white American masculinity signified by the cowboy figure invokes a dissonant desire, troubling the white authority of the latter, but also eliciting viewer incredulity of the former. Instead of Del Mar and Twist’s abjection from the Symbolic realm, however, it is my racially excessive body that is precluded from representation in the original, widely celebrated, Brokeback Mountain narrative. ‘Racially excessive bodies,’ though, is a nebulous category that variably includes and excludes Indigenous bodies, whose elision from representation can be better described as attempted erasure (or even ‘repression’ in psychoanalysis), rather than alien exclusion. So in my case, the “Brokeback” video and song, act less as a return of the repressed but more as a return of alien excess. I am disidentifying with the notion of authentic belonging and inclusion, having never ‘really’ belonged or been wanted, while playfully silencing the Wonder Bread whiteness of the film’s protagonists and their supposed belonging. I even go so far as to figuratively replace one of the white cowboys. In my narrative reconfiguration, these white men become silent, unseen objects of desire, decentered and displaced.

My return, however, continues to bear the scar of separation. Serendipitously underscoring the point, my arm is literally broken in the video; the cast on my arm acts to visually dislodge my body from the ease of its inhabitation of cowboy-ness. Incidentally, I broke my arm in a cycling accident before filming the video. At the time of filming, I worried that my real life injury would detract from the seamlessness of our video – and it does. An opposite

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interpretation, however, comes from Anne Rubenstein.\textsuperscript{360} When I presented this section of my dissertation to Rubenstein’s first year class, she interpreted my cast as facilitating my inhabitation of the manly cowboy trope – as if I broke my arm, falling off my horse. Although interpretations of the visual trope are manifold, the cast stands out as a gestus of disidentification, strategically seen by some viewers. The serendipitous blending of real injury with fictitious cowboy parody acts to \textit{simultaneously displace and facilitate} my parodic inhabitation of \textit{Brokeback Mountain}’s white cowboys – a disidentification with American cowboy ideology. My yellow/brown skin, like fibrotic scar tissue, disrupts the mythic desire for the seamless, healthy, white flesh of what Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds call, “white men’s countries.”\textsuperscript{361}

The Chinese drag Tseng wears, a Mao-gray worker’s uniform, works to unsettle Tseng’s body from integrating seamlessly into the regenerative landscape.\textsuperscript{362} In “Brokeback That Ass Up,” despite my best effort, spectators (both on and off screen) can see through the gaps of my parodic repetition. I unsuccessfully emulate western, rural style with plaid and denim pulled from my suburban closet. My authenticity slips, like nipples peeking out of my gay muscle shirt. Externalizing the queer feeling in the beer tent, ManChyna’s animated gaiety visually contrasts strangely with the serene pastoralism dominating the video’s aesthetic. In this way, the dynamism of the medium – video – functions like the Chinese drag of “Expedition Series;” my animated movement further dislodges my already alien body from the white settler-scape. From a Sino-cultural perspective, however, my inhabitation of rurality evokes a different authenticity.

As a Chinese-bodied, but also westernized, farmer I disidentify with Mao’s romanticization of the hearty rural worker of the Communist revolution.

Locating “Brokeback” in the rest of ManChyna’s oeuvre, Tseng’s Chinese drag parallels my own recitation of Communist drag. On Allegiance to the Fag (2012), the mixtape on which “Brokeback” is featured, the visual style I chose to foreground activates multiple registers of nationalism, queerness, and eastern (Chinese/North Korean/Soviet) communism.

Figure 13. Chinese propaganda (left) 1967 translated to “‘Destroy the old world; Forge the new world.’ The worker is destroying classical Chinese texts, music on vinyl (western culture), a crucifix and buddha.” (Tanner 2011) Cover art (right) for ManChyna’s 2012 mixtape, Allegiance to the Fag (2012).

The cover, for example, is an illustration by “Brokeback” (2012) video stylist Lauren Hortie and features me in recognizably Kim Jong Il-spectacles (Figure 13). I am illustrated wearing a Mao-gray uniform like the strong, healthy worker of the People’s Republic of China, depicted crushing symbols of ancient Chinese customs and cultural objects. I am illustrated similarly stomping on metonyms of young western masculinity, mostly consisting of popular culture artifacts related to hip-hop music – WuTang Clan vinyl, an Eminem effigy, Odd Future paraphernalia – but also bro-ish masculinity in general (PlayStation controller, energy drink).
My recitation of a pan-communist aesthetic shares a similar point of interest as Day’s interpretation of Tseng’s disidentificatory intention. Tseng is not alone among queer Asians in North America who appropriate and redeploy stereotypical cultural referents. Of video artist Richard Fung’s work, José Muñoz suggests, “Orientalism in *Chinese Characters* (1986), like the signs of colonial power … are refunctioned by Fung’s disidentification with these cultural referents. Disidentification is the performative re-citation of the stereotypical Asian.”

Muñoz refers to the stereotypical ‘Asian bottom in porn’ when engaging with Fung’s work. Day’s engagement with Tseng’s work, however, refers to the excessive alien foreignness of Tseng’s body, recited by his Maoist costuming. I apply Day’s analysis to my own recitation of oriental excess conditioning my movement through settler space. We simultaneously embrace and reject the medium of landscape art, white pioneer settler-ism, and Occidental projections of Oriental Chinamen. However, I do not show up to the Shawville beer tent in Oriental regalia; this signals a shift from Tseng’s emphasis, highlighting another aspect of disidentification with white, settler nationhood manifest in rural landscape. Unlike Tseng, I am less confrontationally alien and more acceptably assimilable.

Assimilating Into the Rural Whiteness of “Brokeback”

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Outfitting my Asian body with western-wear in “Brokeback,” I mobilize a cinematic dialectic of the “model minority” and “Yellow Peril” myths that pre-exist my confrontation with the manifest white masculinity of colonial expansion in the Westerns referenced by *Brokeback Mountain*. Few representations of Asian bodies exist in the cinematic history of Westerns. Those films that do exist are relatively modern and retain few elements of traditional Westerns, such as *Rising Sun* (1993) and *Shanghai Noon* (2000). In fact, these movies are so unlike traditional Western films (a modern, urban crime-thriller and buddy comedy, respectively) that the comparison is arguably inapt. However, the juxtaposition between Asian cowboys and rural cinematic landscape remains salient because of the virtual omission of Asian bodies from classic Westerns as *cowboys* (instead of secondary/tertiary characters, like railway workers, grocers, or Chinese houseboys). Modern viewers could mistake such erasure for the impossibility of Black, Latino, Indigenous, or Asian American cowboys. Following Homi Bhabha’s idea of colonial mimicry, I would call my Asian cowboy a kind of pioneer or settler colonial mimicry. Of the former, José Muñoz suggests, “that through acts like postcolonial mimicry and the emergence of hybridized and queerly reflexive performance practices, the social and symbolic economy that regulates otherness can be offset.” For Bhabha,

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365 Beenash Jafri’s dissertation follows the figure of the ‘racialized cowboy’ through filmic representations over time. Jafri suggests that, in addition to depictions of South Asian-American cowboys in *Indian Cowboy* (2004), the non-white, ‘racialized cowboy’ is “less anomalous than we think.” Jafri, “Desire, Settler Colonialism, and the Racialized Cowboy.”

366 In fact, the prototypical, white, American cowboy is descended from Chicano vaqueros, or cattlemen, who predate the colonization of Plymouth Rock by several decades. Richard W. Slatta, *Chicanos in the Pacific Northwest: An Historical Overview of Oregon’s Chicanos*, vol. 6, 3, 1975.


368 Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.*
colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference…mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal... the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers. 369

Thus, for Bhabha, the not-quite-right closeness to empire that the colonized subject mimics itself produces an-Other knowledge that inherently critiques and disavows the empire. In this instance, where I don the Asian Cowboy, my pioneer settler colonial mimicry similarly embraces and disavows the so-called ‘new world’ empire, whitened and Americanized. Like my mimicry of ideological stereotypes of alien excess (my communist drag), I follow Muñoz’s strategy of disidentification with my pioneer drag; the impulse of disidentification and slippage are similar, but just in a different hat. Like the derided “been-tos” (been to the Western empire) in Fanon’s vernacular, the parodic repetition of my Asian cowboy-ness is always already suspect in western cultural imaginations of cowboys, irrespective of my attempts to assimilate.

Yuko Kawai suggests that Rising Sun’s Asian cowboy personifies the dialectic of the model minority, an apt imitator of western progress, and the yellow peril, a representation of western fears of miscegenation common in old Hollywood films. 370 The Asian cowboy in Rising Sun is actually a hypertextual reference within the film – the opening scene depicts a karaoke video in which a black-clad Asian cowboy, the protagonist, saves a white woman from the white

cowboy antagonists, dressed in white. Kawai suggests that the Asian cowboy in *Rising Sun* is a twist on the older, yellow peril stereotype because he does not signify evil foreignness, but rather an ‘out-cowboying’ of the white cowboys. Gary Okihiro argues that the stereotypes of model minority and yellow peril are not polar opposites; they are circularly relational, maintaining white supremacy as either justified or threatened and readily transforming one into the other. Following Okihiro, Kawai further suggests the Asian cowboy retains the threat of miscegenation, stealing the white woman away from and foiling the white cowboys’ plot – the model imitator is just another face of perilous threat. In my performance, ManChyna embodies the Janus-faced, interconnected stereotypes Okihiro and Kawai read in western cultural representations of Asians. Following Okihiro and Kawai, I suggest that these figures, assimilable cowboy and unassimilable-queer-communist, exist in the same liminal state of tension.

My intention upon arrival in Shawville was not to provoke the friendly, pale-faced residents of the small town with my foreignness; I was easily the most visible minority without even trying. Dressing in agrarian accoutrements like stonewashed denim, plaid shirts, and overalls, I meant to evoke the 1970s-era rodeo rider and ranch hand of *Brokeback Mountain*. At the same time, we three queers responsible for “Brokeback” meant to fit in, to blend as best we could. While Tseng was alive, in contrast, he garnered a reputation as a provocative and confrontational performance artist by adorning himself in Chinese drag, infiltrating high society parties as a Chinese communist dignitary. Although Tseng’s work silently derides the

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372 Kawai, “Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril.”
373 Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
“vastness of Westerners’ ignorance,” I suspect Tseng’s cultural mobility is at least more legible in the urban landscapes of Montreal and New York in the 1970s and 80s; what if he had donned the same performance in rural areas around the same time, with real people rather than rocks? A rubric of modern progress already exists that connects urbanity and art, which renders the same kind of creative provocation unthinkable in a rural context. In other words, standing out as different in city life can, at least, be understood as ‘being creative’ or representing ‘diversity,’ and so on – markers of modern progress that flatter the liberal urbanite. The thought of standing out in a small rural town, however, can strike dread in the heart of a minoritarian. In the rurality of his “Expedition Series,” Tseng does not appear to encounter anyone but nature, in its phallic, regenerative beauty, as Day describes it. In the isolation of western Canada’s wilderness, one does not necessarily meet the potential for drunken violence in a beer tent that might make a city-dwelling, queer person of colour “afraid of small towns.” In contemporary Shawville, Québec I wanted to make Lauren’s family, our kind hosts, comfortable with our already queer (and my coloured) presence on their farm and in their homes. Thus, we unconvincingly wore NASCAR and rodeo tank tops to ease the minority/majority encounter, both on the farm and at the fair. Our participation as eager minorities betrays a readiness to integrate. We disidentify with the myth of the ‘model minority’ while, at the same time, distancing and defamiliarizing ourselves through excessive participation and parodic repetition, which becomes inescapably inauthentic.

Still Separate

374 Ibid.
I bake into the lyrics of “Brokeback that Ass Up” a simultaneous inclusion, vis-à-vis queer sexual desire, and alien exclusion of racialization. Lyrically, the song approximates a nonlinear narrative of rural, gay, cis-male sexual desire, naming the protagonists of the eponymous film, Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar. I interlace a disjointed pattern of rural motifs such as wood chopping, manual transmission pickups, farming techniques, and so on, in order to recite the rural, midwestern motif of *Brokeback Mountain*:

You my Ennis Del Mar  
pick you up in my truck  
jump start your car  
stick shift your muff/  
Jack a rodeo cowboy  
Twist it in  
bareback, no saddle,  
raw rigging/  
Just tell the Mrs.  
that you fishing  
and I'll meet you on that hill  
in Wyoming!

- ManChyna “Brokeback That Ass Up” 2012

Although I signal their names, I am not actually speaking to the characters of the film, but rather a nameless listener. Vis-à-vis my queer sexual desire for the listener I foreground my sympathy with the tragic gay romance in *Brokeback* (2005). I am relating to the film like other contemporary viewers – as an atemporal abstraction of queer sexual desire. However, I am careful not to embody the characters themselves; I know that I cannot authentically do so, as a racially incongruous subject. As Muñoz says, the minoritarian subject does not choose the limits of the cultural codes with which she plays and in which she lives. I stand racially apart from Del Mar and Twist.
My separation from the *Brokeback* (2005) narrative also extends beyond excessive racialization and incorporates a temporal and urban separation from Proulx’s short story and Ang Lee’s motion picture. The film, set in the 1970s and 80s, stands apart by many decades from its Romantic nostalgia for rural simplicity and purity. The lyrics of “Brokeback” make nonlinear reference to contemporary touchstones of Internet era hookup culture, more at home in the early twenty-first century than the nineteenth or even the twentieth centuries:

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can't grind me
no high speed
no squirt.com
to find me/
just look on up
from that gloryhole
and tap your foot
if you want a mouthful/
in Mexico!
i'm gonna fuck you
like it's nineteen
seventy four/
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- ManChyna “Brokeback That Ass Up” 2012

Juxtaposed with the movie’s rural motifs extended by the video and lyrics, these technological elements emphasize a temporal dissonance necessary for nostalgia of an imagined utopia of gay cruising, prior to the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. Such a nostalgic gaze, encircled by death, gets inscribed into Proulx’s Romantic rural narrative, also burdened by the abject violence of the story. Linda Hutcheon suggests that the double structure of parody is “an inscription of the past in the present, and it is for that reason that it can be said to embody and bring to life actual
historical tensions.” My parody re-inscribes the temporal dissonance and abjection of death through my disidentification with both the pleasures and timeline of *Brokeback Mountain*.

For Day, “Expedition Series” captures such temporal tension. Day reads Tseng’s re-activation of a settler myth, vis-à-vis imagery constructed for tourists, as the kind of parodic inscription of the past in the present Hutcheon defines. “Brokeback” similarly recalls a queer past read through midwestern-style scenery. I am invoking a utopic gay past that cannot be retrieved without the weight of a necrotic history, but is nevertheless longed for. The anachronism of queer technologies penetrating my re-telling of “Brokeback That Ass Up,” pretending to be *like* 1974, underscores the temporal discord and plot tension inherent in the nostalgic gaze of *Brokeback Mountain*. The threat that burdens Del Mar and Twist’s happy fantasy is their eventual discovery; the drama of the film is their violent outing as not belonging to the strong, rural masculinity they perform so well. Similarly, contemporary romanticization of rural life is brimming with tension of the past within the present. White yearning for the nostalgia and serenity of rural life is always already linked to the desire for the purity of a white nation. The nostalgic fantasy in service to its own mythic naturalization is just that – a longing for fabled nineteenth century purity. Both *Brokeback Mountain* and my song (2012) animate a late twentieth century rodeo rider and shepherder playing at pioneerism on Indigenous land. Each is filled with a similar tension: that whiteness will be *outed* as a settler charade.

**Shawville: White Rural Canada?**

Shawville, Québec sits on Algonquin land. Shawville is “wedged between the Ottawa River and the Gatineau Hills. The town is very close to the Ontario-Québec

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 provincial border [on the Québec side]… seventy kilometres northwest of Ottawa-Gatineau, Canada’s National Capital Region.”

Figure 14. Location of present-day Shawville, Québec (red dot) in relation to historic Algonquin territory in the Kiji Sibi (Ottawa River) watershed. This figure is reprinted with permission of the Publisher from Fractured Homeland by Bonita Lawrence © University of British Columbia Press 2012. All rights reserved by the Publisher.

Before the English misnamed the Ottawa River, it was known as the Kiji Sibi, or the Great River of the Algonquins, the Indigenous nation responsible for it and its surrounding watershed.377 “Despite the renaming of the Kiji Sibi landmarks and imposition of an anglicized or gallicized settler veneer on the watershed,” Bonita Lawrence writes, “the land remains Algonquin, and an abiding Algonquin presence and sense of place survives that

more than four hundred years of colonial incursion has never succeeded in uprooting or destroying.”³⁷⁸ James Morrison³⁷⁹ details the continuous presence of Algonquins in the Ottawa Valley throughout the area’s settlement, but argues that Christianization of many Algonquin along the lower Ottawa contributed to more complex, dual identities.³⁸⁰

Shawville, suffused with the lower Ottawa’s scenic rurality, may be read as a white settler community; and it feels especially so to an urban-ethnic-outsider like myself when imposing my racialized difference upon it. The town appears to comprise primarily white settlers at first glance, like many rural Canadian communities. Bonita Lawrence describes ‘The Valley’ (as the region is colloquially known) as such: “[i]f one looks at the Ottawa River watershed today, often described as part of Canada’s ‘heartland,’ the Algonquin presence seems to have been entirely erased”³⁸¹ (emphasis mine). In the apparent absence of Algonquin people, whiteness creeps in, becoming the wallpaper of rural life. Such a reading parallels Day’s analysis and naming of the ‘settler eugenic’ landscapes in Tseng’s photograph series. Day reads the wilderness on which Tseng imposes his Orientalized body as a settler landscape to emphasize the recoding of the land as white. As I have argued, the agrarian rurality displayed in “Brokeback” can similarly be read as ‘settler;’ perhaps more so due to the seeming ease of representing settlement vis-à-vis farmland rather than wilderness. Yet this supposed settler-codification of farmland-rurality always already

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³⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.
³⁷⁹ James Morrison is a non-Indigenous historian who, as Bonita Lawrence describes, conducts “research specifically for Indigenous communities involved in resisting colonization (where those communities retain control over ownership of the knowledge and how it is to be used).” Ibid., 25-26.
³⁸⁰ James Morrison, “Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed” (Sicani Research and Advisory Services, 2005), 30.
belongs to the Algonquin people, even if their communities have become scattered and seemingly erased from representation by the juggernaut of colonialism. The Anglo/Gallic whitening of the land may congeal my outsider status as a racialized interloper, appearing to exclude the possibility of merger with the whitened space. Yet at the same time, my own spatially congealed foreignness can be used to dislocate the unnatural grip that whiteness appears to have over bucolic beauty. It is the responsibility for urban-ethnic-outsiders like myself to see this land firstly as Indigenous and secondly as settler-eugenic.

The specific Algonquin people whose traditional territory Shawville is built on is the Kichesipirini Algonquin First Nation. As Bonita Lawrence explains of Algonquin territory (Figure 14), “those living in the lower Ottawa River watershed have gradually come to refer to themselves as the Omamiwininiwak, the ‘downriver’ people…The Algonquins upriver, along the northern tributaries of the Ottawa as well as the upper Ottawa itself, generally refer to themselves as the Anishnabeg, or sometimes the Irini (now Inini).” 382 To clarify, I am referring to the Omamiwininiwak Algonquin bands in the regions of the Kiji Sibi, downriver of Mattawa, who are part of the Algonquin nation, rather than the also widely used name Anishinaabeg. 383 This also included distinct Algonquin groups living throughout the Ottawa River watershed such as:

382 Ibid., 19; See also Morrison, “Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed.”
383 James Morrison suggests that “[i]n their own language, Algonquin people call themselves anishinabeg” (Morrison 2005, 2). Since, however, “[t]he term ‘Anishinabeg’ [plural form of Anishinabe, variant transliterations: Anishinaabeg, Nishinaabeg, Nishnawbeks, and so on] refers … to the people whom colonizers have called ‘Ojibwa/Ojibway’ or ‘Chippewa’ …[and] Native people also use it to refer to the relatives of the Ojibways, the Pottawatomis, and the Odawas” (Lawrence 2012, 303), I will not be using Anishinaabeg in this paper. Anishinaabeg can refer to a wider language group of Indigenous people, collectively known as Algonquian – those who speak Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language) (ibid). For this reason, Anishinaabeg is not specific enough for my purposes when referring to the Algonquin nation.
the Ouaouechkarini (or Weskarini), who lived along the Lievre, Petite Nation, and Rouge Rivers; the Kotakoutouemi, who occupied the Councill and Dumoine watersheds; the Kinouchepirini, or Quenongebin, whose territory was between the Petawawa and Bonnecherre Rivers; the Matouachkarini (or Matouwaskarini), who occupied the Madawaska River region; and the Ountchatarounounga (or Onontchataronnon), who lived along the Mississippi, Rideau, and South Nation Rivers.\textsuperscript{384}

But specifically, the location of present-day Shawville exists in the traditional 17\textsuperscript{th} century territory of the Kichesipirini Algonquin First Nation, whose centre of life comprised the upriver Morrison and Allumette Islands (Figure 14). Today, however, Kichesipirini Algonquins have primarily been displaced to the Ontario side of their traditional homeland, in the nearby town of Pembroke, Ontario, while Allumette Island is now part of Québec.

Kichesipirini displacement exists in a wider context of colonial alliances and warfare that led to widespread Algonquin dispossession of the Kiji Sibi watershed. In 17\textsuperscript{th} century eastern North America, the major Indigenous-European alliance networks consisted of (1) the Iroquois Confederacy allying with the Dutch and, later, the English and (2) the Algonquian Indigenous nations allying with the French.\textsuperscript{385} According to Bonita Lawrence, “[t]he alliances cemented with Europeans … transformed [traditional patterns of Indigenous warfare]… so that warfare became large-scale and deadly, utilizing European weapons and amplified by rivalries between Britain and France.” The result, Lawrence continues, “[was that] the British and the French encouraged or even fomented wars between their respective allies in order to weaken each other’s foothold in the

\textsuperscript{384} Lawrence, *Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario*, 22.

Colonial utility and amplification of warfare between Indigenous nations laid part of the groundwork for the weakening of Indigenous sovereignty over their territories.

The Kichesipirini, however, played an important role in resisting 17th century European incursion northwest via the Kiji Sibi. Lawrence explains the role of the Kichesipirini in resisting territorial dispossession of the watershed as such:

For French explorers, missionaries, and fur traders, a central figure – indeed, a central obstacle in accessing Indigenous territories – was Tessouat, the leader of the Kichesipirini Algonquins … For twenty years, until his death in 1636, Tessouat and the Kichesipirini confounded the desires of the French to use the Ottawa River to penetrate further north into Huron/Wendat territory and ultimately onward to the Great Lakes in order to establish their own trading fort… a violation of [Algonquin] territorial integrity. Because the Kichesipirini held the narrows of the Ottawa at the fortress-like Morrison’s Island as well as Allumette Island, Tessouat was able to assert a monopoly on the trade passing through his territory… But Tessouat’s focus was broader than simply amplifying Kichesipirini power. Aware that the connections with the French had resulted in the collapse of Indigenous diplomacy and recognizing that [Jesuit] conversion to Christianity threatened the ability of Algonquins – and indeed of other Indigenous nations – to resist the French presence, Tessouat strategized to stop the spread of the militaristic Jesuit order north of Algonquin territory by attempting to undermine its conversion efforts among the Huron/Wendat.

The Kichesipirini represent a powerful resistance to European trade, military, and spiritual incursion northward and westward by using the strategic location of their homeland on Allumette Island. Ultimately though, with Tessouat’s death and a new, secret French-Mohawk alliance, 1647 saw a “massacre of the Kichesipirini [breaking] the Algonquin stronghold; the defences of Morrison’s Island could no longer impede the French. Nor could the Iroquois attacks be held back” with their Dutch-acquired guns. A quarter of a century of primarily Mohawk attacks

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386 Lawrence, Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario, 22.
387 Ibid., 23.
388 Ibid., 24, 261.
forced many Algonquins to vacate their homelands. The French seized this opportunity to push
further north into the newly open Kiji Sibi watershed, establishing posts upriver at Lake
Timiskaming, Fort Coulange, and the mouth of the Dumoine River.389 For the Algonquins, and
especially the Kichesipirini, the latter half of the 17th century resulted in a colonial-led
breakdown in diplomacy between Indigenous nations and a forced migration from their
traditional homelands where (in the case of the Kichesipirini) Shawville currently sits.

The 18th century continued Algonquin dispossession of the lower Kiji Sibi. Still
recovering from population decimation and slowly reclaiming territory lost in the 17th century
wars, several Algonquin bands explored peace talks with the Iroquois Confederacy. In this
context, according to Gilles Havard, the French met with these and several other Indigenous
nations at the Montreal Conference of 1701, because they sought to “short-circuit” any cross-
Indigenous alliances that could form without their involvement.390 But by mid-century, the peace
deteriorated. Following French cession of territory after their defeat in the Seven Years’ War, the
British issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The Royal Proclamation consolidated Britain’s
imperial position and hold over former New France, from Florida and the Caribbean to Acadia
and Quebec.391 But the Proclamation also set out ambiguous terms of how the British were to,
henceforth, ‘purchase’ territory from Indigenous nations. According to Dean Neu, however,
“[a]lthough Britain technically ‘purchased’ the land from indigenous peoples, the threat of

389 Ibid., 24.
military force throughout colonial history formed the backdrop to negotiations,” especially the contemporaneous slaughters of Indigenous people in the United States. ³⁹²

Threat of military violence in such colonial land purchases also benefitted from legal misrecognition of Algonquin territory. Toward the end of the 18th century, after the American Revolution, Britain concentrated on settler incursion of Eastern Canada in order to safeguard against potential American invasion. ³⁹³ For this reason, the Crawford Purchase of 1783 and the Oswegatchie Purchase of 1784 acquired land along the boundary between Upper and Lower Canada for the British, negotiated with the Mississaugas and Mohawks, respectively; these purchases encroached northward into the Ottawa River Watershed and into neighboring Algonquin territory. ³⁹⁴ Furthermore, Bonita Lawrence argues that the British mapping of the Kiji Sibi in 1791 and erroneous naming of it “as the ‘Ottawahs River’… may have been deliberate, for bypassing those who held title to the land would facilitate the removal of resources from their territory.” ³⁹⁵ Purchases of territory with ambiguous boundaries from neighbouring nations coupled with the misrecognition of the Algonquin watershed itself facilitated British encroachment into Algonquin territory, “usurping legal jurisdiction over their territory so that Algonquins who attempted to evict squatters from their land were threatened with legal reprisals.” ³⁹⁶ Such settler squatters, although “chaotic” for British authorities, benefitted the empire by ensuring immediate European presence and alienation of Indigenous people from their

³⁹² Neu, “‘Presents’ for the ‘Indians,’” 168.
³⁹⁴ Joan Holmes and Associates, “Algonquins of Golden Lake Claim Volume 1” (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, October 30, 1993); Lawrence, Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario, 36.
³⁹⁵ Lawrence, Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario, 34.
³⁹⁶ Ibid., 36.
Under British colonial law Algonquins, despite their continuous relationship with and presence in the watershed, were ‘legally’ being ejected from their lands throughout the 18th century.

The splitting of the Algonquin homeland into Upper and Lower Canada with the Ottawa River has culturally fractured the Algonquin nation in multiple ways. According to Lawrence, renaming the Kiji Sibi as the Ottawa River in 1791 manifested the Constitutional Act of that year, dividing Québec into Upper and Lower Canada using the Ottawa River as a territorial marker.398 As Heather Majaury describes it, the river that “was once the heart of [Algonquin] territory… The provincial division has created a language division … Few Algonquins in Ontario speak anything but English. Many Algonquins in Quebec speak only French.”399 Because Shawville’s location is so close to the Ontario-Québec border, a “linguistic contact zone,” it is today a site of cultural and linguistic contestation between white Francophones and Anglophones.400 Ironically, the re-signing of English language signs with French makes the Anglophone communities in the region “feel erased.”401 Such linguistic tension between white settlers functions to efface both Indigenous claims to legitimate authority of the area and the colonial cultural elision of Algonquin culture by the provincial language division. Colonial cultural erasure has especially affected Algonquin in the lower watershed, south of Mattawa. In this lower region, including

397 Ibid., 305.
398 Ibid., 35.
401 Ibid.
Shawville, settler influence and industry was more prevalent and had been established earlier than Mattawa and northern Ontario.  

Such colonial pressures in the lower watershed (and also upriver of Mattawa, but to a lesser degree, according to Lawrence) have led to centuries of cultural assimilation necessary for survival; these pressures were organized differently between the two provinces, further pulling apart Ontario and Québec Algonquins. As Bonita Lawrence points out, Ontario logging of Algonquin forest forced many Algonquins in that province to survive by either trapping ‘illegally’ or through “partial adaptation to white society – through jobs, schooling, and, most of all, through church attendance.” On the other hand, Québec Algonquins could still maintain a livelihood in the fur trade throughout much of the nineteenth century. Since the fur trade would not be economically outstripped by the logging industry until the late nineteenth century, the Québec interior’s pristine forests – and the Algonquin homeland – were maintained, sustaining Algonquin traditional livelihoods longer than their Ontario counterparts. Québec Algonquins thus maintained both their language and livelihoods on land far longer than those in Ontario, whose lands were systematically deprived by the overwhelming settler incursion, except for the small reserve at Golden Lake. Using the heart of Algonquin life, the Kiji Sibi, as a provincial divider would function in the coming century to culturally split Algonquins ending up on either side of the river. Such cultural divisions would later prove to be one hallmark of contemporary fractures fuelling divisions in the current land claim and resistance to clear cutting and

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403 Ibid., 52.  
404 Ibid.  
405 Ibid., 84.
hydroelectric projects undertaken by the status-holding Algonquin groups in Ontario and Québec, respectively.  

Nineteenth century creation of Algonquin reservations functioned to legally disrupt the livelihoods of Algonquin people in the Ottawa watershed, pressuring them to concentrate their communities on reserves. In the period between 1791 and 1851, Britain was denuding the white pine forests of Algonquin territory for their shipbuilding efforts. Deforestation disrupted Algonquin ways of life, which depended on the land, and their abilities to respond effectively. Attempts to respond to the disruption of logging and settler-squatters included at least twenty-eight petitions to colonial administrators on both sides of the Ottawa to protect at least part of the land for Algonquin use – as Bonita Lawrence puts it, “a vain effort to force the British to honour the terms of their own Royal Proclamation of 1763.” But plans for logging throughout Algonquin territory were intensifying, so Lower Canada decided to create two reserves in 1851 (Maniwaki on Rivière Désert and Timiskaming); a smaller reserve at Golden Lake (now home to Pikwakanagan Algonquin) was created in Ontario. At first many Algonquin in the Québec interior could sustain their trapping-based livelihoods away from the settler logging pressures on the Ottawa River. Soon, though, settlers also began overhunting beavers in the interior, creating dire conditions for many Algonquin, forcing them into the relative security of the Maniwaki reserve. Despite this pressure, as Lawrence points out, these reserves were meant to be, in the minds of both Indian Affairs and the Algonquins, temporary posts for religious instruction and

406 Ibid.
407 Ibid., 36-37.
408 Ibid.
409 Ibid., 39.
schooling, not permanent residences. At the same time, the Indian Agent (an Indian Affairs administrator of the Indian Act) for the Maniwaki area stopped annuity payments to off-reserve families, further inducing them to settle permanently at Maniwaki. By creating these three reserves and imposing unlivable economic conditions for Algonquins off reserve in the late nineteenth century, British colonial authorities could, in their minds, clear the land not just of beavers and timber but of material and symbolic ties to Algonquin indigeneity.

The separation between reserve-based Algonquins and off-reserve Algonquins further fractured Algonquin people based on “Indian status.” As Bonita Lawrence explains, in Canada both individuals and groups of Indigenous people can be regarded as having or not having status. Groups may not have “federal recognition because they were left out of treaty negotiations – the band simply was not present and was therefore not included.” In Ontario, the majority of Algonquins do not have status because their families were not listed as “registered Indians” at the Golden Lake reserve since their lands were too quickly consumed by “the juggernaut of colonial settlement,” leaving them without an assigned reserve. Lawrence, however, counters the official record by rigorously documenting the historical traces of non-status Algonquins in and around the Ottawa River watershed, particularly in Ontario, and by interviewing present-day Algonquin people to document their continuous presence and connection with the area. Lawrence’s project is all the more urgent because the high proportion of non-status Algonquins in Ontario effectively renders them invisible to the Canadian government, weakening their avenues of political resistance. Generally, the boundaries of status and non-status cannot be

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410 Ibid., 40.  
413 Ibid.
redrawn once established, but “[t]hrough a land claim… a people can gain recognition as Indigenous,” though this is rare because Canada only negotiates with those already recognized as “Indian;” for this reason, “the Ontario Algonquin land claim [organized by Pikwakanagan Algonquin of Golden Lake] where most of those negotiating have never been recognized as Indian and are seeking formal recognition through the claim, is highly anomalous.” 414

For the Kichesipirini Algonquin this multi-level fracture of Algonquin nationhood is all the more problematic for their claims to presence and authority in the Ottawa River watershed. Bonita Lawrence sums up the juridical plight of the Kichesipirini, who once occupied Allumette Island for six thousand years: 415

[I]n Pembroke [Ontario], the Kichesipirini Algonquins, who live primarily in Ontario, must cope with the fact that the centre of their traditional territory, Allumette Island, is now part of Quebec. This is doubly problematic in that the Allumette Island people are descended from the ancient Kichesipirini, who once controlled the trade on the Ottawa River and therefore were the single greatest obstacle to European penetration of Algonquin lands. 416

Even though the Kichesipirini Algonquin are the rightful authorities of the watershed in the region of Shawville, their displacement to the Ontario shore of the watershed and arbitrary separation from the heart of their homeland, Allumette Island, is sharply unjust. But the injustice is also legally meaningful. In 2006, the Kichesipirini Algonquin were denied a place within the Ontario land claim because their assertion of membership and territories spans across provincial jurisdictions and would cause “complexities” for the claim. 417 Instead, “the Algonquins of Ontario suggested that Kichesipirini members could simply join existing communities as

414 Ibid., 6.
415 Ibid., 273.
416 Ibid., 259.
417 Ibid., 274.
Ontario-based individuals.” The suggestion that individuals rather than the Kichesipirini as a group can enter the Ontario land claim further fractures the Kichesipirini Algonquin nation and renders them once again invisible in the eyes of settler colonial law – and even Indigenous appeals of the law. This is in spite of the Kichesipirini peoples’ importance to both Algonquin history of resistance and, in their territorial expropriation, colonial settlement of the area and Canada.

With the putative erasure of Kichesipirini Algonquin ties to the area, small, rural towns like Shawville become coded as white, naturalizing settler ownership of rurality through outdoor festivals. In a documentary about Algonquin territorial dispossession, The Invisible Nation, such rural erasure is depicted comically, but also darkly. In Notre Dame du Nord, a predominantly white rural town on Lake Timiskaming, along the northern Ontario-Québec border, a tractor-trailer competition is held annually. The “Rodéo du Camion” (or, ‘truck rodeo’) happens in the white part of town, adjacent to the Timiskaming First Nation reserve, according to Randy Polson (former Timiskaming band council member). Set to the mariachi-style trumpets of Johnny Cash’s “Ring of Fire” (1963), the transport trucks are seen racing each other in the documentary, puffing black exhaust clouds into the country air. As Polson describes it, everyone in attendance (mostly white settlers) stands on Timiskaming land not only in spirit, but legally too. Like the rest of the Algonquin homeland, even the reserve at Timiskaming was not safe from settler incursion. Over the years parts of the reserve were surrendered to white settlers in Notre Dame du Nord and neighbouring Nédélec; but the roads on which the truck rodeo happen were

418 Ibid.
not, and so still belong to Timiskaming First Nation.\textsuperscript{420} Although Algonquin territorial ties persist, not a single non-white face (except for Polson being interviewed) is shown dotting the rural merriment. The festival’s celebration of rural life layers a veneer of whiteness over Indigenous lands, culturally sedimenting a connection between whiteness and rurality by suppressing Algonquin presence.

The Shawville Fall Fair similarly elides the Algonquin presence within the rurality it whitens. Truck shows are akin to fall fairs in that they are both temporary festivities celebrating rural life, crop harvests, agricultural vehicles, and livestock. At the end of “Brokeback” we thank the “residents of Shawville, Québec,” a parodic gesture of deferential gratitude for the unwitting hospitality provided by the white settler community. Perhaps settler-hood in the area has become so securely naturalized that even glimpses of xenophobic discomfort, in the form of the awkward gawking we encountered, can be navigated by certain alien bodies embodying explicitly deferential behaviour. Did our particular embodiments of model minority and homonormativity safeguard our relative mobility through this space? Or maybe the community comfortably incorporated our alien bodies as deferential tourists, holding true so long as we affably contain our excess to contributions toward the local economy. As Alex Murray reminds us, in Foucault and Agamben’s models of state power, “the state doesn’t care about the populous as long as it pays tax and remains docile.”\textsuperscript{421} The ontological security of white rurality, although vigorously written over Algonquin land, is now seen as so natural that it cannot be disturbed.

That my racial and sexual exoticness is conditionally welcomed enfolds my group’s collective queerness with it. My group’s differential inclusion into Shawville’s whitened and

\textsuperscript{420} Polson in Ibid.

\textsuperscript{421} Alex Murray, \textit{Giorgio Agamben} (New York: Routledge, 2010), 59.
heteronormativizing rurality is multivalent. One member has family ties to the region; another is conditionally embraced through romantic family bonds. The two off-camera are white, queer cisgendered women subjects. I am the fey, friendly, and foreign-faced man prancing around on hay bales. Our moment of embrace can be read along an axis of white, queer sexual aspiration into national belonging, in what Scott Morgensen calls “settler homonationalism.” Resituating Jasbir Puar’s critique of homonationalism, Morgensen argues that settler-colonialism produces “non-Native queer modernities” within the realm of queer politics. Such sexual modernities perpetually negate indigeneity in (white) queer aspiration to national inclusion and, simultaneously, naturalizes settler-colonialism in confrontations with racial difference, which also sustain Indigenous disappearance. In this analysis, my racialized inclusion into the settler state, vis-à-vis Canadian multiculturalism, becomes secondary to the inclusion of my friends’ white queerness. On the other hand, our group’s moment of inclusion can also be read in the other direction too. In the latter analysis, my racial assimilation within liberal multiculturalism becomes the model on which our homonormative inclusion is based. In Sunera Thobani’s critique of Canadian liberal multiculturalism, for example, she suggests that inequalities of sexual orientation (among other differences) are “rendered secondary and less material” than the constitution and internal management of cultural communities through the country’s multicultural policy. This conclusion makes most sense if one considers homonormativization

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424 Morgensen, *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, loc 197.
as being a temporal (in addition to hierarchical and material) secondary project to that of liberal multiculturalism.

The inclusion of our little motley crew, though, consolidates the white rural denizen’s supposed ownership of the land through the simultaneous but unequal demands of subjugated racial and sexual difference in service to settler-colonialism and the modernization of rural, hetero-masculine whiteness. The modernization of whiteness that centers heterosexuality and masculinity at the site of whitened rurality requires a simultaneous embrace of queer and racialized inclusion. We are guests, secondary to the ‘real’ citizens of Shawville. Our sexualities and racializations are hierarchically subjugated by this settler-crafted space as simultaneously excessive. However, the contestation of land ownership centres on cultural fears of racialized exploitation and a loss of pioneer masculinity. The short answer is that none of us are entitled to Kichesipirini Algonquin land, except the Kichesipirini people. But the long answer begins with the Oriental excess of my body. Such visually embossed difference distributes the cultural weight of our group’s uncomfortable welcome unevenly across our collective profile. But regardless of which index makes us queerer, our actual queerness or my racialization, our roles as subjugated interlopers into the whitened, heteropatriarchal codes of rurality play into the settler colonial project of Indigenous elimination. In other words, that they welcome us as guests legitimizes their roles as hosts.

