PSYCHIC POSITIONS

PSYCHIC POSITIONS:
CHINESE CANADIAN WRITING IN
MULTICULTURAL CANADA

By

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Masters of Arts.**

MASTER OF ARTS (2002)   McMaster University
(English)   Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Psychic Positions: Chinese Canadian Writing in Multicultural Canada.

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Number of Pages: vi, 153.

ABSTRACT

Canadian multicultural policy today serves to define Canadian national identity to both its citizens and the international community at large. In 1971, the federal government officially began to implement an ideology of cultural pluralism, which today serves to guide all Canadian policies, program initiatives, and laws. But while Canada enjoys a reputation as a country free from the racism plaguing the United States and other competing Western nations, numerous activists, academics, historians and politicians have questioned official multiculturalism's ability to truly eradicate racism. In fact, they argue, the policy has quite the opposite effect, entrenching racist ideology under a veneer of liberal inclusion, and masking the asymmetrical relations of power governing interaction between whites and non-whites in this country.

While several excellent materialist criticisms of Canadian multiculturalism are available today, these studies have confined their analyses for the most part to structural forms of racism engendered through legislative and popular discourses. This study seeks to build upon the work begun by these theorists by offering an analysis of the psychic or affective effects of racism upon racialized minority subjects and a reconsideration of the way in which marginal subjectivities are engendered through racist discourses. In order to achieve this end, this study traces the history of legislative and popular racism against a particularly marginalized ethnic group, the Chinese, from their arrival in the mid-nineteenth century up to their current position in multicultural Canada. In order to explore

fully the psychic dimensions of racism, this study also includes an examination of select Chinese Canadian literature in English by Wayson Choy and Fred Wah. These texts not only lend voice to the history of exclusion faced by the Chinese in Canada, but theorize about alternative hybrid subjectivities that offer both sites of individual and cultural expression, and valuable anti-racist politics.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity to thank several people, without whom this project would not have been possible. Firstly, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Coleman, for his thorough, insightful, frequently tough, but always kind criticism of this thesis, as well as his emotional and intellectual support over the past several years.

I'd also like to thank Dana Hansen for her kind ear through many brainstorming sessions, and Mary Chan for her keen editing eye, thoughtful and helpful interest in this project, and absolute impatience for my overly lengthy prose.

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Introduction: Writing 'Canadian' Subjectivity in Multicultural Canada.

[Canada] is faced with a stupefying ignorance [that denies that] there is racism in this country.

Dionne Brand

We demanded some genuine reforms—some changes…and instead we got *multiculturalism*.

Himani Bannerji

Why write? The way in which a writer of color in Canada might respond to such a question is layered with a number of related questions: For whom do you write? How do you define your community, and in what ways does your writing reflect upon your experience within it? For writers coded as 'ethnic' or 'visible minority' in this country, the answers to these questions bear the traces of multiple histories of government and popular racism through which racialized subjects have been discriminated against, marginalized, and oppressed. Over three decades ago, the federal government departed from a policy of explicit racism by abandoning its practice of legislating immigration based upon race or country of origin, and instituting instead a universal point system to determine eligibility for entry. The advent of an official policy of multiculturalism followed soon after. Can this shift in legislation and national ideology be considered a progressive step towards anti-racist politics?

Our country presently defines itself to its citizens and to the international community at large through its commitment to multiculturalism, extolling the free

exchange of cultural values and products that are encouraged, rather than suppressed in the name of nationalism. The current incarnation of Canadian multicultural policy, enshrined both within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and legislated as law at all levels of government, has come to serve a pedagogical function: various multicultural festivals, funding programs, laws, and other areas of public discourse *instruct* Canadian citizens on the proper way to show national loyalty, or to show 'unity in our difference.' Conversely, such instruction extends to the rest of the world as Canada seeks to differentiate itself from the American cultural monolith to the south and the trace memory of the British colonial empire to which we are still indebted.

Multicultural policy has also become nearly synonymous with liberal inclusionism, an ideology that serves to both determine present and future policy decisions while it simultaneously animates and reifies Canada's imagined past as a benevolent and tolerant nation, founded upon the British legal system and a world away from the brutal and repressive subordinating practices of our American neighbors. While the public face of Canadian multiculturalism appears enlightened and respectful of cultural difference, official discourses of cultural exchange elide the asymmetrical relations of power that still govern the interaction between whites and non-whites in this country. Those classified as 'visible minorities' through immigration legislation, media discourses and government funding and programs frequently find that the assumption of 'citizenship' in Canada is considerably more problematic for those whose skin color marks them as ec-centric, abnormal, or 'other.' Does the shift away from discriminatory legislation towards a policy based upon enlightened liberal inclusionism truly eradicate

racism? In what ways is multicultural policy complicit not only in entrenching racist perceptions and norms of behavior in the national psyche, but also complicit in *producing* racial classifications in which non-white bodies are scripted as binary opposites to normal, or "*Canadian*-Canadians" (Mackey 2)?

While I wish to distance myself from the political views put forward by Neil Bissoondath in his seminal text, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, I can certainly identify with his contention that "any one critical of multicultural policy...is immediately branded a racist" (Bissoondath 5). To those who would level such accusations at me or at the dozens of activists, academics, historians and politicians who are similarly critical of this policy, I would ask one simple question: has multicultural policy effected any real change in racist attitudes towards persons of color in Canada? Before answering this question, I would invite such people to examine media representations of non-white immigrants and 'visible minority' citizens in this country, representations in which a turban in a legion can still incite furious debates over the way in which *they* are infringing upon *our* system of values, in which boatloads of Chinese refugees desperately fleeing poverty and political oppression appear as an invading horde upon the west coast that is reminiscent of the yellow peril fears of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and where reporting of crimes committed by black individuals are still considered representative of the African Canadian community as a whole.

This study seeks to engage with multicultural discourse in Canada both as an official policy and an ideological imperative upon which Canadian national identity is currently founded. As a white male middle-class academic, experiential aspects of being

racially 'visible' are foreign and inaccessible to me. In addition to this, when studying literature produced by a marginalized population in Canada, I must be aware that my own skin color and sex position me near the top of existing hierarchical structures in academic institutions or the country at large. As such, my intent in this project is less to comment upon the nature of grievance suffered by visible minorities in this country, than to insist upon its existence, along with its political value as a precondition to beginning the process of ameliorating the damage of racism upon racialized subjects. I have not offered any prescriptions upon the way in which the intangible effects of racism should be grieved by its victims, but limit my discussion to advocating for the time, space and respect necessary for this cathartic expression to occur, and to contributing to the disruption of racial and gender hierarchies in this country.

To attempt to approach the multiple histories of various racialized communities in Canada would similarly be impossible for lack of time and space, and it would be reductive in collapsing the specificity of experience suffered by various so-called 'visible' minorities in Canada into a homogeneous category of 'non-white.' I decided therefore to limit my study to the history of the Chinese in Canada. For Chinese Canadians, as with many racialized groups in Canada, the desire to articulate individual and community identity involves negotiation with a long history of racial marginalization and outright exclusion. The material trace of this history is still discernable in contemporary demographics and in the way in which Chinese Canadians are represented in mainstream media and government discourses. They appear at once as 'citizens,' and as exotic or orientalized 'others.' Thus, their history of silence, and written attempts to

break this silence make the study of Chinese Canadian literature a fertile ground in which to critique the seemingly totalizing national image of benevolence and tolerance espoused by English Canada. It is my hope that by approaching the material histories of the Chinese in Canada *without* the ability to speak authoritatively from a position of lived experience, I can engage with the affective dimensions of racist exclusion from a critical distance and offer insights that may assist those currently attempting to negotiate the affective field of racial discrimination.