The reconfiguration of the Ottawa River watershed as white-owned rurality was a necessary condition for settler nation building. To reiterate, the ongoing project of attempted Algonquin elimination along the Kiji Sibi begins at least with the French-Mohawk massacre and forced displacement of Kichesipirini in the latter 17th century. This removal of indigeneity continues with the provincial division and purchases of Algonquin land in the watershed over the
18th century and induced settlement of Algonquin people on reserves in the latter 19th century. The location of Algonquin territorial dispossession along the Ottawa River is not coincidental. The river is a geographic gateway to the west and north, a necessary step toward federalizing the vast expanse of what would become Canada. Upriver of Allumette Island is the town of Mattawa. The town is the boundary of the upper and lower Ottawa and it is here that the river connects to Lake Nipissing, the French River, and Georgian Bay and the Great Lakes system. For this reason Bonita Lawrence calls the river “both the gateway to the west, via the Mattawa River, and to the north, via Lake Timiskaming” and so for “Europeans, the river was a gateway to the North American interior, the most direct route between the St. Lawrence and the upper Great Lakes.426 If Canada’s western and eastern settlements were ever going to be ‘federalized’ into a white settler nation, the Ottawa River and its people would have to come under settler authority, both legally and culturally.

The historic fur and lumber economic route along the Ottawa River laid the foundation for the rail connection between eastern and western Canadian economies. Mattawa, where the Mattawa and Ottawa Rivers meet, has long been a gathering place for Algonquins and the more northerly Nipissings, but also became an important trade post for European fur fortunes in the 1600s.427 By the 1800s, the fur trade was waning, replaced by lumbering. Trading posts like Mattawa transformed into depots and distribution centres for the logging industry.428 Transportation began changing during this time with canoe routes giving way to roads and horse

427 Ibid., 263.
drawn sleighs, and eventually to railways; increased access to the area encouraged European settlement.\footnote{Chrétian, “‘Mattawa, Where the Waters Meet:’ The Question of Identity in Métis Culture.”} As Randall White summarizes

In the 1930s the Ontario-born historian of ‘the Empire of the St. Lawrence,’ Donald Creighton, dubbed this Ottawa-French River canoe waterway, the route of the historic Canadian ‘economy of the north’. In broad outline, it marks the path through Ontario followed by the first transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway of the later nineteenth century and the modern Trans-Canada Highway completed after the Second World War. The Ontario country of the upper lakes thus linked to western Europe via the St. Lawrence River seaport of Montreal can also be linked to Europe via the salt water coast of Hudson and James bays in the far north, into which several large inland water systems drain, including the Severn, Albany, and Moose rivers. This northern outlet was much more important in an earlier era of the region’s history than it has subsequently become. But even today its earlier significance survives in the Ontario Northland Railway that runs from North Bay on Lake Nipissing to Moosonee on James Bay.\footnote{Randall White, Ontario, 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History, vol. no. 001. (London: Dundurn, 1985), 17.}

The St. Lawrence, which the Ottawa River meets, was a boon for Canadian trade economies, linking Upper and Lower Canada with the Atlantic and lucrative European markets.\footnote{Barry Glen Ferguson, Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 197.} By 1881 the Canada Central Railway connecting Ottawa and Pembroke, where most Kichesipirini live today, reached Mattawa, linking the historic Ottawa-French River canoe waterway by rail.\footnote{Lawrence, Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario, 264; “Canadian Pacific Railway,” World Heritage Encyclopedia, accessed March 17, 2015, http://www.worldheritage.org/article/WHEBN0000005959/Canadian%20Pacific%20Railway.} Westward expansion of a transcontinental line beyond the CCR’s terminus at Bonfield, Ontario, though, depended on its incorporation with the Canadian Pacific among other smaller rail networks.\footnote{Other railways systems in Ontario and Québec that predated the intercontinental CPR included the Great Western and The Grand Trunk Railways, as well as the Intercontinental in the east. A summary of the amalgamations and extension of multiple pre-existing railway lines in eastern and western Canada can be found in}
Valley access to a country capable of rapid expansion.\textsuperscript{434} The economy of the colonial fur trade along the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers functioned as a precursor to the major rail-based staples trade that defined the era of Canadian transcontinentalism.

The completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 truly begins to link the settler nation as an economic and federal unit. In the traditional staples approach of Canadian political development, the economics of western trade determined the political formation of Canada. Donald Creighton defines transcontinentalism as, “the westward drive of corporations encourage[ing]… the supercorporation of the state.”\textsuperscript{435} Creighton goes on to say that the trade of products like fur, timber, and later wheat “enforced commitments and determined policies. The state was based upon it: it was anterior to the state…From the first, the government was committed to the programme of western exploitation by the river system.”\textsuperscript{436} A key ingredient of John A. MacDonald’s Canadian development strategy of the late 1870s, “The National Policy,” for example, was increased federal funding for the transcontinental railway – a condition for British Columbia’s entry into Confederation.\textsuperscript{437} Via the Ottawa River, the CPR would connect the west with Montreal, the St. Lawrence, and the European markets. The CPR would expand trade of wheat between the west and Ontario.\textsuperscript{438} It opened up mining industries in the Canadian Shield, facilitating the discovery and transport of nickel, iron, and silver in the

\textsuperscript{434} Quoted in Ferguson, \textit{Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925}, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{436} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{437} White, \textit{Ontario, 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History}, 150.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid, 154.
1880s and 1890s. Thus, the expansion of trade routes was not only an economic concern for private corporations. The question of Canadian nationhood, Confederation, and its success on the frontier of western economic expansion depended on the railway that approximated the historic settler route, or the “economy of the north.”

Economic and political connection of eastern and western markets defined Canadian nationhood in competition with the United States. In the late 1870s, Macdonald’s “National Policy” emerged as an alternative to the Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty of the 1850s and 60s. Of the several iterations of this free trade treaty, American leaders would only consider ‘commercial union,’ which would in the minds of loyalists, be a first disloyal step toward American annexation of Canada both economically and politically. And from British Columbia’s perspective, union with America seemed more fruitful than joining Confederation: British Columbia was boxed in by America’s purchase of Alaska in 1867, the completion of the American Northern Pacific Railway in 1869, and were isolated from the British Empire because of the Rockies. The colony would not join Confederation unless tied by rail to the rest of Canada. With the re-election in 1878 of Macdonald’s Conservatives to federal power, Macdonald instituted high tariffs encouraging domestic products, putting Canada in direct competition with American exports. Federal infusion of funds to complete the CPR, linking British Columbia with the historic trade route of the Ottawa-St. Lawrence waterway, thus became all the more important in competing with the United States. Mackintosh’s review of the St. Lawrence Valley (the larger valley with which the Ottawa Valley merges) settlements

440 White, Ontario, 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History, 150.
441 Ibid.
442 Chan, The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle, 18.
outlines their geographic differences contrasted with their competing American counterparts in the Mississippi Valley. According to Mackintosh, “[t]he New West of the Canadians was the American North West. The Canadian frontier was the American frontier” (added emphasis). Mackintosh does not only mean this comparison as a romantic allegory, that ‘the western frontier’ serves culturally similar functions to white Canadian and American settlers. The impulse toward ‘commercial union’ was seen as Canada’s “manifest destiny” for American leaders. Economic westward expansion of trade along the St. Lawrence directly competed with American trade routes like the Hudson-Mohawk and Mississippi River systems. From America’s perspective, creating a north-south Union of economic interests would benefit both nations. In other words, the Canadian and US ‘frontiers’ were functionally the same with respect to their economic futures.

In Canada’s competition with America, Mackintosh depicts the northern region as economically and geographically disadvantaged without transcontinental rail. In addition to the economic benefit to the American economy derived from southern cotton fields and New England manufacturing, Mackintosh also describes The Rockies and The Laurentian highlands as geographic barriers to inward federal expansion for Canada. Without transcontinental rail transport to facilitate settlement of the Prairies and the movement of staples, Canada’s St. Lawrence trade route would be unable to compete with America. But as Barry Ferguson later

446 Ferguson, Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925, 197.
447 Mackintosh, “Economic Factors in Canadian History.”
448 Ibid., 21-23.
explains, once the geographic “barriers” were overcome with 19th century advances in rail technology, the agricultural staples of Ontario and later the Prairies would “prime the pump” of the new dominion’s industrialization, shaping “the economic maturation of Canada after 1900.”449 The late 19th century federal infusion of CPR funds connecting the Ottawa Valley railway system with those in the west becomes all the more important to Canadian competition with America – and to a sense of Canadian nationhood with BC’s entry into Confederation. So, according to Ferguson, following the model of British colonial trade policies, the self-interested trade policies of an independent Canada fostered the development of transcontinental railways to better compete with American western economies, thus creating the conditions for Canadian economic prosperity and political maturity450 – much of which depended on the centuries-long wresting of control of the Kiji Sibi watershed from the Algonquin people.

The relationship between western expansion and settlements in the Ottawa Valley, however, was not only economic and political; the cultural imprint of Canada’s westward expansion ties together the racialized exclusion and exploitation of indentured railway workers and the attempted elimination of indigeneity vis-à-vis the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR steam powered Confederation, belting the country together economically and politically. As detailed above, this required the territorial dispossession of Algonquins in the Ottawa Valley among many others across the young nation. In Iyko Day’s argument, the convergence between the railway’s completion and the creation of Alberta’s Banff National Park as a regenerative landscape for masculinity and racial purity is not coincidental. For Day, “the very conditions of possibility for Banff’s pristine environment depended on appropriating and eliminating

450 Ibid, 197-198.
Indigenous peoples and exploiting and excluding aliens.” The forging of Canada’s character, as ‘true north strong and free,’ is manifest in the Romantic imagery of a rugged, white nature evoked by the wilderness landscapes reimagined in the Group of Seven’s art. For Canada, “as in other settler states, elimination and exclusion are two sides of the settler colonial coin.” Tseng Kwong Chi, in Day’s analysis, disrupts the myth of white purity that has become culturally embedded in these landscapes. How then, might we imagine the relationship between these obverse sides of the settler colonial coin on two sides of the country? While the attempted elimination of Algonquin people in the Ottawa Valley and the exclusion (as well exploitation) of most Chinese workers in the west occurred at a greater distance from each other than that between Alberta and British Columbia, what role did the Canadian Pacific Railway play in actually bringing them together? What kinds of cultural (white) anxieties are elicited by contrasting the whitened, rural space in Shawville with my particular Sino racialization?

As is well known, the western extension of the CPR in British Columbia was built by exploiting thousands of Chinese migrant labourers, but requires recitation here. China in the nineteenth century was characterized by the political instability of a declining Qing Dynasty linked to western invasions during the Opium Wars, food shortages, natural disasters, and peasant uprisings. Large-scale worker migration was induced by these and other deteriorating conditions, coupled with the Qing government rescinding their ban on emigration; many of these workers were drawn to the mid-century Gold Rush and railway construction in both the U.S. and Canada. An American contractor, Andrew Onderdonk, won the bid to build the Port Moody-

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452 Ibid.
453 Chan, The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle, 16.
454 Ibid.
Craigellachie portion of the British Columbia railway. Onderdonk favoured Chinese labourers because of his experience with them on his US railway projects, such as the Northern Pacific Railway in Oregon and the Southern Pacific Railway in California.\textsuperscript{455} They worked at wages 30 to 50 percent lower than white workers and were more willing or desperate to do the most dangerous kinds of work refused by white men, like handling highly explosive nitroglycerine for tunnel blasting.\textsuperscript{456} The American recruited Chinese workers both from the United States (roughly 1500 already in the US experienced with railway construction) and China (15,701 men).\textsuperscript{457} Onderdonk promised passage home after construction was complete as well as paid relocation costs in advance (ship passage), meaning that most who could not afford the initial travel worked as indentured labour to repay this advance.\textsuperscript{458} Those Chinese labourers who did not die from starvation on the initial passage from China, their lack of equipment to survive Canadian winters, and disease from malnutrition were assigned riskier and more arduous work than white workers. European workers worked “lighter types of jobs, like measurement, calculation, and design [while t]he Chinese were mostly engaged in the heavy work – building bridges, chiselling tunnels, chipping away at rocks, and transporting heavy debris.”\textsuperscript{459} The death estimate varies widely between 600 and 2,200 Chinese workers, because no one officially kept track of them outside their work.\textsuperscript{460}

With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, many Chinese workers were forced to migrate eastward. Once the CPR construction was complete, the Canadian government


\textsuperscript{456} Chan, \textit{The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle}, 18-19.

\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{459} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{460} Ibid., 21.
legislated the anti-Chinese federal head tax in 1885, the first Chinese Immigration Act. Suddenly out of construction work, the thousands of Chinese labourers already in Canada and working under Andrew Onderdonk found that he refused to honour his promise of paying their passage back to China.\textsuperscript{461} The American Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 meant that Chinese workers who migrated from America could not return there either; but simultaneously, the Panic of 1893 led to a U.S. national depression, meaning there was also an undetermined influx of Chinese workers from America into Canada.\textsuperscript{462} As these men scrambled for work in domestic service (laundry, cooking) and manual labour (forestry, canning, farming), anti-Chinese sentiment in the cultural form of Yellow Peril spiked in British Columbia with the increasing number of Chinese immigrants. Although the majority of Chinese stayed in British Columbia, the loss of work and anti-Chinese racism led to an outflow of many Chinese workers across the country.\textsuperscript{463} As Chan describes it, “[a] steady stream of Chinese… began moving east on the very railway they had built to unite the country. Opportunities for starting small businesses beckoned where Chinese communities were smaller and anti-Chinese sentiment had not reached the same heights as in British Columbia.”\textsuperscript{464} With westward expansion and cross-continent federalization secured upon the CPR’s completion, the racialized labourers that were used to build Canadian nationhood now had to turn east, to less hostile provinces (which remained true until anti-Chinese racism had a chance to spread across the nation).

My contact with the gentle farmland of Shawville in “Brokeback” serendipitously unearths the cultural circuit that links both the erasure of Algonquin indigeneity and the

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid., 23-24.
\textsuperscript{464} Ibid.
exploitation of Chinese migrant labour to the white Canadian nationhood built on them. My particular heritage as a Singaporean-Canadian of the Chinese diaspora links me more directly to national discourses about multiculturalism in the latter twentieth century than with Chinese railway workers of the nineteenth century. The seeming white rurality of Shawville, however, cannot visually make this distinction about my alien incursion into the space. Oriental excess is Oriental excess when juxtaposed with the rural whiteness in “Brokeback.” Like Xander Redd wrote, I am a “Gay Rural Chinese rapper” (my emphasis) – not a twice-removed diasporic immigrant, by way of Singapore. In a western visual economy, my Asian indeterminacy reduced to simply being Chinese functions to link my animated body to the bodies of Chinese workers across time and space. In Redd’s words, my racialized queerness “unsets” the supposed naturalness of this rural scene’s whiteness. Accordant with my earlier analysis of the ‘ease of settlement’ represented by Shawville’s pastoralism, the link between rurality and the whiteness of comfortably settled settlers just is. Yet the charade of rural whiteness requires ample work to conceal the racialized and Indigenous bodies, Chinese and Algonquin, which condition its existence as regenerative space for a white Canada. However, just because the whitening of rurality requires work does not necessarily mean that it can be easily shaken. The unnatural grip of whiteness is vice-like, but nervously unstable. The instability of whiteness, especially in direct contrast with the Oriental excess of my Chinese racialization, comes from something more than just the haunted memory of elimination and exploitation.

The settled farmlands of the Ottawa Valley can be read as betraying a cultural anxiety with respect to its relationship to the western frontier. In the visual representation of comfortable settlement, an uneasy subtext of expansionist derision can trouble the calm of already settled lands. William Mackintosh makes sense of this in terms of a loss of labour strength to the
western frontier colonies: “After 1870, the cream of the immigrant and native population was drawn off [to the west]. … In that period all the vitality which a moving frontier absorbs from a people, and gives back again, was lost to the communities of Canada. The export of men was draining the very life-blood of Ontario rural settlements.” Mackintosh’s review of Canada’s economic history echoes Jeffersonian era rhetoric of the masculine strength needed to conquer frontier land in the west, but also reminds his audience of the zero-sum logic undergirding such a conception: the settlements left behind get imagined as diminished, drained of lifeblood. The ‘west’ retains the residual fantasy of pioneer romance. But the movement of masculine strength westward is coupled with a loss of strength in the already-settled colonies of Ontario and Québec. Such lands were, at that point, considered settled and firmly in the grip of the Dominion of Canada’s white charter groups, but could not retain the mythic strength of the western horizon. While the whiteness of older settlements in Ontario and Québec could be, in pioneer logics, considered easy and natural, such ease of settlement comes at the price of cultural anxiety over the loss of masculinity to more rugged, westerly terrain.

More broadly, Mackintosh inadvertently connects this sense of cultural anxiety about the expanding nation’s racial character with future discourses about the benefits of multiculturalism. The economist praises the potential strength of the cream of, or the best, immigrants and Indigenous people, implying the possibility of an immigrant and Indigenous hierarchy. Of course, Mackintosh was referring to white immigrants from Europe when speaking of the cream of the masculine population. But the words still anticipate the colour-blind rhetoric that rises to prominence in Canadian public discourse many decades after his writing. Such hierarchization eventually opens up a potential space for supposed ‘model minorities’ when the unstable

category of whiteness later promises exaltation of racialized minorities beyond those hardy eastern Europeans. As previously discussed, the nineteenth century disdain for cities rested on the immigrant-led degeneration of such settlements, but the racial profile of immigrants was decidedly paler than today. This demographic included some Chinese and Black people, but also the not-yet-white immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, the Irish, Jewish, and so on.

Rural life, whether it is western wilderness or flat farmland, acts as a regenerative site for white respite and eugenic rejuvenation. Paradoxically though, its relationship to the Canadian project of western settlement and federalization – of consolidating and naturalizing a white settler state from coast to coast to coast – the pastoralism of the Ottawa Valley is always already haunted by the potential loss of masculine vitality. As a space for rejuvenating whiteness, rural sites like ‘the Valley’ are always in peril of degeneration.

ManChyna’s queer, Oriental excess in “Brokeback” disassimilates with the narrative of strong, easy, and natural Anglo-Saxon ownership of the settler landscape on display. My presence – specifically as a “Gay Chinese Rural rapper” – in Shawville rurality is simultaneously welcome and uncomfortable, both in my experience of and watching it. Like Mackintosh’s celebratory manoeuvre, praising immigrants while lamenting the loss they represent for Upper and Lower Canada, my queer, Asian masculinity uproots and displays a multivalent circuit of cultural anxiety vibrating just beneath the surface of Shawville’s pastoral landscapes. Chinese racialization both makes possible and threatens the whitening of this Indigenous space.

Mackintosh reminds us of the threat of racialized labour competition by invoking racialization and masculinity when pointing to the cheap and exploited labour used to construct Canada’s Confederation, vis-à-vis the railway and mining industries. ManChyna’s body is linked to both competition and exploiting. With this uncomfortable knowledge as the backdrop, I dance on the
easy pastoralism, the settled whiteness, and the ‘unquestioned’ settler ownership of this landscape. My excess also calls forth the deliberate work done to eliminate Algonquin indigeneity to make this space white. Simultaneously, my contemporary imposition onto this scene is conditioned by the idealized multiculturalism anticipated by this very work of migrant labour, rooted in the era of transcontinentalism. The white celebration of “good” immigrants, both then and now, is always already coupled with competing celebrations and anxieties: the anxiety over diminishing masculinity, fears of the supposed degeneracy of indigeneity and racialization, and the underlying reliance of whiteness upon them. My disassimilation with this celebration is a jovial supplication to the assimilatory demands of whiteness upon racial and sexual incorporation – it looks to be, and was in fact, very fun to make. But the danger of prancing about on whitened rural land goes beyond the simple possibility of sexually phobic reprisal. Dancing on a fine line of assimilation and derision, I mock this cultural circuit of whiteness precariously teetering on racial, sexual, and settler violence embedded within rurality, always threatening to erupt.

And so, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fears of racialized degeneration and the rightful belonging of indigeneity to settled landscapes always already haunt the reputedly white coding of an emerging Canada. “Brokeback” animates the cultural excess of my queer and Orientalized body on the eugenic landscape of Canadian rural whiteness. Such rurality, precariously and insidiously conjoined with whiteness, attempts to erase Indigenous claims of territorial sovereignty by leveraging a compassionate welcome of foreign and queer guests – an apparent legitimation of white ownership of the land. In parallel with my humorous animation of excess, “Brokeback” parodies the pioneer settler logics of Hollywood Westerns, tapping into the strong cowboy masculinity that is claimed to legitimize homonormative
aspirations of *Brokeback Mountain*. The dislodging of rural whiteness with my Oriental excess puts into conversation rightful Indigenous memories of and juridical claims to the land. These reflective moments point to the possibilities of political commensurability between subalternity and Indigenity for unification between subjugated Asian Canadian immigrants and Indigenous people, toward an oppositional consciousness against white supremacist projects of settler-colonialism.
Chapter 4

Promissory Exaltation

This chapter is about the impossibilities of direct dissent within the parameters of assimilation into a morally exalted and putatively modern framework of liberal multiculturalism. I begin with a backstage anecdote about Russia and a burlesque show, “The Boylympics.” The disidentificatory show explicitly targeted Russian non-modernity in the context of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. In publicly criticizing the regressive domestic (LGBTQ) and international (annexation of parts of Ukraine) policies of Russia in 2014, we performers were performing a moral exaltation of Canadian subjectivity. I begin with this story not to defend abhorrent Russian policy, but to begin outlining the conditions of public speech acts on the Canadian stage. I suggest that to avoid risking public outcry, the kinds of political noise that can safely be made publicly within a framework of Canadian liberalism, must contribute to a project of national self-exaltation, which Sunera Thobani targets in her work.\(^\text{466}\)

I next turn to the public speech acts of UBC academic Sunera Thobani for contrast, whose necessary and rightful critique of American imperialism led to public outcry against her words, and also *her*. The differences between our speech acts are manifold (burlesque and academic for one), but I focus on the forms and national targets of our criticisms. My troupe’s flippantly humorous critique targeted the non-modernity of a country, not our own. By contrast, Thobani’s direct denouncements of America (and by extension, for parts of the Canadian public, Canada) elicited strong refusal in the media and by public officials. By putting these two public speech acts in dialogue with one another, I reflect on the conditions that celebrate and discipline


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political enunciations, publicly staged within a modern liberal Canada. I outline the kinds of political critiques that are allowable within this framework of liberal multiculturalism, based on their contributions to or denouncements of the exaltation of whiteness.

The sexual component of detaining dissent is revealed in my own private encounters with whiteness, as A.W. and as ManChyna. During intimate private moments and another moment that slips between public and private, I bear witness to the sexual intimacies linking private and public assimilation and the conditions that limit minoritarian dissent in either space.

BoylesqueTO presents, “The Boylympics: Cold Sports. Hot Men.”

Figure 15. Boylesque show poster for the Boylympics featuring members (left to right) Mahogany Storm, El Toro, and Wrong Note Rusty. Staged at Lee’s Palace, Toronto, Ontario. February 28, 2014. Photo credit and poster design, Greg Wong.

On a bitingly cold winter night, my all male burlesque troupe, BoylesqueTO, staged our annual winter show, an original production called the Boylympics. The show ironically lampooned the 2014 winter Olympics in Sochi, which ended one week prior to the show. Dark
humour shaped and threaded the show together with the hosts’ hilariously macabre banter. Sexy
Mark Brown, a rail-thin, cisgendered man donned drag to play an androgynous news reporter,
Suzie Puffpiece, “from Hamilton’s CHCH.” (Figure 16)

![Figure 16](image)

Figure 16. Sexy Mark Brown as Suzie Puffpiece, backstage at the Boylympics. February 28, 2014. Photo by author.

Suzie acted as the shocked liberal foil to the other unfeeling, authoritarian hosts, Ginger Darling and Bologna Rye. The latter characters were hybrids of KGB-type/Cossack soldiers and celebrity athlete/sports commentators from Russia. Throughout the show the three satirized ‘puppy-cide,’ human rights violations, and the world’s apathetic distraction-by-spectacle. The
hosts ended the show with a sombre speech addressing the plight of LGBT people in Russia.

The Boylympics is itself a disidentificatory event. Our sketches queerly sexualize
Canadian national sports; the raising of the Canadian flag becomes a stripper’s pole routine; the absurd contradictions between The Olympics’ stated goals of peace and Russia’s international and national human rights violations are brought to center stage. Yet the show re-circuits the
Sochi Olympics within the parameters of Canadian free speech, underscored by the hosts’

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467 The trope of dogs and puppies is in reference to news reports of the Russian government hiring private contractors to exterminate stray dogs ahead of the Sochi Olympics. See, for example, Ivan Watson, *Russians Say Authorities Rounding Up, Poisoning Stray Dogs before Olympics*, 2014.
heartfelt speech at the show’s conclusion. Within these parameters, our critique of Putin’s government also functions to disidentify with and disassimilate into our own national self-image of rational modernity (Figure 17), returning to an updated but familiar Cold War refrain of a Red Russia. One criticism, however, stands in contrast. In their script, the hosts obliquely critique Canadian participation in the recent games, but never pointedly name it. These games, several commentators have argued, parallel the Berlin Olympics of 1936, wherein the world’s nations make no attempt to call out the Olympics host’s aggressive political policies. The hosts’ reference is made under their breath, audibly into their mics, at one point during the show. However, this one exception implicates all western nations that participated in Sochi, dispersing the responsibility from Canada in particular.

Interestingly, the day after the Boylympics were staged, Saturday March 1, 2014, Russia moves its military into the former Soviet state of Ukraine under the guise of protecting Russian nationals living in the south eastern part of the country, Crimea. Notable world officials (the current Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird, Czech Republic’s former Foreign Minister, Karel Schwarzenberg, and former U.S. secretary of state, Hillary Clinton) parallel Russia’s incursion into Ukraine to Germany’s 1938 occupation of Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland. The area, formerly German territory prior to the First World War, was invaded under the pretext of protecting ethnic Germans in the area, obscuring Hitler’s irredentist ambitions. Leslie MacKinnon, John Baird Compares Russia’s Actions in Ukraine to Nazi Invasion of Czechoslovakia, vol. Politics, 2014; Jack Moore, Crimea Invasion: “Putin Acting Like Hitler” in Ukraine Land Snatch, 2014; Philip Rucker, Hillary Clinton’s Putin-Hitler Comments Draw Rebukes as She Wades into Ukraine Conflict, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hillary-clintons-putin-hitler-comments-draw-rebukes-as-she-wades-into-ukraine-conflict/2014/03/05/31a748d8-a486-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c_story.html.
Figure 17. Boylesque T.O. members (right to left: ManChyna, Linda Gallant, Mike LeSage,) performing an anti-Putin protest song, “God Save Putin,” (pronounced “poutine,” referencing The Sex Pistol’s anti-imperial song God Save the Queen) as the queer, anarchopunk, Québécois Pussy Riot cover band, “Mussy Riot.” Boylympics, February 28, 2014. Photo Credit, Cheol Joon Baek, Now Toronto.

The direct critique, however, remains pointed at Russia. As I stand on stage with the other performers and production personnel, the three hosts deliver their post-show speech. Now out of character, Bologna, Sexy Mark Brown, and Ginger Darling speak earnestly, connecting the absence of legislative protections for LGBT people under Putin’s regime and the everyday violence being enacted by hate groups like “Occupy Pedophilia,” who violently target LGBT people in the streets, seemingly without consequence. I highlight for analysis Sexy Mark Brown’s words about Canada. Paraphrasing, Mark suggests that even with the many social problems in Canada, “we” (speaking to the audience) should be thankful to live in a country in which a nakedly political satire like The Boylympics can be staged safely in public. I agree in principle that we performers should be glad, or “grateful,” for our freedom to live and speak without risk of government-sanctioned (either implicit or explicit) violence.

What safeguards our political satire, however, is not the modernity of Canada per se, since Canada is not the welcoming oasis for foreigners that it purports itself to be. In a public speech on May 30, 2014, Prime Minister Stephen Harper maintains a Cold War refrain, re-articulating Russia as external security threat. Harper, in rightly criticizing Russian president Vladimir Putin’s military expansionism into western Europe, confusingly merges together under the banner of ‘evil’ political ideologies as diverse as “Nazism, Marxist-Leninism, today, terrorism — they all have one thing in common: the destruction, the end of human liberty.” In

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his speech, the Canadian Press notes, Harper continues to consolidate Canada’s role as liberatory haven for those fleeing oppression in Russia: “Instead of communism's grim determinism, they found Canadian opportunity.”\textsuperscript{470} Despite such overtures by Harper and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander, some observers like the Canadian Council for Refugees suggest that while the Canadian government may voice support for refugees, without real policy changes, it is in practice very difficult for LGBT identified people to claim refugee status; and it is even getting more difficult for \textit{all} refugee claimants, they say.\textsuperscript{471} For LGBT-identified people, this may be related to the difficulty in proving someone is gay. As B.C. queer activist group, Qmunity, ironically derides, “Where to start? Is it a deep knowledge of musicals? The number of rainbow garments in your closet? Your defiance of gender norms? A certain unicorn \textit{je ne sais quoi}?\textsuperscript{472} (original emphasis).

Instead of Canada’s assured liberal safety, our relative security from discursive regulation is premised on our explicit target of critique – the less modern Russian state. I interpret Mark’s words to suggest that we performers and onlookers should be thankful for our ability to be freely and conspicuously \textit{gay} on a Canadian stage, without fear of overt violence. As long as the target of our performative critique remains situated \textit{elsewhere}, our safety as citizens remains in tact.

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid.
Our performed gayness and the gratitude for performing it contribute to Canadian subjects’ self-perception of sexual exceptionalism, underwritten by the critique of other, non-western states.

The less overt implication, however, about Canada’s (and other nation’s) hypocritical participation in – and tacit approval of – the 2014 Olympics is the actual disidentificatory criticism hidden in our performance. On the one hand, we perform a co-consolidation of our, and Canada’s, reputed sexual exceptionalism. Yet this ostensible critique of Russia also frames our identification of hypocrisy central to Canada’s sense of itself as modern. Crucially, we target the contradictory tension implicit in this Canadian sense of caring nationalism. Such hypocrisy is reflected in our very choice to cooperate with Canada’s symbolic participation in the Olympics: acquiesce to nationalist ideology and participate in the Olympics competition, representing both the old (imperial warfare, pioneering) and new (compassion, welfare) forms of the nation-state.

Beyond the disidentification and embodied critique of minoritarian subjects on display at the Boylympics, the event also articulates the historical logics of fascism and eugenics that not only haunt but also condition a newly modern, compassionate welfare state. The disidentificatory critique of Canada in the Boylympics is oblique, funny, and enjoyable; it also shores up Canada’s self-image as a bearer of sexual modernity. The Boylympics neither fully identify with nor reject the sexual exceptionalism of Canada as a bastion of welfare for its citizens, queer and

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473 In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar argues that the United States’ self-perception of moral superiority and modernity is premised on, not only a gendered exceptionalism (wherein first world women, and their morally advanced nations, occupy a state of exceptionalism among women of the world where gender equality lags behind), but also a sexual exceptionalism. The latter contributes to what Puar terms, homonationalism, or “the emergence of national homosexuality… that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire.” Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 2. Canada’s ongoing nationalist agenda of distinguishing itself from America in the global imaginary consolidates an even more modern, more sexually exceptional character than the United States by legalizing same-sex marriage just slightly before the latter. The positive outcome in Canada elides internal conflict that arose and continues to smolder around the issue of same-sex marriage.
racialized. Our production constitutes a site of disidentificatory enunciations hiding a critique of Canadian ideology within that same ideology.

Our criticism of Russia as a non-modern entity, however, simultaneously buttresses Canada’s self-conception as a sexually exceptional state; this conception implicates Canada’s white subjects as racially ‘exalted,’ while simultaneously excluding racialized and Indigenous minoritarians. Sunera Thobani proffers an analysis of positive characteristics attributed to the Canadian settler state, imagined as an aggregate of its venerated nationals; such qualities are said to distinguish its national subjects from their Others in the national imaginary, recuperating the whiteness of Canada through a self-image of compassion.474 Analyzing state policies and popular practices, Thobani triangulates two such outsiders constructed in relation with the figure of the national subject as “Indians” (Indigenous people) and immigrants; the former are “presented as making impossible and unending demands for special treatment in their claims to land… state funds and…resources” and the latter “are made responsible for importing ‘their’ backward cultural practices into the country…, along with their diseases…murderous hatreds…and their criminal gangs.”475 Thobani asserts that (white) Canadian national subjects are materially exalted in the formation of the Canadian nation state through legal organization and preferential treatment compared to the other figures in her triad. Primarily, Thobani examines legislative sanctions of colonial violence (The Indian Act), the construction of welfare policies giving preferential treatment to Euro-Canadian families, and immigration policies scrutinizing non-White families (The Citizenship Act); her arguments come together in a critical analysis of the 1994 Immigration Policy and Social Security Reviews. Thobani theoretically extends the

475 Ibid, 4.
material organization of Canadian state policy, based on Native and Racial status, to the symbolic organization of white nationals, Indians, and immigrants in the cultural imaginary.

In Thobani’s framework, whiteness becomes symbolically exalted. Defining exaltation as a technique of power (in the senses of subject-self constitution and the juridical power over life and death), Thobani argues that the technology of exaltation ontologically differentiates white Canadian national subjects from and in relation to “the Indian, the [non-European] immigrant, and the refugee.” Thobani argues legal and symbolic differentiation becomes hierarchized in the national imaginary, venerating white national subjects with qualities of cultural capital, signalling their modernity and worthiness of the nation’s material benefits; conversely, she writes, “the post-9/11 archetypal image of the Muslim terrorist” receives a “tenuous and conditional inclusion” and “the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples [becomes] an impossible political objective.”

Such exaltation of white nationals becomes core to the modernity of Canada in what Thobani calls ‘the rescue of whiteness’ in the middle of the twentieth century. Scholars like Freda Hawkins have pointed to a shift from a white-Canada policy to a liberalized immigration policy. The shift, according to Hawkins, was a result of bureaucrats understanding that “Canada could not operate effectively within the United Nations, or in a multiracial Commonwealth, with the millstone of a racially discriminatory policy round her neck.” Further, Thobani links this recognition in Canada to an “international crisis of whiteness.” Thobani summarizes:

476 Ibid., 5.
477 Ibid., 29.
478 Ibid., 18.
The crisis of whiteness in the post-war period was forged by a number of factors. The rise of fascism in Europe among those who claimed to be the most civilized and advanced races in the world – including the Nazi regime, with its genocidal policies that culminated in the horrors of the concentration camps – led to a complete shattering of the legitimacy of western scientific theories of race. Moreover, the scientific theories used by the Nazis informed state policies not only in Germany but also in the other western countries, including Canada. As a partner in the Allied forces fighting fascism, Canada claimed moral superiority over Germany along with its allies in defeating Nazism. But embarrassingly enough, the racial science used by the Nazis could be also found informing Canadian state policy.  

Thus, Thobani calls Canadian multiculturalism “a timely and effective response” to ward off potential accusations of racism, “recasting [Canadian] national identity in a manner … distinct from the United States and Europe, and thus not (directly) implicated in their (more visible) colonial and imperialist histories.”

Through multiculturalism, Canadian identity could be reconstituted as tolerant and cosmopolitan. For Thobani, white nationals were able to project accusations of backwardness and racism onto anyone but themselves, resolving “the crisis of whiteness through [Canada’s] reorganization as tolerant, pluralist, and racially innocent, uncontaminated by its previous racist history.” Thus, Thobani extends scholarship on immigration and multiculturalism by suggesting the recuperation of whiteness’ moral superiority acts to modernize Canada and its white nationals vis-à-vis a narrative of tolerance and pluralism. Following Thobani, the modernist ethos of rationalism that compelled prewar ideals of eugenics purity continues to drive participation of white and minoritarian participation in a eugenics of difference through the logic of strength shaped by capitalism and incomplete knowledge – and ennobling – of hybrid vigour (to be discussed in the next chapter).

481 Ibid., 153.
482 Ibid., 154.
BoylesqueTO’s disidentificatory challenge to Canada’s hypocrisy is thus shaped by our ideological indebtedness to the state’s apparatus of welfare within the Canadian narrative of tolerance and pluralism. Contributing to such ideology, we bring forward in time Canada’s imperialist past and project it across the Bering Strait. It is against this past that a modern, compassionate Canada defines its exceptional and exalted character. As subjects presenting a queer minoritarianism on stage, our recognition (and criticism) of fascism in the Far East is conditioned by the technology of welfare’s originary relationship, that is the ethical abhorrence to fascism in Europe. That same ideology of welfare, which thinkers like Sunera Thobani suggest contribute to a self-exalting narrative of progress from a non-modern past, shapes the relationships that white Canadian nationals have with Indigenous people, racialized immigrants, and queer sexual subjects: a relationship of infantilization, figuratively producing national wards of the state. The processes of infantilization can take the form of multicultural assimilation and the regulation of docility through gratitude, incentivized with the promise of exaltation, and instrumentalizing our own queerness and the mere fact of our existence in service to the settler state. In other words, assimilation through the attempted elimination of Indigenous cultures, incorporation of multiracial immigrant labour, and assimilation of homonationalist capital represent strategies of infantilization. Such infantilization constrains minoritarian dissent. Nationalistic sentiment, therefore, pivots on fascistic logics from a masculine pioneer identity, a purity of European coloniality valorized by settler-colonialism, to modern paternalistic welfare statism that encourages silence and supplication. Such logics of fascism do not serve merely as the backdrop to, and impetus for, modern welfare though. Logics of fascism also condition the compassionate relationships modern nationals have with minoritarian subjects whose supposed
welfare buttresses Canadian nationals’ own sense of modernity and mature progress – a relationship of paternalistic authoritarianism.

In order to explain how our troupe connects to Canadian critical race feminism and its threat to Canadian national thought, we first must understand the potential correlations and transpositions between Canadian and American hegemony in a post-9/11 moment. Such correspondences have tended to link and conflate anti-racist and anti-imperial feminist and queer stakes across borders. I translate the cross-border pollination of multicultural nationalist imaginations first through my experience of American cinematic hegemony, transiting through a discussion of multiculturalism as a nationalist ideology, before directly addressing the cross-border regulatory forces that shape minoritarian dissent.

**Canadamerica and Multiculturalism**

Sentiments of patriotic nationalism can admittedly choke me up, especially in representations of war. Partha Chatterjee might call this individual manifestation of nationalist thinking, a “frenzy of irrational passion” in the colonial world, a failure of nationalism to live up to Enlightenment ideals.\(^{483}\) Ten years old in a Canadian theatre and watching *Independence Day* (1996), I vividly recall the American president’s speech – an inspirational rally of terrestrial militant forces against an alien threat to “mankind.” The actor playing the U.S. president, Bill Pullman, addresses soldiers and average citizens-turned-militia, against a military vehicle backdrop:

> Good morning. In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world. And you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. Mankind. That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can’t be consumed

by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interest. Perhaps it’s fate that today is the fourth of July and you will once again be fighting for our freedom. Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution. But from annihilation. We are fighting for our right to live - to exist. And should we win the day, the fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday. But as the day that the world declared in one voice, “WE WILL NOT GO QUIETLY INTO THE NIGHT. WE WILL NOT VANISH WITHOUT A FIGHT! WE’RE GOING TO LIVE ON! WE’RE GOING TO SURVIVE!” TODAY, WE CELEBRATE: OUR INDEPENDENCE DAY!

At the crescendo of Pullman’s monologue, I held back tears, inexplicably proud of his patriotic defiance against an enemy threat. I did not, at the time, register the hilarious absurdity of conflating American independence from imperial tax and trade regulations with an imagined annihilation of humanity.

Joanne Sharp suggests that post-Cold War, Hollywood scripts like Independence Day (1996) relay a longed for stability of the US-Soviet, capitalist-communist, binary for public consumption.485 Such films rewrite a familiar world-order in older films like Red Dawn (1984), but with literal aliens. Incidentally, Red Dawn’s remake in 2012 contains no significant changes to its pan-Asian, Orientalist xenophobia, retaining a direct link to Cold War anxieties. Soviet communist invaders become transmogrified into Chinese communists, but due to fear of losing Chinese distribution into its lucrative markets, MGM Studio made yet another shrewd switch, making the invaders North Korean.486 The films, Sharp argues, keep the familiar order constant by reconstituting an image of American national identity through an imagined cinematic threat. The familiar geopolitical narrative of America as the world’s sheriff is recycled in Independence Day such that the world becomes America’s synecdoche – an image of world-identity, of

484 Roland Emerich, Independence Day (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1996).
globalizing American hegemony, Benjamin Barber describes as “so generic, so affecting, so ubiquitous, and so empty that it will no longer be recognized as American, it will just be.” The imagined threat to my globally imagined community, the-world-but-also-America, is a fictional alien force – the terrifying nonhuman that audiences can easily rally against. My memory of this script of America versus alien threat, good versus evil, remains with me as a nostalgic piece of my childhood, a moment of personal interpellation into ideological nationalism. Although ambivalence now fetters my childhood enthusiasm to be hailed into citizenry within nation-state ideology, it is never far from me.

While I do not wish to conflate America and Canada, my experience of Canada is an Americanized one, ideologically affected by U.S. cultural hegemony. My situated analysis of the Canadian nation-state is simultaneously specific to the history and geography of Canada, while always in conversation with the ever-present force of American influence. I am not describing increasingly similar expressions of nationalism as Wright and others suggest, although such convergence of nationalist expression adds strength to my argument. Instead, I describe discursive protection of nationalist ideology as something worthy of defense that is often associated with (but not limited to) American patriotism. Through the promise of inclusion and the threat of expulsion, a sense of nationalist protection conditions minoritarian dissent that directly opposes nationals’ sense of legitimacy and moral superiority. Defined in contrast to

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America’s melting pot, which is often characterized by the dissolution of cultural difference, the 
Canadian settler state’s ideology is imagined as a compassionate multiculturalism.

Canada’s multicultural statism and its fraught inclusionary relationship with alien others 
and the ‘Indian problem’ are the ideological conditions that shape both my life history and 
ManChyna. Since the inception of multicultural policy in Canada, official statist multiculturalism 
has threatened to water down increasing bicultural (Franco/Anglo; Indigenous/settler) tensions. 
Kogila Moodley suggests, “With the stroke of a multicultural brush, the policy neutralized the 
special claims of French and Indigenous Canadians. Both of these historical groups with charter 
rights are now equalized among numerous others.”490 The heritage of such nullification is 
underscored for me while filming Brokeback that Ass Up” (2012) in Shawville, Québec. In the 
provincial boundary, Lyndal Neelin refers to Anglophone “community resilience” in a 
Francophone province.491 As a site of linguistic tensions, my alien feelings of inauthentic 
belonging to the whitened landscape are multivalent. The continued language and cultural 
disputes between Anglo and Francophone Canadians elide the targeted elimination of Indigenous 
people – a discussion about which white charter language should be used to write over 
Indigenous land. The overwhelming whiteness of this tension cruelly implicates my own 
presence in Canada and Shawville in multicultural policy meant to assuage bicultural tensions, 
which underwrites Indigenous erasure.

490 Kogila Moodley, “Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 6, no. 3 
(1983): 320–31; see also Himani Bannerji, The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on 
Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2000); Ann 
Manicom and Marie Campbell, Knowledge, Experience and Ruling: Studies in the Social 
Organization of Knowledge (University of Toronto Press, 1995).
491 Neelin, “The Importance of Being Shawville: The Role of Particularity in Community 
Resilience.”
Moodley goes on to link the private with the public under the rubric of multiculturalism. “Yet with a festive aura of imaginary consensus,” Moodley continues, “multiculturalism implies that Canadian society offers equality of opportunity in the public sphere, regardless of private ethnic classification.”\(^{492}\) The promise of inclusion into public life, in this view, is always already haunted by the privacy of ethnicity. In the context of multiculturalism, ethnic origins are paradoxically constructed as belonging to one’s private life but celebrated in the public arena for contributing to its cultural mosaicism.\(^{493}\) The slide between private and public lives has characterized the experience of multiculturalism for minoritarians since its inception.

I partly attribute my embrace of the Canadian nationalist ideology of liberal multiculturalism to a received gratitude from my immigrant parents. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Canada’s immigration policies under Pierre Elliott Trudeau underwent a significant liberalization, encouraging immigration from non-European nations to abate a domestic labour shortage.\(^{494}\) My parents’ Canadian arrival from Singapore in 1972 was facilitated by such liberalization during this period.\(^{495}\) Thus, I am acutely aware that my existence and movement in Canada are made possible by its liberal democracy, underwritten by the reputedly humane capitalism characterizing Canada’s welfare state in the latter twentieth century. Canada’s more recent legislation federally recognizing same-sex marriage is another welcoming condition (one that Jasbir Puar indexes as part of a homonationalist discourse consolidating the moral

\(^{492}\) Moodley, “Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology,” 320.

\(^{493}\) Ibid.

\(^{494}\) Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*.

\(^{495}\) The greatest numbers of ethnic Chinese arriving during this period were from mainland China and Hong Kong, a mix of rural and cosmopolitan immigrants with vastly different English abilities, educations, and skill sets. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle*. 

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legitimacy of the west⁴⁹⁶) further circumscribing my freedom to live and exist not only as a non-white immigrant, but as a gay man too.

Yet such welcoming conditions are always already at odds with each other, as several scholars critical of homonationalism point out. In this area of scholarship, we see the co-production of homonationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Following this logic, Scott Morgensen further names white settlers as architects of ‘modern sexual minority’ identities and politics that act within and sustain white settler colonialism, when they establish indigeneity as a primitive template for modern sexuality to incorporate and overcome.⁴⁹⁷ While Morgensen clearly names settler whiteness as the medium of queer settler colonialism, he also notes that if the colonization of Indigenous peoples and its permeation of sexual politics remain unnamed, “even multiracial and transnational queer critiques of racism and imperialism can erase Native people and naturalize settler colonialism in ways that indirectly define queer modernity as not Native.”⁴⁹⁸ And so, my inclusion into the Canadian settler nation-state as a racialized, queer, son of Asian immigrants is always already conditional and fraught with tension. Such tension emerges from my tangled relationships with homonormativity, whiteness, racialization, and settler violence. My creative self, ManChyna, animates these tensions as a gay man whose sexuality is leveraged against racialized immigrants; simultaneously, my Asian-ness and queerness is leveraged against other non-whites, both racialized and Indigenous. Given my proclivity for weepy-eyed nationalist sentiment, my family’s internalized gratitude for our conditional degrees of freedom live on in spite of myself.

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⁴⁹⁶ Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times.
⁴⁹⁷ Morgensen, Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization, loc 196.
⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., loc 209.
So the very personal and often private experiences of minoritarian sexuality and ethnicity co-produce access to public life under the rubric of liberal multiculturalism. Such access gets purchased at the cost of other minoritarians and oneself. Access is also regulated by the conditions of whiteness. My movement through Canada’s colonized space as a gay and Asian-racialized minoritarian is the locus of my disidentificatory gratitude, play, and critical challenge to the conditions of whiteness. More specifically it is the promise of whiteness that conditions public articulations of dissent, which I view as performances of citizenship.

The Promise of Exaltation Revoked

Sunera Thobani’s notion of exaltation guides my analysis of performing minoritarian experience for liberal multicultural and homonationalist publics. In outlining the racial exaltation of whiteness, Thobani importantly identifies the legal and material benefits accrued by white Canadian nationals through symbolic elevation. Additionally, and crucial to my point, Thobani’s own political dissent against conservative Canada’s unthinking allegiance with the United States catapulted her into the national spotlight. This spotlight illuminates the conditions for public dissent against the narrative of western tolerance and pluralism that have come to define western liberal nationalisms. Thobani’s public excoriation manifests the capriciousness of exaltation as a promissory note made to non-white subjects.

Rendering Thobani’s castigation sensible is her own analysis of multiculturalism and the moral elevation of whiteness. Analyzing Canadian policies of multiculturalism, Sunera Thobani convincingly argues that white nationals of Canada become exalted in the cultural imaginary over Indigenous people and racialized immigrants through attributing to themselves a kind of
modern morality.\(^{499}\) Thobani suggests the twentieth century rise of compassion as an ethic of the modern welfare states like Canada represents a process of rearticulating moral superiority of advanced western nations in the face of the horrors that marked mid twentieth century European history.\(^{500}\) In Thobani’s words:

> The modernist impulse said to inspire the development of western civilization had also imploded from within the heart of Europe with the rise of fascism, exposing the violence at the heart of Europe’s claims to moral, racial, and civilizational superiority. It is surely no coincidence that in this climate the welfare state’s emphasis on compassion and ‘care’ as the characteristics of its nationals emerged. The welfare state’s characterization of the nation-state as shaped by the ethic of compassion, which was to be the basis for their social solidarity, became an important means by which a claim to western civilizational and moral superiority could be reconstituted.\(^{501}\)

Moral and civilizational reconstitution is the primary objective of such exaltation; Thobani calls this the “rescue of whiteness.”\(^{502}\) Thobani argues clearly that the biological racism undergirding the eugenic impulses of Europe’s fascistic civilizationalism became anathema to a sense of compassionate selfhood defining modern welfare states and, by extension, their nationals.

By such logic, Thobani argues, racialized minorities and Indigenous people, should be grateful that white nationals allow us the freedom of entry into and movement within Canada’s borders:

> [T]he deployment of citizenship to confer an (abstract) ‘equality’ on all subjects, including Aboriginal peoples, enabled it to construct Aboriginal peoples in the national imagination as ingrates who demanded preferential treatment and special


\(^{500}\) The focus on the mid century rise of fascism in Europe of course echoes the intellectual analyses and reflections of the Frankfurt school. Adorno, for example, suggests that “A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* vol. 1 (Continuum, 1973), 365. Analyses like Thobani’s, however, assess the effects of recovering the liberal democracy on offer in place of the atrocities of fascist authoritarianism.

\(^{501}\) Thobani, *Exalted Subjects,* 112.

\(^{502}\) Ibid., 150.
rights, over and above what was a fair entitlement of all other citizens. In their rejection of assimilation into the mainstream, Aboriginal people were all the more readily constructed as demanding more than their fair share, and hence, as discriminating against Canadian citizens, placing them at a disadvantage.\(^{503}\)

Compassion in Canada, thus, is reserved specifically for its own nationals, imagined as white British and French colonists – not racialized late-comers or Indigenous people. Such minoritarian subjects who might reject mainstream assimilation into the settler state, reimagined as multicultural, are viewed as ungrateful for the putative chance of salvation in the pale, white arms of Canadian welfare – what Paulo Freire calls “false generosity.”\(^{504}\) In this way, Thobani argues that the compassionate welcome of many-cultures serves not only to quiet bicultural tensions, but also as ‘the final solution to the Indian problem in Canada.’ For Indigenous people, salvation is imagined as deliverance from themselves: maintaining the myth of anachronism and the ‘disappearing Indian,’ which co-constructs stereotypical images of savage and drunken Indigenous men and helpless women, justifying the continued erasure of Indigenous cultures and people (except in the service to Canada’s own mythology).\(^{505}\)

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\(^{503}\) Ibid., 98.

\(^{504}\) In Freire’s words, “Any attempt to ‘soften’ the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their ‘generosity,’ the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this ‘generosity,’ which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source.” Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

\(^{505}\) For discussion about the logic of elimination, see Patrick Wolfe’s “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native” Wolfe, Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, Vol. 8 Taylor & Francis, 2006), 387-409.; For a discussion of the discursive construction of deviant Native masculinities, see Sam McKechnie, Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2014). For a discussion of Native artifacts (as ahistorical) becoming constitutive of white settler culture, see Elizabeth Cromley, "Masculine/Indian," Winterthur Portfolio 31, no. 4 (1996), 265-280.
In the case of racialized immigrant subjects, the promised assimilation into white Canadian safety is never complete and always disciplinary. For us, compassionate salvation is understood to be liberation from a less modern and less compassionate elsewhere; but we are still excessive compared to the serene enlightenment of whiteness. My racialized body in the farmland of Shawville is always already marked as notable, excessive, and dissonant with the landscape inscribed as now belonging to white nationals, seemingly easy and natural. My queer friends and I, visibly marked by racial excess, are provided a limited freedom of movement because we participate gleefully, but silently, in the fair festivities. Rural Canada gets the best of both worlds: to function symbolically as a reservoir for whiteness and benefit materially from a liberalized economy, enhanced by immigrant labour. Modern Canada gets constructed as a compassionate, multicultural, but-definitely-white nation regulating the field of public opinion, provoking discursive backlash against refusals to silently participate, to assimilate into ideology. Prohibition of dissent is encoded in the message of otherness (sexual, racial, and otherwise), vis-à-vis putative compassion, lest we ‘get sent back to’ the less modern places we come from. In contrast to my experiences filming “Brokeback That Ass Up” and participating in the “Boylympics,” Sunera Thobani’s public profile serves as a flashpoint for liberal nationalists’ regulation of minoritarian dissent.

Shortly after Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, Thobani publicly remarked on the hypocrisy of mourning American victims of 9/11, but not victims of U.S. foreign policy to nearly the same degree. Her speech marked Thobani (Simon Fraser

506 Thobani’s speech, “War Frenzy,” was intended to rally women across Canada to oppose Canadian support of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. Her critique of U.S. foreign policy was aimed specifically at the U.S. invasion of Iraq during the Gulf War. Now, after the second invasion of Iraq, Thobani’s words do not seem as controversial as they did in the emotionally
University-educated, Associate Professor at UBC) as the only non-American on a list of 115 scholars and high profile speeches on college campuses (including Jesse Jackson and Noam Chomsky), compiled by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni,\(^{507}\) denouncing them for lacking patriotism and ‘blaming America’ for the attacks on September 11, 2001. In Canada at the time, Thobani was roundly criticized by the premiere of British Columbia (Gordon Campbell), Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, and investigated for hate speech – something unthinkable in a compassionate Canada – by the RCMP.\(^{508}\) To be clear, I am not saying that such criticism is tantamount to government censorship, even though government officials participated.

Such criticism, however, does not take the form of rational debate of ideas between equal national subjects. *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente\(^{509}\) expands on the sentiment about Thobani:

> Ms. Thobani is an idiot. But she’s also a living demonstration of the values that we must defend. She’s entitled to get up in public and say any idiotic thing she wants, and no one has the right to lock her up. The terrorists want to destroy that. In fact, Ms. Thobani’s freedom to speak her mind…stands as the decisive counterargument to her argument. The truth is that the emancipation of women anywhere on this planet depends solely on the spread of Western democratic values. Where in the


\(^{509}\) Margaret Wente is a high profile, libertarian-conservative polemicist who writes for the *Globe and Mail*. 

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world, I wonder, do they think women are more equal than they are here? In Muslim countries…? In China…? In Tanzania (Ms. Thobani’s homeland), where wife beating is widespread?510 (added emphasis)

The ‘they’ Wente describes are “feminists” like Thobani, which can be interpreted variously: academics, ‘professional activists’ (as Wente derides them), and so on. Kent Roach observes, however, that Thobani’s status as a visible minority distinguishes her from her academic and activist peers listed and surveilled by the ACTA. Roach chronicles the mainstream news rhetoric connecting Thobani’s perceived insolence and her foreignness: “The Vancouver Sun asked: ‘Why is she here, in the West she apparently loathes?’ and the Victoria Times Colonist commented: ‘Canada welcomed her into this country, then gave her a stage and money. In return, she has repeatedly criticized our way of life and directed sheer hate at our friends”511 (added emphasis). In other, lower-profile publications like the Edmonton Journal, sentiments about Thobani’s racial otherness and the ease with which dissenting subjects like her can be cast from the safety of Canada’s welfare. One letter to the editor calling to raise funds for Thobani’s deportation reads, “Sounds to me like she's just not happy living in a country where she can actually get away with spewing her brand of ignorance, and get paid to boot. Perhaps squatting under a full-length burka for a few years, or being beaten for being a woman just trying to survive in a Taliban-ruled society might change her tune. Let's do our best to let Sunera know that we won't be satisfied either, until she's free of the tyranny of North America!”512 The letter’s sense of superiority, conveyed through flip irony, is premised on the idea that Thobani’s place in Canada cannot be revoked.

510 Margaret Wente, Two Reasons to Thank Sunera Thobani, 2001.
511 Roach, September 11: Consequences for Canada, 120.
Especially for those deemed as other, the certainty of Canadian citizenship is not natural and enshrined. I am in this instance thinking about the current debate on Canada’s Bill C-24, which became law June 16, 2014, giving the federal government expanded powers to revoke citizenship. But there are other elements of citizenship that do not involve one’s passport. Rhetorically revoking Thobani’s Canadian-earned doctorate with the diminutive, “Ms.,” Wente reminds readers of Thobani’s non-national status – i.e. “Tanzania (Ms. Thobani’s homeland).” Thobani, like myself and other racialized subjects, is always already read as in excess of the bleached national fabric of Canada’s ‘original’ (non-Indigenous) charter groups, namely French and British colonists. Thobani’s politics, deemed insolent by a phobic and reactionary public, underscores the impossibility of her status as a ‘national’ (the implied “our”), despite her western education and regardless of her actual residency or citizenship. I suggest that as a racialized woman, Thobani is not perceived as equal to the national subjects of Canada, but as a perpetually foreign ward of the state.

Further, Wente reiterates the precarious position of favourability that minority groups have in the compassionate hand of Canada’s real nationals. Speaking about the ‘good work’ the

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conference organizers do – compassionate social work, like providing services for Indigenous women – Wente warns these ‘good subjects’ about the uncertainty of their futures when associating with insubordinate subjects like Thobani:

We need the work these agencies do. They need our tax dollars, our United Way money, our personal cheques and our corporate support. But they also need to hear that they are in danger of losing our goodwill. The destructive ideology that has infected their planning and thinking is severely undermining the good work they do … I’ve got a suggestion for the governments, United Ways, good-hearted corporations and citizens who pay the bills. Tell these people it’s time to get back to service work, and stop wasting their time and money cheering for Ms. Thobani. She just gets in the way.”

Wente’s is one voice among the media, public, and government officials who categorically denounced Thobani’s (in retrospect, mild) criticism of the United States. Still, the columnist articulates a paternalistic logic meant to regulate the dissent of racialized others, perceived as wards under the aegis of the state. The message constructed becomes, ‘be grateful for the grace of our compassion, lest our goodwill be revoked.’

Given the racist overtones of phobic reactions to Thobani, criticizing her for her insolence, it is unsurprising that notions of intolerance and hate-speech are projected onto her. Fittingly, Thobani argues later that not only does multicultural policy constitute an ideological ‘rescue of whiteness,’ but also a projection of intolerance onto the bodies of racialized others:

Multiculturalism .. enabled the suturing of the post-colonial crises by enabling a different kind of projection: that of the anxieties of an intolerant and racist whiteness onto immigrants…[whose cultures remain] stubbornly traditional despite the nation’s offer to modernize them, despite its hospitality and generosity…If

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514 The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centers organized the conference in 2001 at which Thobani delivered “War Frenzy”


516 Wente, *Two Reasons to Thank Sunera Thobani.*
whites were to be accused of racism, genocide, and colonial exploitation, they could now respond in kind by pointing to how much worse immigrants were, with their primitive and backward cultural practices, their corruptions, misogyny, cronynism and violence. With whiteness coming to signify tolerance… people of colour could be tied … to cultural parochialism, authoritarianism, essentialism, and intolerance… [a framework assuming] rigidity in the cultures of racial others, of their enduring inferiority, immaturity, and the need for their reformulation under the tutelage of progressive – always modernizing – western superiority.  

Although Thobani does not specify the character of ‘intolerance,’ the sentiment for me activates a register of antagonism between the ethnic subject and the white queer subject permeating western interracial relations. I recall reactions among my own friends to my family’s negative reception of my queerness.

In Scarborough, a Toronto suburb currently characterized by recent South and East Asian migratory influxes compared with white gentrification of the downtown core, my family is located in an increasingly hyper-racialized community within Toronto’s suburban/downtown demographic reversal. Among my urban, white, queer peers, perceptions of my parents’ immigrant status interlock their negative reaction within a colonial matrix that casts their reactions as ‘understandable because of where they come from.’ Sunera Thobani suggests, “National subjects who fail to line up to the exalted qualities [of Canadian Nationhood] are treated as aberrations; their failings as individual and isolated ones. The failings of outsiders, however, are seen as reflective of the

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518 Chan uses historical archival data (legislative debates, Royal Commissions, city records, census data, academic papers, works of historians, and newspaper and magazine reports, as well as recollections from personal papers, interviews, autobiographies, and memoirs) to demonstrate the changing settlement patterns of Chinese in Toronto since the implementation of the points system – a shift from urban Chinatown to Chinese ethno-burbs. Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle*. 

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inadequacies of their community, of their culture, and indeed their entire ‘race.’” My family’s views are not understood as unthinkable individual ignorance, as might be the case for intolerant white parents whose views are irreconcilable with a compassionate modern, and secular white citizenry. Instead, my family’s alien racial excess becomes explanatory for their ungenerous limitations perceived as immature and underdeveloped, consolidating both the modernity of whiteness and Canada’s internal management of racial difference.

Religiosity plays a role in modifying whiteness and intensifying ethnicity. White parents who might react negatively to their queer children can be explained through the sectarianism of religiosity. A negative reaction in this light might be legible insofar as Christianity, and religion more broadly, is cast in secular Enlightenment terms as non-modern. The superiority of whiteness is again rescued by casting religion as signifying devolution of the mind. The colonial spread of Christianity via white missionaries throughout the world consequently conflates the religio-conservatism of Euro Christian sexual mores with ethnic bodies. A contemporary debate in Vancouver (a city with one of the highest Chinese and Chinese-Canadian immigration rates in the country) highlights this. The Vancouver School Board’s new gender policy is highly contested. Such debates however, intone racist currents casting the ‘ethnic Chinese’ community, and especially its Christian segment as particularly homophobic and transphobic. David Ng asks of his queer and trans allies, “Why is it that when white Christians are homophobic and

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transphobic, they are ‘homophobic and transphobic Christians,’ but all of a sudden, when Chinese Christians are homophobic and transphobic, they are ‘ethnic Chinese’ Christians who are homophobic and transphobic?” I respond that the reason is because both ‘Christian’ and ‘ethnic’ are equated under the rubric of ‘unenlightened and non-modern.’

Unlike my very ethnic family, however, I am not often accused of bigotry. As the Anglicized version of myself, Andrew, I might be described as a subject assimilated into a modern, white, Canadian citizenry; some (like my parents) might derogatorily call me a white-washed “banana,” or as Cantonese peers growing up would call me, 粟شه. I suspect the latter is in part due to my overt sexual expression – a rejection of reputedly ethnicized non-modernity toward assimilation into western queer modernities. My family sometimes lets me know how very western my gayness appears to them. In this scenario, my sexuality is debased as a product of western assimilation. Yet my Asian racialization also gets implicated in baseness. For westerners, my performance of overt queerness, (that very queer ManChyna) presumably rescues me from the supposed provinciality of my race and culture. ManChyna disidentifies aggressively with celebrations of his sexuality and racialization within a multicultural, and thus ‘enlightened,’ framework. Not everyone sees ManChyna like this, though.

“ManChyna, you’re a racist and a bigot”

*He may even double his efforts to date Caucasians since they are now more symbolic of acceptance by the host society, i.e., the Caucasian girls are ‘forbidden fruits.’*

- Stanley and Derald Sue, on their figure of the Asian American ‘Marginal Man’

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521 Sue and Sue, “Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health,” 42.
In a chandeliered, Greek-style restaurant-turned-dive bar in downtown Buffalo, New York, I give a sweaty performance to a modestly sized, multiracial crowd of people of varying sexualities, genders, and physical abilities. I begin my set with a song called, “Mighty Faggot,” in which I introduce myself as ‘the mighty faggot’ on top of a beat sampling the cartoon character Martin Prince (a fey, asexual nerd-child on The Simpsons). In the sample, Prince’s character tells his peers that they should stand up to a local bully: “He’s right, individually we are weak, like a single twig *snaps twig*/ But as a bundle we form a mighty faggot!” I assume the show’s writers share my delight in publicly parading the homophobic slur, wrapped in double entendre, semi-shielded from criticism with defiance and solidarity against oppression. But I was not, in fact, shielded from such criticism. Walking off stage after my set a white stranger, ‘John,’\(^\text{522}\) confronts and sarcastically congratulates me for being both a racist and a bigot. Surprised and rattled, but extremely curious, I ask John what he means by this. He responds, “Every other word out of your mouth was either anti-gay or anti-black.” Later that evening in my hostel room, I reformulated my reaction in GIF form.\(^\text{523}\) When I retell the story, including the moment at which John begins to make sexual advances toward me, several people respond comparing it to the idea of ‘negging,’\(^\text{524}\) popularized by online “pick-up artist” and “seduction”

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\(^{522}\) Pseudonym

\(^{523}\) It can be found on my personal tumblr page: A.W. Lee, “ManChyna, You’re Racist,” ManChyna, January 31, 2014, http://24.media.tumblr.com/71b0fed871809934ffdebce5eb1f18/tumblr_n0edz4ld1stjoxzo2_r3_500.gif.

\(^{524}\) According to the most upvoted definition on Urban Dictionary negging comprises, “Low-grade insults meant to undermine the self-confidence of a woman so she might be more vulnerable to your advances. This is something no decent guy would do. They say that the
communities. Such an explanation, however, individualizes the insult as coming from a morally reprehensible, indecent man. If meant to degrade my physicality or abilities then why not target my hair, my clothing, my rapping style or another aspect of my performance? I focus on John’s specific *moral* denunciation of my character – accusing me of being a racist and a bigot.

After a short exchange about lyrical interpretation and an intervening mediation by the show promoter (a strong, queer, Black woman who thankfully advocates on my behalf during the encounter), he later apologizes for potentially misinterpreting my intentions. I am less concerned with John’s apology, or that he may have misinterpreted my performance, than I am with the slippery logics of his assessment. I interpret his interpretation as a reading of my underdeveloped character, framed by the conditions of my racialized body and public performance as a rapper. I read John’s attempts to morally shame me as pedagogical, as an attempt to teach me the error of my, what he calls, ‘hatred’ and to shepherd me into an enlightened modernity. I contend there are no references in my work that can be directly construed as racially bigoted, so I suspect the element that might frame me as bigoted is my frequent deployment of the term ‘faggot.’

The use of faggot in hip-hop is understood as exemplary of hip-hop’s association with racialized bodies as an immature cultural form to be corrected and summoned into modernity. For some, it exemplifies the alleged antagonism between black racial and queer sexual politics. Rich Juzwiak, a staff writer for Gawker.com, uses searches on rapgenius.com’s databases to argue against Hel Gebreamlak’s (racialicious.com contributor, blogger) suggestion that Macklemore’s hip-hop music is not revolutionary, as his vocal accompanist Mary Lambert

professes.\textsuperscript{525} Juzwiak argues, “Certainly, I can see [Macklemore’s case that the genre of hip-hop is apparently anti-gay], given the combined thousands of instances of "fag," "faggot" and "homo" that reverberate throughout the genre. Surely, no other genre can boast the degree of explicitly expressed anti-gay sentiment that hip-hop can”\textsuperscript{526} (added emphasis). However, Gebreamlak suggests that Macklemore profits from and simultaneously denigrates hip-hop, promoting the notion that the genre is inherently homophobic, or that it ‘hates’ gays, as a line in “Same Love” suggests.\textsuperscript{527} Gebreamlak goes on to argue that Macklemore’s overt use of language like, ‘white privilege,’ extracts him from the coordinates of such privilege, insidiously shielding him from criticism for inhabiting the role of hip-hop’s queer-saviour.\textsuperscript{528} Rinaldo Walcott refers to the popular refrain that hip-hop is anathema to gay sexuality as, a “boring preoccupation with hip hop as homophobic ... lacking in both queer content and queer bodies.”\textsuperscript{529} High profile “comings out” are truthfully rare for international corporate hip-hop, and reasonably garner widespread attention.\textsuperscript{530} The rational upshot of such attention within a compassionate and worldly capitalism,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{525} Macklemore, née Ben Haggerty, rose to prominence in the popular music industry with his song “Thrift Shop” (2012, producer Ryan Lewis), noted on occasion by media for his whiteness (Complex, Interview Magazine, Gawker, etc.) in a traditionally black medium. His song “Same Love” (2013), sampling and collaborating with singer Mary Lambert, became an anthem for marriage equality in the United States during a period of multiple states recognizing same-sex marriages.
\item \textsuperscript{526} Rich Juzwiak, \textit{Self-Appointed Privilege Police Officer Denounces Macklemore’s Pro-Equality Anthem}, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{528} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{530} See, for example, writing about Frank Ocean and Azaelia Banks’ notable comings out as bisexual. Rich Juzwiak, “Why 2013 Was Hip-Hop’s ‘Faggot’ Spring,” \textit{Gawker}, December 27, 2013, http://gawker.com/why-2013-was-hip-hop-s-faggot-spring-1484894585; Stacy Lambe,
however, is the discursive promotion of hip-hop’s modernization. The narrative suggests that in recent years hip-hop has become increasingly ‘accepting’ of queerness - either that ‘hip-hop’ is becoming more accepting or that it should or could be.\(^{531}\) The underlying presumption is that hip-hop culture, and its mostly Black producers, is not already modern. Public comings out supposedly signal modernity for the genre’s continued enfranchisement within a cosmopolitan capitalism. Such logic is predicated on the notion that hip-hop and, by association, black communities are excessively homophobic, provincial and unenlightened. By such logic, racialized communities and their hip-hop loving youth require shepherding into modernity by commercially successful white knights like Macklemore.

Homophobia in hip-hop cannot be denied, but neither can its presence be described “as only a reflection of actual lived experience.”\(^ {532}\) According to Tricia Rose,

> Hip hop reflects the important role that homophobia plays in defining masculinity. Women who are considered too independent, tough, or powerful are negatively labeled as lesbians. Men insulted for being too weak are often called ‘faggots.’ In this version of heterosexual masculinity, the parameters of manhood are being protected when homosexuality is equated with ‘femininity,’ and both are designated as weak and subordinate. This general culture of homophobia is compounded by black males' long-denied access to the full powers of patriarchal masculinity, which in turn may have encouraged a particular brand of black homophobia.\(^ {533}\)

Yet, for Rose, American mainstream perceptions of hip-hop suggest, “[i]t's as if black teenagers have smuggled sexism and homophobia into American culture, bringing them in like unauthorized imports.”\(^ {534}\) Instead, Rose argues, corporate interests that benefit from the common

\(^{531}\) Lambe, “The Year Hip-Hop Went Queer.”

\(^{532}\) Tricia Rose, The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about When We Talk about Hip Hop—and Why It Matters (New York: BasicCivitas, 2008), 87.

\(^{533}\) Ibid., 248.

\(^{534}\) Ibid., 19.
claim of ‘keeping it real,’ or authentic representation of “hard-truths” about Black urban life, foster the distorted images of negative social stereotypes, such as the trope of Black youth being more sexist and homophobic than mainstream (white) America.535

But is hip-hop more homophobic, or more generally hateful, than other corners of music, such as country and western? Both progressives and moral conservatives in hip-hop tacitly accept homophobia in hip-hop. Conservatives equate hip-hop with a patriarchal masculinity deemed antithetical to homosexuality and some progressives use anti-sexism as a “stand in for other kinds of hatred and discrimination perpetrated by hip hop,” while are also “uncomfortable” and “distressed” by any mention of homosexuality.536 Yet homophobia in hip-hop is derived from Black reactions to the broader culture. As Earl Ofari Hutchinson writes of the conservative tone of masculinity in hip-hop: “[i]n a vain attempt to recapture their denied masculinity, many black men, mirror America's traditional fear and hatred of homosexuality. They swallow whole the phony and perverse John Wayne definition of manhood, that real men talk and act tough, shed no tears, and never show their emotions.”537 The “John Wayne definition of manhood” is pervasive throughout the American cultural imaginary, beyond just the Westerns genre he is associated with. Patricia Hill Collins, alternatively, links the homophobia in hip-hop to intertwined progressivism and conservativism in strains of Black cultural nationalism.538 As Collins writes,

[w]ith so much vested in glorifying the mother [in Black cultural nationalism]…Black gays, Black lesbians, and Black women who embrace feminism all become suspect,

535 Ibid., 146.
536 Rose uses Mos Def as an example of the latter. Ibid., 247-251.
because each group in its own way challenges the centrality of motherhood for Black families, communities, and ultimately the Black nation. The homophobia in Black cultural nationalism seems linked to this belief that maintaining a conservative gender ideology is essential for Black families, communities, and the Black nation as family.539

The links between hip-hop and larger Black nationalist projects thus reflect the reaction of Black America to white supremacy. Black youth are not importing homophobia into white America, but rather are reflecting the latter’s own threads of queer hate.

The character of hip-hop’s current capitalist secularism, however, renders it an easy target for a neoliberal logic of ‘bad individuals’ who are deemed unenlightened and non-modern. Country and western, although similarly hyper-capitalist, is associated with southern U.S. pride, replete with confederate flag paraphernalia, and Christian fundamentalism with its associated homophobia. Even if individual country artists do not say ‘faggot’ with the same frequency as hip-hop artists, the former’s associated ideologies are well-documented repositories of hateful speech and physical violence. Flipping the critique around, Walcott suggests, “Our desire for a pop star queer hip hop artist says more about our desire to reside deep within capitalism’s embrace than it does for undoing the hegemonic power of capitalist heternomativity as a dominating force of human life…as if market inclusion means freedom.”540 Walcott identifies the desire for inclusion into mainstream cultural consciousness, which some minoritarians subjects have, as being only thinkable as inclusion within the dominant ideology of capitalism.

Continuing his explanation, John’s accusatory logic hinges on the diversity of his friends and the separation of private and publicly available ‘hate speech.’ By John’s logic, it is acceptable for him to call his black friend a ‘nigger’ and for her to call him a ‘faggot’ in private,

539 Ibid., 111.
among his peers. As John says this, he half-speaks and half-mouths the invective while turning to our mediator, the show promoter (“Gillian”541). I read John’s half-spoken racial slur, his spinning around to Gillian, as a defiant apology for his admission, as if to say, I’m sorry, but it’s true. But he actually explains to us, with repetition and the supposedly mitigating closeness of his friendships that “it loses its hatred.” I could dismiss John as misinformed, shrouding myself with the epistemic superiority of authorship – i.e. claiming, ‘that’s not what I meant’ – emphasizing my celebratory intent (revolutionary strength through defiance and unity), and extracting myself from accountability. Alternatively, I could dismiss the encounter as a case of miscommunication, redirected criticism. I take the spirit of his accusation (if not the coherence of his logic) seriously, however, John is not alone in perceiving me as enabling homophobic publics with my performances as ManChyna performances.542 I am interested in the disjuncture of our communication and the slippage of meaning. Cultural mechanisms of assimilation and regulation, especially John’s distinction of public and private spaces, are at work in this chasm of meaning.

541 Pseudonym

542 I relate my encounter with John to another criticism I once received from a young, self-identified, gay Indigenous man in Canada – “Frank” (another pseudonym). My encounter with Frank also happened after a ManChyna show. The young man’s concern centered on my use of the term ‘faggot’ and its recitation by (presumably) straight audience members. Frank suggested that my use of the term might make it sound, as he said, “cool,” that it could be taken as an invitation for them to use the term. Frank’s point leads to a serious consideration of the contested possibility of reclaiming symbolically violent language. I believe, however, that Frank and John’s concerns about my lyrics are connected by a thread of respectability politics, the representation of acceptable sexual citizenry – or, as Lisa Duggan describes it, “homonormativity.” John’s misgivings centered on his uncertainty about my motivations, whether or not I intend to undermine stereotypes (his words were, ‘blow up stereotypes’) of gay men or reproduce them. I deny neither interpretation, because they are both true with respect to my disidentificatory relationship with gay sexuality. My motivations to undermine existing stereotypes of queer sexuality exist in parallel with my embrace of them. Little, if anything, about my presentation of my queer sexuality as ManChyna is acceptably mainstream, the mission of homonormative libertarians Lisa Duggan describes. Yet, the very existence of my anti-normative posture is shaped by assimilation and inclusion. Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism.”
The private/public distinction John uses to define my unacceptable, hateful speech can be understood by returning to Enlightenment thinkers whose ideas shape this social division. In Immanuel Kant’s essay, “Answer the Question: What is Enlightenment?” he argues that the irrational ‘immaturity’ (Unmündigkeit) is presumed to exist in the private sphere. Kant argues this private immaturity is the very basis for his defense of autonomous reason in the public sphere, which ideally is characterized by mature reason. Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, in his defense of multiculturalism as an improvement of the public sphere, calls such private characteristics ‘primordial,’ to be repudiated when assimilating into public democracies. Alexander here is criticizing assimilation into civic life, defining it as the shedding of ‘primordial’ characteristics cultures of origin. Assimilation, for Alexander, is an undesirable mode of incorporation compared to ‘multiculturalism;’ the two, for Alexander, are different. While Alexander’s critique of assimilation as a mode of incorporation is useful, his promotion of multiculturalism and assimilation as different types of incorporation is not. Himani Bannerji describes American notions of ‘multiculturalism’ as operationalizing an ambiguous political process “from above or from below,” whereas in Canada, “multiculturalism is a state-

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544 Several translators interpret the word unmündig as immature. Unlike the English associations of youth with immaturity, which would be more appropriately translated from Unreife, Unmündigkeit refers to any state of nonage, or non-rational naivety, unrestricted by age. Those persons deemed by the state to be incapable of autonomous reason, be they a child, a senile elder, people with mental disabilities, and so on, can be associated with Unmündigkeit. Such persons cannot, by Enlightenment standards, participate or have a voice in civic life.
sanctioned, state-organized ideological affair.” I argue that Canadian multiculturalism colours the nationalist ideology of compassion into which I assimilate, not that they are different in kind. At the same time I part from Alexander’s assumption that the public forum is a neutral space in which, he suggests, multiculturalism represents an improvement. The violence of settler-colonialism’s erasure of indigeneity and dehumanization of Blackness naturalizes the polis of America and Canada, the body politic into which racialized minorities must be absorbed, as white.