My attention to the affective or psychic effects of racism upon racialized subjects differentiates this project from many of the excellent materialist and structuralist approaches to relations of power between whites and non-whites in Canada. Texts such as Peter Li's *The Chinese in Canada* provide comprehensive analysis of the structural dimensions of government-sanctioned racism and their corollary economic and social effects on those subordinated within its structures. Himani Bannerji's collection of essays, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender*, a text to which I am deeply indebted for much of my theoretical understanding of the way in which racism operates, offers a Marxist approach to race, class and gender relations, and the way in which categories of race and gender allow the state to infiltrate the lives of 'visible minorities' in this country. Her autobiographically inflected criticism also highlights the emotional dimensions of racist immigration policies in order to strengthen her structuralist critiques. However, while these texts are valuable to a study of race relations in Canada, they do not engage with the *way* in which structural racism operates upon and within the psyches of non-white individuals. Attention to the

psychological effects of the history of racism is a necessary concern, because "rather than prescribing how we as a nation might go about 'getting over' [the history of racism in Canada], it is useful to ask what it means, for social, political, and subjective beings to *grieve,*" to acknowledge that a great injustice has occurred that has lasting effects upon those who have been victims of it (Cheng 7).

To this end, I have made use of Judith Butler's study of psychic violence in her text *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* as a major, although not exclusive theoretical basis for this project. A brief discussion of Butler's theories of subjection is valuable here. She claims that "Althusser's doctrine of interpellation continues to structure contemporary debate of subject formation, offering a way to account for a subject who comes into being as a consequence of language, yet always within its terms" (Butler 106). Althusser contends that subjection occurs when the individual is hailed by the voice of authority, in the context of my study, the Canadian state and when the individual turns towards the authoritative voice, he or she is interpellated as a 'subject,' as 'the-one-who-was-hailed' (Althusser 245). There is no enunciation of the subject prior to this subjection: in being interpellated, the subject is simultaneously conceived and subjugated. However, the nature of the turn performed by individuals towards the voice of authority remains ambiguous. Butler asks, "why would the [individuals] respond [to being hailed]…without critically evaluating the authority that hails them? What conditions and informs this response?" (Butler 112) She points out that by framing his discussion of interpellative processes in religious analogies, Althusser ascribes "the putative force of divine naming to the social authorities" (ibid 114). But if social

authorities do not possess the power of divine naming, they can in theory be refused. The act of turning is not merely a response to a 'voice,' but is rather an action "conditioned both by the 'voice' of the law and by the responsiveness of the one hailed by the law," suggesting a certain predisposition or vulnerability to the force of law that exists in the individual prior to being hailed (ibid 107-108). For Butler, Althusser's theories of interpellation are reliant upon a certain "passionate attachment" within the individual to the condition of subjection, an attachment upon which the constitution of the subject through the act of hailing is dependant, but for which he or she is unable to account fully (ibid 129). For the purposes of this study, the question remains: what is the nature of this attachment within the context of Chinese Canadian immigration history, and how does it produce Chinese Canadian subjects?

If a subordinating authority holds in its power the possibility of continued existence for the subject, then the desire to survive, or to persist as oneself involves a necessary submission to this power in order to continue to exist, even in a subordinated capacity. Butler notes, "the desire to survive, 'to be,' is a pervasively exploitable desire. The one who holds out the promise of continued existence plays to the desire to survive. 'I would rather exist in subordination than not exist' is one formulation of this predicament, where the risk of 'death' is also possible" (ibid 7-8). It is reasonable to assume that when an immigrant flees from a country where one faces political persecution or poverty, the desire to exist and remain within a safe haven such as Canada is just such a pervasively exploitable desire. But to suggest that Chinese Canadians are passive victims of racist categorizations, that they assume externally imposed

subjectivities without resistance or agitation is misleading and potentially demeaning. It follows then that Althusser's model of subjection needs to be elaborated in order to account for the way in which passionate attachments contribute to the formation of racialized subjects.

In order to conceptualize a subject that 'desires' the condition of subjection, Butler turns to Freud's model of melancholia outlined in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud's intention here is to distinguish between the conditions of mourning, which he considers a natural process of accepting loss, and melancholia, which describes a pathological refusal to accept loss and a subsequent withdrawal from participation in the social realm into the domain of the psyche. Butler claims that there is an inherent social element to Freud's configuration of melancholia which makes his study valuable for understanding the concept of a subject which is produced through a reflexive taking of itself as its own object. According to Freud, in a melancholic patient, "the ego is said to 'turn back upon itself' once [libidinal attachment] fails to find its object and instead takes itself as not only an object of love, but of aggression and hate as well" (Butler 168). Upon the foreclosure of a libidinal attachment, the melancholic withdraws this attachment into him or herself, designating the ego or the conscious self as a substitute object for what has been lost (Freud 247). As Butler points out, this 'turning back' of the libido actually produces the ego "as a *psychic object*": the social loss, which can refer to the "loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction...*such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on*" becomes here reconstituted as an ego loss, a loss that Butler argues is in fact *constitutive* of the ego itself (Freud 243; Butler 171, my

emphasis). But how does racist exclusion specifically contribute to the production of these reflexive subjectivities?

For racialized subjects in Canada, the introjection of a lost social object is an opaque and frequently indescribable experience. The ability to fulfill social aspirations within one's family, community, or nation is contingent on the ability to belong within such structures. Further, since one's subjectivity is frequently reliant upon, or articulated through one's community attachments, the denial of belonging can become threatening to one's subjective identity. In the context of racialized subjects in Canada, this 'turn' thus assumes a survival ethos, a turn inward when faced with the impossibility of continued external existence, and the production of a psychic life that substitutes for, but never fulfills, a denied social life. It is this suspended position that non-white individuals find themselves in within Canada, trapped between a nation that legislates racialized citizens as non-beings, and social, economic and political circumstances that prevent alternative attachments. It is in this context that an introjected social loss can become constitutive of the racialized subject's consciousness.

The question remains though as to how this condition of stasis becomes psychically violent. In the social realm, the individual evaluates his or her relationship to a desired object through their own conscious reason: however, in taking itself as its own object within the psyche, "a form of moral reflexivitiy is produced in which the ego splits itself to furnish an internal perspective by which to judge itself": this split represents the formation of the conscience (Butler 181). The conscience then becomes the point at which the libidinal energies that were formerly directed at an external social object

collect, energies that can include love and desire as well as hate or revulsion. While this reflexive turning back upon the ego takes place solely within the domain of the psyche, Butler argues that this is not a strictly asocial configuration, and that the shift inward results in a contamination of the psychic sphere with elements of social regulation (ibid 180). This is not to claim that a mimetic internalization of social regulation into the conscience occurs. Rather, the violence that occurs within the psyche through the turning inward of libidinal attachment reflects "the circuitous route by which the psyche accuses itself of its own worthlessness" (ibid). The conscience then gauges the value of the internalized psychic-object against these social ideals, and inevitably finds it unsatisfactory. The violence cultivated within the psyches of racialized subjects in Canada thus stems from the continued inability to either fully occupy the subject positions extended to white subjects or attach to valid social alternatives, resulting in the belief in the individual that their being is somehow lacking. This self-contempt, although one effect of racism upon the psyche of a racialized subject, is not the only source of psychic violence.