The ‘hatred’ John hears in my lyrics and sees in my performance should be, in his opinion, contained to private conversation where it is somehow mitigated or ‘lost.’ By this I think John means the relational context in private spaces might mitigate the objectively racist and homophobic language used by he and his absent friend. But how does such mitigation work? Can subjects be less affected by such violations than in the public realm? This might be true in terms of immediate, material consequences, but the psychic effect is just as real. John’s speech conditions, the restriction of the use of ‘faggot’ to private spaces, can be better explained through its status as unenlightened. I understand John’s accusations of me in the context of hip-hop, itself a youthful form, associated with non-modernity and un-enlightened immaturity with respect to its use of sexuality and profanity. Simultaneously, I also understand such accusations in the context of my particular racialization.

547 Ibid., 543; To contextualize Alexander’s U.S.-specific theorization of multiculturalism, America has not adopted a federal multicultural policy like Canada. Also, relative to Canada, the United States scores low (but not the lowest among western countries) on the Multicultural Policy Index for Immigrant, Indigenous, and National Minorities (scores, rationale, and tables found at http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/index.html). “Multiculturalism Policy Index,” Queen’s University, accessed July 20, 2015, http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/.
The projection of regressive immaturity onto the bodies of racialized others activates a psychic register, structured by anthropological colonialism, which infantilizes racialized others. David Eng reminds us of the colonial narratives in Freud’s early racist depictions in *Totem and Taboo*. In it, Freud describes “non-European savage tribes — the Akamba, Australian Aborigines, Barongs, Battas, Malays, Maori, Melanesians, Polynesians, Ta-Ta-thi, Zulas, and so on” or the “dark-skinned others” of Africa and the South Pacific as psychosexually underdeveloped figures.\(^\text{548}\) Eng argues that Freud’s conception of non-European Indigenous peoples in imperially seized lands rests on an atavistic vision of ‘savages’ as incompletely developed and uncivilized, derived from the storied travels of European anthropologists. Freud views colonized bodies, Eng believes, as child-like, developmentally stunted, and without the civilized capacity to banish forbidden mental formations into their subconscious. According to Eng, Freud refuses Africans and Southeast Asians the possibility of an id. Eng argues that the figure of the psychosexual primitive in Freud’s oeuvre contributes to a western logic of elimination, disappearing the figure of the Indigenous – i.e. erasure of non-modern others, vis-à-vis civilizationalism, indicates social progress. Eng goes on to argue that such fantasies of sexual and racial difference are written into western narratives of modern, liberal subjects’ development – a development that is inextricably sexual and racial.

Eng’s choice of the Asian male body in contemporary North America as a site of convergence of puerility, racialized alien otherness, and sexual inferiority instructs my connection between the racial and sexual children of the white nation-state. Eng connects contemporary, racist conceptions of Asian men in the west as psychically castrated, similar to

women in this framework; full subjecthood for each group then is similarly foreclosed from the modernist European perspective. Although the analogous treatment between colonized Indigenous people and ‘Asians’ is conflated without expanding on Hawaiian Indigenous scholarship, his choice of the analytic category “Asian” foregrounds the particular colonial history of America’s imperial adventures in the South Pacific throughout the twentieth century.\(^{549}\) Eng’s argument, however, that homosexual men are pathologized and infantilized by the same racist ideology conflating ontogeny and phylogeny in psychoanalysis’ treatment of non-European bodies is useful:

Freud’s management and erasure of the figure of the homosexual are a simultaneous management and erasure of the figure of the primitive…The management and erasure of ‘primitive’ sexual impulses are no longer figured here as the threat of incest but as the threatened return of same-sex desire. In this regard, a displaced racial otherness is made legible in the lexicon of pathological (homo)sexuality.\(^{550}\)

Both the dark-skinned other and homosexual in the narratives of western psychoanalysis serve as immature figures relative to the fully realized subject of the heterosexual, white, European male. Unsurprisingly, by such logic, the figure of the homosexual is haunted by clinical conceptions of misplaced object-desire and thus constitutes an underdeveloped subject, child-like and sexually impulsive. Also expected is, as Eng argues, that racial fantasy gets inextricably bound to sexual fantasy. For the racialized bodies of dark-skinned immigrants, considered bearers of cultural origins, the retention of a child-like status conditions the relationship between immigrant guest and national host. Similarly the newly

\(^{549}\) In *Ends of Empire*, Jodi Kim illustrates the textual connective tissue between the imperial expansion of the U.S. into the Southeast Pacific islands, Cold War logics, and contemporary racist encounters of Asians in America. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).


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liberated gay or lesbian subject, in the self-congratulatory lens of homonationalism, always already retains a child-like relation to the welfare of enlightened nationals.

So the projection of intolerance onto racialized immigrants and sexual minorities within the protective borders of a compassionate, modern nation-state parallels Puar’s claims about the analytic category of homonationalism. The hierarchic, sexual and gender exceptionalism characterizing current measures of tolerance and modernity among nations also structures the internal management of racialized and sexual others as immature and underdeveloped subjects. Sunera Thobani’s speech directly opposes nationalist ideology (American, to be sure, but Canadian responses conflate the two via ‘national friendship’). Responses to Thobani, the denouncements by the Canadian public, media, and state officials, project a racial insolence onto her. Such projection deems Thobani as ungrateful for Canadian compassion and warning other minorities to stay away from her supposedly dangerous thinking.

For Gillian, John’s flagrant use of racist language (and his friend’s use of, ‘faggot’) is “comfortable” in the private space of banter between friends. My performance, Gillian points out, may trouble John by bringing hateful language into a public space, making such symbolic violence transparent and obvious. My public display of unenlightened, non-modern language – let us call it my ‘oriental faggotry’ – is not a direct opposition to dominant ideology. Neither is it a re-appropriation of disparaging language, although such thinking influences me. Rather, my display is a public retrieval of the non-modern specter of undeveloped parochialism, the private primordialism of my ethnic and queer excess that haunts my minoritarian assimilation into multiculcy settler homonationalism. Such retrieval transgresses the private/public distinction, supported by the thinking that such separation is
always already false, an ideal hoped for by Enlightenment thinkers but never achieved in practice. John’s discursive regulation of my transgression of the public/private divide constitutes a regulatory act, disciplining my performatively foregrounded rational immaturity.

As mentioned, John eventually shifts the tone of our conversation from accusatory to apologetic and, finally, to sexually propositional. The setting of our conversation changes locations too. The show promoter, attempting to better mediate us, ushers us from the public space of the bar to the private dressing room. When the conversation becomes conciliatory, Gillian leaves to continue her night, which was sidelined by our conversation. Alone and in this private space, John begins to ask me what my plans are later and insisting that he, and only he, show me the ‘after hours’ Buffalo scene, and so on; John is obviously hitting on me. One might consider John’s earlier antagonism with me as some kind of prelude to his real motivations, but I do not consider our conversation to have this trajectory. The messiness of our stumbling conversation, his often times incoherent and racist logic, and the accidental (but not-unimportant) change of setting comprise far too jumbled a scene to have been part of a calculated pick-up scheme. Instead, I consider the last leg of our conversation as part of the same, regulatory logic informing the first. John’s accusation of me as a racist bigot is conditioned by the psychic projection of rational immaturity onto my sexual and racialized body. In public, John attempts to regulate my savageness by enlightening me with his compassionate, modernity. In private, such assimilatory regulation turns toward and operates through sexual consumption and an implied promise of sexual assimilation. My encounter is neither isolated nor idiosyncratic.

The promise of sexual assimilation is understood by some scholars not only as individual but also as part of a symbolic and legal apparatus to supposedly improve the lot of populations
deemed inferior. Carla Pratt, in her analysis of American state miscegenation laws, calls the promoted assimilation of Native Americans through intermarriage, “sexual assimilation.” Pratt suggests,

[m]any whites believed that the offspring of white-Indian unions would inherit some of the positive attributes of whiteness. In their view, this had a civilizing effect, elevating these people above those with pure Indian blood. Consequently, segments of white society viewed reproduction between Indians and whites as a form of sexual rehabilitation for Indians. … sexual assimilation was a progressive and more compassionate solution to the ‘Indian problem’

Pratt suggests that while such sexual assimilation facilitated cultural genocide federally it also extended the colour line of American white supremacy from separating only white/Black to including alienation of Indigenous/Black. Such extension was accomplished, according to Pratt, by tribal adoption of anti-miscegenation laws originally intended to prevent Black/white intermarriage. Pratt specifically looks at the laws adopted by the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole people in the American antebellum period. Sexual assimilation, Pratt argues, contributes to the internal hierarchization of America’s racial caste, symbolically wedging Indigenous people “in the middle of the black-white models of racial subordination.”

In Canada, Bonita Lawrence’s study of urban mixed-blood Indigenous realities calls attention to the “statistical genocide” of Indigenous peoples through the legislated effects of the body of colonial laws known collectively as the Indian Act. “[A]rithmetical genocide or statistical extermination” refers to the affect that blood quantum policies have had on the

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552 Ibid., 413
diminishing demographics of several Indigenous nations in America.\textsuperscript{553} In the Canadian context, Lawrence suggests that the gendered revocation of Indian status from Indigenous women who marry men without status (and their children) comprises a campaign to “erase their Nativeness.”\textsuperscript{554} Such children of mixed race descent (pejoratively called “half-breeds,” “mixed-bloods,” and so on), as Lawrence argues, become the targets “of carefully controlled assimilation… the primary means by which Canada sought to destroy its pacified Indian population… creating a Canadian citizen of Aboriginal heritage who has relinquished his collective ties to his Native community and any claims to Aboriginal rights.”\textsuperscript{555} Like Pratt’s suggestion that sexual assimilation into American white supremacy comprises a supposedly compassionate, sexual rehabilitation of Indigenous people, the Canadian Indian Act, Lawrence continues, “proposed voluntary enfranchisement as a ‘privilege’” for Indigenous people. Such privilege, under the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, came with limited material benefits (twenty hectares of freehold land), but was ultimately a failure since in the next sixty years only 102 persons benefitted.\textsuperscript{556} Despite its failure, the policy and its imposed loss of status become increasingly compulsory and remains on the books until 1951. After the divisive amendment of the 1985 Indian Act (Bill C-31), the logic of Indian status measured by blood quantum maintains the underlying assumption that white blood symbolically improves the status of Indigenous people. The latter, under such logic, no longer require the legal recognition as Indians in what Lawrence calls an expanded “bleeding off” of Indigenous people, “extending new status

\textsuperscript{553} Ward Churchill, \textit{Indians Are Us?}: \textit{Culture and Genocide in Native North America} (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994), 193; see also Lawrence, “\textit{Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood}, 77.
\textsuperscript{554} Lawrence, “\textit{Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood}, 120.
\textsuperscript{555} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid.
restrictions to men as well.” Likewise, Lawrence foregrounds the complicated “assimilatory desires” frequently wrestled with among many urban mixed-blood Indigenous people, a rejection of the “unsafety of Nativeness and embrace … of triumphant white culture” mediating light-skinned privilege with “a nexus of increasing access to wealth and privilege that accompanies increasing whiteness.” From both above and below, the logic of sexual assimilation then maintains the internal management and subordination of so-called “pure” and “half-breed” Indigenous people alike under white supremacy, while putatively bestowing white privilege onto “half-breeds.”

The promise of sexual assimilation, the “bleeding off” of Indigenous “unsafety,” is not limited to Indigenous people. Other legal scholars like Deenesh Sohoni point out the categorical construction of Asians in America (foreign and domestic born) as conditioned by similar anti-miscegenation laws during this same period, consolidating America’s racial hierarchy:

[T]he term white had been intended generically to [legally] exclude ‘black, yellow, and all other colors’ … Chinese and Asians as nonwhites ‘were among those signified as black, mulatto, and Indian. At the same time, some courts recognized Asian ethnic groups as a distinct intermediate racial category between the ‘savage’ African and the ‘civilized’ European. These scholars agree that caught somewhere between America’s constructed racial dichotomy of Black and white are other non-Black people of colour and Indigenous people (the latter being racialized, re-cast as one group among many ‘foreigners’ rather than the original authority of the land). The construction of this “middle ground” includes, at different times and in different spaces, Indigenous and Asian people (and so on). And the construction of this hierarchy is

557 Ibid., 64.
558 Ibid., 10.
always shifting between frameworks of race, sexuality, gender, and indigeneity; the so-called bottom rung, middle, and even the top shift strategically depending on the end goal. As Sohoni points out, anti-miscegenation laws aimed at (primarily male) Asians were never intended to further land expropriation, as in the case of intermarriage between Indigenous women and White American men. Asians, unlike Indigenous people, were never considered the rightful owners of U.S. or Canadian territory; they were always alien sources of labour (sometimes welcome, more often not). The historical impulse of assimilation between these two groups is different, but in a contemporary moment for settler states characterized by multiculturalism, as Moodley points out, our distinct assertions of belonging become flattened into equivalents. Thus, our social assimilations into national ideology are interlocking aspirations for many immigrants and Indigenous people, despite different heritages of xenophobic exclusion, colonial erasure, and anti-miscegenation.

The aspiration to belong intertwines with a promise of sexual inclusion. Victoria Freeman calls miscegenation, paradoxically, “the most intimate act of inclusion [coupled] with an idea promoting social exclusion.” The governmental regulation of sexual intimacy, vis-à-vis anti-

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560 Moodley, “Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology.”
561 Canada’s racist history and migratory patterns differ from America’s specific history with slave colonies, de-emphasizing the starkly black-white colour line in the Canadian cultural imaginary persisting in the American context. I am thinking, however, with scholars who identify cross-pollinating hierarchies of Anglo-Saxon, white supremacy between British colonial settler states like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Victoria Freeman (2005), for example, compares these four British settler states’ anti-miscegenation laws to conclude that the different racial hierarchies constructed in these separate contexts is based on white nationals’ (often white, working class frontiersmen) relationship with the colonized land and people, framed by an international, pan-European discourse of social and physiological differences between the races. Victoria Freeman, “Attitudes toward ‘Miscegenation’ in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, 1860-1914 [Native-Newcomer Relations: Comparative Perspectives Conference],” Native Studies Review 16, no. 1 (2005): 41.
562 Ibid.
miscegenation laws (and the regulation of marriages in general), speaks to the public concern this ostensibly private act elicits. The civilizing effects of education and assimilation of savages (in this instance, me) is incomplete if it remains at the level of rational debate in the public realm. If out-group members are to be purified of their so-called ‘primordial’ qualities, described by Alexander, the task of civilizing assimilation is only complete in white settler logic if both mind and body are enlightened through linguistic and sexual colonization. By such logic, minoritarians cannot simply parrot colonial language and symbols, but should also fully embrace the purity of the white nation by physically expunging our private primordialisms. In this private, sexual space, I identify a grammar of promise as the regulatory mechanism conditioning my minoritarian savagery. Such promise is not just one of public exaltation, to which Thobani refers as having already been conferred onto white nationals. But this promise is also ‘the most intimate act of inclusion’ that a liberal white national can offer a minoritarian: sexual assimilation.

The desire for sexual assimilation is not limited to heterosexual inclusion. Vaginal Crème Davis calls interracial queer sexual congress the “snow period” for minoritarians. In Davis’ words, “I felt like if I had some cheap white boyfriend, my life could be perfect and I could be some treasured thing. I could feel myself projected through some white person, and have all the privileges that white people get – validation through association.” Muñoz reads Davis’ desire for “some cheap white boyfriend” as corresponding to “the assimilationist option that minoritarian subjects often choose.” Muñoz believes the attempted acquisition of privilege through sexual and/or emotional association to be unviable for people of color. Yet the transactional interaction happens. Some ‘snow period’ minoritarians may deeply desire

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563 Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, 97.
564 Ibid.
assimilation, to be carnally consumed. The orifices of whiteness are hungry for dark bodies, proffering the carrot of inclusion as reward for submission. The promise of carnal inclusion by exalted nationals of a settler state, queer or otherwise, conditions the private and public assimilation of minoritarian subjectivity.

Figure 18. Steers and Queers poster for Night of 1000 Dollys, 2014 edition. Illustration by Lauren Hortie.

In my own life, I reflect on instances in which the transaction of sexual assimilation is acutely felt. “Dollywood” (2012) appears alongside “Brokeback” on Allegiance to the Fag (2012). Like the latter, I wrote “Dollywood” for a performance at Steers and Queers, but for a special instalment paying tribute to rural gay icon Dolly Parton called, “Night of 1000 Dollys” (Figure 18). My vocalists\textsuperscript{565} sing a disidentificatory hook remixing two works by female icons of gay America, Dolly Parton’s “Jolene” and Madonna’s “Hollywood:”

\begin{quote}
I got the wood, not for Hollywood/
I got the wood, not for Bollywood/
I got the wood, it’s for Dollywood/
A Raging Par-ton, It’s for Dollywood
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{565}BoylesqueTO vocalists, Linda Gallant and Michael LeSage, and independent musician, Amanda Balsys
The hook celebrates my disidentificatory love for Dollywood as a metonymical coordinate for the American south, a place I hate to love and love to hate. In 2009, I moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, a short drive from Pigeon Forge, Dolly Parton’s hometown, and the site of her eponymous theme park, Dollywood. I went to Tennessee because, “[I] Got a job down south/Couldn’t get one at home,” (“Dollywood” 2012). Although not factual (I was employed in Canada at the time), I disidentify with the trope of unwelcome foreign labour: after this line, I defiantly yell to no one in particular, “yeah I stole your job/ I'm a pro mofo/ I’m a pro homo/ Yeah, I stole your fucking jobs” (“Dollywood,” 2012). For context, I was invited to join a primarily white university faculty, a performatively liberal enclave within a socially conservative state. At the public university, I estimated that the classroom demographics reflected the broader racial makeup – mostly white students, with a large minority of Black students, followed by a small fraction of Asian students (mostly exchange students from South Korea). My move to Tennessee, and into this specific space, felt like an extreme assimilative manoeuvre – one in which I was encouraged to be both very Asian (a model minority, highly educated) and compatible with the whiteness that typified my work life and its attendant class-marked social circles.

Interestingly, I did not feel my queerness to be noteworthy in Chattanooga. Unsurprisingly, there are gays in even small towns nestled in the Smoky Mountains. But more often than not, like the general population, those Americans are Black or white, and sometimes Hispanic. I am not suggesting that the Christian conservativism dominating the cultural fabric of

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566 Notably absent in my classrooms was any significant Hispanic population, which should have outnumbered the Asian population of students.
a red state like Tennessee is at all ‘friendlier’ to queers than people of colour. Moving from Canada, this fear of religious homophobia dominated my pre-Tennessee imagination and led friends to, jokingly, fear for my safety. I point, however, to queer sexuality as not being notable in the Smoky Mountains compared to my other more notable social coordinates: a gay Chinese man, fluent in English, and from Canada of all places. While in the South, I experience the most cordial discrimination, hospitable notoriety. Even among the educated, liberal, NPR-listening set, who might otherwise reject rural parochialism, my use of chopsticks during work lunch breaks becomes an endearing curiosity, worthy of conversation. More often, though, my sense of out-group non-belonging is typified by my experiences with strangers. My actual gay pilgrimage to Dollywood (a wonderfully overpriced, gay ole’ time) becomes a metaphorical space, in which I collect these experiences:

So I took a trip to Dollywood/
My white friends loved it/
I loved it too, white kids said
“yo, kick it!”/
‘Cause they thought I was a
ninja and all of Japan/
and then they also said,/
“I love you Jackie Chan”

Publicly, my alien excess is a notable wrinkle in the bleached rural fabric of small town, southern America. Privately, the promise of sexual assimilation also conditions my excessiveness in this rurality.

The lyrical tag at the end of my song, “Dollywood,” refers to a joke that a man from Macon, Georgia used when attempting to pick me up at a gay bar in Chattanooga. Upon telling him that I came to Chattanooga for work, he goes on to collapse my racialized, foreign labour with a racist slur against Chicano laborers:
“this white dude called me a Chinese wetback/
then he smiled and asked if I wanted to fucking bareback”

The racist-yet-erotic proposition offers private incorporation of the barest, most intimate kind to me. This scene is unlike the promise of inclusion regulating my savage non-modernity I later experience with John in Buffalo, NY. In Chattanooga, I perform no publicly available speech acts that point to my unenlightened, primordial qualities. Only my yellow body dislodges me from the space I occupy in this Chattanooga gay bar. The speech act that becomes available in our interaction, however, is the stranger’s knowingly racist slur, said with a smirk, bulldozing a path for his sexual advance. Again, this could be read as an instance of ‘negging,’ opening up a space for his pickup. But, like with John, I focus on the character of his insult rather than the fact that he insults me. Unlike John, the man is not attempting to operate with the currency of enlightened modernity. Instead, he almost dares me to challenge his politically incorrect, non-modernity that sustains an ideological white supremacy undergirding anti-immigrant fears of alien labour. If I do challenge such racism, the offer of sexual inclusion is jeopardized. If I accept the sexual assimilation on offer, by virtue of its co-construction, I supplicate to and assimilate into the hierarchical white supremacy that frames it. Of course individual minoritarians can choose any number of tactics between the opposition I present (walking away, engaging but not thinking about it, privately despising one’s choice for assimilating, and the list can go on). I am attempting, however, to think through the conditions regulating such choices to publicly or privately counter an ideology of enlightened whiteness that is constructed on racist and genocidal logics, still allowing white nationals to profess themselves to be multiculturally compassionate.

Such conditions transcend the artifice dividing public and private spheres. The potential for authoritarian control in the private realm always already haunts the putatively egalitarian
civic sphere. Kant’s insistence on the creation of a public sphere rests on the banishment of non-rational authoritarianism to the private sphere. Alexander suggests that,

[i]n the public sphere, Kant declared, all men are enabled, indeed mandated, to challenge authority in the name of autonomy and to act according to the principles of universalism. Yet when these same men are in their private spheres – in the church, the business organization, the family, the army, or the state – they are not allowed to exercise these civil rights and they do not have to allow others to exercise them in turn.\(^{567}\)

For Kant, in these spaces that Alexander calls ‘private,’ “arguing is not permitted: one must obey.”\(^{568}\) By such logic, only private spheres are defined by unquestioned authority, by authoritarianism. Alexander goes on to suggest in “[t]he private spheres, people were relatively ‘free’ to do what they liked, to whom they liked, and in all sorts of decidedly undemocratic ways.” Not only is the primordial logic of authoritarianism confined to private spheres, by such reason, undemocratic and rationally immature people are also expatriated to this uncivilized space.

‘Undemocratic’ behaviour thus criss-crosses between the unstructured space of the private and structured public realms. In his writing, Kant questions the infallible authority of the church, a supposedly private space: “should a society of ministers… have the right to commit itself by oath to a certain unalterable doctrine, in order to secure perpetual guardianship over all its members and through them over the people?” Supposedly private spaces, like the Church, are characterized for Kant by authoritarian control over its members, who by adherence to unalterable doctrine are kept rationally stunted and immature. Though, even for Kant, the public and private were never fully separate, which

\(^{567}\) Alexander, “Theorizing the ‘modes of Incorporation’: Assimilation, Hyphenation, and Multiculturalism as Varieties of Civil Participation.”

\(^{568}\) Kant, “Answer the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”
drove his impulse to separate them. The Church, for Kant, is a ‘private space’ with communal influence and is thus a public concern – along with everything under its jurisdiction, including marriage and sexual practices. I follow Foucault’s treatment of sexuality as a socially constructed essence of character, supposedly private, but regulated by various technologies of the self as a productive conduit of state power. The promise of sexual assimilation into a multicultural nation is not only a private interaction. Such promise is always already articulated with the promise of assimilation into the nation’s civic life. And so, the conditions regulating dissent against ideology of the public realm always already shape both civic participation and private sexual practice. By such logic, the promise of sexual assimilation acts as a regulatory technology conditioning minorititarian dissent both publicly and privately.

The freedoms of movement, speech, and dissent must then be disciplined and regulated in the internal management of difference in an ever-diversifying nation, both publicly and privately. The bodies of racialized persons, immigrant or not, are hailed as guests onto the shores of a compassionate, multicultural state. Compassion and tolerance for these guests is intimately linked with the impulse of sexual tolerance, of homonationalistic inclusion. Such compassion expresses itself in the most intimate of sexual encounters, the most private moments of assimilation into the white supremacy of a liberal multicultural, homonationalist settler state. Compassion, sex, and tolerance become intertwined as a regulatory technology of assimilation. The compassionate welcome of racialized others and the carnal inclusion of sexual others, enmeshed in a matrix that transcends public and private conduct, are both conditioned by the projection of

569 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. 
psychosexual and racial immaturity onto the bodies of non-nationals. With an incestuous twist, such projection of immaturity underwrites the parental, caretaking self-concept of western nationals in a putative welfare state, enabling both public and sexual discipline of its ‘wards.’

The grammar of parenting I invoke is not meant to return to a view of the nation-state as a heteronormative institution, which bans as perpetual outlaws the racialized other and sexual deviant (a notion that Puar’s monograph argues against). Instead, this logic frames the manoeuvres of dissent central to my disidentificatory speech acts as ManChyna. The processes of multiculturalism, homonationalism, and sexual assimilation each enfranchise and regulate my minoritarian speech acts. These processes activate cultural anxieties about the proliferation of state wards as burdensome. And as these wards become increasingly stranger to the liberal nation, these processes simultaneously reveal the intrinsic character of the state, imagined as strong and white (True North Strong and Free). As the body politic gets ever more coloured, queered, disabled, transgendered, and so on with all our ‘special demands’ for social justice, how do processes of multiculturalism and assimilation work to co-produce these subjects on the public stage? I am interested in the work done by such inclusionary regulation in service to the naturalization of the white settler nation. Thus, the regulatory conditions supporting and restricting such wards’ mobility and freedom of dissent take on a character of parenting. The sexual discipline of the new whiteness, our would-be parent, demands gratitude and assimilation into its ideology, under the threat of revoking racial belonging and at the ethical cost of Indigenous claims to sovereign nationhood. A particular style of authoritarian parenting frames my reading of the conditions under which disidentifying minoritarians must navigate as
subjects, both identifying with and counter-identifying against these inclusionary ideologies. My parenting metaphor is not only meant to name the authoritarianism, which conditions dissent for minoritarians deemed non-nationals, but intentionally roams into the psychic terrain of incest to explore my conditions of sexual assimilation, framed by the co-existence of hybrid strength and cultural anxiety of sexual mixing.
The Hybrid Vigour of Tiger Mom


Pathologized mothers, controlling images of ethnic excess, and my song “Tiger Mom” (2012) are the key characters of the following chapter. In the first of its two parts, five cultural texts triangulate my song, a narrative of excess and excellence, “Tiger Mom” (2012). These include Amy Chua’s *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), two periodical publications about Asian western assimilation separated by three months (November 2010 and January 2011), and two songs, one by Nicki Minaj (2010) and the other by the Spice Girls (1996). “Tiger Mom” ethnically and queerly disidentifies with the pathologies of Asian motherhood displayed in Amy Chua’s parenting memoir, *Battle Hymn*. Chua presents an intergenerational model of neoliberal competition and American-celebrated individualization as a mapping and expansion of the model minority myth. “Tiger Mom” parallels and disidentifies with *Battle Hymn* and also with the cross-racial pathologization of Black motherhood in Minaj’s “Did It on Em” (2010), which heavily influences the musical and lyrical styles of my song. Each text displays individual minoritarians disassimilating into modern western liberal multiculturalism. As I call it in my song “416” (2012), the latter is a “multyculty” capitalism that gleefully, and with much tension, incorporates racial and sexual difference.

“Tiger Mom” joins *Battle Hymn* with Nicki Minaj’s “Did it on em” in a parodic manoeuvre, which disidentifies with the narrative of assimilation vis-à-vis minoritarian pathology in pursuit of capitalist accumulation, competition, and hybrid vigour. The pathologies
that Minaj, Chua, and ManChyna recycle in our respective practices focus on ethnic motherhood
that disidentifies with a centering of whiteness within western racial hierarchies. We each use
images of pathological ethnic motherhood, specific to our different positionalities within white
supremacy, to humorous and disidentificatory effect. I argue that such excess within each
cultural figure’s disidentification with dominant cultural codes acts as both the currency and
dubious reward of assimilation into liberal multicultural capitalism, exposing the latter’s eugenic
impulse of hybrid vigour. While *Battle Hymn* implicitly disidentifies with tropes of Asian
pathology, Chua’s explicit celebration of her family’s assimilation into the American promise of
individualist success also disassimilates with pathology as her mode of entry into fuller
citizenship. Chua’s celebrations of American individualism and her own use of “Asian pathology”
in parenting illuminate the eugenic conditions that shape her purchase into multicultural
capitalism, epitomized by the biological and cultural hybridity of her youngest daughter, Lulu.

The second half of this chapter moves into the theoretical target of my triangulation – the
eugenic conditions for assimilation into a modern capitalism shaped by the ideals of
multiculturalism. The eugenic ideal of hybrid vigour is continuous with racial purity, which
supposedly gets cast as historical and anathema to liberal multiculturalism. The deployment of
difference (in notable, pathological excess in our cases) is conditioned by the regulatory
normativity of white supremacy and capitalist competition. Scientific rationalism undergirds the
conditions of competition and a continued fascination with evolutionary ideas, which infuse
multicultural incorporation of difference in the settler colonial context. In the instance of Amy
Chua and the Tiger Mother trope, with which ManChyna plays, hybrid vigour logic is the
necessary precondition, justification for, and logical corollary of a multyculty capitalism and an
ethos of modernity undergirded by the desire for economic progress.
Reflected in the following disidentificatory works toward assimilation (exemplars of disassimilation), the currency of integration becomes both the conditions for and the output of assimilation. I describe an excess of pathology congealing from our performative bodies that we can use as currency for legibility within the cultural imagination that eugenically fetishizes difference. While the question of assimilation without recycling ideological codes of excess is beyond the scope of my project, the tropes with which I play comprise a conditioning structure for all racialized subjects to navigate and respond to (whether accepted or rejected) within a whitened west.

**Part 1 Malignant Mamas**

Amy Chua’s Tiger Mother

Amy Chua’s Tiger Mother is the primary trope inspiring ManChyna’s Tiger Mom. Contention surrounds the “Tiger Mom moment,” as OiYan Poon calls Battle Hymn’s publication. Reactions in the post-Tiger Mom moment run the gamut from choleric to curious. Some researchers in social psychology and economics, for example, ground research questions in “Tiger Mom” as naming an ontologically real phenomenon. They ask questions like, “Can Chinese and U.S. Parenting Coexist?” or, “What defines tiger parenting? How common is this type of parenting? What implications does tiger parenting have for child and adolescent

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development and well-being？” or, is “Asian parenting ... the source of ... academic success [for Asians?] Do Asian children spend more time studying and practicing music than children of other ethnic groups? Do Asian parents spend more time pushing their children to academic success?”

To refuse or ground any argument in Chua’s Tiger Mother – is she material or myth? – exceeds the scope of my project. Instead, I disidentify with the cultural coding of Chua’s Tiger Mother trope as an ideological corollary of multiculturalism and capitalism to explore the conditions of assimilation that Tiger Mother’s existence in the public imaginary points us toward. I imagine that Tiger Mother’s shadowy figure is real as a repository of western panic, steeped in Cold War orientalism, not a fiction because of it. Tiger Mother becomes real in Chua’s use of her.

The Tiger Mother stereotype can elicit both revulsion and a snicker of recognition among Asians in the “high expectations Asian dad” Tumblr meme, or the “Tiger Mom” meme it and Chua’s book later precipitated (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Select examples of "High expectations Asian Dad" and “Tiger Mom.” The former is an advice animal image macro series based on clichéd stereotypes of authoritarian Asian parenting, first posted in March 2010. (http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/high-expectations-asian-father) The latter is another macro series that proliferated after the Dad meme and Chua’s book were first published.

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On the other hand, multiple commentators challenge Chua’s memoir, arguing that she adheres to and capitalizes on racist myths of Asians as perpetual foreigners, ready to invade or are already invading the economic and cultural west.\textsuperscript{574} Chang and Poon separately point to the pop cultural climate that was primed for Tiger Mom’s easy penetration into the cultural imagination.\textsuperscript{575} This included widely disseminated videos of an “evil Chinese professor” explaining the downfall of the U.S. Empire in 2030 and a UCLA student complaining about the ‘hordes’ of Asians at the school she attends.\textsuperscript{576} Wallace’s racist views of ethnic Asian hordes invading, proliferating, and overrunning her campus is one example of the familiar race-based perception of Oriental excess, which Poon and Chang say primed the popular press for \textit{Battle Hymn}. Relevant for my Tiger Mom, Wallace’s rant is grounded in the image of a pathological family arrangement. Chua is accused of perpetuating this image of pathological parenting – overbearing, ever-present, and very \textit{ethnic}. Wallace’s logic directly anticipates the confluence of pathological family arrangement and model minority excellence that Amy Chua trades in.

First, I should note that Chua claims the book is too often misread because of its more widely circulated avatar, an excerpt published in the \textit{Wall Street Journal}. Chua claims the excerpt was edited to be more acerbic than the book.\textsuperscript{577} Even this claim, though, is seen as a ploy. Erin Khuê Ninh argues of the book that, “Chua deploys humor consistently in her writing, to

\textsuperscript{575} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{576} See appendix B for a brief transcript of Wallace’s video.
insert an irony and distance in our reading experience of her tactics, to numb their sting;” the ‘sting’ being the “elements in Chua’s vaunted Chinese parenting [that] resonate with each and every category [of emotional abuse in pediatric psychology].”

Chua’s memoir functions as a disidentification with cultural codes of American assimilation. I read the same humour that Ninh points to, not as a cushion for her tactics of authoritarian parenting and racist aspersions on Chinese families, but as a tactic itself – a tactical disidentification with cultural codes of immigrant assimilation. Chua, knowingly or not, disassimilates with the fictions of the American Dream. *Battle Hymn’s* (2011) extremely cynical identification with a narrative of immigrant assimilation becomes parodic, but is not parody per se. The text is not parody proper; a reader should not decipher it as a false imitation of said codes because it reads too genuinely to be argued as self-aware. Marketed as a memoir and parenting advice book (although Chua denies the latter), *Battle Hymn* is supposed to display the author’s personal identification with the belief system presented in its pages.

In *Battle Hymn* (2011) Chua posits a familiar belief system about Chinese-American immigrants and their perceived progress, which resonates with Robert Park’s four-stage theory of assimilation. In Chua’s words,

I’ll bet that if someone with empirical skills conducted a longitudinal survey about intergenerational performance, they’d find a remarkably common pattern among Chinese immigrants fortunate enough to have come to the United States as graduate students or skilled workers over the last fifty years… The immigrant generation (like my parents) is the hardest-working…penniless, but they will work nonstop until they become successful engineers, scientists, doctors, academics, or businesspeople. As parents, they will be extremely strict…everything they do and earn will go toward their children’s education and future. The next generation (mine), first to be born in America, will typically be high-achieving…play the piano and/or violin. They will attend an Ivy League or Top Ten university… tend to be professionals… If they are female, they will often marry a white

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person…they will not be as strict with their children as their parents were with them. The next generation (Sophia and Lulu’s) is the one I spend nights lying awake worrying about. Because of the hard work of their parents and grandparents, this generation will be born into the great comforts of the upper middle class. Even as children they will own many hardcover books (an almost criminal luxury from the point of view of immigrant parents). They will have wealthy friends who get paid for B pluses. … Finally and most problematically, they will feel that they have individual rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and therefore be much more likely to disobey their parents and ignore career advice. In short, all factors point to this generation being headed straight for decline. Well, not on my watch. From the moment Sophia was born and I looked into her cute and knowing face, I was determined not to let it happen to her, not to raise a soft, entitled child – not to let my family fall.579 (original emphasis)

Chua’s anecdotal inference is essentially a personalized, humorous, and intergenerational account of Robert Park’s four-stage theory of assimilation.580 Considered a “melting pot theorist,” Park’s theory describes a “progressive and irreversible” path for immigrants. Some of Park’s thinking about dominance and invasion was inspired by Social Darwinism.581 Beginning with contact and competition, Park describes immigrants as moving through stages of accommodation (stable relationship between distinct groups, such as slavery), assimilation (adoption of majority culture, at least outwardly as “superficial uniformity”582), and eventually amalgamation (marriage and interbreeding).583 Chua conveniently skips over most of the violence inherent in Park’s contact, competition, and accommodation stages. For Chua, her second-generation daughters already represent the shining beacon of interbreeding. Rhetorically, the whiteness of

581 Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, The Urban Sociology Reader (Routledge, 2012), 84.
her husband, Jed, is used to underscore the “weird racial combination” of their family.\textsuperscript{584} On vacation, for instance, Chua wonders if people assumed Jed to be “the adopted white son of an Asian family? Or a human trafficker selling us into slavery?”\textsuperscript{585} In addition to humour, Chua’s sense of progress is inflected with something different than Park’s original model.

Chua’s anecdotal supposition is inflected with the anxiety of failed progress and individual agency that simultaneously praises the American free market economy. For Chua, intergenerational progress is not inevitable. It must be worked at and shaped by individual actions. For Susan Koshy, Chua’s thinking exemplifies a “neoliberal understanding of human abilities as sources of potential income redefines child-rearing” and emphasizes “care and cultivation, and not only educational and professional training, as potential ‘investments’ in the human capital of children.”\textsuperscript{586} Chua’s application of neoliberalism on parenting and social progress dovetails with a deep adoration of American exceptionalism generally, and its free market specifically. The performance of this domineering parenting style can be viewed as a strategic navigation of capitalist ideology. In this way, Chua’s memoir is not only a self-parody, as she claims.\textsuperscript{587} I read \textit{Battle Hymn} as a parody of a narrowly defined conception of American assimilation as integration into free market capitalism. \textit{Battle Hymn} manifests a profound understanding of assimilation as it is influenced by both the terror of ethnic excess and the logics of competition that value strength. In fact, for Chua, the platitudinous philosophy of ‘assuming strength in children’ represented in \textit{Battle Hymn}, “is 100% All-American.”\textsuperscript{588}

\textsuperscript{584} Chua, \textit{Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother}, 87.
\textsuperscript{585} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{588} Ibid.
The intergenerational narrative of neoliberal success in *Battle Hymn* deploys Chua’s matriarchal ethnic excess not only as justification for but also proof of her family’s excellence. Poon suggests, “the success of Chua’s memoir can be explained by how the author positions herself as an informant on the ‘cultural tradition of [her] ancient ancestors.’ By doing so, she takes advantage of white anxieties over China’s challenges to American exceptionalism and white dominance in elite U.S. colleges.” An American citizen by birth (first generation), from the Midwest who speaks no Mandarin, Chua hires “a Chinese nanny to speak Mandarin constantly to Sophia,” her first born, as a component of her ‘antidecline campaign.’ Chua makes an explicit decision to emulate what she thinks successful Chinese Mothers do, an appeal to ‘ancient ancestors’ mirrored by the faux Chinese-scripture cover design by Elsa Chiao. Chua is supposedly drawing on the ancient wisdom and strength of her ethnic foremothers. Taken as a whole, *Battle Hymn* is a hilarious drag performance of Chinese authenticity. The performance congeals Chua’s ethnicity, acting as a kind of currency justifying her family’s individual success on the basis of her ethnic essence.

Chua’s strategic uses of essentialism are simultaneously praised and criticized for taking on the role of a cultural informant. As a supposed insider, Chua provides an essentializing/but-not-essentializing “Chinese Mothering” technique and a pattern of intergenerational assimilation and integration into American Society. Throughout *Battle Hymn*, Chua regularly employs a dissonant doublethink. Chua denies a belief in something but uses it anyway, like her rejection of astrology. Chua claims, “I don’t believe in astrology – and I think people who do have serious

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problems – but the Chinese Zodiac describes Sophia and Lulu *perfectly*.