Since the conscience takes the ego or psychic-object as the target of its aggression, and this object consists of "the psychic sanctification of once-external objects or ideals", "we might well ask whether the situation in which the ego is…berated by the ideal is not the inversion of a prior situation in which the ego would…have berated the ideal?" (ibid 183-185) In other words, the rage that the racialized subject might have directed against the subordinating authority in the social realm is now turned back against his or her own ego in the psychic realm. Is it possible that the authoritative force of the

Canadian government(s) preempts unrest within the realm of the social by cultivating an internal psychic violence within citizens it deems to be 'other'? The state certainly behaves in this way, but what other forces of authority produce socio-economic contexts in which subjects find themselves suspended, unable to attach to an object of desire? Further, how do forces of authority perform such actions? Butler argues that the conscience is not analogous with the social or moral authority of the state: rather, the withdrawal of libidinal attachment into the psyche marks the vanishing point at which the authority ceases to function as an external force acting upon a subject, and reemerges as a "psychic idealization" within the individual (ibid 191). This circuitous route, while difficult to trace, marks the point at which various authorities of the state subject citizens deemed to be culturally inferior or undesirable. It is the nature of these subordinating forces, along with their psychic effects that are my main area of inquiry in this project.

In order to understand the degree to which legislative restrictions against the Chinese and contemporary multicultural policy have contributed to marginalizing Chinese subjects in Canada, chapters one and two will explore the way in which Chinese Canadian subjects have been subjected within public discourses from the mid nineteenth century to the present day. In particular, I will focus upon the ways in which such discourses cultivate a degree of psychic violence within the raced individuals who must occupy them by refusing the subjects the ability to express themselves as full or valid citizens, and similarly denying the existence of racial discrimination against them. Chapter one explores the debates concerning immigration legislation to restrict the entry and participation of Chinese immigrants in Canada. Chapter two explores the shift in

Canadian policy from explicit racial exclusion to liberal inclusionism espoused through multicultural policy. While a historical approach to racist subjection allows me to hypothesize about the nature of the attachment that facilitates the process of subject formation, a lack of historical accounts and my own inability to read Chinese make it difficult if not impossible to fully explore the exigencies of such desire. Instead of limiting my analysis to historical documents then, the last two chapters of this thesis examine literary texts by two Chinese Canadian authors, Wayson Choy and Fred Wah, in an effort to explore these nuances. These texts provide non-authorized sites in which the affective dimensions of the violent psychic ambivalence generated by racist practices appear in a more personalized and salient form, and the prescribed subjectivities engendered through multicultural discourses can be challenged. Further, each of these three texts modifies or extends the limits of Butler's configuration by demonstrating how the specific demands of Chinese Canadian history influence the *way* in which an unraveling of psychic violence must be performed by Chinese Canadian subjects.

My approach to literature is informed by my awareness of the way in which literature, and Canadian literature in particular, functions as a pedagogical site in which a Canadian cultural ethos is debated. The administrative apparatus of the Canadian state, in conjunction with mainstream media and other sites of public discourse persistently relegate visible minority individuals to marginal positions within the national imagination by producing authorized forms of ethnic diversity that non-European subjects must occupy in order to attain some semblance of political voice. Would not the production of cultural artifacts such as literature from within such positions reinforce existing relations

of power between white and non-white Canadians by actively proliferating such representations of racial identities? As David Leiwei Li points out, "cultural hegemony maintains itself not so much by imposing white writing upon the minority, but by soliciting white writing from the objectified minority" (Leiwei Li 214, reprinted in Goellnicht, "Blurring" 343). How might the images of 'community,' 'nation,' and racial identity within 'visible minority' texts offer alternative subjectivities that challenge dominant nationalist or essentialist conceptions of ethnic diversity? Since psychic violence is sustained through the persistent (mis)recognition of minority subjects as equal participants within the nation, cultural narratives are required that disrupt the authority of nationalist, historical or essentialist racial discourses that seek to produce signs of ethnic or racial 'diversity' that manage, rather than challenge asymmetrical relations of power within Canada.

Perhaps then, the key to reorienting Canadian multicultural policy is to engage with that most fluid part of its apparatus: its pedagogical devices. While pedagogical devices are traditionally thought to impart a unidirectional flow of instruction to 'students' or 'citizens,' Homi Bhabha claims that in actuality, this transfer is far more ambiguous and multidirectional. He notes, "the pedagogical founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people." However, he also points out that "the performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow *between* the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside" (Bhabha 147-148). For Bhabha,

> pedagogy becomes a performative act, a mediation rather than simply a
> medium, that reveals in its narrative ambivalence an "unsettling tension

between where the subject emerges and where it ends up." Such ambivalence not only offers a political space for challenging the ideological aspects of a narrative cultural pedagogy—"what we think we see without really looking"— but also draws attention to the disrupted borders and fissures within dominant social formations, strategies, and practices. (Giroux 96)

For Chinese Canadian writers then, producing texts from *within* the pedagogical framework offered by official state multiculturalism allows the possibility of disrupting the scripting of raced Asian bodies as "subjects who function as objects in [colonial] knowledge formations legitimized by institutional normalization" by "inhabiting the dominant representations, not as external frames of reference, but as internalized artifacts—artifacts that can be *(re)inscribed* [*sic*]" or *(re)occupied* (Chow 180, my emphasis).

Because I contend that the texts in this survey serve an extended political function by acting as sites of political anti-racist activism, a brief justification of my choice of texts from amidst the plethora of materials written by Chinese Canadians in both English and Chinese is needed. As Lien Chao points out, "the efforts that Chinese Canadians [have] made, collectively and individually, to communicate with the dominant groups in English [have been] fruitless, one-sided attempts" until quite recently (Chao, "Anthologizing" 146). Outside of a few notable offerings, it has only been in the past three decades that concerted attempts by the Chinese Canadian community to produce a community-based literature for mainstream consumption have been taken seriously by the majority population in Canada.[1] For Chinese Canadian writers, the process of 'writing community' presents a challenge on numerous levels: how, and in what capacity can a contemporary writer begin to redress the collective silence endured by the Chinese

Canadian population through the first century of their presence in Canada? How can he
or she assert a recognizable textual voice that does not simply replace the homogenizing
practices of nationalist discourse with essentialized discourses of racial difference?
Finally, how does a writer of Chinese descent in Canada approach the task of recovering
a 'Chinese' voice in English, a language coded with historical traces of colonial
domination? Is such a recovery necessary, or even possible?

This last consideration is especially problematic. Since the expiation of psychic
violence among Chinese Canadian individuals requires the enunciation of individual
cultural identity through a community-based voice, would not the act of publishing in
English, the language of most mainstream Canadian cultural and administrative discourse
and the linguistic sign of Anglo cultural hegemony in this country undermine this
project? Chao claims that there is a possibility of strong resistance inherent in the
privileging of heritage over official languages, as was demonstrated by the publication of
Chinese language newspapers such as *The Chinese Times* in the early twentieth century.
Such publications, she claims, fostered a sense of collective identity and community
during a period of rigid marginalization of Chinese immigrants in Canada (Chao, *Beyond*
18-19).[2] However, while such writing served as a means to form a pan-Chinese forum for
a largely immigrant population, contemporary writing by second or third generation
Chinese Canadians is comprised of a far more linguistically heterogeneous mix.
Speakers identifying themselves as 'Chinese Canadian' can include individuals fluent in
multiple dialects of Chinese in addition to English, or, as in the case of the authors in this

study, may be fluent only in English. Would a 'heritage language' provide recognizable subjectivities for Chinese Canadians who are unable to speak or read Chinese?

Several contemporary Chinese Canadian writers have voiced such concerns over the publication of their writing in English, as "the very choice of the language in which to compose is itself a political statement on the part of the writer" (ibid 148). While the desire to communicate with mainstream audiences is pressing, for many Chinese Canadian writers the decision to publish in English is determined by their own linguistic capabilities, or lack thereof. In conversation with Marke Andrews, Sky Lee points out that:

> our generation is the first generation to regain a voice. Our original cultural voice was lost in the process of being displaced from China to Canada. That move takes several generations. I'm often ashamed to say that my voice is in my colonizer's language, in English. I am not fluent or literate in my heritage language (Andrews D17).

Chao claims that for many second or third generation Chinese Canadians, the loss of Chinese language can result in a certain cultural loss (Chao, "Anthologizing" 161). She argues that since the context-specific nuances of Chinese language are difficult to reproduce in translation into English, some experiential aspects of Chinese Canadian community life are beyond the limits of written English. However, despite the risks of (mis)representation surrounding the publication of minority texts in English, "not to use words, to avoid discourse by remaining silent, is perhaps more dangerous than using words despite the distortions that accompany language" (Goellnicht, "Minority" 294). Chinese Canadian writers writing in Chinese, English or French must be conscious of the limitations and possibilities of their language of publication, because "if a work is not

available to a certain readership, then, as far as that readership is concerned, it does not

exist" (Chang 799). This is particularly pressing for a Chinese Canadian author wishing

to extend the enunciation of his or her own voice to similarly marginalized individuals:

the production of a text in any language will necessarily exclude some members of a

linguistically diverse community, but can also offer a salient voice to fluent audiences

that can exceed the ethnic sensibilities of one or another monolingual culture. To this I

will add one caveat: the choice to study Chinese Canadian texts in English is for me, not

really a choice at all, but a linguistic necessity. I am unable to speak or read Chinese, and

as I approach this study, I am acutely aware of the fact that had these authors not

produced their texts in English, their material would remain completely inaccessible to

me. This is a limitation, but one that I don't believe invalidates this study upon grounds

that it limits which Chinese Canadian writing I discuss. Rather I would hope that the

theoretical considerations outlined in this thesis might provide a model for which those

individuals who are able to discuss Chinese Canadian texts written in Chinese might

approach such works.

There is one other critical limitation to this study that deserves comment. The way

in which gender and race intersect to produce racialized female subjects means that the

discrimination faced by Chinese Canadian women is a multiply layered marginalization.

While I comment briefly in my discussion of Choy's books upon the way in which the

patriarchal elements of nationalist discourses and essentialized Chinese culture impact

upon Chinese Canadian women in ways quite different from men, space constraints have

severely curtailed my ability to discuss such considerations at length. Gender is

minimized in this study not because I consider it unnecessary for a study or race; rather, I consider it *essential* to any discussion of race politics so that the marginalization of women of color is not elided in the thrust to dismantle the pillars of white power structures. However, the exigencies of subjection faced by Chinese Canadian women are so complex that to attempt to deal with them separately in this project would have resulted in a reductive or glossed-over analysis, the damage of which I believe would outweigh the merits of such a discussion. The original design of this thesis included an additional chapter on Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*. When researching this thesis I also considered including Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*. While I comment briefly on how female characters in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* encounter the dual forces of racist and patriarchal discourses, I would urge my readers to approach Lee's and Lai's texts for a full, and decidedly more nuanced treatment of the experience of Chinese women in Canada. Additionally, a limited critical discussion on race and gender in Chinese Canadian literature can be found in Lien Chao's *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English.*

I will conclude this introduction with a few extra words of caution: while this study contains an extended discussion of the nature of psychic violence, it is important to recognize that it is *not* a case study in Chinese Canadian writing, but rather a study in the psychic effects of racism that is grounded in the historical specificity of the Chinese Canadian experience in Canada, and the attempts by two Chinese Canadian writers to enunciate community-based subjectivities. While I have not been able to extend my

discussions to other Chinese Canadian texts written in English, this will perhaps be a future project either for myself or for those currently working in this field.

NOTES

[1] For a discussion of early efforts by Chinese Canadian writers to enter the literary mainstream in Canada, see Lien Chao, "Anthologizing" p 145-146. This article also contains a valuable discussion of contemporary attempts by the Chinese Canadian community to popularize Chinese Canadian writing, poetry, visual art, film, etc through the production of anthologies such as *Inalienable Rice: a Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* and *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*, as well as the touring exhibition *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*. While an examination of these projects through the psychoanalytic framework I am proposing would be valuable in elucidating the process of expiation through the recognition and expression of formerly subaltern voices, it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[2] Chao cites research by Jean-Michel Lacroix indicating twenty-three newspapers published within the Chinese Canadian community across the country in the first half of the twentieth century. The majority of these works were published exclusively in Chinese, while others were published in a bilingual format with Chinese And English, and sometimes Chinese and French as well.

Chapter 1: Legislative Exclusion and the Production of Chinese Canadian Subjectivity.

Now, what is the purpose of this legislation? Is it for the purpose of excluding Chinese from Canada, or is it for the purpose, in an indirect way, of collecting taxes from them?

> MP Edwards, speaking to the House of Commons, 1885.

It is to keep them out.

> MP Wilson, responding to the above.

From their arrival in British Columbia in the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants found themselves marginalized within the Canadian polity as a result of discriminatory legislation and virulent popular racism among the white majority population: racism that circulated through political debate, public forums, and published media records. Much critical work by historians and theorists such as Peter S. Li, Anthony B. Chan, Kwok B. Chang and David Chuenyan Lai has detailed the effects of an institutional imperative on the part of the federal and British Columbian governments to marginalize and exclude the Chinese from full participation in the Canadian state, while simultaneously exploiting them as a source of cheap labour for use in the project of nation building and industrial expansion. Others such as Peter Ward and Patricia Roy have combined an investigation of the economic motivations for discrimination with an

analysis of the psychology of racism in British Columbia that stemmed from a desire to

maintain a homogeneous white population in the province.[1] That Chinese immigrants

were subjected to numerous racist legislative and social restrictions governing their

participation in the Canadian state is clear. Many current scholars have approached this

history of exclusion through a revisionist historicism, seeking to highlight the

discriminatory practices of the Canadian authorities representing the white population,

and to reassert the participation of Chinese immigrant labourers in construction narratives

of the Canadian West. While there is a certain value to this sort of historicism, it

nevertheless operates upon an assumption that Canadian authorities engaged in a

unidirectional imposition of power onto a despised minority segment of the population

through a series of legislative restrictions governing entry into and participation within

mainstream society. However, an alternative interpretation of the debate surrounding

immigration legislation put forward by Lily Cho argues that the disparity between the

stated intention of such restrictions and their real effects suggests that the position of the

government towards Chinese immigrants was more ambivalent than earlier criticism

suggests, and that the Canadian authorities held conflicting desires to include *and* despise

the Chinese population in BC (Cho 2). This consideration raises several important

questions about the relations of power operating between Chinese immigrants and the

majority white population represented by the government through the late 19th and early