The central doublethink in the text, however, encompasses the terms “Chinese mothers” and “Western parents,” which, for Chua, do not refer to “all Western parents – just as ‘Chinese mother’ doesn’t refer to all Chinese mothers.”

The rhetorical device, ‘is/is not,’ is better characterized as an imprecise operationalization of the concepts, Chinese mothers and western parents. Are these concepts actual parenting strategies, corresponding to authoritarianism and laxity, or not? For Chua, it seems like the answer is yes and no.

To charge the memoir as being an essentialized portrayal of Asian parenting as homogenously authoritarian is not wrong, but misses what is interesting about it. Chua’s supposition not only tells us about her view on *parenting styles*, but also about the intergenerational transformation of her *children*. Chua’s fears of a supposed generational decline beget her prophylactic decision to map an authoritarian rule over her family. Chua is unlike scholars of American immigration and ethnicity who emphasize structural racism as the major factor limiting opportunities of second-generation children of non-European immigrants.

Instead, Chua emphasizes individual effort and the increasing “softness” of success.

Modernization and the reputed ‘feminization’ of bureaucratic capitalism are hardly new concepts.

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593 Ibid., 4.
Articulating masculinized hardness with racialized migration, however, Chua depicts immigrant families (and potentially her own children) as becoming *too western*, softened by financial success, protections of modernity, and the safety of welfare. It is a notable flip of American exceptionalism. And so Chua, with *Battle Hymn*, elaborates a narrative of Chinese mothering that emphasizes the raw disciplinary power of Chinese non-modernity.

Such authenticity functions in Chua’s memoir to remind readers of the non-modernity of oriental excess. Another component of Chua’s antidecline campaign includes recalling physical labour for her tiny children:

I didn’t ask my daughters to chop wood or dig a pool. But I did try to make them carry heavy objects – overflowing laundry baskets up and down stairs, garbage out on Sundays, suitcases when we traveled – as often as I could. Interestingly, Jed had the opposite instinct. It bothered him to see the girls loaded down, and he always worried about their backs.  

Characterizing her husband, Jed, as the spineless white American who wants to baby his daughters, Chua casts into relief the “Chinese Mother’s” toughness, forging strength under the weight of manual labour. The story is a humorous personification of Chua’s anecdotal observation of the cultural advantage she sees in an Asian heritage. “Most of the other students at the school had liberal Western parents,” Chua says, “who were weak-willed and indulgent when it came to practicing.” Chua contrasts Chinese mothering with her supposed “disadvantage” of having “an American husband who believed that childhood should be fun.” Coding the ‘liberal’ nature of western parents as a weakness developed from the indulgences of modern progress, Chua emphasizes and intensifies her ancient mothering technique as both ethnicized and non-modern. In the manoeuvre of constructing

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596 Ibid., 27.
597 Ibid., 46.
a self-parodic Tiger Mother, Chua articulates the narrative of model minority success with cultural codes of non-modern, ethnic excess. The latter becomes multicultural currency. Such excess, which takes the form of ‘ancient Chinese secrets of Tiger Mothering,’ emerges from Chua’s posited belief system about generational decline and it simultaneously becomes the strategy used to supposedly stave it off.

Chua’s ancient ways remind me of the character Song Liling, a Beijing opera singer and a Chinese spy in David Henry Hwang’s M. Butterfly (1988). Based on the real life drama of Bernard Boursicot, a French diplomat who was “accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi [Peipu], whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman.”598 In the Cronenberg adaptation of Hwang’s play, Liling (the fictional version of Shi) says of her hapless target, the French diplomat: “He was very responsive to my ancient Oriental ways of love, all of which I invented myself, just for him.”599 Hwang explains:

The diplomat…attempting to account for the fact that he had never seen his ‘girlfriend’ naked, was quoted as saying, ‘I thought she was very modest. I thought it was a Chinese custom.’ Now, I am aware that this is not a Chinese custom, that Asian women are no more shy with their lovers than are women of the West. I am also aware, however, that Boursicot’s assumption was consistent with a certain stereotyped view of Asians as bowing, blushing flowers. I therefore concluded that the diplomat must have fallen in love, not with a person, but with a fantasy stereotype. I also inferred that, to the extent the Chinese spy encouraged these misperceptions, he must have played up to an [sic] exploited this image of the Oriental woman as demure and submissive.600 (original emphasis)

599 Quoted in J. L. Wisenthal, A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly (University of Toronto Press, 2006).
600 Hwang, M. Butterfly, 85.
The stereotype of the “blushing flower” is only one vision of Oriental women. The cynical genius of Chua’s performance, also manufactured for a white gaze, is an invented monstrous hybrid of western stereotypes: ‘ancient Oriental techniques,’ performatively embodied as matriarchal excess. Chua taps into the dragon lady, the sickly chinaman, and the presumed ancient roots of Chinese authoritarianism. The play Chua makes is that she needs to retrieve ancient secrets of discipline. The very act proves in Chua’s mind and in the audience’s that her family is becoming too western, a subtle trick of the hand that exalts the west.

The ethnic currency of ‘Tiger Mother’ that Chua peddles also benefits from western familiarity with Asian family arrangements that are likened to a white Protestant work ethic. In 1980, the dearth of social science research on Asian Americans led Robert Staples and Alfredo Mirandé to suggest the lack of attention paid was because, “as a group [compared with Black, Chicano, and Native Americans], they are not perceived as a ‘problem’ in American society or as very different in their family lifestyles,” and instead of wily, devious, exotic, and mysterious, the newer prevailing image “has changed to a hard-working, conforming, cohesive family group.” Staples and Mirandé suggest the middle class attributes that make Asian American families, “similar to… middle-class Anglo families,” indicate that Asians are not only “equal to white Americans, but often fare better in terms of educational achievement, median family income, and marital stability.” Within such thinking, the meagre gains of the model minority are understood as an emulation of whiteness and social conservativism.

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Within the acclaim, however, the conservativism of Asians becomes ontologically different from whites, deemed pathological when convenient for the majority; the difference in conservativism is linked in dominant thinking to something foreign and un-American from which assimilating offspring will seek to distance themselves. Predicting (if not outright informing) Chua’s armchair sociology about interracial marriage, Staples and Mirandé similarly argue about the existing literature that, “[i]n comparison to the other minorities, Asians have more conservative sexual values.”602 The authors perceive such conservativism as essentially different from the assumed progressivism of America, to which future generations of Asian Americans supposedly flee. To explain the observation that a “majority of third generation Japanese Americans marry non-Japanese mates” Staples and Mirandé posit, “a primary reason is the more acculturated Asian woman’s dissatisfaction with the more traditional Japanese male’s limited attitude toward women.”603 The model minority myth becomes a rhetorical bait-and-switch, pivoting on America’s sexual exceptionalism. On the one hand conservative attributes become aligned with middle class WASP America, conflating immigrant efforts to navigate a white supremacist western culture with Protestant work ethic. This is most convenient for the dominant culture when comparing Asians against so-called ‘problem’ minorities (Black people especially). Yet, paradoxically, this same conservatism also renders them essentially and ethnically different from whites. Although some observers suggest that Asians in the west are making increasing gains and are ‘becoming white,’ such an opinion elides the glass ceiling of assimilation.

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602 Ibid.
603 Ibid., 897.
Tapping into a tiger-dragon metaphoric slippage, Chua constructs an all-encompassing narrative of the model minority. While some contemporary scholarship places the disciplinary role squarely on the Asian father’s shoulders, others suggest the novelty of Chua’s Tiger Mother is her contribution of the matriarchal authoritarian to a domineering Asian parenting style. Chang suggests Chua adds to the model minority myth, “an overbearing Asian mother who is now widely portrayed by the media as the secret weapon behind the overachieving Asian American student.” But why name her the ‘Tiger Mother?’ In what Susan Koshy calls, a “scalar leap from the domestic affective economy to the global political economy” Chua even presents her parenting techniques at the World Economic Forum. In economics, the “Tigers” typically refers to the free market economies of, “East Asian countries [the markets of China/Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea] that joined the rich Western countries after less than 50 years of ‘miraculous growth.’” Wang Tao, however, suggests that the phrase “Ya Zhou Si Xiao Long,” is mistranslated due to the Orientalist conflation of the Far East with these bestial figures, and should instead read, The Four Asian Dragons. It is not difficult then to read a metaphoric slippage from the exotic Dragon Lady to a dominant Tiger Mother personifying (or at least implicated in) western anxieties of Asian economic and sexual dominance. The former is a western fantasy of a cold and sexually domineering East Asian

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woman (or as Sheridan Prasso describes, “steely and as cold as Cruella De Vil, lacking in the emotions or the neuroses of real women.” Chua’s memoir ages the Dragon Lady from a young dominatrix, like an early career Lucy Liu, into the Tiger Mother, unforgivingly drilling her children during piano and violin lessons. For a comedic example of this slippage, see Conan O’Brien’s parody, “My Friend’s Hot Tiger Mom.”

Chua’s origin story of the subservient model minority raised by an aging Dragon Lady further reproduces the pathological non-modernity of Asian Americans. Eliza Noh’s research connects the model minority myth to high rates of Asian American female suicide patterns in America (the highest in the age ranges of 15-24 and 70+ of all ethnicities) by arguing that racial and gender subjugation silences the traumas of structural inequalities. Following Battle Hymn’s publication, Noh uses Chua’s Tiger Mother as another iteration of the psychosocial stressors of the model minority myth. The build-up of psychological traumas of gendered racism that accumulate over time, which Noh terms “insidious trauma,” are undoubtedly profound. Chua’s addition of the domineering matriarch to this narrative is especially insidious in that it ties the Tiger Mother to a pre-existing stereotype of Chinese non-modernity and social pathology.

Chua, however, uses this perceived pathology (that may result in real clinical trauma) to exalt her western audience with her own daughter. Describing her feisty,

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Americanized second born daughter, Chua admits, “a lot of people liked Lulu – there was something almost magnetic about her inability to ingratiate. Thank God we live in America, I thought to myself, where no doubt because of the American Revolution rebelliousness is valued. In China, they’d have sent Lulu to a labor camp.” 

Chua’s aside is more than a humorously benign jab at both America and China’s reputed and respective progressivism and despotism; she reminds us of the linear notions of development at play in Chua’s triumphalist immigrant/assimilation narrative – from the darkness of labor camps to the revolution of intellectual Enlightenment. Chua is reminding us of Lulu and Chua’s *ethnic origins* in non-modernity (‘labor camps’) a discursive manoeuvre activating and merging half-formed cultural memories of Russian Gulags, Nazi concentration camps, and Chinese reform and re-education labor camps (*lao tung kai tsao* and *lao tung chiao yang*). Chua summarizes her comparison between the West and its Eastern fantasy of non-moderns using an anecdote humorously contrasting choices of vacation destinations between her parents and her white in-laws: “my parents wouldn’t have gone to Guatemala, Zimbabwe, or Borobudur [where her in-laws traveled]; they took us to Europe instead, which has governments.”

The authoritarian despotism and psychological terror Chua apparently uses with her children presents an image not just of a deranged individual parent, resolutely dissociated from local mores, but one that participates in a western projection of ethnic spectacle; the value of Chua’s book is its supposed revelation of the secret pathology of

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613 Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 38.
615 Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 55.
culturally structured Asian families. Chua becomes more than an extreme helicopter parent, but transcends into a domestic spectacle of Asian terror. Linking racialized U.S. capitalism to a critique of multiculturalism, Angela Davis once said, “Multiculturalism has acquired a quality akin to spectacle.” Davis is describing the cynical deployment of multicultural rhetoric as a tool for corporate America to profit from internally managed difference in an increasingly globalized economy. Scholarship in countries that are celebrated to varying degrees for their multiculturalism point to the vast array of consumable products produced from authentic ethnic excess. The conservatism associated with the model minority myth, while ‘close enough’ to that of traditional American whiteness, remains ontologically different in its ethnic excessiveness. By differentiating the essence of Asian familial arrangements as ‘the Chinese way,’ Chua actively performs a minstrelsy of Asian authenticity for her western readers. Explaining the efficacy of her daughter Lulu’s public, teenaged ‘insurgency,’ Chua affirms the suspicions of curious western readers:

> Chinese parenting in the West is an inherently closet practice. If it comes out that you push your kids against their will, or want them to do better than other kids, or god forbid ban sleepovers, other parents will heap opprobrium on you, and your children will pay the prices. As a result, immigrant parents learn to conceal things. They learn to look jovial in public and pat their kids on the back and say things like, ‘Good try buddy!’ and ‘Go team spirit!’ No one wants to be a pariah.

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616 Quoted in Bannerji, “The Paradox of Diversity.”


618 Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, 172.
The ethnic spectacle that Chua parades insidiously merges Orientalist consumption of Asian authenticity (in the form of her memoir) with the pathology of Asian families as viewed from a western gaze.

Amy Chua defines success with western grammars of cultural achievement in *Battle Hymn*, alongside her presentation of ethnic spectacle as the putative Tiger Mother. Throughout the memoir, Chua seems to *love* her Chinese heritage. For example, Chua asserts that “My last name is Chua – Cài in Mandarin – and I love it.” Yet for me Chua’s spectacle of heritage-loving Chinese traditionalism reiterates *Battle Hymn* as an object of explicit desire, a retrospective plan, and confirming celebration of her family’s assimilation into American society. In one passage, for example, Chua sketches the traumatic roots of her desire to assimilate into American culture:

Growing up in the Midwest, my three younger sisters and I always knew that we were different…we brought Chinese food in thermoses to school; how I wished I could have a bologna sandwich like everyone else! … [Our family] started off as outsiders together, and we discovered America together, becoming Americans in the process… I remember my father… how excited he was introducing us to tacos, sloppy joes, Dairy Queen, and all-you-can-eat buffets… I remember a boy in grade school making slanty-eyed gestures at me, guffawing as he mimicked the way I pronounced *restaurant* (rest-OW-rant) – I vowed at that moment to rid myself of my Chinese accent. But I also remember Girl Scouts… winning a Daughters of the American Revolution essay contest; and the proud, momentous day my parents were naturalized. (original emphasis)

Chua signals rural, working class American authenticity using sloppy joes, bologna sandwiches, Girl Scouts, corporatized consumption, and The American Revolution. Collectively, these cultural practices are benchmarks of Chua’s multigenerational

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619 Ibid, 14.
620 Ibid., 16-17.
journey toward full American assimilation. Despite her emphatic love for her
Mandarin name, a symbol of cultural difference, Chua also aims to eliminate her
accent – a tangible, phonic marker of ethnic excess she appears to consider to be a
shameful relic of her family’s primordiality. Yet Chua’s performance of rurality is
only one aspect of authentic American culture signifying success in the West.

In a simplistic narrative of cultural ascension – from rural and working class to urban and
cosmopolitan – Chua values above all else western classical music as the pinnacle of high
culture. In Chua’s words,

That’s one of the reasons that I insisted Sophia and Lulu do classical music. I
knew that I couldn’t artificially make them feel like poor immigrant kids.
There was no getting around the fact that we lived in a large old house, owned
two decent cars, and stayed in nice hotels when we vacationed. But I could
make sure that Sophia and Lulu were deeper and more cultivated than my
parents and I were. Classical music was the opposite of decline, the opposite
of laziness, vulgarity, and spoiledness. It was a way for my children to achieve
something I hadn’t. But it was also a tie-in to the high cultural tradition of my
ancient ancestors.621 (original emphasis)

Yet who are Chua’s ancient ancestors about whom she writes? The trail of composers in Battle
Hymn follows Europeans Edvard Grieg, Claude Debussy, Giuseppe Verdi, Jacques Ibert,
Giovanni Viotti, Felix Mendelssohn, and Wolfgang Mozart; she does not include nineteenth and
twentieth century Chinese composers like Lǚ Wènchéng, Li Jinhui, Yǐn Zìzhòng, or Hé Dásha.
Perhaps she reads them as imitators of an inherently western form, since for Chua, “The Chinese
never achieved the heights of Western classical music – there is no Chinese equivalent of
Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.”622 Chua goes on to describe the ahistorical nature of Chinese
civilization, paradoxically deeply ancient but at the same time without history.

621 Ibid., 23.
622 Ibid., 208.
I read Chua’s ‘ancestors’ as a lateral, if not literal, genealogy. Such family resemblance does not comprise her actual family or cultural lineage in chronology, but other immigrants who have succeeded in the realm of western proficiency she delights in – classical European music. For example, Chua describes Sophia’s accomplished piano instructor, Professor Wei-Yi Yang (of Yale), in a humorously self-deprecating list of comparisons: “This man is a genius. I am a barbarian. Prokofiev is a genius. I am a cretin. Wei-Yi and Prokofiev are great. I am a cannibal.” Here, Chua reveals the nature of her hierarchy as a ladder of occidental cultivation. Yang epitomizes for Chua an apex of western achievement. Yang’s mastery of class-marked, European cultural codes becomes a model for her and her family’s successful assimilation into the upper echelons of American high culture.

In addition to Chua’s rejection of her own perceived primordiality, a theme of anti-provincialism also maps onto her desire to be viewed as urban and cosmopolitan. In addition to her own accent, Chua strips herself and her daughters of putatively primordial characteristics, ensuring her image is neither rural nor provincial – emblems of backwardness for Chua. Chua calls this theme her, “Anti-Provincialism Lecture Series:”

Whenever I hear Sophia or Lulu giggle at a foreign name … Freek de Groot or Kwok Gum – I go wild. ‘Do you know how ignorant and close-minded you sound?’ I’ll blow up at them. ‘Jasminder and Parminder are popular names in India. And coming from this family! What a disgrace. My mother’s father’s name was Go Ga Yong – do you think that’s funny?… ‘Never ever make fun of foreign accents,’ I’ve exhorted them on many occasions. ‘Do you know what a foreign accent is? It’s a sign of bravery. Those are people who crossed an ocean to come to this country. My parents had accents – I had an accent … Even in third grade, class-mates made fun of me. Do you know where those people are now? They’re janitors, that’s where.”

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623 Ibid., 124.
624 Ibid., 85-86.
Ignorance and provincialism are unacceptable remnants of primordialism for Chua, even as she breathes out class-based scorn. Paradoxically, the very accent Chua banishes from her own mannerism she defends in others. Within a paradigm that employs multicultural fluency to signify cultural adeptness, however, Chua’s wild reprimand of her daughter’s provincialism makes all the more sense. On a family vacation, for example, Chua decries of Lulu, “We’re in Russia, and you refuse to try caviar! You’re like a barbarian.” 625 The accent for Chua is not shameful as a sign of Otherness, per se, but rather what it represents – the germinal location in her personal theory of cultural assimilation. Chua condescendingly describes immigrant accents as a praiseworthy sign of strength viewed in others at a pitiable stage on their way to assimilation. The same symbol in Chua’s personal habitus becomes a weakness to be shed immediately upon integration. In other words, accents in others are signs of strength and bravery to Chua for the very reason she imagines it as her own handicap to overcome.

Even though Chua’s image of successful, multigenerational assimilation is based on acculturation of cosmopolitan codes of modernity, of high culture and multicultural generosity, it is also predicated on the continuity of her imagined Asian tradition of explicit anti-modern authoritarianism. Chua’s own daughters embody her family’s apex of assimilation. Lulu, Chua’s youngest and supposedly most difficult to raise in the “Chinese way,” provides the most entertaining and endearing battles in Chua’s memoir; she embodies the feisty American spirit of rebelliousness and individuality that Chua expressly desires to mitigate with the diligence of authentic Chinese traditionalism in a sort of cultural dialectic – the exemplar Chinese-American hybrid. The final component of Chua’s antidecline campaign involves she says, a demand for respect from her daughters,

625 Ibid., 204.
as my parents did of me. This is where I was least successful. Growing up, I was terrified of my parents’ disapproval. Not so with Sophia and especially Lulu. America seems to convey something to kids that Chinese culture doesn’t. In Chinese culture, it just wouldn’t occur to children to question, disobey, or talk back to their parents. In American culture, kids in books, TV shows, and movies constantly score points with their snappy backtalk and independent streaks.  

Fluent Mandarin speakers and virtuosic instrumentalists, Chua’s daughters she tells us, “were just like Chinese kids. Except not quite” (my emphasis); in China they were considered “two little foreigners who speak Chinese.” Chua apophatically claims the accusation bothers her intensely.” Sophia and especially Lulu are, however, model minorities par excellence. The two mix the rebellious spirit of American independence and the diligence of an ethnic ethos – thanks to Tiger Mother – but not too much of either. Chua’s supposed ‘failure’ to impose all of her ‘Chinese traditionalism’ functions to rhetorically mark her family’s actual success within her theory of assimilation. Chua imagines her family, and Lulu in particular, as a strengthened hybrid, the best of both worlds. The vainglorious spectacle of ethnic traditionalism becomes, in Chua’s personal theory of hybrid assimilation, the conditional asset to purchase the best mode and outcome (multicultural hybridity) of assimilation into contemporary American ideology. Chua strokes America’s cultural exceptionalism by strategically merging its fetishistic obsession with individuality and a more recently acquired hunger for multicultural difference.

Excellence and achievement are not the sole property of the model minority stereotype. The “not-so-model” racialized minoritarians in the American racial hierarchy, Black people, are also influenced by capitalistic imperatives of ethnic excess congealing from a consumption of multicultural difference. In hip-hop especially, capitalistic

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626 Ibid., 24.
627 Ibid., 56.
imperatives of competition shape the tropes of domination so popular in mainstream hip-hop. The ethnic excesses of Asian and Black people are historically distinct and unequally array our bodies within white supremacy. Yet by comparing Amy Chua’s maternal authoritarianism with Nicki Minaj’s brand of maternal domination, a connection between these distinct tropes can be made – a connection of pathologized mothers historically connected by the co-production of the model minority and the “negro family.”

Nicki Minaj Dominates Her Sons

Late in “Tiger Mom” I directly disidentify with Minaj, parodying her name and calling myself, “Dicki Minaj.” In sexualizing the themes of model minority excellence, I also reference Minaj’s 2010 song, “I’m the Best.” I also emulate Nicki’s diminutive interpellation of my listeners as “sons.” Domination through the primal threat of incest called forth by ‘sons’ in Minaj’s work refracts a distinct trope of Black motherhood as pathological, which I amplify in “Tiger Mom” to affect an excessive form of racialized and sexualized deviance. My queer parody of, and disidentification with, the ‘bad’ mothers in Minaj and Chua’s works destabilize both of those images.

My deployment of Minaj and Chua’s related logics of excessive ethnic motherhood constitutes disassimilatory practice within multicultural capitalism leading to my theoretical critique of the conditions that make such thinking possible, the multicultural eugenic exaltation of hybrid vigour. Minaj is the second ‘malignant mama’ that ties Chua and ManChyna’s mothers together. Without resorting to analogy, I tie these disassimilatory mothers through an interconnected pathology pitting so-called model minorities against other minoritarians. Lastly, I describe the strategy of difference-as-purchase exhibited by Chua, Minaj, and ManChyna within
the framework of liberal multicultural capitalism, arguing that it is undergirded by the valuation of difference as a eugenic ideal.

In 2010 following the success of independently released mixtapes like Beam Me up Scotty (2009) and a series of high profile guest verses on tracks like Kanye West’s “Monster” (2010), Nicki Minaj (born Onika Maraj) emerged as a singular economic force in the commercial music industry. Minaj’s debut full-length album Pink Friday (2010; Young Money Cash Money Records and Universal Motown) is notable for debuting with the second highest first-sales week by a female hip-hop artist since 1998’s Miseducation of Lauryn Hill, remaining the number one album on Billboard for 73 consecutive weeks.628

One non-radio single from Pink Friday, “Did it on ‘em,” is a notable aesthetic holdover from her earlier mixtapes and guest verses, emerging as a remarkable example of maternal domination. Although equally well-produced (producer: Shondrae “Bangladesh” Crawford), the song can be distinguished from the glossy dance tracks and pop ballads populating her album by its aggressive bass tone and her growly command to the audience. In the chorus, Minaj proclaims overtop a decisive 90bpm that she has,

Shitted on 'em/
Man, I just shitted on 'em/
Shitted on 'em/
Put your number 2's in the air
If you did it on 'em
(“Did it on ‘em,” 2010)

Minaj tells her audience to hold up the number “two” sign if we listeners have bested our competition, like Minaj suggests of herself. Complementing her feculent metaphor for success,

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Minaj articulates her capitalist triumphalism with a surprisingly maternal authoritarianism in the next line as well as later in the song:

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\begin{align*}
\text{All these bitches is my sons/}
\text{And I'm a go and get some bibs for 'em/}
\text{A couple formulas, little pretty lids on 'em/}
\text{If I had a dick I would pull it out and piss on 'em}
\text{...}
\text{All these bitches is my sons}
\text{And I ain't talking 'bout Phoenix}
\text{Bitch I get money so I does what I pleases}
\text{I live where the motherfucking pools and the trees is}
- “Did it on em” (2010; Pink Friday)
\end{align*}
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Neither Minaj’s boasts of economic achievement nor her invective uses of ‘bitch’ are distinct in commercially successful hip-hop music. Minaj’s humorous visuals, however, depicting her foes as her sons (and, interestingly, not her daughters) is a notable trope in her lyrics that infantilize real or perceived competition. Minaj simultaneously plays into a masculinist image of feminized competition (for male attention) and diminishes rappers of both genders as her “bitches” and “sons.”

629 Other examples from Minaj’s repertoire include:
“[I] Look up to Jada, I love her and Will
Bitches my sons but they not in my will
The fuck be wrong with these bitches?
The fuck be wrong with these niggas?
....
Bitches is bitter, my titties is bigger.
You bitches my sons, I need a babysitter”
- “Yaas Bish” (2014; The Pink Print) featuring Soulja Boy

“Cause these hoes so busted
Hoes is so crusty,
these bitches is my sons
And I don't want custody”
- “Stupid Hoe” (2012; Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded)
Minaj’s lyrical performance of phallic domination disidentifies with the male penis while activating and subverting the white supremacist grammars of Black American womanhood and sexualization. Minaj phallically dominates her competition by suggesting that if she “had a dick,” she would “pull it out and piss on 'em.” Minaj’s conditional act of domination disidentifies with the phallus as a reservoir of power. Yannitsi and de Maré suggest a feminist corrective to English’s centering of the phallus: the Kunta. Although the heterocentric binarism of Yannitsi and de Maré’s corrective limits its use to ‘balancing’ the phallus in the European symbolic order rather than abolishing it altogether, it is nevertheless useful in describing the character of Minaj’s presentation of gendered symbols – equivalent with the phallus on display in so much of rap lyricism. A literary alternative to Kunta that Yannitsi and de Maré omit, however, is the Sanskrit term yonic, the symbol of the Hindu goddess Shakti. Yoni refers to the feminine generative power associated with Shakti and is typically depicted with Shiva’s linga. Kunta is more appropriate here for its ties to European symbolism (like the phallus) and the destructive power (rather than generative) that both the Kunta and Phallus elicit. At the same time, Kunta avoids the feminizing orientalism of Eastern languages by rooting the binary opposition within European language traditions.

630 As Yannitsi and de Mare write, “There is still no adequate symbol for [women’s] role … We suggest therefore that the more trenchant name ‘Kunta’ be adopted, a proud Old Norse name, which liberates us from the debased epithet and from the shame factor of the pudenda (areas of shame, pudor = shame) foreshadowed in Eden’s Tree of Knowledge. Phallus and Kunta can now engage with each other on the level and we can thereby consider a multitude of dualities which, because of the previous monism, or at any rate asymmetry, produced widespread imbalance, and created pseudo-unresolved or quasi-resolved dyads… The womb power of the Kunta presents us with the womb’s inherent function of containment, of structure, adding perspective and parameters to an otherwise unbridled competitive phallocentricity rocketing to Mars.” Stavroula Yannitsi and Patrick de Mare, “Phallus and Kunta,” Group Analysis 31, no. 1 (1998): 122–23.
Minaj deploys both the kunta and phallus in a disidentification with Euro-centric forms of dominion and power. In kuntic fashion, Minaj uses “pussy” with similar potency as her use of “dick” to locate her kuntic-phallic power.

Pussy like girls, damn, is my pussy gay?
It's a holiday- Play with my pussy day!
Pussy this, pussy that, pussy cakin'
Pussy ride dick like she a Jamaican
Pussy stay warm, pussy on vacation
You loose bitches need a pussy renovation
You can eat it with a pussy reservation
Pussy 'bout to get a standing ovation


Minaj floods her listeners with rhetorical repetition of her ‘pussy,’ a kuntic synonym with phonemes that are similarly quick and harsh. Although Minaj utilizes both kuntic and phallic metaphors of domination with similar potency, she also mixes these symbols indeterminately:

“My wrist look like I am a jewel thief/But that's just cause I am a boss bitch/That macaroni cheese and grill my swordfish” (“Boss Ass Bitch,” 2013, my emphasis). The cultural overdetermination of “swordfish” is foregrounded as Minaj ambivalently claims both the phallus and kunta as an indeterminate gendered site of power. A swordfish could be interpreted as Minaj demanding fellatio performed on her;632 it could also indicate a culinary marker of European wealth. Minaj kunticly transforms her phallic power by linking the command to fellate her (to swordfish) with a weaponized image of her vagina (“my swordfish”).

Minaj is by far the most successful Black female rapper in the commercial music industry at the beginning of the 2010s. I do not intend to erase the works of other Black woman rappers (contemporaries or predecessors), but rather to highlight the economic and perceived singularity

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of Nicki Minaj’s success in commercial hip-hop and across music charts at this moment in time. Notable examples of Black female rappers emerging as high profile (but not cross-over-successful) in the music industry during this same period include: Azaelia Banks, Dominique Young Unique, NoName Gypsy, Nitty Scott, Tink, Rhapsody, Nyemiah Supreme, Asia Sparks, Tiffany Foxx, Junglepussy, Sasha Go Hard, Katie got Bandz, Kilo Kish, Chella H, Shystie, Angel Haze (also Native American), Lee Mazin, Rich White Ladies, and so on. Yet even predecessors (commercially successful Black woman rappers) like Lil’ Kim, Monie Love, Queen Latifah, Missy Elliot, Da Brat, Eve, MC Lyte, Lauryn Hill and so on no longer appear as the faces of commercially successful music projects. Hill and Elliott are possible exceptions, but both careers are seemingly limited by medical and/or personal reasons. In the North American pop music industry at the beginning of the 2010s, Minaj appears to be one of a handful of commercially successful (largely white) women rappers and the only Black woman operating at the same multi-industry ‘brand’ level as major figures like Drake, Jay-Z, Lil’ Wayne, T.I., and so on. Minaj, according to pop culture and hip-hop scholar Erik Nielson, is the exception to the rule. Given her status of singularity, Minaj cannot be unaware of her ties to contested notions of Black femininity and sexuality.

Minaj is both celebrated and criticized for her embodiment of “Hottentot”-style pornotroping. Hortense Spillers names pornotroping as the dehumanization of captive Black bodies as physically powerless flesh; it is, as Alexander Weheliye argues the condition for

becoming racialized as Black (and dehumanized) in America. For Spillers, “the African female subject…[is] not only the target of rape… an interiorized violation of body and mind – but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture.” Yvette Abrahams applies Spillers’ externalized pornotroping to the enslavement and sexual display of Sara Bartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus.” Popular writing often notes the comparisons between Sara Bartman and Nicki Minaj’s “blaxploitative” self-presentation of hypersexualized, Black femininity. Minaj’s appearance on Saturday Night Live’s skit, “Bride of Blackenstein” for example, garnered attention from several writers, including one likening Minaj to a twenty-first century “Hottentot Venus.”

In spite of such reactions (or maybe because of), Minaj continues to employ a visual aesthetic accentuating her ‘booty’ with calculated poses, costumes, and so on. From the first of her major label music videos, “Massive Attack,” (2010) to the artwork for her 2014 single, “Anaconda,” Minaj’s buttocks have played a pronounced role in her visual aesthetic. Responding to criticisms of her “Anaconda” artwork, in which Minaj sexually squats back-first in a pink thong, Minaj publicly calls attention to the disparity between perceived reactions to her artwork and white, Sports Illustrated models in the very same pose (to which reactions include, she

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asserts, “Angelic. Acceptable. LOL”). The disparity implies that Minaj’s Black ‘booty’ is diametrically opposed to white ‘booty’ in a racist imaginary. Inhabiting criticisms received from fellow Black cultural figures and writers, Minaj inhabits and disidentifies with the “Hottentot” stereotype as a familiar mode of Black female sexuality within white supremacist ideology.

As a singular female force in the commercial rap industry, Minaj is also contained by and disidentifies with gendered expectations. In interviews Minaj calls attention to gendered inequality in the professional rap game, comparing her success with (and differential treatment from) male hip-hop moguls like Lil’ Wayne and Jay-Z. A recent social media campaign led by Sheryl Sandberg (a high ranking executive of major tech companies like Facebook and Google) attempts to ban the use of ‘bossy’ as an adjective for women leaders. Minaj, however, embodies and describes herself as a “Boss Ass Bitch,” an unrelenting disidentification with pejorative uses of both ‘bossy’ and ‘bitch.’ Minaj notes the non-existence of a blueprint for a sustained career as a Black female executive, equivalent with a hip-hop magnate like Jay-Z. Minaj views Jay’Z’s *Blueprint*(2001) album as a literal “blueprint for male rappers.” With *The Pink Print*, Minaj intends to forge her own *BluePrint* for female rappers to come,” recycling gendered colour themes, mismatching familiar pornotropes of Black female sexuality, conventional phallic symbols of masculine hegemony in hip-hop (such as ‘dicks’), and the usual denigrations of

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powerful women. By disidentifying with these many tropes, Minaj renders indeterminate her seemingly conventional metaphors; she navigates a phobic public reaction to her sustained success as a Black woman at the top of the pop-rap industry by strategically swerving into and out of ideological stereotypes.

The juggling of metaphors for Black female sexuality and masculinized domination converge in Minaj’s unconventional images of and disidentification with motherhood.

Figure 20. Illustrative annotation of the Rap Genius article, "My Sons: Nicki Minaj’s Postpartum Politics." The post’s author suggests, "Nicki Minaj paints herself as the Madonna with Children of rap music,” parodying Pietro Perugino's "Madonna and Child" (1495) with the doctored photo. As noted, Minaj depicts baby bottles, bibs, formula, and especially the term ‘sons’ to allegorize her domination of rivals (Figure 20). While in some instances, male rappers may refer to themselves as ‘daddy’ (Big Daddy Kane) or ‘Poppa’ (Notorious B.I.G., “Big Poppa” (1994)), the metaphor in these instances tend toward sexual innuendo that objectify women as “goldiggers” (“I love it when you call me big poppa/ To the honies getting money playing niggas like dummies,” for example) rather than directed at them as real or even perceived competition. When the metaphor extends to men (rarely), it is deployed amiably. The unreleased demo version of 2Pac’s “Hit Em Up” (1996), for example, includes an extended verse by Outlawz member, Hussein Fatal (Bruce Washington), in which he rhymes, “I push packages every
hour/my sons passed/when slappin’ nickels/on glass forties/so hand me that cash you made/on
that F.” Multiple interpretations can be inferred from the line (friends dying or drinking while
serving five year prison sentences for assault related felonies). But the spirit in which Fatal uses
“my sons” is amiable, describing friends or colleagues in the drug trade and prison-industrial
complex.

In contrast, I read Minaj’s use of infantilization and discordantly sweet depictions of
mother-son relations as infused with a humorous impulse of disidentification. First, the little-
boy-trope is not limited to female rap competition. If looking at the many instances when Minaj
lyrically dismisses other women as “bitches” or “sons,” one might interpret this tactic as an
attempt to scorn other women in her capitalist ascent. Yet Minaj indiscriminately ‘little-boys’
(used as a verb to mean ‘subordinates’) all of her competition, including men. Take, for example,
Minaj’s recent remix of PTAF’s “Boss Ass Bitch,” (2013) in which she points to the many men
that she controls:

Yo, I employ these niggas
They be grown men, but I little-boy these niggas
Want the cookie, so I gotta Chips Ahoy these niggas
But I never iPhone, Android these niggas
Use rubbers with ’em, I don't never raw these niggas
More money than em', I'ma son all these niggas
I ain't shopping, but it's like I gotta store these niggas
Put em’ on time-out and never call these niggas
- “Boss Ass Bitch” (2013)

The multiple gendered targets of Minaj’s matriarchal control, which are conflated with sexual
(“cookie,” “rubbers/raw”) and capitalist (“employ,” “more money”) domination, renders less
definite her trope choice than a conventional view suggests. The trope of motherhood also
includes women rappers as her descendents. In the RapGenius article, “My Sons: Nicki Minaj’s
Postpartum Politics,” the site’s top contributor to Nicki Minaj’s artist page calls attention to
Minaj’s metaphor of sons as not only themes of parental control and aloofness, but also the ‘birthing’ of other female rappers.644

Second, Minaj’s “post-partum politics” simultaneously flaunt and critique her lone status as a Black woman atop the commercial, hip-hop music industry by recycling ideological stereotypes of US-based images of Black motherhood – a stereotype of single-parent, matriarchal family organization imagined in white supremacist American culture as an excessively ethnic form of family. In Hortense Spillers’ critique of Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s still influential645 report on the American “Negro Family,” Spillers attempts to undo Moynihan’s misnaming of strong Black women as the source of Black men’s supposed failings, such as underachievement in lower socioeconomic strata.646 Spillers’ objective is, “to reclaim the relationship between Fathers and Daughters.”647 Spillers suggests that Moynihan’s misnomer is a part of a racist symbolic order she calls, an “American Grammar,” which imagines “the African-American

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female’s ‘dominance’ and ‘strength’ [as coming] to be interpreted by later generations – both
black and white, oddly enough – as a ‘pathology,’ as an instrument of castration.”

The corollary of such a grammar is Moynihan’s binary opposition of the American white
family and the “Negro Family.” Depictions of the “Negro family,” according to Spillers, reveal
Moynihan’s perception that

‘Ethnicity’ in [the case of African American families] freezes in meaning, takes on
constancy, assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal. … in its powerful
stillness, ‘ethnicity,’ from the point of view of the ‘Report,’ embodies nothing
more than a mode of memorial time, … a signifier that has no movement in the
field of signification, the use of ‘ethnicity’ for the living becomes purely
appreciative, although one would be unwise not to concede its dangerous and fatal
effects.

In other words, Spillers suggests that the notion of a so-called “Negro family” is incompatible
with a modern (white) American patriarchy that supposedly grooms men for leadership. The
former, for Moynihan, becomes a primordial relic from “African matriarchies.” In his own words,
Moynihan’s supposition is that “the Negro community has been forced [by its own women] into
a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society,
seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the
Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well.”

In the well intentioned, but ultimately patronizing, report Moynihan suggests the “Negro subculture”
represents a “Tangle of Pathology,” because of a perceived matriarchal and ‘ethnic’ social
arrangement that supposedly emasculates its men. With conditions worsening for many Black
Americans since the report but becoming more difficult to ‘see’ than legislated discrimination
(housing discrimination, unequal employment opportunities, targeting by the Prison-Industrial

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648 Ibid., 74
649 Ibid.
Complex, as examples), Moynihan’s perceived pathology continues to haunt Black Americans and their families in the public imagination. Ethnicity’s “stillness of memorial time” continues to exist as a red herring for the continued social inequality and anti-Black racism faced by Black Americans.