20th centuries in Canada. How did the legal categorization of "Chinese" interpellate

Chinese immigrants within subjectivities that occupied a marginalized or subordinated

position *within* the Canadian state? Were such subjectivities assumed unproblematically

by individual Chinese immigrants, and did the specific historical context of early Chinese immigration to Canada preclude the possibility of resisting interpellation? What is the nature of the authoritative force that maintains this racial hierarchy, and how does it constitute subordinate subject positions for Chinese immigrants? Further, how might the subjection of Chinese subjects as non-beings within the state affect the way in which Chinese immigrants were able to fulfill their entitled expectations of social participation? This chapter will examine the implications of Cho's rereading of legislative racism against the Chinese in the late 19th and early 20th century in British Columbia. By departing from traditional approaches to the history of the Chinese in Canada, a reconsideration of the relations of power between those in authority and those subject to the constraints of this authority becomes possible. This reconsideration will allow me to concentrate on the way in which psychic violence is the result not only of racist exclusion, but can also develop through racist policies that include racialized minorities in marginalized or socially inferior positions.

The narrative of nation building in the Canadian West is deeply inscribed in the annals of official Canadian history, memorialized by events such as the nineteenth-century gold rush in the Fraser Valley and the pounding of the last spike on the CPR West in 1885. As numerous historians have pointed out, though, official versions of history tend to ignore or efface the contribution of Chinese immigrant labourers in these projects. The history of racism against the Chinese began upon their initial migration to British Columbia's Fraser Valley in 1858. During this period, large numbers of Chinese labourers traveled north from California to prospect for gold: while this initial migration

originated from the United States, subsequent immigration came directly from China, primarily from the counties of Canton and Taishan (Li, *Chinese* 11,14). While some of these workers worked as non-contract or independent labourers, the majority arrived under contract to assume a variety of menial positions in mines, canneries, and sawmills. By 1881, a significant number of contract labourers were also employed on the construction of the CPR (ibid 17). The arrival of Chinese labour was marked by scattered incidents of racial animosity but despite this, public reaction to their presence was restrained in comparison to similar periods of immigration in California and Australia; further, there were no initial attempts at legislative restrictions on Chinese immigrants on the part of the British Columbia administration (Li, *Chinese* 22; Ward 24; Roy 4). Li notes that during the 1860s in British Columbia, a large labour deficit existed as a result of outward migration of white workers from labour-intensive and menial jobs: Chinese participation in the labour pool was thus considered indispensable. Speaking before the 1885 Royal Commission, Sir Matthew Begbie, Chief Justice of British Columbia remarked that:

> Chinamen are very largely…employed in all the labourious parts of our coal mines…they constitute three-fourths of the working hands about every salmon cannery…they are a very large majority of the labourers employed in gold mines…they are the model market gardeners of the province.
> (Li, *Chinese* 24-25)

Thus, Chinese immigration provided an essential supply of workers to fill the most menial and labour-intensive jobs in the province. By 1880, Chinese immigrants comprised nearly 20% of the BC population (Ward 15). While specific racial incidents in British Columbia were far less in number than those in California, the increasingly visible

presence of Chinese in the province was met by a burgeoning nativism among the majority white population (ibid ix).

Although initial response in Canada to the presence of Chinese immigrants was relatively subdued, rising anti-Chinese sentiment eventually resulted in several legislative restrictions. British Columbia joined the Dominion of Canada in 1870, and by 1876, they had passed bills to disenfranchise the Chinese and prohibit them from working on government projects (Li, *Chinese* 23). In response to increasing pressure from BC, the federal government appointed a Royal Commission in 1885 to examine the effects of Chinese immigration upon the province, and subsequently passed a bill leveling a head tax on Chinese immigrants of $50 per person. Second and third commissions followed in 1900 and 1903, raising the tax to $100 and $500 respectively (ibid 29-30). In addition to the taxes, the 1885 legislation also included tonnage restrictions on ships entering Canadian ports, so that no vessel could bring more than one Chinese immigrant per fifty tons of cargo (ibid 30). Soon after the turn of the century, the War-Time Elections act of 1917 stated that only those who qualified for provincial franchise could vote in federal elections, thus disqualifying the Chinese from both the provincial and federal franchises (ibid). Finally, in 1923 after persistent lobbying by the BC government and numerous anti-Chinese and anti-Asian groups, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act or Exclusion Act, barring all Chinese immigration to Canada save for a very select group of controlled individuals: this legislation remained intact and strictly enforced until its repeal in 1947.[2] Li and numerous other historians draw direct parallels between the increasingly prohibitive legislative constraints on Chinese immigration, and

their dwindling value to the Canadian state once the need for a source of cheap labour decreased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In reading the history of Chinese immigration to Canada, numerous theorists have questioned why anti-Chinese sentiment was so pervasive during this period. What motivated the white population to seek restrictive measures against Asian immigrants despite their value as a source of cheap available labour? Further, how was the Canadian government able to rationalize a split labour market founded on the overt subjugation of a large section of the BC populace? In *The Chinese in Canada*, Peter Li traces various Chinese stereotypes as part of an organized imperative on the part of the British Columbia and Canadian governments, one that he describes as "institutional racism"(ibid 3). The institutionalization of racism within government policy reflected a desire on the part of Canada's government and industry leaders to procure a cheap and disposable labour force for the purposes of industrial expansion and nation building, while at the same time designating Chinese immigrants as socially inferior to the white population and restricting them from full participation in the Canadian polity (ibid 12). In this way, the Canadian elite could maintain a white cultural hegemony while still utilizing Asian immigrants as cheap labour. Li's reading of the debate surrounding the head taxes and other restrictive legislation focuses on the design of the Canadian government to find a balance between the desire to exclude the Chinese as unassimilable others, and the economic necessity of maintaining a cheap labour force for the project of nation-building. He contends that discrimination faced by the Chinese through "the removal of citizenship rights, exclusion from immigration, and restrictions on occupational competition"

constituted a concerted effort on the part of the federal government to exclude Chinese immigrants from entry into the Canadian state, and to marginalize Chinese-Canadians already there (ibid 33). He argues that because discrimination against the Chinese was "systematic and legal, and its practice was rationalized by an ideology stressing the superiority of white cultural values," it thus constituted a sustained and sanctioned imperative on the part of white Canada to prevent Chinese immigrants from enjoying citizenship rights and full social participation within the state (ibid).