Like the fraught pornotropes of Black female dehumanization Minaj deploys with calculated flare, she humorously inhabits and parades familiar tropes of matriarchal domination and emasculation. If white European womanhood has historically and symbolically been restricted to the private realm of family (as mothers) and becomes available publicly only as male owned commodity (sexualized object), the processes of imagining Black, ‘ethnic’ motherhood also remains a conditional and violent limitation for the presentation of Black women within a white supremacist imaginary. Minaj recycles and performs dominating infantilization by disidentifying with a parodic version of Black matriarchy so closely tied to Moynihan’s Report. Yet, like her ambivalent sexual-symbolic anatomy, Minaj’s lyrical target is widely dispersed, emasculating both men and women; she, again, renders indeterminate any definite ‘meaning’ of such imagery. As the lone woman in a pantheon of mostly Black men atop the pop hip-hop industry, Minaj could be ideologically contained by “hottentot” stylization of a horny male gaze – and is consistently accused of doing so. Instead, I argue, she activates this hyper-sexualization while also selectively foregrounding an underlying “American grammar” of Black matriarchy. Both tropes of Black womanhood – “Hottentot Venus” and domineering matriarch – are deemed pathological and excessively ethnic within a racist grammar but also, and importantly, familiar within this imaginary. I suggest the familiarity of these tropes within Minaj’s discursive manoeuvres allows her a limited range of navigation within the phobic public reaction to her claims of masculinized symbolic power. Minaj’s humorously evasive
confrontation, which juxtapose baby bottles and thongs, becomes all the more necessary the
closer Minaj approaches to a central seat of power within the hip-hop industry as the latter itself
becomes assimilated into America’s hyper-capitalist consumer culture – the target of phallic
capital apparently moving further away with each attempt at grasping it.

Minaj’s disidentification with tropes of Black female sexuality and motherhood form a
specific kind of disidentification that Muñoz describes as “comedic disidentification.” The
practice of humorous inhabitation by performers of colour, for Muñoz, “accomplishes important
cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself
of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies.”651 Muñoz describes
the kitschy, parodic humour of sisters Ela Troyano and Carmelita Tropicana (feminist queer
filmmakers/performers), as well as Vaginal Crème Davis (whom Muñoz calls a “terrorist drag
artist”). Davis – herself a multiracial Chicana – performs variously as a Black ‘welfare queen,’
white supremacist militiaman, Italian pornstar/Parliamentarian, among many other personae.
Troyano and Tropicana make and perform films infused with distinctly “cubana dyke camp”
sensibilities. In short, both parodic inhabitations of ideological stereotypes send-up, cross-wire,
and short circuit the stability of logics in which their intersectional identities may locate them
within dominant ideology. While one reading of such short-circuiting might conclude it to be a
form of campy subversion, such a reading is anathema to Muñoz’s description. Instead, Muñoz
distinguishes between a Sontag-derived, “discourse of middle- to upper-class white gay male
sensibilities”652 and the camp (or preferably, ‘kitsch’) made by the queers of colour he describes

652 Ibid., 120.
as “dislodging…the discourse of camp from male dominance.” The theory of disidentification (and, specifically, the comedic kind) asserts that the comedy on display in the embodied theory of the Troyano sisters and Davis enacts “self against the pressures of the dominant culture’s identity-denying protocols.” Yet these performers do not sculpt signs of race, gender, and sexuality out of nothingness. Each performer deploys their body, as always already inscribed by ideology, within this ideology – or, as Muñoz defines them:

a ‘disidentificatory subject’ who tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form. As a practice, disidentification does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life.655

Each act takes existing cultural forms, recycles them through their own bodies authentically and inauthentically, investing those forms with new and critical energies. I read Minaj’s recycled embodiment of Black female sexualization and matriarch-domination tropes within American ideology as her tactical re-investment of them with new energies.

Minaj’s comedic disidentification continues to be shaped by a capitalist logic. Minaj forcefully penetrates this system with her lyrical kunt-phallus (or, swordfish). As a Black woman, Minaj plays with the familiar porno- and matriarchal-tropes already inscribed on her body by racist American Grammars; she troubles both the masculinized construction of this public realm and racist perceptions of motherhood wedded to Black women in her ascent to become and be ‘the best.’656 Primary in Minaj’s rise, though, remains the system of capitalist accumulation, consumption, and competition that

653 Ibid., 122.
654 Ibid., 120.
655 Ibid., 12.
656 “I’m the Best” (2011) Nicki Minaj, Pink Friday
conditions Minaj’s entry into her elite economic echelon. Capital accumulation is the primary marker of her success as well as the justification for her tactics. Minaj’s comedic disidentification is not a critique of the hip-hop industry’s evolution and assimilation into the American economy per se. Minaj’s embodied limitations, however, make space for a critical analysis of success, assimilation, and achievement conditioned by the logics of capitalism (such as competition). If comedic disidentification, according to Muñoz, enables the avoidance “of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” when participating with (and within) these ideologies, the practice itself gestures toward the limited discursive resources available to the performer of colour in the symbolic realm. Minaj’s material ascent, tied to her discursive play within America’s racist grammars, is conditioned upon her adept use of these cultural codes as a kind of currency for access. And cyclically, the end goal of such an ascent – wealth – becomes both the marker of success within and mode of entry into this capitalist matrix. In other words, the logics of capitalist accumulation (competition and being ‘the best’ rather than, for example, female solidarity) become the beginning, end, and ontological condition for assimilation into America for this woman of colour.

Of course white consumption of ethnic excess is not limited to Asian or Black authenticity. The pathologized Black motherhood in Nicki Minaj’s ‘Hottentot Mama’ functions to dehumanize Blackness within a racist visual economy of anti-Black white supremacy. Chua’s Tiger Mother trades in a parodic extreme of specifically Asian excess, which casts Asians as perpetual foreigners. It is in these performances that I see and hear, with deep pleasure, Chua and Minaj’s implicit disassimilation into capitalist liberal multiculturalism. In Chua’s embodied performance of difference, I hear and see her cynically disidentifying with codes of race and
success within a capitalism that purportedly values difference. In Minaj’s performance, we see an interlocking of sexuality and gender with the disidentificatory performance of Blackness in this same capitalism. Judith Butler calls the gap between the actual codes and perceived values in which we minoritarians play a slippage. The slippage is a “constitutive failure of the performative… between discursive command and its appropriated effect,” which provides a moment “for a consequential disobedience.”657 In Chua and Minaj’s excessively ethnic motherhood drag, we can feel the ‘slippage’ between majoritarian expectations and minoritarian performance, an ambivalence that disobeys while being rewarded for obedience. But is this humorous slippage limited to extremes of ethnic excess, of social pathology drag? Without making analogies, I return to the minoritarian consciousness that I argue for in Chapter 2. Pathologized motherhood is only one example of the ways minoritarians may also be able to “hear and sing” – to use Muñoz’ words – this shared way of thinking, this shared strategy for navigating the many mouths of the hungry white whale. Before returning to the pathology of my own figurative maternal pathology, I transit through other examples of non-mother minoritarians performing ‘otherhood.’

Non-Mother Others

Chrystos is a Menominee poet whose work reveals a similar awareness of performing “Indianness” for white consumption. Chrystos, in fact, jokes about this in her poetry, ostensibly using her presentation of identity to purchase into dominant cultures of multiculturalism, which are ready to devour minoritarian bodies, be they racialized or Indigenous. In her poem, “Dear Indian Abby,” Chrystos sets up an Indian version of a Dear Abby-type advice column:

What should I do
about those ones who try to crawl down my throat
bulging eyes are going to Understand
me or Else
Get some of my spirit get some of my magic
OOOOOHAAAAOOOO they want it
Want to explain how I could have a better grasp
of Native issues if I read this book or that by some
white person Want me to listen to them with traps
dangling from their back pockets
Gonna get some gonna get some of me now
from Sincerely Puzzled

…Best thing to do is tell them you’ve heard
there’s a great Indian wise woman named Whale Rabbit
over anyplace around 3,001 miles away
& you’re real sure
she’s waiting patiently for them to show up
& they’d better hurry cause her fee goes up in 2 weeks
& your fee for giving them the directions is only $350
Don’t forget to smile
as you wave goodbye
Yours Truly, Indian Abby”

- Chrystos

For Theresa Harlan, Native American women’s bodies are presumed to be imbued with magic
that, for Sincerely Puzzle, is at risk of being consumed by white people, “those ones,” who want
to crawl down her throat to get at it. The advice Indian Abby gives is rich with ironic dismissal
of “those ones” – take them for what you can get or what they are willing to give you in their
zealous consumption of difference. Hernández-Avila interprets Indian Abby’s response “to this
insistent objectification” as requiring, “a humour that gives back the objectified image served up
in exaggerated (and reappropriated) language, sending ‘those ones’ back home to their own

Chrytos’ setup and ironic advice I read as disidentificatory with the expectations of ‘those ones.’ The self-aware poem dispenses advice, via Indian Abby, to fabricate “a great Indian wise woman.” Put another way, simply invent the ancient wisdom that ‘they’ are so receptive to and get paid doing it. Chua’s performance of tradition is less obviously self-aware and appears to buy into the conditioning gaze in a way that Chrystos does not. Yet the parallel I see is in the bodies of the performers, read by spectators as an authentic vessel for an-other culture. Our knowledges and histories may actually be rich with ancient knowledge, but white consumption would rather elide the specificity of it, repeating the damning violence of colonialism and racism. Instead, they want our multicultural magic.

In a humourless Canadian context, the spectacle of multiculturalism has been operationalized by state policy, exalting public spokespersons, the kind that ‘those ones’ expect to hear from. As Sunera Thobani summarizes:

State-funded community organizations promoted the emergence of a class of elite cultural 'spokes(wo)men,' whose primary claim to political space was articulated within the terrain of multiculturalism, and they have defended this stake vociferously. State support for community organizations facilitated the state's role as arbitrator of community representatives. These funds designated official insiders and outsiders in communities of colour. Speaking culture to power became the avenue to accessing this coveted status.

Thobani is following in the work of Linda Carty and Dionne Brand who demonstrated that multicultural funding initiatives of the 1980s fostered competition between cultural groups, dismantling self-organized, multi-racial, anti-racist coalitions. Carty and Brand describe the making of "Visible minority woman" as a figure constructed by such state-funded

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661 Ibid.
By creating and fostering conferences and organizations for ‘visible minority women’ and multiculturalism, Brand and Carty argue, state funding enabled the management and containment of anti-racist community organizing by promoting a middle-class leadership; this elite class focused more on issues of cultural identities than on socio-economic inequalities. Thus, the exaltation of certain spokespeople on the basis of differential identity consequently dismantles the possibility for real coalition building. The obverse of exaltation, though, is the tactical clambering of individual minoritarians who use their perceived ethnic spectacle as keys to access the gates of respectable white society. Of course, the success of individuals is at the expense of others – the damaging effects on real coalition building – and the culprit is the logic of competition bred by the collusion of white-centered multiculturalism and capitalism.

In the grant-supported arts industries we see a similar exaltation of multicultural spokespeople. The Canadian music industry is awash with a sea of white musicians. A handful of people of colour, however, successfully navigate funding opportunities for musicians and artists. Even fewer achieve relative popularity, endorsed by Canada’s public broadcaster CBC and/or promoted by the CRTC’s minimum 35% Canadian content that must be played on all music airing stations and programs. K’naan (née Keinan Abde Warsame) is a Universal Canada recording artist.⁶⁶³ The song, “Wavin’ Flag” (2009), is a pop hit for the Somali-Canadian and was subsequently used as backdrop for an anthemic-sounding Coca-Cola spot during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. From K’naan’s 2009 album Troubadour, the song originally reached number


two on the Canadian Hot 100 Chart.\textsuperscript{664} Subsequent remixes of the song included a charity single raising funds for companies in the Canadian NGO sector and on for Coca-Cola’s FIFA World Cup ‘anthem’ commercial; the later releases reached a wider audience raising K’naan’s international profile onto a multinational stage.\textsuperscript{665} The lyrics can be found in Appendix C.

The public narrative K’naan constructs for himself comes in the handy form of a 2012 illustrated children’s book.\textsuperscript{666} In the book title, \textit{When I Get Older: The Story Behind Wavin’ Flag}, K’naan explains that the chorus for the song comes directly from a self-sustaining poem he quietly repeated to himself as a child, newly landed in North America and struggling to fit in culturally. Aside from the obvious interpellation of citizenry vis-à-vis American ideals (“They’ll call me ‘Freedom’/Just like a waving flag”), the song can be critiqued from a variety of perspectives: the metonymical flag of imperialism and its emphasis on embodying nationhood; the cynical fantasy of purchasing freedom by participating in Coke-branded capitalism.

However, K’naan’s performance of what ethnomusicologist Nicol Hammond describes as ‘primitivism’ is most relevant to my discussion. Hammond fits the song into a broader context of the 2010 World Cup’s performance of an ‘underdeveloped Africa’ and ‘developed west’ dichotomy. According to Hammond, a

\begin{quote}
narrative of African potential for development from primitivism…[uses] the singers’ escape from war-torn Somalia, and his hopes of overcoming his earlier struggles (‘When I grow older/I will be stronger/…’), but fills out the percussion with a heavier African drum-beat and a low, percussive vocalization [resulting in] a sound and narrative that is recognizably African\textsuperscript{667}…[The song presents Africa to the world with an image] of underdevelopment and primitivism maintain[ing] the neo-colonial relationship of Africa and the West that reproduces African poverty.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{664} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{665} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{667} This FIFA remix was titled the “Celebration Remix”
Just as the original colonial powers in Africa infantilized the continent and its people in order to justify their imperial ambitions, so the World Cup governing body and media interests continue to justify their interests in [South Africa] through the reproduction of underdevelopment.668

This imagined Africa is in contrast to the present-day reality of rapid economic expansion among many African countries, South Africa being exemplar. I do not suggest to know the motivations of K’naan in producing “Wavin Flag.” Though, composer and performer royalties from international radio play and Coke ads are understandable motives for such careful consideration and brand construction. Instead I point to several facets of the song to suggest that it represents careful construction for widespread, multinational appeal - the re-written lyrics, its narrative extended through the inoffensive medium of a children’s storybook, and the rearrangement of the musical composition into a more “African sound.” Within this reading, the song promotes the personal narrative of K’naan as an infantilized vessel of western aspiration within the neocolonial Africa/West dichotomy.

But I wonder to what degree K’naan’s celebrated origin story, which the music industry and audiences value above much else, is tied to the Blackness he embodies. I defend K’Naan’s cultivated narrative – not the narrative, per se, but rather the cultivation of it. “Wavin Flag’s” original 2009 lyrics included a verse that narrates a cutting, anti-war indictment of colonial powers:

So many wars, settlin' scores,  
bringing us promises, leaving us poor,  
I heard them say, love is the way  
love is the answer, that's what they say  
But look how they treat us, make us believers  
we fight their battles, then they deceive us

try to control us, they couldn't hold us
'cause we just move forward like Buffalo soldiers

All earlier references to war and poverty are stripped from the later, more popular remixes of the song (measured by chart status, industry awards, international reach, and corporate tie-ins). Bond et al describe this as a, “tragic commercialization and depoliticization” of K’naan’s work.669 While true, Bond’s critique undervalues the material rewards for K’naan who successfully navigates a capitalist mode of cultural production. I am not defending the dubious ethics of individualist pursuits of capital. I am, however, interested in the notion that K’naan’s strategy of material survival/success is inherently ‘tragic.’ Such aspersion assumes the original, more critical variation of K’naan’s work is more politically profound than the later version. Bond’s critique suggests that the labour involved in blunting some of Wavin Flag’s more poignant lines diminishes the realness of it and, by extension, K’naan. Within a western discursive field limiting the range of possible ontologies for Black bodies (especially in hip-hop), K’naan shifts his public image from critic to symbol of aspiration.

Such a shift, in my view, is not one of kind but rather degree. In both cases, K’naan does not represent a threat to the west’s infantilizing relationship with Africa or Black bodies that serve as synecdoche for the ‘dark continent.’ In the first narrative, as a critic, K’naan is a survivor of civil war, rightfully angry at the destitution and despair European colonization wrought on Africa. Such criticism has little effect on liberal white Canadians who can neatly compartmentalize it as “European” and “in the past.” In the second, as a

symbol, K’naan becomes the Coke-drinking version of a football-wunderkind Popeye, who represents hope and aspiration, and a (statistically unlikely) route out of poverty. In both cases, the rapper remains an embodied conduit for ‘poor Africa.’ Another Canadian rapper, k-os, initiated a public beef with K’naan because of the latter’s cultivated use of African imagery, made for the acceptable consumption by western audiences. In his song B-Boy Stance (2004), k-os disses K’naan for filming an earlier music video in Kenya, transparently instrumentalizing his out-of-Africa narrative, which remains tastefully consumable for white folks: “they took cameras to Africa for pictures to rhyme/ Over: Oh, yes, the great pretenders […] Religious entertainers who want to be life savers.”

K’naan’s performance of his African authenticity for his audiences is not lost on his contemporaries. Such internal disputes about representation point to an important implication that white exaltation of individual multicultural spokespeople has for anti-racist coalitions.

In K’naan’s defense, I read his strategy for minoritarian success as a cynical disidentification with the limited tropes made available to him within a culture of liberal multiculturalism. In both versions of K’naan’s public presentation of self, he reiterates the ‘poor Africa’ narrative, first with rage and second as embodied aspiration. In the second, however, his work is more commercially successful. Why must the burden of representation fall on one man’s shoulders when the liberal listening public will either dismiss it or gobble it up when convenient? The ever-shifting nature of the new whiteness is resilient enough to take direct criticism and even sometimes incorporate it along with the minoritarians who open themselves up, their life stories and bodies, for public

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670 Quoted in Hombach, “Wavin Flag and K’naan.”
consumption. However, it is the promise of success within this hungry system of injustice, which K’Naan thoroughly supplicates to, that may triangulate the outline of the white beast.

The limited tropes available to minoritarians within a culture of liberal multiculturalism are specific to the bodies of each, unequally hierarchized within white supremacy. For K’naan, his refugee Africanness draws directly on the primitivism that western powers invest into an image of Africa. For Chrystos, Indian Abby mocks ‘those ones’ for desiring the magic and ancientness of a wise woman so far away that she is always already vanishing, never to appear. For Nicki Minaj and Amy Chua, the pathologies of Black and Asian motherhood respectively, neatly fit within capitalist discourses of capitalist inclusion. My own Tiger Mom parodies these images, and the system of whiteness that produces them, embodying my own queer malignant motherhood.

Tiger Mom, A Queerly Malignant Mama

*Mama I love you*
*Mama I care*
*Mama I love you*
*Mama you’re my friend*

“It’s bittersweet”
- Amanda Balsys (also known as PuTang Clam when accompanying ManChyna), commenting on the song while recording it.671

“Tiger Mom” (2012) comedically disidentifies with the cultural formations of ethnic excess, Asian ethnicity, and multicultural capitalism activated by the matriarch in

671 Personal communication, 2011.
Amy Chua’s memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Featured on my nationalism infused mixtape, *Allegiance to the Fag* (2012), “Tiger Mom” (2012) ironizes Amy Chua’s signature character, a figure that has become infamous since her 2011 publication, *Battle Hymn*, identifying with late capitalist modernity by paradoxically identifying with the perceived pathology of ethnicity and non-modernism. Inhabiting such ideological stereotypes of race and sexuality functions as a multivalent confluence. My parodic “tiger mom” renders transparent the themes of authoritarian parenting, multicultural welfare, and the limitations of minoritarian dissent within assimilation into modern, culturally hybridized national ideology. “Tiger Mom” (2012) also reflects the disidentificatory impulse informing Nicki Minaj’s maternal lyricism. The song is and is not about motherhood. As my collaborator Amanda Balsys told me after hearing a demo version, “It’s bittersweet.” “Tiger Mom” synthesizes the ideas already manifest in the content and form of Chua and Minaj’s works. I am led by this song to advance an argument that the ideals of incorporation into liberal multiculturalism are always already connected to and informed by eugenic ideals reputedly spurned by progressive modernity.

Besides deriving lyrical tropes and some vocal styling from Nicki Minaj and Amy Chua, ManChyna’s “Tiger Mom” (2012) draws on the music of The Spice Girls’ 1996 ode to motherhood, “Mama.” I make some small but significant changes when transposing the chorus and other musical elements from the song. “Tiger Mom” samples the lyrics and main melody line from the chorus of “Mama” and stays in a minor key, attempting to maintain the original song’s sense of melancholic yearning. However, singer Amanda Balsys shifts the melody into a lower register. Instead of the original infantile head voice displayed in “Mama” (1996), Amanda projects forcefully with her more mature chest voice. My use of a harder edged synthesizer over
the childlike piano in “Mama” also matures the sound. Immediately in the introductory chords and chorus these changes signal a grown-up kind of adult, even if listeners do not yet recognize the pornographic twist of our adult version of the song still yet to come.

Unlike the acoustic folk style of the Spice Girls’ song, “Tiger Mom” plays with social codes of femininity and authenticity. In asking, “[w]here are all the great female electric guitarists?” Sheila Whiteley argues that acoustic instrumentation gets feminized in the cultural imagination, while electronic instruments, associated with technology and technical competence, are considered the domain of masculinity.\textsuperscript{672} Kip Pegley argues that, like computer hacking culture (a similarly masculinized subculture), the electric guitar gets imbued with masculinized traits such as ‘risk-taking.’\textsuperscript{673} One social implication in the assertion that electronics (and electronic instruments) become codified as ‘masculine’ is that this constructed correlation between gender and instrumentation gets entangled with gendered socialization of girls and women. Thus, the logic goes, an acoustic sound that is warm and safe gets naturalized as feminine, while aggressive electrification gets masculinized. In shifting the acoustic style of “Mama” to an electronic sound, I de-feminize “Tiger Mom,” a song that both is and is not about the gendered role of mothering. Electronically, I am disidentifying with the gendered expectations of an authentic motherhood.

Furthermore, the electrification of folk music also destabilizes the latter’s status of authentic musicality. As Eyerman and Jamison remind us, “[i]n one of the most famous incidents in the history of modern music, Bob Dylan was booed off the stage at the Newport Folk Festival

\textsuperscript{672} Sheila Whiteley, \textit{Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender} (Routledge, 2013). For further problematization of simplified genre-gendering see Tara Rodger’s \textit{Pink Noises} (Duke University Press, 2010)

\textsuperscript{673} Kip Pegley, \textit{Coming to You Wherever You Are: MuchMusic, MTV, and Youth Identities} (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan, 2008), 53.
in July 1965” because of his release a week prior of, “Like a Rollin’ Stone, which, with electric backup, was already moving up the pop charts.”674 Folk traditionalists met Dylan’s electrification and remixing of folk into folk-rock with shouts of “Play folk music! Sell out! This is a folk festival! Get rid of that band!”675 For traditionalists, to electrify folk music is inherently inauthentic. Such thinking holds true even for other musical genres that become electrified.

Disco, for example, was in its height of popularity derided as an inauthentic form of rhythm and blues. As several writers point out, the marginalization of disco in the U.S. mainstream was a racially and sexually codified backlash – by largely white, masculine rock fans – against its celebration of non-heteronormative sexuality and multiracial pleasures.676 Gillian Frank points out, though, that this backlash was also gendered: “[s]everal white and African American commentators [in the 1970s] believed that disco, despite its origins in gay African American clubs, hurt black music and black male musicians.”677 Frank continues, “[b]ecause black women dominated disco culture,” in a racist marketplace that pitted Black femininity against Black masculinity, “it was black male musicians who complained the most about disco” tying disco’s synthetic sound to inauthenticity, diametrically opposing it to the raw masculinity of Rhythm and Blues.678 Thus, disco is often remembered as simply effete, emasculated, homosexual, unintelligent and often conflated with whiteness, erasing the radical celebration of

678 Ibid.
multiracial and sexual pleasure the repetitive beats and synthetic strings emerged from. My electrification and disco-ization of the Spice Girls’ folk-like ballad then amplifies both its inauthenticity and effeteness.

However, the original marriage of the Spice Girls and folk authenticity was always already strangely dissonant. The Spice Girls are themselves a 1990s British revival of 1960s American all-girl groups. They are, from the first, burdened by an expectation of inauthenticity projected onto their foremothers. The latter vocalist groups were pushed aside with the British invasion of ‘beat music’ in America, thought of as more authentic than the manufactured gloss of female vocal groups.\(^{679}\) The Spice Girls represent both a repetition and reversal of the original ‘Britpop invasion’ into the U.S. In the ‘stripped down’ acoustic setting of the “Mama” music video, for instance, the Spice Girls ratchet up the conveyance of intimacy and authenticity to audiences. The performative folk-authenticity of the song and video could be read as either responding to or dissonant with the Girls’ conspicuous status as a manufactured pop group, optimized for merchandising. The artifice of intimacy, rare for the Spice Girls, is already surprising when showcased in “Mama.” Such surprising cultural re-circuiting is the material that “Tiger Mom” re-signifies, aurally and lyrically.

My own “Tiger Mom” goes on to play with and re-circuit the sonic notions of electronic inauthenticity of the already dissonant “Mama.” Electronic instrumentation usually denotes an inhuman distancing between musician and listener. Think of the distilled frostiness of Kraftwerk, their slickly robotic performances, and their musical descendants like Daft Punk. Yet Amanda’s isolation of a single melody line makes the chorus more inviting to listeners than the chorus in “Mama.” The Spice Girls’ harmonies make singing along more difficult for casual listeners due

\(^{679}\) Whiteley, Sexing the Groove, 37.
to their intricate complexities. Amanda’s own playful and organic embellishments when singing the melody line also make the technically perfect harmonies of the Spice Girls seem almost robotic in their musical skill. Thus, “Tiger Mom” disidentifies with both the themes of femininity and authenticity that are embedded in the musical fabric of “Mama,” ingredients intended to make the latter feel more organic. In playing with and re-circuiting traditional notions of electronic instrumentation, Amanda and I accomplish what the Spice Girls’ contrived folksiness does not – an inorganic closeness with listeners vis-à-vis the coldness of electrification.

Amanda’s chorus and my verses also disidentify with the social codes of femininity and masculinity implicit in the forms of singing and rapping. Suzanne Cusick locates the performance of gendered differences in the vocal performances of “Song” and “Speech” in late twentieth century North America. Singing within the parameters of a Song is a deeper penetration of the feminized body by the rules of society. Singing requires formalized training and disciplined submission to cultural rules deep within the body, in order to control pitch, timbre, and volume. Amanda’s performance within the song can be considered a profound observation of accepted cultural patterns, an act gendered as feminine. The feminized rules of Song performance, for Cusick, infantilize women’s voices into adulthood. In Cusick’s words, girls “are told to speak and sing [after puberty] as though nothing had changed…girls are taught to perform – by the continuity of their adult vocal production with their childhood vocalizations.” Thus, the deep-body penetration represented by the feminized practice of

681 Ibid., 29-30.
682 Ibid., 33.
683 Ibid.
singing (especially in one’s head voice, like the Spice Girls) stunts the realization of women’s ‘adult’ voices. Yet Amanda abandons the Spice Girls’ infantile vocalization of “Mama” in favour of a profoundly adult register.

Speech, while also disciplined by the mouth into intelligible words, represents less cultural penetration into the fine motor muscles that Song does. Because boys are taught to renegotiate their changing vocal cords after puberty, Cusick identifies this practice as an encouragement of acquiring masculinity. Cusick describes Speech as a masculinized renunciation of the feminized rules of Song, a refusal of penetration to acquire “manly Speech.”

Rapping, while adhering to less formalized rules of flow, can be likened to such masculine refusal of cultural submission, disregarding the deep compulsion of a musical key. One can rap rhymes to most songs, irrespective of the key that a song is written in. A rapper is beholden only to the tempo of the beat, relying on one’s informal sense of flow. My rapping, however, embraces both the masculinity of Speech and penetration (literal sexual penetration). Both Amanda and I can be described as conforming to the demands of our gendered Song/Speech cultural demands. Yet our performances combined with the song’s lyrical and musical content flips our traditionally gendered roles.

Lyrically, my changes also reflect a disidentification with the trope of maternal love and motherhood. In “Mama” (1996), the Spice Girls lament their adolescences spent in conflict with their mothers. Building tension in the bridge, the group retrospectively reflects on their experiences with an evolved sense of appreciation, concluding with wizened voice, “Mama/I love you/Mama/I care/Mama/I love you/You’re my friend/You’re my friend.” Amanda sings the same line but with a queerly sexualized and racialized twist looming in the background of my

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684 Ibid.
verses. ManChyna becomes the hyper-sexed, hyper-racialized, and disciplinary Tiger Mom.

Amanda’s intimacy with the listener enables her chorus to stand in for the (male) listener, telling me how much he loves and cares for me. The audience, as I make clear in my opening verse, is hailed into the parameters of the song as an infantilized man (“Hey boy, call me your tiger mom”). I go on to tell the generalized ‘him’ that,

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\begin{align*}
I'm \textit{supposed to be your mom}/ \\
in \textit{this tender loving song}/ \\
suck \textit{my Long Duk Dong}/ \\
shut \textit{up boy and sing along}/ \\
- \textit{“Tiger Mom,” ManChyna (2012)}
\end{align*}
\]

Although replicating the tender imagery of “Mama,” we oppose the saccharine melody with the sexual tension between me and the listener, both interpellated into a queer masculinity.

Additionally, far from refusal of penetration, I invite it and monstrously recast it: “and if I had a clit/I would open up and sit on em.” I am here reversing Nicki Minaj’s domineering line about pissing on her sons with a “dick.” Drawing on the anti-woman terror of vagina dentata, I invite penetration by my listeners as the monstrous \textit{ManChyna dentata}. Vis-à-vis the clitoris, I re-wire the gendered expectations of motherhood in the original “Mama” as well as Minaj’s own disidentification with masculine power.

Completing the incestuous allegory derived from Nicki Minaj’s songwriting, I resolve the sexual tension of double entendre in “Tiger Mom” (2012) by explicitly pronouncing my identity as the “tiger fag.”

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\begin{align*}
\textit{Come here, lah/ Tèng tiào (_excel) lei lah}/ \\
\textit{I will beat ya/I am your mama}/ \\
\textit{I’ll beat you off with my bamboo stick}/ \\
\textit{That is a euphemism for my dick}/ \\

don’t make me mad/ \\
\textit{I’ll spank you bad}/ \\
\textit{I don’t give a shit}/
\end{align*}
\]
I'm the tiger fag/

The juxtaposed imagery of deviant faggotry and authoritarian discipline converge multiple modalities of pathology, one sexual and the other ethnic. Neither image reclaims such tropes, but instead operate within phobic ideologies that are underwritten by an economy of pathology.

The cultural nodes of pathological maternalism I use in “Tiger Mom,” Nicki Minaj’s “Did it on em” and Amy Chua’s Tiger Mother, were released in 2010 and 2011, respectively. This cultural moment also saw two periodical articles circulate widely, giving even more context and urgency to “Tiger Mom.” One was an excerpt from Chua’s forthcoming Battle Hymn, published in the Wall Street Journal. The second was published in a Canadian periodical, Maclean’s. The interconnectivity of these articles, one being the public avatar of Chua’s Battle Hymn and the other being highly relevant for Canada, continues the tradition of cross-border media publications that maintain the model minority stereotype as a regulatory image.

“‘Too Asian’?”

In November 2010, Maclean’s magazine published an article simultaneously praising and lamenting the presence of Asians in Canadian higher education as ‘superficial.’ Originally titled, “‘Too Asian’?” the article’s authors, Stephanie Findlay and Nicholas Köhler, editorialize the phenomenon of higher rates of university admission by Asian Canadians. Findlay and Köhler suggest that the diversification of postsecondary schools in Canada has “put them at risk of being increasingly fractured along ethnic lines. It’s a superficial form of multiculturalism that is

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expressed in the main through segregated, self-selecting, discrete communities.”

In other words, the higher rates of academic achievement of Asians in Canada and the U.S., for Findlay and Köhler, is ‘superficial’ and not a ‘real form of multiculturalism.’ The authors’ logic is supported by culturally essentialist visions of socially isolated Asian children, who are “single-minded in their approach to university,” Findlay and Köhler write. The authors’ backhanded praise of drive and achievement is always already paired with the social pathology of Asianness. According to the authors, not only do white nationals consider Asians to be stealing the ‘rightful’ university spots of their children, but they also ruin the experiences of white, Anglo-Saxon nationals by failing to integrate into their sporting and drinking rituals, since “an ‘Asian’ school has come to mean one that is so academically focused that some students feel they can no longer compete or have fun.” The authors assert

Privately, … many in the education community worry that universities risk becoming too skewed one way, changing campus life—a debate that’s been more or less out in the open in the U.S. for years but remains muted here. And that puts Canadian universities in a quandary. If they openly address the issue of race they expose themselves to criticisms that they are profiling and committing an injustice. If they don’t, Canada’s universities, far from the cultural mosaics they’re supposed to be—oases of dialogue, mutual understanding and diversity—risk becoming places of many solitudes, deserts of non-communication.

The ‘desert of non-communication’ the authors write about are not read as spaces for

minoritarians to seek refuge from phobic general publics, but rather as spaces white nationals are barred from reaching into. Again, the presence of too many unassimilable Asians does not represent a ‘true cultural mosaic,’ but rather a cultural pathology that ‘skews’ campus life away from being an ‘oasis of dialogue and diversity’ toward a ‘a place of many solitudes.’ Reading

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686 Ibid.
687 Ibid.
688 Ibid.
between the very faint lines, however, the ‘cultural mosaic’ Findlay and Köhler write about centers white nationals and their precious snowflakes that need more ‘fun,’ which the pathological Asians are destroying.

The article rightfully sparked outrage among many Asian Canadians and responses suggest that the editorial reproduces racist stereotypes of Asians as excessively alien others. A brief review of academic responses to the issue includes the collection of essays in Too Asian?: Racism, privilege, and post-secondary education edited by RJ Gilmour. Among the arguments, some authors assert that the model minority stereotype consolidates a focus on the university campus as a site of racial moral panic. Others focus on the university as a site of neo-colonial practice, extending the class-exclusionary ethos of places like Oxford into racial hierarchies in Canadian university admissions and even textbooks. Still others in the collection bring Asian student perceptions about identity to the fore in the context of the Maclean’s article. Dan Cui and Jennifer Kelly, two of the collection’s authors, also published the article “‘Too Asian?’ Or the Invisible Citizen on the Other Side of the Nation?” The latter is a critical discourse analysis of the original article, situating it in a history of national periodicals “reproducing stereotypical social identities of Asian students, reinforcing unequal power relations with ‘whites’ and ideologically constructing the social norms and values based on white supremacy.” Scholars and the general public can agree that the Maclean’s article is a regrettable example of a longstanding tradition of insidiously racist constructions of Asians as socially problematic model minorities.

690 Dan Cui and Jennifer Kelly, “‘Too Asian?’ Or the Invisible Citizen on the Other Side of the Nation?,” Journal of International Migration and Integration 14, no. 1 (February 2013): 157–74.
691 Ibid., 171.
I highlight “Too Asian?,” not as an example of racist media or media racism per se, but rather to underscore the perceived contradiction between the promise of assimilation, its impossibility, and the perceived source of Asian pathologization. Such impossibility is not, in fact, a contradiction within Canadian multiculturalism. I argue that it is a precise application of the latter’s inherent whiteness. Regardless of perceived minoritarian success, any gains in public life are met with scepticism about the source of such gains as being derived from ethnic pathology. Given the very near history of Yellow Peril, white nationals can easily dredge up cultural tropes of sickly Chinamen, socially unassimilable pests invading their whitened spaces. An explanation for Asian inability to assimilate coincidentally (or strategically?) appears in Amy Chua’s parenting memoir and its accompanying Wall Street Journal editorial that was published shortly after the Maclean’s publication.

Three months after the publication of “Too Asian?” in January 2011, The Wall Street Journal published an excerpt from Amy Chua’s Battle Hymn. The title of the article, “Why Chinese Mothers are Superior,” is considered “misleading” by the author. The title is also clearly inflammatory and probably assisted in its viral circulation, which far eclipsed the attention received by the Maclean’s article. Although Chua distances herself from the WSJ’s title and the assertion that Battle Hymn is a how-to parenting manual, the excerpt from the book is an

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692 Augie Fleras distinguishes between the individualizing notion of ‘racist media,’ in which individual authors or their texts are deemed as racist, and the structurally conditioned existence of ‘media racism,’ which emphasizes the normalized regulating discursive practices that reproduce racist ideologies. Augie Fleras, Mass Media Communication in Canada (Nelson, 2003).


aphoristic guide to raising “stereotypically successful kids.” The excerpt (and the book itself) employs stereotypes about culturally derived characteristics of motherhood that lead to successful children, in Chua’s opinion. As a safeguard against accusations of cultural essentialism, Chua couches all of her assertions in the language of memoir. What is elided in the excerpt, though, is the real object of Chua’s fetishization. *Battle Hymn*’s focus is not Chinese mothers or even her stereotypically successful child Sophia. Rather, Chua’s rebellious younger daughter Lulu is the real star of Chua’s praise, because of the supposed ‘failures’ of tiger mothering on her. Lulu acts as a conduit for Chua’s praise of America and the eugenic logic of hybrid vigour (as I will explain shortly). But to get to the moral of Chua’s narrative of American exceptionalism, she engages in a *strategic use of Chinese motherly essentialism* to define the success of her daughters. When I read Chua’s strategy, reading it as a disidentification with American exceptionalism, I was struck with a deep swishy pleasure.

Sublimating my pleasure, in the months following the *Maclean’s* article and *Battle Hymn*’s publications, I held a tribute party for them both as ManChyna. My disidentification with the *Maclean’s* and *WSJ* articles merged the ideas peddled in their pages into a showcase of local Toronto talent, which I curated under the queer art banner of Granny Boots.

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Granny Boots was a monthly dinner-and-a-show queer performance space organized and run in 2011 by local Toronto performer, Ryan G. Hinds.
Figure 21. Facebook event information text and photo from Granny Boots presents “Too Asian!!! (Don’t Tell Tiger Mom!)” March 23, 2011. Gladstone Hotel, Melody Bar, Toronto, Ontario.

The event conceptually convened the correlates of ethnic excess in the two articles. If “‘Too Asian’?” represents ethnic excess in its pathological student/child form, the WSJ article and Battle Hymn represent the maternal side of this coin. The collection of performers included Asian Torontonians, mostly queer and gender non-conforming, taking space on stage with poetry, burlesque, modern dance, and (of course) rap. Between performances, I asked performers to wear a tiger mask and read excerpts from Battle Hymn, in the style of mid-century, white, ‘beatnik,’ poetry readings. The absurdity of the night was, in retrospect, a projection of my own reaction to the two publications – mildly confused bemusement. My confusion at the sheer audacity of the articles acted as my compass, compelling me to organize the night. My choices of curatorial elements congeal heterogeneous ingredients of Asian difference perceived in the west: Communism, tigers, dragons, and invasions. The ‘study group’ specifically nods to the
humourless and pathological isolation of Asians that exists in the minds of writers like Findlay and Köhler and their interviewees. The authors believe, “Asian-Canadian students are far more likely to talk about and assert their ethnic identities than white students.” Fitting into this superficial observation, I organize an ethnic-oriented study group, disidentifying with the deserts of non-communication lamented about by the *Maclean’s* writers. Shhh, it’s a study group.