Li and other social historians link the application of legislative restrictions to the proliferation of Chinese stereotypes that justified their dehumanization as virtual "labour machines," invaluable for menial work but undesirable as full citizens who would enjoy the same rights extended to white immigrants within the country (Chan 42). Kwok B. Chang points out that government research studies concerning Chinese immigration, government-funded organizations, and various Royal Commissions were designed to "generate knowledge or information in order to bring light to a specific ethnic group or facet of ethnic relations": knowledge that produced and disseminated a considerable amount of literature that was used "to justify and rationalize racism…rather than to formulate federal policies and strategies to combat [its spread]" (Chang 2-3). This practice of investigating the impact of Chinese immigrants upon mainstream society reflected a white desire to produce a knowable representation of an 'unknowable' or 'orientalized' other: by propagating "images of the Asians…in print and visual media, in attitudes and in commonplace knowledge," Asian, and in particular, Chinese subjectivities were legitimized that confirmed relations of power between Anglo and

Chinese individuals in which the latter occupied a subordinate or inferior position (Chan 37).[3] The racialization of Chinese immigrants in popular as well as legislative discourses allowed the state to legitimate its designation of 'Chinese' "within the nation as a body whose movements had to be documented, policed, and contained through state representation" (Miki 189).[4] While the efficacy of such stereotypes in convincing the white populace of the need to restrict the rights of Chinese is well documented, it is less clear how such stereotypes operated upon the psyches of Chinese immigrants themselves. Did such stereotypes foster a certain internal racism within these immigrants, inculcating dominant cultural values within the psyche of an oppressed minority? An examination of how racialized Chinese bodies occupied an 'othered' position in the dominant white popular imagination will help clarify this discussion.

The proliferation of the 'Chinese sojourner' depended upon a complex negotiation of positive and negative conceptions concerning the presence of Chinese labour. Ward points out that during periods of economic depression in which jobs for white workers became scarce, the designation of "sojourner" inferred that Chinese immigrants were not interested in investing their earnings into their adopted community and so were unwilling to assume any community responsibilities. Because they were able to "survive and prosper on living standards far below those of the Western worker," it was assumed they were competing unfairly with white workers for positions in the industrial and resource sectors (Ward 10). Roy also links negative stereotypes of Chinese immigrants to their perceived threat to the local economy: she points out that local merchants in Victoria and Vancouver frequently leveled attacks on the Chinese based on the claim that they

engaged solely in ethnic business relations, and unlike white workers did not patronize local white merchants. In the minds of white British Columbians, "the root problem [with cyclical downturns in the BC economy] was the Chinese custom of sojourning" (Roy 8). Most attacks upon Chinese immigrants during this period were thus couched in economic terms, equating the presence of Chinese labour as a direct threat to both the economic stability of the province, and the maintenance of a white cultural hegemony within its communities; these stereotypes concealed moral aversions to an imagined 'Asiatic other'(ibid 9).[5] This allowed both the white majority population and government authorities to justify legislative restrictions on their participation in the Canadian polity once there was no longer a need for their labour on development of the nation's infrastructure. The very nature of this particular stereotype of the Chinese as temporary and disposable facilitated the easy passage of restrictions on Chinese immigration during periods when they were no longer deemed essential to industry and national growth.

While historians generally acknowledge the fabricated essence of these stereotypes, they also concede that several of these characterizations did have a minor basis in fact: many early Chinese immigrants *did* migrate with the hope of returning wealthy to China one day to settle and retire, and the conditions in Vancouver and Victoria's Chinatowns were notably unsanitary. The project of several historians has thus been to engage with the proliferation of these stereotypes with the intention of highlighting the social conditions that contributed to their emergence. Chan notes that arguments that the Chinese refused to participate in mainstream society do not appreciate the social force of racist restrictions in producing the conditions of their position within

the state. He observes that opponents of Chinese immigrants cited their "bachelor life," interest in "clannish associations," and habit of remitting their wages to relatives in China as evidence of their desire to remain transient (Chan 40). Li also argues that evidence used to characterize the Chinese as being culturally unassimilable into the Canadian hegemony was in fact *produced* by institutional and legislative restrictions on Chinese labour and living conditions:

> [from] the outset, the Chinese could not be assimilated into Canadian society because they were never allowed to be assimilated…if the Chinese community appeared foreign to white Canadians, it was because its social isolation, vice activities and poor living conditions…were the results of racial oppression and societal alienation (Li, *Chinese* 4).

The adaptation strategies of the Chinese-Canadian community, such as retreating into culturally-homogeneous enclaves and patronizing ethnic businesses to avoid competition with white proprietors, did not stem from strong cultural ties to China but were in fact produced by external factors imposed upon the Chinese-Canadian community by the white majority population (Li, "Economic" 102).

While the arguments of Li and others are valuable in critiquing the material conditions from which such stereotypes could emerge, their interpretations of the debates surrounding the role of the Chinese in Canada still focus upon the idea that state authorities only supported Chinese immigration so long as it provided a cheap and sustainable workforce to be used in the project of nation building. Disenfranchisement and restrictions upon social movement insured that the Chinese "were powerless to unsay their representation as classified bodies that had to be [marginalized] for the sake of social order" (Miki 190). Ward notes that during the 1870s and 1880s, the British

Columbian government approved numerous bills designed to restrict the presence of

Chinese-Canadians in the province: in 1884, following the passing of similar anti-

Chinese legislation in California, the BC government approved measures that a) forbade

Chinese immigration, b) imposed a $10 annual poll tax on Chinese-Canadians living in

the province, and c) banned any person of Chinese decent from acquiring crown lands.

The intention of this provincial legislation was unequivocally to restrict both future

immigration of Chinese into the province and to marginalize landed Chinese immigrants

and naturalized Chinese Canadians already there. However, Ward claims that prior to the

completion of the CPR in 1885, Ottawa consistently disallowed these restrictions out of

the need to maintain a steady workforce for construction on the CPR: while Prime

Minister MacDonald "accept[ed] the principle of immigration restriction…he would not

enforce it until the railway's end was in sight" (Ward 38). Chan maintains that by

attempting to placate the BC public regarding the presence of Chinese labourers on the

CPR through various racist discourses espousing the necessary presence of an 'inferior

race,' MacDonald reinforced the notion that these immigrants would never be a lasting

section of the population, but rather "were unlikely to remain as permanent settlers"

(Chan 39). Li further points out that Ottawa specifically disallowed BC's attempts at

immigration restrictions on the grounds that only the federal government had the right to

pass legislation to control immigration: not out of a desire to prevent immigration

restrictions based on race (Li, *Chinese* 35). While the Supreme Court of Canada blocked

provincial legislation that sought to impede the flow of workers necessary for national

building projects, they allowed bills to stand that placed restrictions on the types of jobs

that Chinese immigrants could hold, as well as bans on the purchase of crown lands by

persons of Asian descent (Ward 38). Li claims that in 1903, this same court found in

striking down legislative acts in British Columbia that such acts "were in truth devised to

deprive the Chinese, naturalized or not, of the ordinary rights of the inhabitant of British

Columbia and in effect, to prohibit their continued residence in that province" (Li,

"Economic" 104).

Several theorists such as Li, Chan, Roy and Ward argue that the actions of the

federal and provincial governments to marginalize the Chinese within the nation

culminated with a mandate of outright exclusion of the despised minority following the

driving of the last spike in 1885. Can we assume though, as do the academics listed

above, that this event is evidence of such a desire? There no question that federal and

provincial restrictions against the Chinese reflected a desire to marginalize them within

the social sphere of the nation. However, the fact remains that the Chinese *were*

permitted to enter Canada, albeit in a restricted and marginalized capacity. In order to

address this issue, we need to turn to an examination of how Chinese subjectivity was

engendered through racist legislative and public discourses, and how Chinese immigrants

were interpellated within such categories.

The production of Chinese immigrant subjectivity alluded to by the above

theorists reflects an certain 'naming' of the subject through the confluence of legislative

and public discourses: a naming that requires that Chinese subjects submit to a certain

subordinated subject position in order to exist within the social realm of the state. This

submission is indicative of Althusser's conception of being 'hailed' by the discursive

voice of authority, in this case the Canadian state. However, as noted earlier, the turn towards the Canadian authorities performed by the Chinese subjects presumes an indefinable attachment to the condition of subjection: none of the theorists mentioned above offers a plausible explanation as to *why* Chinese immigrants would desire to occupy such subjectivities. An investigation into the nature of psychic attachments involved in the constitution of subordinate subjectivities can offer some insight into this problem, but before beginning to answer this question, I first need to interrogate the nature of the subordinating authority itself: the Canadian state.

By framing investigations into the racist practices of the Canadian authorities within an Anglo-Chinese binary in which the former exerts power upon the subordinate latter in a unidirectional fashion, static representational categories emerge that belie the complexity of the historical context of Chinese immigration into Canada through the late 19th and early 20th century. In her analysis of the debates surrounding the head taxes and Exclusion Act, as well as the phrasing of the acts themselves, Lily Cho presents an alternative interpretation of the intentions of the Canadian government in imposing restrictions on Chinese immigrants. Cho traces the legislative history of head taxes and Commission debates that culminated in the 1923 Act. She contends that although current critical discussions interpret the head taxes and various other legislative restrictions "as a policy of state-sanctioned discrimination motivated by repugnance for Chinese immigrants in Canada—a logic of undesirability which creates a policy of restriction and ultimately outright exclusion," attention to the specific language employed throughout these debates suggests that the intentions of the federal government were more

ambiguous than current critical discussions suggest. While Cho certainly does not claim that legislative restrictions on Chinese were non-racist in nature, she maintains that the production of Chinese subjectivities through official government discourses was couched in a rhetoric of liberal *inclusion*, rather than outright exclusion (Cho 2).

As Cho points out, in debates in the House of Commons over increasing the head tax imposed on Chinese immigrants in 1885, MP Edwards asked, "Now, what is the purpose of this legislation? Is it for the purpose of excluding Chinese from Canada, or is it for the purpose, in an indirect way, of collecting taxes from them?", to which MP Wilson responded, "it is to keep them out" (ibid 10). However, while Wilson's response encapsulates the intention of this legislation, Chinese immigration actually *increased* during the head tax era (ibid 15). Edgar Wickberg confirms Cho's contentions, noting that although an initial drop in immigration numbers followed the imposition of the 1885 tax, Chinese immigration had regained strength by the second tax in 1900 (Wickberg 59). He notes further that numbers continued to rise even after the increase to the head tax in 1903: "as critics of the 1900 Chinese Immigration Act predicted, raising the head tax from $50 to $100 was no deterrent, and immigration levels remained as they had been for the few years previous. In fact, in 1903 they went up to 5000 arrivals, the largest ever for a single year" (ibid 83-84). Although the taxes were designed as a monetary deterrent to Chinese immigration, they had little or no effect in this capacity because Chinese coming into the country were not directly responsible for paying the tax upon arrival. Rather, labour brokers assisting in the passage from China to Canada or the owners of ships or trains bringing immigrants into the country assumed the initial financial burden of the

taxes. As a result, Chinese labourers entered into a system of indentured coolie labour, whereby their initial entry fees would be paid for them and they became liable for the full amount to whomever assumed their debt upon arrival (ibid 14). As Cho points out, "if it was the labour brokers and ship captains who paid the tax in the first instance...that actual amount of the tax itself is in many ways less relevant as a deterrent to immigrants" (ibid 14-15).

Tonnage clauses in the three bills containing the details of the tax also suggest an ambivalent attitude towards Chinese pressence. The 1885 bill contained a clause restricting how many Chinese immigrants could be carried based upon tons of cargo on the ship: no more than one immigrant for every fifty tons. However, the 1900 and 1903 bills did not contain this clause, but rather only regulated the amount of the tax, and who was responsible for its payment (ibid 12).[6] The tax was intended to deter immigration, but if the federal government had really intended to bar entry to Chinese immigrants, they could have included the existing tonnage restrictions in the second and third bills, or even increased the ratio of tons to immigrant in order to further restrict entry (ibid 13).

Finally, several critics such as Li do note the desire of the federal government to alleviate the fears of the white BC population while simultaneously maintaining a steady supply of cheap labour. However, much critical work still links the driving of the last spike on the CPR in 1885 with the introduction of the first Chinese head tax during that year. Cho points out ,though, that "the last spike...was more of a photo opportunity than a sign of the actual completion of the railway" (ibid 10). Work on the CPR continued for decades after this point, and Chinese labour was increasingly desirable in the expanding

industrial and natural resource sectors in British Columbia .[7] Therefore, to equate the

official completion of the CPR in 1885 with an end to the need for Chinese labour is

unsupported by either the history of construction upon the line or census numbers

indicating an increase of Chinese immigrants during the head tax years. Rather than

approaching the head taxes and other legislative restrictions as rooted in an ideology of

explicit exclusion of an unwanted minority, Cho argues that debates surrounding their

inception indicate that these bills, while still designed to restrict or exclude Chinese

immigrants from full participation in British Columbia society, are couched in an

ambiguous rhetoric of "inclusion, justice and fairness" (ibid 18).[8] She argues that to

engage with one aspect of their function at the expense of another is to misread how

racism can function within a policy of inclusion in addition to exclusion (ibid 18). Such

an omission can also have implications upon how we understand the way in which racism

functions within the psyches of its victims.

Approaching legislative restrictions against the Chinese during this period as

reliant upon a rhetoric of both exclusion and inclusion allows a redefinition of how

'Chinese' evolves as a category of racial identity through legislative and social discourses

in the head tax era. Cho points out that in parliamentary debates over the presence of the

Chinese in Canada, complementary stereotypes of "the undesirable Chinese…[and] the

desirable immigrant who represents the cheapest labour that can be found" emerge

simultaneously: frequently, positively racialized invocations of Chinese identity in public

forums such as the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration were used as a

method of chastising white workers for not wanting to include Chinese labourers on

national projects. Writing for the 1885 Commission, Chapleau remarked:

> It is something strange to hear the strong broad-shouldered superior race,
> superior physically and mentally, sprung from the highest types of the old
> and new world, expressing fear of competition with a small, inferior and
> comparatively speaking feminine race. When France or England has any
> special object to gain, nothing is thought of…entering …China…taking
> what either nation desires, and against their will…but if the Chinese come
> over to your country in the peaceful pursuit of trade or industry—they must
> be driven back—because they are more sober, more frugal, and in the
> humblest calling of labour work a little harder than others feel inclined to
> (Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in Canada, 1885,
> LXIX, reprinted in Cho 6-7).

This statement illustrates how racialized liberal humanist rhetoric successfully inscribed

the image of a physically, culturally and mentally inferior Chinese subject into official

government record. Further, by linking the project of national expansion with the larger

imperial expansion of Britain, Chapleau's comments ascribe to the ideology of colonial

expansion and inclusion governing the Empire, an ideology similarly based upon

interpellation of racial subjects within a white cultural hegemony (Cho 7).[9] In what ways

might Canadian discourse of liberal tolerance have assisted in preventing social or

political resistance from a marginalized population within its midst?