The authors paint a picture of “balkanized” university campuses, ostensibly concerned about integration, but that rhetorically centers whiteness and conveys a sickness of isolation among Asian students. Despite the authors’ purported concern over maintaining an atmosphere of dialogue and diversity on Canadian campuses, they rhetorically center whiteness in their article. The *Maclean’s* article revolves around the concerns of their core interviewees (two white, private school educated teenagers). White nationals, their children, and their concerns about multiculturalism take center stage for Findlay and Köhler. Anti-Asian racism is briefly mentioned in one academic’s quoted assessment of the trend, but analysis of the assertion is provided no significant page space in the article. The space apportioned to the obviously racist admissions practices is slightly larger but still cleaved from the sickly image constructed of Asian students and their families. The *Maclean’s* article is dominated by descriptions of ‘fevered’ Asian parents, socially inept and lonely Asian students, and difficulties among universities of “getting [Asian] students out of their bedrooms.” The picture of depressed and lonely Asian students is hackneyed but it is the interpretation of this phenomenon that is disputed.

Findlay and Köhler’s explanation for the islands of isolated Asians is located in the behaviour and cultures of Asian students themselves. Cui and Kelly point out that “‘Too Asian’?” “represents ‘Asian’ students as self-segregationists who should be blamed for their own
Further, Cui and Kelly assert that Findlay and Köhler attribute “‘Asian’ students’ academic success to their ahistorical cultural traditions.” Such essentialization, however, is not limited to the academic success of Asian students. The assumed pathology of self-segregation, isolationism, and social ineptitude is also located in the bodies of Asians. Socially isolated and incapable of integration into ‘mainstream’ (white) campus culture, Findlay and Köhler’s Asians create “deserts of non-communication.” The authors suggest that Asians risk the fundamental goodness of the University campus as a microcosm of Canadian liberalism (“oases of dialogue, mutual understanding and diversity”). It must be made explicit that the deserts of non-communication Findlay and Köhler so performatively fear is one that is inaccessible for white people. Again, the authors center white concerns about the nature of the university, the synecdoche for Canada. According to Findlay and Köhler, “Diversity has enriched these schools, but it has also put them at risk of being increasingly fractured along ethnic lines.” Diversity is, for the authors, ostensibly enriching but simultaneously treated like an infection, invading the pristinely uniform (white) student body, and risking its fracture. The vectors of this disease are ethnic bodies unable to seamlessly integrate. With the pre-existing notion of the “sickly Chinese” associated with Yellow Peril, the resonances between illness, foreign threat, and unassimilability echo in the Maclean’s article.

Lurking behind the backhanded praise of model minority excellence, co-constituting it, is the ever-present threat of Asian pathology. As discussed in the previous chapter, the promise of assimilation has a chilling effect on public dissent for minoritarians desiring integration into the putative safety of western modernity. To be considered well integrated, one must remain silent

696 Cui and Kelly, “‘Too Asian?’ Or the Invisible Citizen on the Other Side of the Nation?” 157.  
697 Ibid., 166.  
698 Findlay and Köhler, “‘Too Asian’?.”
about structural inequality. Yet, the state of silence conditioned by assimilation under the rubric of model minority excellence also becomes pathological for observers. The pathology is cyclic. Without the freedom to name the social structures limiting minoritarian dissent, problems and dissonances get assigned to the essence of the individual and/or her traditional culture (and not the racist society in which she lives). In an insidious reversal of cultural attribution, pathology is laid at the feet of the subject herself. The ethnic excess of the minoritarian’s body, the brown scar on whitened land, which renders her forever foreign also becomes indicative of an originary source for non-modern pathology.

Noh’s research on Asian American experiences of mental health indicates a social attribution of pathology on the bodies of minoritarian targets of white supremacist patriarchy. From in-depth qualitative interviews with Asian American women who have attempted suicide, Eliza Noh reflects on the silencing effect the myth of model minority excellence has on the psychological health of her interviewees. Noh suggests,

…the prevalence of the model minority ideology serves to discipline unruly Asian American subjects that disrupt the American myth of meritocracy and progress… The pressure of letting go of any feeling that does not conform to the stereotype of the meek and mild model minority is particularly salient for Asian Americans who are always expected to assimilate and not make waves.699

Instead of identifying gender and racial trauma as structural forces shaping self-destructive behaviour, Noh suggests, “the difficulty of representing trauma, the problem of healing within oppressive contexts, and perhaps the impossibility of recovery itself” are raised by her interviewees; they are silenced “about their suicide attempts and their experiences of racial and

sexual violence…manifested through bodily self-mutilations and recurring memories of psychic pain.”

While the specific experiences of Noh’s interviewees may or may not be generalizable, the conditions and external perceptions of their traumas are. Service providers, according to Noh, are not attributing the self-destructive behaviours exhibited by these individuals to pathological social structures like racism and patriarchy. Instead, the source of trauma is too often understood as discordance between the women’s supposed non-modern origins and American modernity. Such discord becomes legible within racist grammars as excessive ethnicity. The source of the perceived excess becomes attributed to a supposedly hyperpatriarchal and misogynistic family life; crucially, whether individual cases exhibit this pattern or not, the perception centers the whiteness of America as modern and benign in comparison. Noh suggests, “[m]any Asian American women remain silent about their psychic suffering in order to avoid compounding it through abuses by the mental health system.” The compounded abuse Noh refers to elaborates the familiar narrative of Asians as pathologically forever-foreign, unable to integrate without ‘making waves.’ Relaying the story of one survivor of sibling abuse, Noh argues, “[t]he social work system failed to take into account the impact of racism on this family. It placed Lydia in an impossible position of dividing her family, labeling it as “pathological” in contrast to the White foster family.” In Lydia’s case, Noh points to the fear of the mental health apparatus’ potential for compounding psychic traumas by structuring her and her family life within a white-centred racial hierarchy – a familiar white saviour trope, morally bolstering whiteness and abjecting

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700 Ibid., 92.
701 Ibid., 96.
702 Ibid., 97-98.
Lydia’s family because of their perceived moorings in a culture thought of as pathological and sickly.

Individual agency plays a role in this scheme of Asianness. I have argued that the educational gains achieved by Asians in North America are connected in the cultural imaginary with the majoritarian perception that minoritarian successes mask a pathological social ineptitude. Such perception within a racist society functions dually, to silence dissent with the promise of western modernity and to recast Asian model minorities as perpetually primordial, pathologically incompatible with the west (even begetting clinical pathology). I counter the common perception that social pathologies of Asians derive from a cultural or essential flaw. It is a system that can only understand foreignness as non-modern relative to the modern and progressive, white west. The perception of meekness within the model minority figure, viewed as socially sickly and a threat to the whiteness of Canada, revokes the possibility of individual agency from the minoritarian. The minoritarian is framed as a victim of her cultures of origin. She is definitely not, by such thinking, a victim of the “modern” and “enlightened” west that frames her existence with racial violence. Noh’s work underlines one mode of navigating this system of victimization—silence and suppression, which for Noh’s respondents may have deadly consequences. Yet silence and suppression is not the only strategy within this framework of majoritarian demands.

Within the historically specific demands of liberal multiculturalism, the same code of victimizing pathology opens a space for strategic uses of essentialism in service of purchasing access to (even if not real belonging within) this liberal framework. The same imaginary framework that constructs a meek model minority can paradoxically be deployed as strength by well-positioned opportunists—Amy Chua, for example. The interstice, in which the Gollum-like model minority toils away in the library basement, is wedged open by the insidious harmony of
multicultural and capitalist ideologies. And in this volatile space a strategic minoritarian is afforded limited degrees of freedom to navigate white supremacist hierarchies toward the ideal of competitive strength. A grammar of neoliberal assimilation articulates the seeming opposition between weak victimhood and strong ethnic participant. One’s ability to successfully integrate American ideals, such as individualism, rebellion, free-market autonomy, and so on, with their ethnic origins transfigures pathology into cultural currency. While others, especially in response to the “‘Too Asian’?” article and Battle Hymn, have demonstrated the damaging effects of the model minority myth both within and across racial categories, I take this as an entry into a deeper discussion of the liberal conditions for minoritarian participation. Yes, such strategies are damaging and never abandon their residues of pathology. However, it is the performative practices of putatively strong ethnic participants, themselves almost parodies of competitive ideals, which shed light on a link between assimilation, eugenics, capitalism and liberal multiculturalism.

Competition-centred ideals of capitalist multiculturalism shape the tactics of Amy Chua, Nicki Minaj, and ManChyna. We each deploy a pathologically ethnic motherhood particular to our own bodies and social locations. Queering Amy Chua’s figure, Tiger Mother, I discursively disidentify with cultural codes of excessive ethnicity and sexuality associated with my queer Asian masculinity. In “Tiger Mom” (2012) I exaggerate themes of Asian invasion and yellow peril already manifest in ManChyna, connecting his communist drag with an authoritarian sensibility in the Tiger Mother parenting style. Interweaving the model minority poles of single-minded student and domineering mother, I emphasize the logic of competition that shapes both. My pathologized motherhood disidentifies with assimilation into multiculturalism and capitalism through the logic of
competition. While obviously different from Minaj’s conversation with Moynihan’s matriarchal mother, like two sides of a white hetero family coin, the queer “Tiger Mom” also relates to western white supremacy as a model minority matriarch, backhandedly praised but also pathologized as excessively ethnic. Within a racist western hierarchy both figures pathologically exceed normativized white motherhood, resulting in emasculated sons and suicidal daughters. Moynihan’s misnaming of Black women as the destructive element of “The Negro Family” is couched in patronizing language of praise for Black Americans’ resilience in spite of this supposedly self-imposed family pathology. The Tiger Mom logic, while not analogous, is similarly framed as a commendable model for minorities, but still pathological for these children who become too ethnic and too Asian under this matriarch.

Minaj and Chua’s overt celebration of capitalist achievement requires no explanation within a logic of accumulation and competition – the pursuit of capital mutually constitutes a pursuit of legitimacy, power, and cultural authority. I regard the cultural assimilation of these maternal subjects as disidentifying with the cultural material available to us – an ethnic excess congealing from our performing bodies – for access and an empty promise of incorporation. Further, disidentification with hegemonic multicultural ideology, using exaggerated difference as a form of currency in disassimilation, enunciates the logics of competition. Whether we appropriately or accurately represent an authentic experience of racialization within white supremacy is beside the point. I do not suggest any of the works participate in authentic representation; rather, the contours and exaggerated silhouettes of our work manifest the warped conditions of assimilation into late capitalist multicultural ideology. Such conditions that limit minoritarian integration, and which
inform our comedic disassimilations, point to eugenic logics of hybrid vigour usually praised within a multyculty capitalism.
Part 2 The Logic of Biological Hybridity as Cultural Strength,

or

Multyculty Hybrid Vigour

The success of Lulu in Chua’s memoir is not limited to her hybrid cultural fluency, but is also implicit in her biological hybridity. Of course, Chua never says this. To speak of one’s daughter like a crossbred plant would be scandalous even for the straight-talking Tiger Mother herself. But Chua proposes a progressive and intergenerational model of minority assimilation. Even the sociological model that Chua’s resembles, put forth by Robert Park, asserts that amalgamation via interbreeding is the natural corollary of assimilation. To deny Park’s (and by extension Chua’s) inspiration from Social Darwinist thought would be disingenuous. And hybrid vigour is the logical connection between assimilation into multiculturalism and Social Darwinism.

Talk of hybridity naturally recalls debate about the term in postcolonial writings on diaspora and cultural mixing. For John Hutnyk, writing on hybridity in science fiction films, the term “has come to mean all sorts of things to do with mixing and combination in the moment of cultural exchange.”703 Hybridity, for Homi Bhabha, evokes the in-between third space of colonialism, in which Asian and African colonial subjects may resist “the words of the master” by re-signifying them.704 Paul Gilroy, critical of celebrations of hybridity, suggests that the term presupposes ‘anteriortly pure’ cultures, and speaks instead of syncretic cultural production (especially Black music and works of Black intellectuals) in the transnational formation of the

704 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 162.
metaphorical Black Atlantic. Stuart Hall, focusing on ‘diasporized’ life of Afro-Caribbean youth culture in the imperial homeland of Britain, praises creative capitalist contact as transforming notions of white British-ness. For Hall, “These 'hybrids' retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions and places of their 'origin'. But they are without the illusion of any actual 'return' to the past.” For many, cultural hybridity is viewed positively.

Some cultural thinkers, however, critique hybridity’s frequent praise from a variety of perspectives. First, hybridity’s roots in agriculture and animal husbandry always already haunt its celebratory feast of exotic cultures. Such associations with bestial degeneracy inform racist treatments of interracial minorities as inferior to the dominant racial group, yet an improved version of the purely racial Other. More generous depictions of hybridity, however, are also critiqued insofar as it functions as an empty signification of cultural cosmopolitanism, an ideal with an actionable policy in Canada – multiculturalism. Annie Coombes and Avtar Brah, for example, suggest hybridity can result in “an uncritical celebration of the traces of cultural syncretism which assumes a symbiotic relationship without paying adequate attention to economic, political and social inequalities.” For these critics, not only do hybridity and multiculturalism represent empty, aestheticized politics of consumption, but hybridity also masquerades as a cultural descriptor, where culture is represented as separate from structural determinations. The determinations of metaphorical hybridity I delineate include multicultural policy as it conditions assimilation of immigrant minorities.

Hybridity in my analysis of multiculturalism looks *beside* its use as a metaphor for cultural mixing and is framed by its original sense of genetic mixing or, in biology, *mixis*. In the white Canadian settler state, the exigencies of capitalism condition the construction of multicultural policy meant to strengthen the state-organism under the process of national exaltation. The organic theory of the state-organism is a logic that has been present since at least the inception of states as political entities.\(^{708}\) At present I am not making a metaphysical assertion about the state as an organism, but rather point to this popular metaphor of the state as a political organism to describe an ontological assumption for the analysis of liberal multiculturalism as being continuous with German nationalist conceptions of the organic state. This manoeuvre opens an epistemological entry into discussing the living processes of multicultural absorption of constituent parts, or newly docile bodies. The organic metaphor also brings to the surface of discussion the ideology of improvement of the body politic as a secondary but equally important site of self-care.

ManChyna, through my disidentificatory exaggeration of queer Asian motherhood, parodies the neoliberalizing logic of Canadian multicultural ideology. My disassimilation into this framework outlines the relationship between immigration policy as a function of educational quality and how this conditions the experience of ‘freedom’ for minoritarians within the Canadian settler state’s white supremacist, racial hierarchy. My exaggerations of the celebrations of cultural hybridity in Amy Chua’s *Battle Hymn* point to the latter’s supporting logic of biological hybridity. And so the liberal celebration of white-centering multiculturalism, which is

tied intimately to the middle class consumption of ethnic difference through cultural hybridity, is also tied to the logics of eugenics.

The Points of Multiculturalism

The meritocratic selection of immigrants via the points system functions to maintain the strength of white nationals – a self-image of economic rationalism. Scholars of Canadian immigration and multiculturalism have argued that the liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s and 1970s was a practical response to a growing need for skilled labour. Freda Hawkins, for example, in her comparison of Canada and Australian immigration and multicultural policies, recognizes that with their large territories and relatively small populations immigration will be the “major instrument” in affecting both economic and population growth.709 Hawkins also recognizes, though, that following Canadian and Australian histories of xenophobic immigration exclusions reproducing white nations, that “[n]either country… was prepared even to think about a universal, non-discriminatory immigration policy until full national independence, a reasonably well developed political system, adequate citizenship legislation, and really encouraging economic prospects and the confidence which goes with them, had been achieved.”710 Sunera Thobani argues that this ‘well developed political system’ and 'adequate citizenship legislation' should also be read as “the racial character of nationals,” or a cultural consolidation of Canada’s whiteness.711 Once such consolidation of the nation’s political apparatus was in place and the whiteness of Canada’s ‘original’ charter groups could confidently efface Indigenous claims of

709 Hawkins, Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared, xxxiii.
710 Ibid., 258.
sovereignty, this ‘non-discriminatory immigration policy’ was incorporated into the Immigration Regulations Act, October 1, 1967 as the Canadian ‘points system.’ As Hawkins describes it,

[...] the points system, [comprises] Numerical weights .. attached to a set of 10 factors … which attempt to assess the qualifications of an applicant for landed immigrant status in the broad areas of education, training and experience, occupation and intended destination, age, knowledge of English and/or French, personal suitability, and the presence or otherwise of relatives in Canada. As a general rule, the pass mark was 60 points out of 100. Members of the family class and retired persons are not selected according to these criteria. Three of the 10 factors do not apply to assisted relatives. Convention refugees are assessed by means of the points system, to enable immigration officers to learn about their background, qualifications, and experience, but are not given a point rating.\footnote{Hawkins, \textit{Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared}.}

To describe this system as ‘non-discriminatory,’ however, is an overstatement. The system is widely praised for not overtly discriminating between candidates based on race. Discrimination, however, is baked into the logic of a points system that assesses applicant qualifications. And to a discerning national, concerned with their perceived right to claim finite resources, such discrimination only makes rational sense – they want to eliminate perceived ‘freeloaders’ and only welcome applicants who might contribute to the nation’s (economic) strength.

The possibility of immigrant inclusion, conditioned by a multicultural point system, emerges from exclusionary ideology. While many non-Europeans were excluded from immigrating into Canada, the case is starkest with immigration from China, the largest non-European source of labour at the time. In the case of Chinese immigrants, during the first half of the twentieth century, immigration was financially prohibitive because of the Chinese Head Tax.\footnote{Chan, \textit{The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to inside the Circle}; for the Widespread impulses of eugenics logic permeated western nations like Canada, the U.S., and Scandinavian countries in the early twentieth century, informing sterilization policies but also exclusionary immigration policies like the Chinese Head Taxes in the U.S and Canada. In 1903 the Canadian Head Tax was almost two year’s wage for a Chinese migrant laborer ($500 CAD).} By the 1920s, Chinese immigration was made impossible with the implementation of the
Chinese Immigration Act on Canada Day, July 1, 1923, lasting until 1947. Amid public
discussion about discriminatory immigration practices, Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s words
to parliament on May 1, 1947 elaborate the government’s logic for the racial regulation of
immigrants:

The government will seek by legislation, regulation and vigorous administration, to
ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as
can advantageously be absorbed in our national economy,... With regard to the selection
of immigrants, much has been said about discrimination. I wish to make quite clear that
Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as
desirable future citizens. It is not a ‘fundamental human right’ of any alien to enter
Canada. It is a privilege. It is a matter of domestic policy.

These same words (“that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we
regard as desirable future citizens”) could be applied to the same ‘non-discriminatory’-
discriminatory practices under the points system three decades later. Even at the outset of
liberalizing Canadian immigration, a rationale of national and economic improvement shapes the
paths of entry for immigrants.

The racially exclusionary impulse of King’s speech to Parliament remains in the cultural
imaginary with respect to university admissions and educational attainment. The element of
King’s speech that might be edited out for a liberal multicultural era, might be the portion that
immediately followed:

There will, I am sure, be general agreement with the view that the people of Canada do
not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the
character of our population. Large-scale immigration from the Orient would change the

northwestern American context, see Jean Pfaelzer, Driven Out: The Forgotten War against
Chinese Americans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

714 Change to Canada’s laws follow four years after the Magnuson Act repealed immigration
exclusion in 1943 in the U.S. Bennett, Multicultural States; Brah and Coombes, Hybridity and Its
Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture; Phoenix and Owen, “From Miscegenation to Hybridity.”
715 King, 1947, cited in Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, Wanted and Welcome?: Policies for Highly
fundamental composition of the Canadian population. Any considerable Oriental immigration would, moreover, be certain to give rise to social and economic problems of a character that might lead to serious difficulties in the field of international relation.\textsuperscript{716}

King’s concern about altering the ‘fundamental character of the Canadian (white) population’ is echoed in 2010 by the concerns of white nationals about Canadian university campuses. Recalling the Maclean’s “‘Too Asian’?” controversy, white nationals don’t want their “fun” traditions intruded upon by pathological Asians who study too much, turning their campuses into “places of many solitudes” and “deserts of non-communication.” While overt racial discrimination was ostensibly resolved by the liberalization of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, the work of constituting Canada as a ‘white nation’ is papered over. I agree with Sunera Thobani when she argues that multiculturalism helps to reconstitute white Canada’s moral superiority on the global stage, while maintaining a racial hierarchy that assumes exaltation of white nationals. In addition to such moral and racial exaltation, maintaining the logic of discriminatory selection (for national adaptation in a changing global economy) also recuperates the scientific rationalism of a white Canada.

A white Canada is at the hidden center of multicultural policy and a celebration of national hybridity. Once here, the enticing enchantment of multicultural hybridity maintains a grip over minoritarians through the promise of exaltation. As Thobani explains it,

For their part, immigrants from the third world who had mobilized against racism in immigration and citizenship legislation were suddenly offered the enticing possibility of greater inclusion into nationhood. Having historically experienced racial dehumanization within the institutional apparatus of the Canadian nation-state, and having been subjected to the economic underdevelopment and the racial conflicts bequeathed their countries of origin by the colonial legacy, this offer of inclusion was irresistible. If their presence was endured by the nation-state largely through exclusionist and segregationist practices in the prewar period, their inclusion and integration in this new era was to come at the cost of their increased subservience, across generations, to the grand narrative of national

\textsuperscript{716} Ibid.
supremacy. No longer openly reviled as racial inferiors, immigrants and their descendants [sic] were instead seduced by their being celebrated as a source of cultural diversity.\footnote{Thobani, \textit{Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada.}} As such, the new liberal era of multiculturalism represented a novel form for the white beast to take. Instead of the exclusionary purists of early twentieth century Canada, the white nationals of the late twentieth century were morally exalted through their adoption of multiculturalism.\footnote{Ibid.} In the process of moral and racial exaltation, the offer of inclusion vis-à-vis multiculturalism became a \textit{disciplinary promissory note} to minoritarians.

The promise of exaltation is demonstrably empty for the supposed model minorities of Asian Canadians. A statistical snapshot of the Chinese Canadian communities (by far the largest Asian Canadian and racial minority group in Canada) in 2001 captures an unsurprising mismatch between multiculturalism’s promise of exaltation and the reality of Chinese Canadians. The survey suggests 27\% of Chinese in Canada, 15 years and older, have at least one postsecondary degree (compared to 15\% of the national average).\footnote{The 2006 report, “The Chinese Community in Canada” in the series “Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada,” summarizes the data collected from the 2001 Census and 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey. Since the publication of the series, however, no follow up has been published for the 2011 National Household Survey, the voluntary survey intended to replace the Canadian Census. Critics of the NHS suggest that it represents one facet of an “assault on information” by the conservative federal government (Battle and Torjman). Some analytic documentation of the NHS exists in the form of reports on Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada. But these documents do not provide as precise a picture of any particular ‘ethnocultural’ group as the Canadian Census once did. The report on “Immigration, Low Income and Income Inequality in Canada: What’s New in the 2000s?” (Picot and Hou) for example, only reports figures for “immigrants,” failing to disaggregate communities, rendering multi-year comparisons impossible. Ken Battle and Sherri Torjman, “The Case for a Canada Social Report” (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May 2013), http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/1011ENG.pdf; “The Chinese Community in Canada,” Profiles of Ethnic Communities in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006), http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2006001-eng.htm; Garnett Picot and Feng Hou, “Immigration, Low Income and Income Inequality in Canada: What’s New in the
Statistics Canada through self-assessment, are also reported as high (76% report a sense of belonging) among the Chinese Canadian communities.\textsuperscript{720} Apparently the promise of assimilation is a heady one. Yet, material discrepancies belie measures of attainment and immaterial senses of integration. Low-income levels are higher among Chinese Canadians (26%) than the general population (16%), employment is lower (56% compared with 62%; unemployment rate of 8.4% compared with 7.4%).\textsuperscript{721} Even if “senses of belonging” are relatively high among this subset of Asian Canadians, a cursory glance at the objective reality of the Chinese community in Canada contradict the promises of liberal multiculturalism. Despite the educational attainments of these ‘model minorities,’ rivalling and surpassing those of white nationals, equal inclusion is shown to be a patent lie.

The geographical pattern of Asian communities is notably isolated. Almost three quarters of the Chinese Canadian community live in two cities, Vancouver and Toronto.\textsuperscript{722} One can encounter figurative oceans of black hair at the Richmond night market or Pacific Mall in the suburbs of Vancouver and Toronto, respectively. Someone living in either city might anecdotally be led to believe that Canada has well-integrated Chinese and Asian communities.\textsuperscript{723} Viewing

\textsuperscript{720} “The Chinese Community in Canada.”
\textsuperscript{721} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{722} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{723} Ibid.

In the American context Hurtado (1989) suggests, “close examination of the statistics of achieved attainment indicates that the structural integration of different Asian groups (e.g., Japanese, Pilipino, Vietnamese, Chinese) is at best uneven and at worst deceptive. Scholars in Asian American studies have highlighted the importance of taking into account bases of stratification such as gender, foreign-born versus U.S.-born nativity, language competency in English, the geographical distribution of the Asian population within metropolitan areas of high income/high cost-of-living locales (e.g., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Hawaii, and New York), historical wave of immigration, and number of wage-earning family members. These factors in combination paint a very different picture of Asian American advancement, especially for
the communities federally, however, one might also confirm Findlay and Köhler’s racist conclusion that Asians self-segregate into “places of solitude” and “deserts of non-communication.” Instead of seeking an internal answer to a supposed Oriental pathology, one might conversely locate the justification for non-integration within the racist attitudes of Canadian nationals themselves. As the 2006 report concludes, despite feeling a sense of belonging,

over one in three (34%) Canadians of Chinese origin reported that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnicity, race, religion, language or accent in the past five years, or since they arrived in Canada. A majority (63%) of those who had experienced discrimination said that they felt it was based on their race or skin colour, while 42% said that the discrimination took place at work or when applying for a job or promotion.24 (added emphasis)

A majority of Chinese Canadians still experience race-based discrimination. This is despite our collective silence to anti-Black racism, in spite of our complicity with settler violence enacted on Indigenous people, and regardless of our collective subservience as model minorities within white supremacy. Asians might collectively stay within our own communities to avoid the contradictions of patronizing praise and detainment within a liberal white multiculturalism, both welcoming and rejecting.

24 “The Chinese Community in Canada.”
Strength, defined by the multicultural points system, is supposed to be the avenue of access for minoritarians into the liberal settler state. But this is patently false. A racial hierarchy, concealed by the myth of multicultural modernity, permanently excludes one group of supposed model minorities, Chinese-Canadians. Still, the promise is enticing, despite the confluence of model minority meekness and pathology baked into it. Amy Chua’s cynical manoeuvres instruct us in navigating the meekness of model minority discourse, transforming pathology into limited power, as long as we integrate into and thereby exalt western sensibilities. Such transformation of pre-existing stereotypes of sickness into something useful for Chua is predicated on the logic of not just cultural hybridity, but also biological hybridity. I turn next and finally to connecting the logic of multicultural eugenics with older forms of purity eugenics.

The Fear of Hybrid Degeneration

The bestial undertones of racial mixing’s roots in biology cannot be forgotten in celebrations of cultural and national hybridity. Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, for instance, traces the provenance of the term in a Victorian vocabulary of scientific racism.\(^{725}\) Phoenix and Owen also remind us of the genealogy of terms for mixed descent like Métis (mongrel dog) and mulatto (mule).\(^{726}\) The mule, a sterile hybrid of horse and donkey, is a particularly potent figure of death, haunting the culturally imagined fears of racial degeneration of Anglo-Saxon stock in a white settler state. Like Iyko Day’s connection of scientific racism in the eugenics movement to the iconic Canadian art of the Group of

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\(^{726}\) Phoenix and Owen, “From Miscegenation to Hybridity.”
Seven, fear of white degeneration unapologetically infuses pre-multicultural Canadian identity. One could argue this articulation of classical eugenics, emphasizing white purity, is simply a footnote in history that haunts celebratory notions of multiculturalism. Yet, inspired by the feisty Lulu Chua, I suggest that such eugenics of purity have an ideological continuity – at least a kernel – in an updated eugenics of difference.

The kernel of eugenic logic is exaggerated and disidentified with in “Tiger Mom” (2012). The last verse of “Tiger Mom” relishes in the bivalence of genetic purity and multicultural hybridity implicit in the codes of interracial improvement, found in Minaj and Chua’s disidentificatory celebrations of capitalist excellence and multicultural assimilation.

I’m takin this shit to the Tyra Banksy
I’m the Top Model minority
My vogue is the shit. all 10s. no Bs
you can call me fucking Hermione.
I'm a Pure blood. Mudblood. inbreed
Singapore. Sino. I'm all chinese.
got no black in me. i'm talking bout genes
but #realtalk. i want some black in me.

My celebration of Sino-purity articulates an indistinct distinction between pure breeds and inbreeds (how are they so different, anyway?) by transiting through the fantasy world of Harry Potter. Rowling, in her universe, uses a stratification of witches and wizards as an allegorical indictment of class inequality in Britain; magical characters are informally categorized as ‘pure bloods’ (unbroken magical lineage), ‘half-bloods’ (of mixed magical and non-magical heritage), and the most derogatory ‘mudblood’ (magical character born to non-magical parents). As one character explains of the latter, “It’s a disgusting thing to call someone. Dirty blood, see.

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727 Day, “Tseng Kwong Chi and the Eugenic Landscape.”
Common blood. It’s ridiculous.” As Skyler Hijazi points out, “[r]acial tensions [in Harry Potter] appear instead as (dis)placed onto the question of blood purity, and a discourse of blood purity becomes the regulatory grammar around which both the spaces and the relationships in the wizarding world are organized.” ManChyna’s verse skips around such connotations of genetic purity and dirty blood, rendering indistinct these distinctions, and returning Rowling’s trope of consanguinity directly to the coordinates of race.

In addition to blurring these imaginary hierarchies, I disidentify with the established racial taxonomy. Queerly, I celebrate the sexual mixis (“#realtalk, I want some black in me”), which usually informs anti-Black cultural anxieties over miscegenation and white degeneration in an Anglo-Saxon imagination. Additionally, a performative aspect to my lyrical misdirection exists. ‘Genes’ also refers to the black ‘jeans’ that I often usually wear on stage, which I sensually touch while, “I’m talkin bout genes.” My cross-racial desire for interracial anal penetration also effectively displaces whiteness from the equation in my yearning for Black material (genetic/phallic) that I lack, being “all Chinese.” I am of course activating malicious registers of masculinity within ideological stereotypes of masculinity that imagine Black masculinity as hypersexual and Asian masculinity as psychosexually castrated. Usually, such polarization works to the advantage of white supremacy by normalizing, and rendering invisible, white masculinity in its desire for a ‘bestial Black phallus’ or the ‘castrated and feminized Asian

anus.’ By eliding whiteness and recircuating its desire for racial others altogether, however, I am interested in the potential for cross-racial strength set in opposition to whiteness. ManChyna in this instance is queerly recycling the ethnic and sexual excesses presented in Minaj and Chua’s work. Like these women, I am disidentifying with some of the most malignant of queer and Asian tropes my body performatively exudes in order to highlight another trope that is central, but more hidden, in my celebration of Tiger Mom: the theme of improvement vis-à-vis difference. Putting these maternal figures in dialogue with each other, we are highlighting the conditions for minoritarian participation as a kind of ethnic authenticity rooted in a vague sense of biological improvement.

Such improvement via difference, however, is troubled by the always-present figure of death connoted by my queer re-figuration of interracial sex. By queerly refiguring the act of ‘seeding’ my queer, maternal belly I am of course recalling a history of queer anality that is always already abjected through a present and history of HIV/AIDS public health crises.\textsuperscript{732} Pharmaceutical developments, however, have recently opened a cultural space for gay, white rapper Cazwell to flippantly rhyme about taking pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV transmission, tenofovir/emtricitabine (trade name: Truvada), as casually as acetaminophen (Figure 22).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{cazwell_tweet.png}
\caption{Screencap of Cazwell's tweet, "Take that Truvada with a Piña Colada," publicly workshopping a rhyme, which ended up in his 2014 single, "Hot Homo (featuring Big Dipper)"}
\end{figure}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{732} Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” \textit{October} 43 (1987): 197–222.
Despite such advances and moderately better climates of social acceptance than in the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, criminalization of HIV-positive persons has rapidly increased in Ontario, Canada since “the 1998 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in R. v. Cuerrier, [1998] 2 S.C.R. 371, which established a requirement that HIV-positive people disclose their serostatus in situations of ‘significant risk of serious bodily harm.’”,733 As Canadian legal scholar Kate Sutherland points out, both liberal and conservative discussion of acts like anal sex deploy language of disgust and abjection in court room transcripts and legislative debates when discussing the criminalization of consensual sex acts (liberals to argue for confining sex to the private realm and conservatives to argue for its public criminalization).734 Such abjection recalls the winter of 1987 when Leo Bersani, responding to the Reagan era conservative mobilization against gay men, famously argued for a sex-affirming embrace of gay male abjection and the cultural associations linking anal sex with death. As Bersani’s essay (“Is the rectum a grave?”) points out, whiteness and heterosexuality of the ‘general public,’ or conservatives’ fetishistic formulation of the ‘family,’ was implicit in fears of homosexuals, African Americans, sex workers and intravenous drug users (i.e. the populations most devastated by HIV and AIDS in America).735 Such cultural anxieties rearticulate existing cultural anxieties over white miscegenation with darker bodies into an explosive, and arguably still present, fear of degeneration via subjects considered degenerate and deviant. In “Tiger Mom,” ManChyna’s sex-affirming embrace of miscegenation, family, cross-racial desire, anal sex, and disidentification with codes of purity re-circuits such cultural codes. But more importantly, such recoding

735 Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”
articulates early twentieth century anxieties over degeneration with late century celebrations of difference.

Like death and degeneracy, whiteness also haunts the very center of multicultural hybridity. While early twentieth century anxieties over white degeneration could be emblematized by the Group of Seven, Canada’s late twentieth century turn toward a seemingly guileless public celebration of multiculturalism might be better symbolized by a gift of art on display in Toronto, Ontario. Every week in the fall of 2014, I walked by a statue on Front Street in Toronto. On Canada Day in 1985, then mayor Arthur Eggleton revealed the “Monument to Multiculturalism” (Figure 23) by Italian artist Francesco Perilli in front of Canada’s busiest train station, Union Station.

Figure 23. "Monument to Multiculturalism," Francesco Perilli, 1985. The bronze statue was presented to the city of Toronto as a sesquicentennial gift by the National Congress of Italian Canadians on behalf of the Italian Canadian community. Photo titled "Statue outside Union Station" by Robert Taylor. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Commons.

According to Toronto Star writer, Kenneth Kidd, the statue’s critical reception was widely pronounced as ‘banal,’ ‘kitschy, ’trite,’ and ‘mediocre,’ but the artist maintained lofty ideals:

It represents a man who, at the center of the globe, joins two meridians; while the remaining meridians are held aloft by doves, a peace symbol in themselves. Moreover, the doves are symbolically meant to represent the cultural vitality of the
people who, with the man, *construct a new world*, under the banner of dialogue and mutual respect.\(^{736}\) (my emphasis)

Perilli equates his statue with the ideals of multiculturalism, the vitality of which can construct a new world that stands, he continues, “contrary to every racist attitude…fanatical fundamentalism…every act of terrorism…struggle between individuals, from violence to conflict to genocide.” Perilli explains that his work “is adverse, in short, to any supremacy of one over the other that can lead appallingly, as has sometimes and even recently occurred, to the moral indecency of ethnic purging.”\(^{737}\)

Despite being critically panned, other interpretations exist. More recently, Perilli and the Italian government have replicated and erected the statue in China, Italy, Bosnia, and South Africa, with potential sites in Germany and along the Palestinian and Israeli border.\(^ {738}\) Evidently, Perilli’s banal bronze statue of a naked, faceless man is appealing-*enough* to the multiple governments agreeing to incorporate it into their public cityscapes. Perilli imagines his statue and the multiculturalism it represents as markers of modern progress, symbolic of this brave new world’s evolution from its primitive attitudes. Yet the strength of *creation* intended for the bronze hands can conversely be interpreted as a destructive force too. As one passer-by notes, “They're bringing the world together…Or he may be tearing it apart. I don't know.”\(^{739}\)

Giving Perilli’s creative intentions serious attention, however, let us hypothetically agree the statue represents the impulse of an improved world through manly strength. Although

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\(^{737}\) Ibid.


\(^{739}\) Ibid.
faceless, the statue is clearly indebted to neoclassical revivalism, suggesting that, intentional or not, the manly strength of fusing ‘meridians’ of the world (possibly a metaphor for different cultures) is coded as white and European. Like Findlay and Köhler’s (Maclean’s) concern about multiculturalism in education, the faceless white man is the literal middle of a multicultural world, centering whiteness in a conversation about multiculturalism. If Multicultural Man’s straining hands represent the strength of character of these morally exalted, rationalistic white nationals, the peripheral doves might represent the minoritarians whose bodies become instrumentalized to shroud the central whiteness of this new world.

It is not just moral goodness, but the notion of strength that undergirds the matrix of multiculturalism, eugenics, and capitalism. While the veneer of goodness may rehabilitate whiteness, this image of forging this improved new world requires strength. The notion of strength is at the heart of Chua’s authoritarian parenting style. Strength is also at the core of the points system of multiculturalism, a prophylaxis against national degeneracy. Yet the fetish of racial purity that defined the early twentieth century had to, at least superficially, be set aside in order to balance the new priority of whiteness’ moral goodness with the persistent desire for national strength. Goodness and strength in the balancing act, however, are tied by the notion of improvement.

The notion of improvement through ethically minded absorption of ethnic plurality has its roots in a liberal compassion espoused by the softer sides of colonial cultural expansion. When it became strategic to legitimize settler-colonialism, colonizers have the option of justifying the hybridization of people as a positive; the colonists can think of themselves as ‘beneficently’ absorbing Indigenous women’s bodies and lands into white ownership, supposedly making each
better. John Lynch, for example, calls attention to the words of Colombian Pedro Fermin de Vargas:

> To expand our agriculture it would be necessary to hispanicize our Indians. Their idleness, stupidity, and indifference towards normal endeavours causes one to think that they come from a degenerate race which deteriorates in proportion to the distance from its origin... it would be very desirable that the Indians be extinguished, by miscegenation with the whites, declaring them free of tribute and other charges, and giving them private property in land.\(^{740}\)

Benedict Anderson, describing Fermin de Vargas as a nineteenth century liberal, points out the incongruous logic of extinguishing a ‘degenerate race’ and simultaneously declaring them ‘free of tribute… giving them private property and land.’\(^ {741} \) The perception of colonial liberation is undergirded by the logic of biological ‘betterment’ of Indigenous women through ‘distancing them from their origins’ (a gentler description of genocidal erasure). As mentioned Bonita Lawrence, in her critique of blood quantum as coming to define Indian-ness in Canada, argues that such logic continues to inform the ‘bleeding off’ of Indigenous people. The dominant culture has the ability incorporate the bodies of minoritarians through the genocidal intermarriage legislations of The Indian Act – a putative ‘improvement’ of Indigenous biologies via their metaphysical merger with the benevolence of whiteness.

Continuing with the history of Latin America, however, historian Jürgen Buchenau characterizes a rapid shift in thinking from the benevolence of whiteness to the strength of hybridity, influenced heavily (like the purity eugenics movements) by the ideas of Charles Darwin. Buchenau summarizes,

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\(^{741}\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 
In the late 1800s, Latin American intellectuals, many of whom were politicians, used Darwin's ideas to promote mass immigration from Europe to 'whiten' and so 'evolve' their people. Some 50 years later, Latin American thinkers abandoned this emphasis on European superiority and instead supported the racial mixing, education and unification of the region's existing populations.\textsuperscript{742}

Buchenau also points out that the wide variation of cultural interpretation of evolutionary ideas in this short period of time, “is testament to the extraordinary ability of people to bend Darwin's ideas to fit ever-changing intellectual and political contexts.”\textsuperscript{743}

The populations of Latin America mainly comprised African-heritage and Indigenous majorities, largely Catholicized, ruled by a small white elite that was divided in its vision for national development strategies. In the era of economic stagnation following the Latin American wars of independence from Europe in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Buchenau points out, the minority ruling class of whites tended to divide into liberals and conservatives, with each group having different takes on how to improve society. The conservatives, wary of Protestant nations such as the United States, favoured the development of internal economic markets. The liberals, many of whom had studied overseas, believed that foreign investment was key to building their countries' infrastructure.\textsuperscript{744}

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, until the 1930s, it was the liberals who gained power throughout Latin America…. developing export economies to feed Western demand for raw materials, liberal politicians sought to evolve their societies based on their own version of social Darwinism. They soaked up the latest ideas from Europe, and read the works of philosophers such as [social Darwinist] Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin and the inventor of eugenics.\textsuperscript{745}

\textsuperscript{743} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{744} Ibid., 284-285.
\textsuperscript{745} Ibid.
Buchenau characterizes two emerging strands of foreign-educated, white liberal modernizers, who exalted European culture: those supporting “hard inheritance” (in favour of ‘whitening’ their nation) or “soft inheritance” (those who believed “people's inheritable traits could be changed simply by altering their environment, including their education, diet and living conditions). Both groups believed that importing European traits, ideals, and labour would improve their nations, the former emphasizing white purity and the latter emphasizing strength through mixture.

Changing economic conditions influenced national development strategies. With the crumbling of export economies reliant on the west following the Great Depression and the death tolls of the First World War, Buchenau suggests, many Latin American countries grew disillusioned with the west, making room for the rise of a new group of intellectuals. These ‘cultural nationalists’ were also influenced by Social Darwinist ideas, but promoted “cultural nationalism and the unification of the multiracial societies in which they lived.” Buchenau gives the example of one such liberal modernizer, a student at Columbia University influenced by anthropologist Franz Boas:

In the 1930s, Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre … considered racial blending an advantage rather than a disadvantage. In an argument that became known as Lusotropicalism, Freyre maintained that the Portuguese colonists who brought African slaves to Brazil were uniquely suited to survive in the tropics and that the subsequent intermixing had created a harmonious society that contrasted positively with the racism persisting in the United States. … Freyre can be interpreted as borrowing from Darwin in arguing for the melding of races as a positive evolutionary step.746

Freyre’s socio-historical diagnosis of the racist land tenure system favouring whites, inherited from Portuguese colonizers, was a damning condemnation of the eugenics of white purity and,

746 Ibid.
for some, provided a ‘hopeful remedy.’\textsuperscript{747} In emphasizing cultural and biological hybridity, however, this hopeful remedy shares a seed of eugenic ideal of improving the nation, not through ‘whitening’ but through multicultural mixture. Purity and difference represents two sides of the same eugenic coin. These ideas, though, must be understood through an even older concept of the state-as-organic.

National strength and the organic theory of the state

Canada’s turn in the latter twentieth century toward a public face of multicultural celebration provides a similar context of liberalization to view the incorporation of people into white settler states: improvement of the state organism through the careful incorporation of ‘qualified’ immigrant labour. In Canada, this system is formalized by ‘points.’ While a prewar obsession with white purity was premised on strength, a shift toward multiculturalism and a putative welcome of difference do not suggest rejection of the pursuit of a strong nation. Supporting the genocidal erasure of ongoing colonialism, the related project incorporating Orientalized others into a system of anti-Black capitalism transfigures the eugenics of purity into a multicultural eugenics of hybridity. A twofold benefit follows from shoring up moral and potential labour superiority in the minds of national subjects willing to conditionally embrace difference: increasing gross domestic product by growing the labour pool and distributing tensions caused by anti-Indigenous and anti-Black sentiment among whites \textit{and} newcomers. The fluidity with which the ‘Oriental’ shifts in this pillared system of white supremacy is a fascinating history that today manifests as the mutable incorporation and co-construction of ‘appropriate’ Others,

or model minorities, which reputedly strengthen the multicultural state organism’s labour pool.

The idea of the nation-state itself is amorphous. In the decades following WWII and the atrocities that extremes of national devotion led to, many have attempted to terminologically parse the concepts. Walker Connor, for example, takes issue with the inter-utilization of nation and state, suggesting the latter to be a “major political subdivision of the world” and the former to be less tangible, whose “essence is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other people in a most vital way” and whose nature remains “shadowy and elusive.”

For Connor, the sense of nationhood is non-political, prefiguring Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities.” The instances when the two become conflated are rarer phenomena, according to Connor. The nation-state is the most extreme case of statism that becomes synonymous with nationalism, Japan and Germany being Connor’s nation-states par excellence. In Japan and Germany, statism, nationalism, and impulses of ethnic uniformity converge. This is not to say, however, that ethnic uniformity is antithetical to the settler colonial state composed of multiple nationalities converging. As discussed (Chapter 2), the work involved in whitening Indigenous land is a multigenerational task requiring considerable effort. In this way, imagined communities, ethnic and language groups, individual family heritages, national unity, and state interests frequently slip into and out of each other. The convergence of ethnic uniformity with bodily, or organismal, unity under the project of nation building is a blurry distinction that interdigitates in the cultural imaginary with notions of the nation as biological entity, strategically emphasizing purity and difference when economic and

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749 Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.
cultural demands necessitate.

The notion of the nation-state as a biological organism is as old as political philosophy and is made infamous in the twentieth century through its deployment by extreme nationalist regimes like Nazi Germany. Geoffrey Mure summarizes western Europe’s fluctuating orientations to organic theories of the state as,

maintained against individualist opposition by Plato and Aristotle…. revolt[ing] against Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke in [Britain] rejected it; but the British idealists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century upheld it, basing themselves not only on Plato and Aristotle but also on Rousseau, Fichte, and Hegel. In fact they argued it with such success that it might almost be said to have become orthodox in British philosophy although an undercurrent of individualist opposition always persisted.\textsuperscript{750}

The competing impulses toward collective organisms or as collections of individuals are such amorphous political ideals as to be oppositions that ‘always persist,’ regardless of the prevailing orientation of the day. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany, Mure continues,

[O]pposition to the organic theory became strong after Germany’s bid to dominate Europe in 1914. Her more recent second effort fanned it to violence in Western Europe. To the liberal individualists Mussolini’s corporate State and Hitler’s Third Reich appeared to damn the organic theory beyond redemption… ‘The organic state’ became a term of abuse to be applied to what its enemies regarded as a product of false theory, or to a certain type of existent state which they felt to be monstrosely wicked.\textsuperscript{751}

In other words, Mure suggests that the impulse toward individualism in modern states is, in part, a reaction to the extremes of nationalism that characterized the collectivistic view of the state as an organism.

Such a state organism, Friedrich Ratzel suggested, is akin to other living species.

\textsuperscript{751} Ibid., 205-206.
Ratzel was a trained zoologist, but extended his biological training and Darwinist influence to human social formations and became the reputed father of political geography (as well as inspiration for Nazi expansionism). The state organism, for Ratzel, has a life of its own, tied to a one-way relationship between the land and people that inhabit it – i.e. the population’s requirement of resources from the land. Such a greedy organism, according to Ratzel, requires an adequate Lebensraum (space to live).\textsuperscript{752} As Woodruff Smith notes in his review of the roots of Nazi imperialism, “Ratzel defined Lebensraum as the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence.”\textsuperscript{753} Overpopulation, Smith argues, was a formative concern in Germany’s colonial politics. The idea of ‘living space’ updates an older German impulse of expansionism from the Middle Ages, Ostsiedlung (eastern settlement), and provides a germinal seed of ideology (via Ratzel’s work) for the German National Socialists to base their nationalist imperialism.\textsuperscript{754} Additionally, according to Sarah Baranowski this existing German ideology is given new legitimacy by the previous successes of French and British colonial expansion into the Americas and their concomitant genocides of Indigenous people.\textsuperscript{755} As David Blackbourn suggests, Lebensraum was to Nazi Germany as the ‘frontier’ was to American expansion, noting explicit comparisons by economists (Gustav


\textsuperscript{755} Shelley Baranowski, Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Schmoller) and sociologists (Max Weber) between “the German east with the American west.” In other words, expanding the body of the nation by conquering so-called ‘untamed’ lands and people comprised a cultural project on which the cultural imagination of a globally dominant power rested.

The components of this national organism, labourers, have an important and paradoxical role in linking the repudiated organic theory with a liberal state characterized by a multicultural embrace of difference. The mutability of the ‘skills’ of workers and where those skilled workers can come from, geographically, are the key loci on which assemblages of capitalism, multiculturalism, and eugenics converge. In the period of eugenics purity, from which modern states and subjects wish to distance themselves, the best skilled subjects were envisioned as white. In a period of globalization, however, a eugenic logic of difference undergirds celebrations of multiculturalism, cultural hybridity, and the putative welcome of workers who are not necessarily white. The wager of bringing in Chinese rail workers, for example, already set an example for bringing in unwanted labourers if the need is great enough.

Purity and Difference Eugenics

So eugenics of difference and purity are always already twins under the logic of capitalist competition. But they are not the same. For one, celebration of difference via cultural hybridity parallels only the ‘positive’ branch of eugenics (promotion of traits) rather than the more familiar, and barbaric, ‘negative’ eugenics (extermination via sterilization and mass killings). And secondly, I am not suggesting that anywhere has a ‘multicultural eugenics of difference’ reached a level of systematization in the ways instituted by Nazi Germany. Rather, I am talking about the

germinal seeds of ideology around which a project like the latter could gather and organize their hateful ideology over a period of almost a century – from the publication of *Origins of Species* (1859)\(^{757}\) and the failed revolution of 1848 to Hitler’s rise leading up to WWII.

The links between German nationalist thought and social Darwinism are well documented.\(^ {758}\) Such links to social Darwinism fuelled not only the German but also international eugenics movements promoting white, Anglo-Saxon purity in the early twentieth century. In Germany, the perception of overcrowding of the Indo-Germanic race with Jewish and Slavic people, perceived as biologically inferior, fuelled local eugenics impulses while in the Americas Blacks and immigrants of various backgrounds in the cities were viewed in similarly denigrated light. Overpopulation was a key impulse in the imperial expansion of the German nation (for more *Lebensraum*).

Overpopulation was also key to the impulse of individualist competition and labour (considering the organic, collective state to be an ‘individual’). Ernst Haeckel was another zoologist cum political philosopher, social Darwinist advocate, founder of the Pan-German League, and contemporary of Ratzel’s. Haeckel argues, “Nowhere in nature, wherever you may look, does … idyllic peace exist … rather everywhere there is struggle and striving to destroy

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\(^{757}\) Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (P. F. Collier & Son, 1909 (1859)).

one's neighbor and competitor.\textsuperscript{759} For people like Haeckel, the impulse of individualist competition, as applied to the collective national organism, is derived from fears of overpopulation and scarcity of resources (just like the imperialist concept of \textit{Lebensraum}). As Richard Weikart explains, Haeckel imagined such competition as a progressive force for capitalist societies:

For Haeckel economic competition illustrated the universal and inevitable rivalry in human society. He favored free competition among workers because this would foster improvement. One beneficial consequence of economic competition is the division of labor, which ‘constantly furthers mankind, and urges every individual branch of human activity into new discoveries and improvements.’\textsuperscript{760}

Echoing the assertions of Adam Smith ("the greatest improvements in the productive powers of labour … have been the effects of the division of labour,"\textsuperscript{761} Haeckel suggests that competition begets the division of labour, which ultimately improves society – at least its productive capacity. And the best labourers, according to Haeckel, are derived from a specific group: whites.

Haeckel, in his taxonomy of twelve species of humans (36 races overall), conceived Caucasians (\textit{Homo mediterraneus})\textsuperscript{762} as being, “from time immemorial … placed at the head of all races of men, as the most highly developed and perfect.”\textsuperscript{763} To justify the colonial expansion around him, Haeckel goes on to say,

\begin{quote}
at present [the ‘species’ of humanity that includes Caucasians] is spread over the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{762} It is unsurprising that even in Haeckel’s descriptions of \textit{Homo mediterraneus}, he confusingly applies ‘Caucasian’ to both the entire ‘species’ of whites and a subgroup, “the least important…now confined to the districts of Mount Caucasus” (570-572)
\textsuperscript{763} Haeckel, \textit{The History of Creation}, 570.
whole earth, and is overcoming most of the other species in the struggle for existence. In bodily as well as in mental qualities, no other human species can equal the Mediterranean. This species alone (with the exception of the Mongolian) has had an actual history; it alone has attained to that degree of civilization which seems to raise man above the rest of nature.\textsuperscript{764}

Both colonial and economic successes of the ‘higher races of man’ (Haeckel suggests there are eight, Caucasians at the top) are then explained, for Haeckel, by the mental and physical qualities of the ‘highly developed and perfect’ Caucasian people in global struggles for land and resources. Haeckel’s (and his many social Darwinist contemporaries) presumption of ‘skill’ and ‘development’ of whites (specifically, the \textit{Germani} - Scandinavians and Germans, Netherlands and Anglo-Saxons) drives the various eugenics projects for ethnic purity,\textsuperscript{765} the assumption being that keeping these ‘species’ from mixing would prevent degeneration of the so-called perfect race.

Of course now, geneticists generally reject the application of racist hierarchies and teleological notions of ‘progress’ onto the blind process of evolution, but the ideas that inform a sense of hopefulness in novelty (like Freyre contended) were always already contained in the same texts advocating for purity under scientific racism. The misconception that evolution has a direction, moving toward some ideal is rightfully seen as a “regrettable misapplication… of scientific advancements … warped to fit prejudicial agendas.”\textsuperscript{766} Yet even in the works of Haeckel, the same text that gave the world a taxonomy of human species reigned by the white \textit{Homo mediterraneus}, a conditional celebration of novelty and mixture can also be found. In \textit{The History of Creation}, Volume 1, Haeckel lays out Darwinian ideas of selection by comparing natural selection with artificial breeding (animal husbandry and horticulture), both using

\textsuperscript{764} Ibid., 571.
\textsuperscript{765} Ibid., 574.
inheritance and adaption as counteracting processes of selection in ‘the struggle for life.’ Each, according to Haeckel, could be harnessed for organismal improvement:

in artificial selection the will of man makes the selection according to a plan, whereas in natural selection, the struggle for life (that universal inter-relation of organisms) acts without a plan, but otherwise produces quite the same result, namely, a selection of a particular kind of individuals for propagation. (original emphasis)

Those like Haeckel who endorsed eugenics of white purity also emphasized trait inheritance.

Unlike in nature, however, Haeckel advocated for the use of so-called ‘plans’ (forced sterilizations, xenophobic immigration restrictions, and ethnic cleansing) – a helping hand for nature.

Adaptation through difference, although derided in his scheme, is not altogether rejected in Haeckel’s opinion:

Adaptation, … which counteracts inheritance, is the centrifugal or external formative tendency…. to create new forms out of those existing …. If we carefully watch the proceedings of an artificial selector—a farmer or a gardener—we find that only these two constructive forces are used by him for the production of new forms. The whole art of artificial selection rests solely upon a thoughtful and wise application of the laws of Inheritance and Adaptation, and upon their being applied and regulated in an artistic and systematic manner. Here the will of man constitutes the selecting force.

The ‘will of man,’ and the artistry of the farmer or gardener are praised for ‘his’ selection of novel traits to make new species of animals and plants. Perhaps the creative force of Perilli’s ‘multicultural man’ can also be celebrated for such artistry – forging a new, multicultural world by pulling together meridians from around the globe. Celebrations of novelty, like in Freyre’s multiracial Brazil and Chua’s visions of her own daughters, are strategically premised on the notion of ‘hybrid vigour.’

Hybrid vigour

767 Haeckel, The History of Creation., 306.
768 Ibid., 450-452.
While hybridity in the cultural sense acts as an anti-essentialist metaphor for colonial anxiety, I return to hybridity’s biological roots, which I suggest inform both the cultural fears and, paradoxically, the hopefulness of racial mixing. If biology connects social Darwinism to state level programs of genocide and imperialism through convergences of Lebensraum, inheritance, and organic theories of the state, what is the metaphysical connection between the scientific roots of cross breeding and multicultural hybridity? In what epistemological framework does Chua’s barely concealed celebration of Sino-American hybridity in her own daughters make sense? Freyre’s solution of multraciality was, as Jürgen Buchenau suggests, a nationalist’s application of evolutionary ideas – adaption via difference – to national problems of racist social hierarchies in Brazil. What about the Canadian context of the 1960s and 1970s, a period of liberalized immigration reform, made it a fertile ground to legislate Multiculturalism in opposition to the former policies of keeping Canada white? Does this cultural and political moment represent a hard break from the eugenics movements popular in prewar Canada? Or has the eugenic ideal of ‘improving the nation’ persisted into an age of self-exalted modernists, putatively celebrating difference within a cult of multiculturalism?

In biology, hybrid vigour is also referred to as heterosis and was first systematically characterized by Charles Darwin. Reviewing the molecular mechanisms of hybrid vigour in the journal Cell, Z. Jefferey Chen provides a generally accepted definition of the phenomenon in the broadest sense:

heterosis or hybrid vigor is evolutionarily defined as that the heterozygotes [a cell or organism that, in reference to a gene locus, has different gene variants] have higher fitness in a population than the homozygotes [parent cell/organism with identical gene variants at the same gene locus].

Genetic ‘fitness’ refers to the reproductive success of a genetic (genotype) or physical (phenotype) characteristic and can be measured in a variety of ways. In plants, as Charles
Darwin noted, cross-breeds exhibit greater vigour of growth, survival, and fertility in hybrids than in the parents and thus increase allele frequency in subsequent generations; this is the reason crossing breeds of plants and animals has long been a useful farming practice. However, as Baranwal et al (2012) suggest that even though hybrid vigour is one of the most widely utilized phenomena, not only in agriculture but also in animal breeding…. our knowledge of the underlying molecular processes that results in hybrid vigour can best be defined as superficial. Even after century long deliberations, there is no consensus on the relative/individual contribution of the genetic/epigenetic factors in the manifestation of heterosis.

Only now, as Baranwal et al summarize, are models of hybrid vigour emerging that integrate direct gene actions, epigenomic factors, and transcription factors. In the century following Darwin’s publication of Origin of Species social applications of inheritance to eugenics programs of purity were popularized. Competing ideas, however, co-existed in the public imagination, such as Freyre’s treatise, extolling the virtues of genetic mixing and adaptation, but did not have the same degree of penetration as the former. In other words, the disagreements between purity and mixture have always already co-existed both scientifically and in their applications to human social policies – twin processes of inheritance and adaption, as Haeckel points out.

Such (mis)applications of genetics and evolution to human sociality can be understood as a convergence of religio-scientific discourse. The key link between scientific understandings of hybrid vigour and understandings of its social application is the metaphysical translation through religious philosophies of American modernism. Lara Vetter explores American modernism

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769 “I raised close together two large beds of self-fertilised and crossed seedlings from the same plant of Linaria vulgaris. To my surprise, the crossed plants when fully grown were plainly taller and more vigorous than the self-fertilised ones.” (Darwin (The Effects of Cross and Self Fertilisation in the Vegetable Kingdom, 1876)

through the particular intersections of science and religion in the works of poets and novelists, Mina Loy and Jean Toomer. In their works, Vetter suggests that

Both [Loy and Toomer] espoused idealist philosophies consistent with notions of spiritual evolution – Loy, through the lenses of Christian Science and Henri Bergson; Toomer, by exposure to the theories of Georges Gurdjieff, of popular historian and psychologist Gerald Heard, of psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke, and of an array of other thinkers on evolution and race.\(^771\)

Both writers, Loy and Toomer, aligned their views of spirituality with modernist views of science and evolution. In their minds, religious spirituality and a human essence can evolve just like our bodies.

Loy and Toomer’s opinions about spirituality dovetailed with ideas about evolution because, as Vetter points out, their bodies played an important role in their respective support for eugenic mixture. Each, according to Vetter, suffered from anxieties about frailty related to various physical conditions and diseases they experienced; but Vetter also suggests that “race is central to their fears about the physical body, as both return obsessively to the issues of evolution and racial identity in their writings.”\(^772\) Each wanted to “escape the body’s ‘prison,’” requiring both an act of individual will – an exertion of control over one’s own body – and a social agenda of eugenics – an attempt at control over future bodies. It is not, however, a form of eugenics intended to purify the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ but rather a eugenics of ‘hybrid vigor,’ … the mixing of races. … crossbreeding between those of different races produces a unique level of self-awareness in the consciousness of what Loy termed ‘mongrel’ offspring.\(^773\)

In their American context, Loy and Toomer espoused the same exaltation of biological hybridity and modernist ideals of science as Freyre advocated for in Brazil during the same timeframe, when eugenics purity infused popular discourse internationally. The neoliberalization of

\(^772\) Ibid.
\(^773\) Ibid.
improvement – ‘control over one’s own body’ – and the focus on ‘future bodies’ are the themes that emerge in the epistemic shift from purity to mixture in Canada’s mid-century turn toward multiculturalism and ‘points system’ of immigration.

For Loy and Toomer, America’s ‘melting pot’ represented an ideological emergence of a ‘new race’ of people. As Vetter explains, America held a special place in the minds of Loy, a British-American immigrant, and Toomer, a mixed race American. For these modernist writers, it is in the ‘melting pot’ of America that each finds an acceleration of the evolutionary process. For Loy, the rapidly evolving [she writes,] ‘America is a miracle: incomparable/to the tortoise history/ of your ancestors’ In its hybridization and ‘accelerated life-tempo,’ she depicts America as the catalyst for evolutionary transformation from physical life to immaterial, energetic existence. For Toomer, the unprecedented mixing of races in America is leading to a new evolutionarily superior race, ‘The New American,’ which combines the best elements of every major race category (African, Caucasian, and Asiatic, to Toomer’s mind) into a being with a heightened spiritual sense. Because ‘interbreeding has taken place among the peoples of America sufficiently to have given a biological meaning to the term ‘melting pot,’ Toomer argues, ‘in America we have a new body.’ … they might be seen as participating in a kind of nativist project that theorizes American identity along racial lines.\(^\text{774}\)

The ‘nativism’ of an imagined ‘New American’ contributes to the ongoing cultural and erasure of actual Indigenous people, vis-à-vis the exaltation of new migrants and their hybrid offspring. The latter, even in the 2010 US census, only constituted 2.9% of the population and at the time of Loy and Toomer’s writing constituted a number of people that rounded to 0.0% the US population.\(^\text{775}\) This is to say that these modernists’ fantasies about a ‘New Hybrid American’ did

\(^{774}\) Ibid., 112-113.

\(^{775}\) Only after 1950 did some regions of the US begin collecting data on mixed parenting, the definition of which shifted from patrilineal to matrilineal between 1970 and 1980. Before midcentury, non-Chinese, -Japanese, and -Filipino Asian/Pacific Islanders and mixed race people (mixed Native, Black, and/or white) were grouped as ‘other’ (site in evernote). Even this amalgamated ‘other’ group only constituted <0.1% of the total population. More precisely, 0.1% is the 1970 level, because between 1950 and 1970, estimates rounded to 0.0. Prior to 1950, the US Census Bureau (2002 table) reports that this category is ‘not applicable.’ Nicholas A. Jones
not match their reality. Instead, such a fantasy functions as an ideological seed added to the multi-faceted US colonial project of writing over Indigenous lands and people with the myth of a New American, comprising – with empty praise – hearty immigrants (that in reality remained mostly white, Anglo-Saxons).

In contrast to America’s ‘melting pot,’ Canada’s ‘salad bowl’ or ‘mosaic’ of multiculturalism similarly constructs a new national figure of ideology that inoffensively manages difference within Canada. Perilli’s “Multicultural Man” and his doves personify the abstract ideal of multiculturalism as a sign of peace, but who is Multicultural Man? In the 1980s, Kogila Moodley described multiculturalism as an Anglo-Canadian ideology that emphasizes “the non-controversial, expressive aspects of culture” to neutralize the political claims of French Canadians and Indigenous people, and ultimately conceals an entrenched ethnocentric (white supremacist) hierarchy of races. As Eva Mackey similarly argues, Canadian multicultural policy emerged in the 1960s as a response to “the emergence of Québec separatism and also the increased politicisation of cultural minorities,” such as Indigenous people’s struggles for self-determination and increasing demands of people of colour for social justice and full citizenship; this, Mackey continues, developed into “a mode of managing internal differences within the nation and, at the same time, created a form through which the nation could be

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776 Moodley, “Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology.”
imagined as distinct and differentiated from external others such as the United States. 778 In addition to the practical internal management of difference and the symbolic differentiation of Canada from the United States, other scholars point to multiculturalism’s ability to recuperate the modern benevolence of whiteness.

And so, hybrid vigour is a religio-scientific logic that promotes the improvement of the national organism. Hybrid vigour undergirds eugenic difference and was always the twin of eugenic purity, only less popular over the centuries as a political explanation for national development. In the post-multicultural age of celebrated cultural hybridity, hybrid vigour underpins the zeal of hybrid-based assimilation practices. Amy Chua’s Battle Hymn is an exemplary text that showcases this zeal. Chua’s disassimilation with the intergenerational merger of her Chinese foreignness with American exceptionalism lays the groundwork for my own parodic sendup of the conditions of liberal multicultural capitalism.

Epilogue

So, please, call me Dr. ManChyna. He is both model minority and faggot chinaman par excellence. His is the embodied minoritarian consciousness I follow and use to map the implicit spatial whiteness of liberal multiculturalism. This is the new whiteness, hungry for difference and amnesic of its past. That past, always already present, is deeply connected to conditioning logics of eugenics, sexual assimilation, Indigenous erasure, and racial violence. Following ManChyna through intimate encounters with such spaces, the logics of the new whiteness reveal themselves through a process of embodied sensation, congealing the excessive difference ManChyna represents. But my presumed assimilability also directs my critical cartography of this new whiteness. Utilizing keys of inclusion – participatory merriment, supplicating to promises of sexual intimacy, and white racial exaltation – I critically map the conditions of the new whiteness that contour my mobility and inadvertently reveal the illusion of its promissory exaltation and assimilation.

Disassimilation is my neologism connecting disidentification with the narrative of assimilation available to model minorities and homonationals, and it is my theoretical contribution to performance studies. Building on Muñoz’s disidentification, disassimilation both narrows and broadens the scope of the former. Disassimilation is on the one hand a subset of disidentification, parodying the fictions of assimilation. On the other hand disassimilation takes disidentification off the ‘stage’ proper. Through the strategy of disassimilation in its many forms of participation I ingratiate myself with the conditioning forces of the new whiteness. It is a contradictory and sometimes repugnant mode of survival within phobic publics. Yet I simultaneously parody the narrative of model minority excellence offered to me, culminating in
my racial and sexual marriage of assimilability and deviance as the pathological tiger mom. She is ManChyna at his best and worst, an examplar of disassimilation.

Tiger mom, however, only partially describes my method of autoethnographic creatography. Each of my songs, videos, and performances comprise a creation that weaves together and aestheticizes my experiences of minoritarian mobility and assimilation. Some more than others enable the embodiment of theory. “Brokeback That Ass Up” the song, for example, is a disidentificatory text that kitschily parodies the white homonormativity of the canonical gay film I reference. Yet creating the video for the song expanded my disidentification into a disassimilatory analysis of whitened rurality, emplaced in Algonquin territory. Such autoethnographic creatography utilizes my racialized queer Asianness to disassimilate into tropes of model minoritarianism and homonationalism. Situated in this particular Algonquin space, colonially whitened through attempted Indigenous erasure and racial exploitation, my performance of disassimilation dislocates the naturalized relationship between whiteness and rurality, toward recognizing rightful Indigenous authority of the land.

My performances also bring me into intimate contact with whitened multicultural spaces. By contrasting my performance in BoylesqueTO with Thobani’s very different critique of government, our disassimilation with Canadian modernity illuminates the condition for public speech acts available to minoritarians. Critical attention is most palatable to the racially exalted when it reaffirms their exaltation. In contrast, my performances extend my autoethnographic creatography to map the intimate moments offered by the racially exalted to minoritarians as a carrot of assimilation. Such promissory exaltation is both fictional and conditioning, always ready to cast a light of primordialism onto the bodies of the minoritarian.
In spite of the grim theoretical picture ManChyna animates, he is also my methodological tool of autocritical humour that strategically yields to but refuses the cultural logics of the new whiteness. By thinking with the pleasures of performance, I offer minoritarians an apparatus of critical laughter and political pleasures, within and against the demands of majoritarian culture. In the face of inclusionary statist nationalism that attempts to enfranchise minoritarian subjectivity, we can still find deep swishy pleasures in each other’s enunciations. Even though the new, kinder and gentler, whiteness still wants to consume and discipline our bodies, our performances can and do enable survival within and mockery of its inclusionary fictions.
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Appendix A.

Excerpt of conversation between A.W. Lee (ManChyna) and Greg Wong (Wrong Note Rusty), May 25, 2009, Google Chat. Original spelling and capitalization is retained.

11:22 AM
greg: thank you!

me: haha
np
we should talk about the scene

greg: ...
yeah, are you still up for doing something for the pride show? something orientalist? haha
i kinda don't have the energy to make a whole new solo

me: yes! i have been kicking ideas around
11:23 AM
but i want to do it right

greg: okay that's great!!! i'm totally onboard for having a serious discussion on how to do it right
...
me: i have some sound clip ideas

but i didn't know what you wanted to do
11:28 AM
greg: to be honest i havent given it much thought!

siamese twins is very circus-y but it could even be like a fan dance
11:30 AM
me: well i kind of wanted to focus on the fact that we were attached
11:31 AM
like, i wanted to start out with the Siamese cat song, but only briefly... at that point we're playing into the stereotype and we could have fans and maybe kimonos.... but i want us to quickly shed all that

greg: oh okay so you're all for the conjoinedness? i'm easy then, let's do it

HAHA ... and then?

me: and then have the entry of the gladiators come on... you know that quick part of it that sounds like slap stick?

like, in the Simpsons with the little [?] in the car
just the first part

at 14 seconds
like when we shed all our asian stereotypes, we could be like, 'we quit
and then try to walk away from each other

and get rubber banded back into each other

and we could do a variety of 3 stooges things to separate from each other

like pull out plastic saws and jack hammers?

explosives?

the chinese did invent TNT

greg: ha!!!

so move from orientalism into slapstick ?

me: but in the end, we say, eff it and drape the CHina flag over our shoulders and walk away

yes!

... walk away still attached

haha

i didn't think i could type all that

greg: haha

me: what do you think?

HAHAHAH

um

greg: the only thing i think is that ... i saw a siamese twin act by the cinnamon hearts and i think it almost begs slapstick . is that maybe too obvious ?
me: uh, no

hahaha..

what did they do?

greg: I almost was thinking, music goes to "i think i'm turning japanese" and then some sort of appropriation of "stuffwhitepeoplelike"

but then the more i think about it the less i want to do it
11:37 AM
me: haha, i guess.. i thought about that song, but it's just not good to perform to

greg: yeah it's kind of steady rock n roll
11:38 AM
hmmm in the act they did it to a song about sisters, and they stripped awkwardly

and in the end they had a parasitic twin between them

me: haha. that's funny

greg: like one would bite the glove of the other's hand
11:39 AM
me: well i wasn't thinking us sexually stripping each other

i was more thinking us feverishly stripping to find out why we can't separate. and then find out we're actually attached

and doing lots of stuff to break our bond.

greg: haha ... well i LOVE your idea of whipping out a saw. i think it's awesome

me: ACTUALLY
11:40 AM
greg: but i think to make that make sense there would need to be sort of a backstory to why we don't want to be together.

me: in addition to the fan part in the beginning, one of us could introduce the saw as a musical instrument
11:41 AM
i thought it would be obvious that we were both sick of being used as oriental sideshow freaks

greg: O. M. G

me: when the music comes to a screeching halt and we try to get rid of our kimonos and fans
greg: haha ... because an er-woo totally sounds like a saw

and plays like one too

me: what's that?
11:42 AM
greg: that whiny chinese instrument

me: yes!

exactly what i was thinking

greg: my cousin plays that professionally

me: but i didn't know it's name

of course your cousin does!

greg: lol she was my piano teacher too right
11:43 AM
UM

i have kind of wanted there to be an instance of noodle throwing ever since bruin$^{779}$ was going to do "my favourite things" and have schnitzel with noodles in his coat

would it be too far to have the "screeching to a halt, i've had enough" moment be because someone threw noodles at us?
11:44 AM
me: okay!

greg: or would that be outrageously offensive to good taste

me: no! it makes sense. like we are so outraged

that we quit

and try to walk away
11:45 AM
greg: i kind of want to make an erwoo just so i can smash it

me: i'm trying to google an image of it

greg: it should be easy, small cardboard box , a stick and some string

$^{779}$ Bruin Pounder (Christopher Hayden), member of BoylesqueTO
me: aha.... i was thinking that we could use the plastic saw instead... so that there is a reason it's on stage.
unless you're not into the idea of slapstick trying to rip apart

i think it's symbolic

actually i think all of it is symbolic

greg: oh right right right sorry i got wrapped up in the cultural accuracy

me: haha.

like in the beginning, around the time the cat song would come up, one of us could be playing the saw

greg: oh, "erhu" is how they spell it

me: and one of us could be using a fan

ah

greg: i had to search up "chinese violin" to get it

me: i will find it


me: haha

nice. that's exactly what i was thinking of

greg: wait what's the cat song ?

me: We are Siamese

greg: oooohhhhh

okay yeah that's good

me: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxpN2XrYDLM

Updated link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdDla0QW844
greg: is that from a disney movie or am i just making shit up

YES! I KNEW IT

i was thinking aristocats

OMG I am LOLLING SO HARD
11:50 AM
me: haha. so do you like the trajectory of this?

greg: i'm gonna pee

wow the accents are really awful
11:51 AM
me: to recap... i was thinking using a fan and the saw for 20/30 seconds, maybe using the first part of the cat song for 30/40 seconds, and then for about a minute and a half we would be feverishly ripping or clothes off and trying to break away from each other
11:52 AM
but eventually realizing that we belong together and drape a chinese flag over our shoulders like Rocky

greg: hot ! i like it
11:53 AM
can we also wear a lot of cheesy makeup and then wipe it off ?

me: yes!

greg: i kind of want people to see the asian face underneath the "asian face"

me: haha. that's funny

like powdered faces?
11:54 AM
and small red lips

greg: yes, with heavy lines at the eyes of course

me: of course!

greg: draggy geisha purple colours of eye shadow

me: okay! so we have a good start.
11:55 AM
i can splice together some music
and i will add in sounds of erhu
and sawing

greg: HAHA

me: etc

greg: right on ... i bet we could just borrow a fan from someone
11:56 AM
like a BIG one,

unless you think , small fans ?

me: yeah, or go to china town

well whatever we can get ahold of

greg: omg ... shopping in chinatown for this act is going to be too much fun
..."excuse me, can i have your most tacky and oriental items"

me: haha

i was also thinking of somehow bringing in that cat with the bobbing hand

but i didn't know how to incorporate it

greg: OMG I JUST LOLLED SO HARD

i think my abs cramped

me: hahaha
11:58 AM

greg: we'll think of something

let me know if i start crossing lines btw

i was the one who thought it would be hilarious to have a Boys Gone Wild wet t-shirt contest at
the Feminist Porn Awards

that got vetoed
11:59 AM
me: haha. i think that would have been fun and sexy

greg: i know right ?!

me: and yes i will tell you. you do the same.
greg: absolutely. wait aren't you the one who threw corn at people

me: actually, i chewed it up and spit it at the audience...

greg: so THAT's what that was all about
12:02 PM
i have so much to learn from you

..
Appendix B.

Text of Alexandra Wallace, a former UCLA undergraduate, complaining about Asians in the UCLA library.

According to Wallace,

The problem is these hordes of Asian people that UCLA accepts into our school every single year, which is fine. But if you’re going to come to UCLA then use American manners…. all the Asian people that live in all the apartments around me, their moms and their brothers and their sisters and their grandmas and their grandpas and their cousins and everybody that they know that they brought along from Asia with them? Comes here on the weekends to do their laundry, buy their groceries, and cook their food for the week. It’s seriously without fail. You will always see old Asian people running around this apartment complex every weekend. That’s what they do. They don’t teach their kids to fend for themselves. (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIXIBat62eU)

Nor do such “old Asians” teach kids manners, Wallace suggests, because in the library they loudly yell “[picks up an imaginary phone] Ohhh Ching Chong Ling Long Ting Tong, Ohhhhh…. I swear they’re going through their whole family, just checking on everybody from the tsunami thing” (ibid).
Appendix C.


Original

Give me freedom, give me fire, give me reason, take me higher
See the champions, take the field now, you define us, make us feel proud

In the streets our heads are lifting, as we lose our inhibition,
Celebration, it's around us, every nations, all around us

Singing forever young, singing songs underneath that sun
Let's rejoice in the beautiful game, and together at the end of the day.
We all say,

[Chorus:]
When I get older
I will be stronger
They'll call me 'Freedom'
Just like a wavin' flag
And then it goes back, and then it goes back
And then it goes back, and then it goes...

Born to a throne, stronger than Rome
But violent-prone, poor people zone,

But it's my home, all I have known,
Where I got grown, streets we would roam

Out of the darkness, I came the farthest
Among the hardest survival
Learn from these streets, it can be bleak,
Accept no defeat, surrender retreat

[Bridge:]
So we strugglin'
Fightin' to eat
And we wonderin'
When we'll be free

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So we patiently wait  
For that fateful day  
It's not far away,  
But for now we say:

[Chorus]

So many wars, settlin' scores,  
Bringing us promises, leaving us poor,

I heard them say, love is the way  
Love is the answer, that's what they say

But look how they treat us, make us believers  
We fight their battles, then they deceive us

Try to control us, they couldn't hold us  
'Cause we just move forward like Buffalo soldiers

[Bridge]

[Chorus]

Coca-Cola Celebration Remix

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh oh. [2x]  

Give me freedom, give me fire, give me reason, take me higher.  
See the champions, take the field now, unify us, make us feel proud.  
In the streets our heads are liftin', as we lose our inhibition.  
Celebration it surrounds us, every nation, all around us.

Staying forever young, singin' songs underneath the sun.  
Let's rejoice in the beautiful game.  
And together at the end of the day,  
We all say,

When I get older, I will be stronger.  
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.  
And then it goes back,  
And then it goes back,  
And then it goes back,  
And then it goes...

When I get older, I will be stronger.  
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.  
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes...

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh oh. [2x]

Give you freedom, give you fire, give you reason, take you higher.
See the champions, take the field now, unify us, make us feel proud.
In the streets our heads are liftin', as we lose our inhibition.
Celebration it surrounds us, every nation, all around us.

Staying forever young, singin' songs underneath the sun.
Let's rejoice in the beautiful game.
And together at the end of the day,
We all say,

When I get older, I will be stronger.
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes...

When I get older, I will be stronger.
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes...

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh oh oh. [2x]

We all say,

When I get older, I will be stronger.
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes...

When I get older, I will be stronger.
They'll call me freedom. Just like a wavin' flag.
And then it goes back,
And then it goes back,
And then it goes...
And then it goes...

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh oh.
And everybody will be singin' it.
Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh oh.
And we all will be singin' it.