As sites of social and legal public discourse, these debates serve to "define and

textually produce the category of Chinese": a category that Cho maintains is "constitutive

of Chinese Canadian subjectivity" (ibid 19). Thus, the development of legislative

restrictions against the Chinese is not a simple process of the legal authority of the state

acting upon and subordinating a racialized minority subject. Rather, the authority of the

state to articulate Chinese Canadian subjectivity through the regulatory mechanism of

legislative debate reflects a complicitous *constitution* of this subjectivity: what Foucault

describes as *assujetissement*, or the simultaneous forming and regulating of the subject

within the field of juridical power (Butler 83-84). The constitution of Chinese

subjectivity within this field not only created "Chinese...as a legal category, but a legal

category which founded a social one" (Cho 20). The identifiable legal category of

'Chinese' resulted in a corollary social category that constituted and regulated the

participation of Chinese subjects within all aspects of the Canadian polity.

Here we must return again to Althusser in order to determine how this

constitution and regulation of Chinese immigrant subjects occurs. Although she forms

different conclusions than many of the earlier academics, Cho's configuration of the

constitutive power of the Canadian legal apparatus also reflects Althusser's conception of

an ideological state apparatus, capable of interpellating subjects within its discursive

terms. The stringent demands placed upon Chinese immigrants as conditions for entry

into Canada were indeed difficult to resist: in the context of early Chinese immigration,

the authority to name or constitute Chinese immigrant subjectivity through juridical and

public discourses belonged exclusively to the white majority population represented by

the provincial and federal governments. Li notes that social and economic forces

motivating immigration to Canada, namely "poverty at home...[and] opportunities

abroad" were the same for Chinese immigrants as their European counterparts, but upon

arrival, the former found themselves unable to participate fully in the social, political or

economic domains of the state (Li 1). Restrictions upon Chinese immigrants as a

precondition of their entry into the country meant that in many ways, the interpellative

authority of the state in naming Chinese subjects could not be refused. Was the Canadian government able to interpellate unproblematic subordinate Chinese subjects? How else could we imagine the way in which racist stereotypes and legislative appellations produced subordinate immigrant subjects?

Despite such restrictions, it would be naïve to assume that the Canadian government possessed the sort of 'divine' power to name that Althusser bestows upon his ISAs; as several scholars point out, despite the denial of political franchise, the Chinese-Canadian community was anything but passive in response to restrictions placed on them by the white community. Gillian Creese notes that in response to labour discrimination against the Chinese by both industry leaders and unions representing white workers, Chinese Canadians persistently agitated for better wages and working conditions, while David Chuenyan Lai's article, "The Issue of Discrimination in Education in Victoria, 1901-1923," traces the actions of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese Canadian community in Victoria in resisting attempts by the Victoria school board to segregate Chinese and white children in schools (Creese 1987; Lai 1987).[10] Could such agitation for franchise present the means by which Chinese immigrants could assert more representative subjectivities? While neither of these articles investigates the implications of how the resistance of Chinese Canadians to discrimination was expressed as a denial of stereotyped subjectivities of the Chinese, they nevertheless suggest that the theory of interpellation needs to be revised to account for the way in which the marginalization of Chinese immigrants within the Canadian polity resulted in the constitution of reflexive subjectivities. Such a revision requires attention to how

passionate attachment to existence is exploited by the state in order to produce a subordinated subject position for Chinese immigrants in the exclusion era, but also to the way in which the concept of 'belonging' within the BC community and the nation at large proved to be a flexible designation that maintained a normative position for whiteness and relegated non-white bodies to marginal ec-centric positions.

In the context of Chinese immigration to Canada during the exclusion era, Butler's configuration of psychic violence allows a reconfiguration of how Chinese-Canadian subjectivities are formed in subjugation. Rather than articulating subject formation as the assumption of a stereotyped Chinese subjectivity formed in public and juridical discourse, or alternatively, understanding the creation of subjectivity as occurring through an internalization of social ideals into the psyche of the individual, the aggressive attack upon the ego occurs as the "melancholic inverts against itself the indictment it would level against the other" (Butler 190). The reflexive subject contests authority, in this case the authority of the Canadian and British Columbia governments which imposed restrictions upon Chinese immigrants, by incorporating it within the psyche, and berating the ego or psychic object in place of the external social object, the Canadian polity (ibid 190-191). It is in the interests of the Canadian government to produce these 'melancholic' subjects as a means of preempting insurrection within the social sphere. In this way, the state exerts power onto a racialized minority not through a unilateral application of authority, but through the production of 'melancholic,' or reflexive immigrant subjects. This production occurs through the legal prohibition of libidinal attachment, in this case the desire of the Chinese immigrant to enjoy full

participation in the Canadian polity, to fulfill the role of citizen in the country he or she is living in, to become a provider for their family back in China, or to satisfy a host of individual desires for self-expression as both Canadian and Chinese.

Rather than debating the ability of the state to interpellate minority subjects, it is more valuable to examine the extent to which resistance to disenfranchisement provided a means by which to minimize the effects of psychic violence. Political agitation for civil rights, such as the examples listed above, necessarily links the enunciation of individual and community voice to the struggle for belonging through the possession of citizenship rights. However, as Lisa Lowe points out, "citizens...are [more accurately] formed...through the terrain of *national culture*", as are the boundaries and positions they inhabit (Lowe 2). While restrictions upon citizenship were couched in flexible designations of race and ethnicity during this era, dominant culture in British Columbia was unarguably *Anglo-white* in nature, regardless of who was allowed to enter the province, and under what circumstances. The dominant population desired to maintain this conception of anglo-normativity, so the production of Asian bodies as unassimilable 'others' was necessary. While legislative restrictions acted directly upon the immigrants themselves, it was this scripting of Asian bodies as abnormal 'others' that truly located them beyond the threshold of belonging in Canada. Thus, despite numerous efforts by the Chinese Canadian community to express themselves socially and politically through a variety of ingenious ways, their efforts were unable to dislodge the centralized position of whiteness within the national imagination. The psychic violence that accompanied the

denial of social attachments within local communities and the nation proper operated more efficiently *beyond* the legal definition of citizenship in the terrain of popular culture, and it was here within the domain of popular *cultural* discourse that the psychic violence cultivated in Chinese Canadian subjects was most prevalent.

Cho's reinterpretation of the intentions of the Canadian and British Columbia governments in imposing legislative restrictions on Chinese immigrants presents a crucial means by which to renew current anti-racist historicism. By focusing on the desire of the federal government to placate the racist fears of the British Columbia population while simultaneously guaranteeing a steady supply of Chinese immigrants as a cheap and disposable work force, her account highlights the practice of producing racialized and marginalized Chinese subjects through a discourse of liberal inclusivity. This understanding of how a policy of inclusion can facilitate racial subjugation is essential in contemporary discussions of Asian-Canadian activism. Studies such as Li's frequently contrast immigration restrictions during the exclusion era with "more favorable [policies]" introduced post World War II. Although critical of continued discrimination faced by Chinese living in Canada, Li sees a steady reduction in the desire of the Canadian state to exclude Chinese culminating in the introduction of a 'point system' to assess eligibility for entry that did not distinguish between countries of origin (Li 85). If we approach the history of discrimination faced by Chinese-Canadians during the head tax era as purely exclusionary in nature, we fail to contest the continued practice of "legislating Chinese immigrants as a category of outsiders" through a rhetoric of liberal tolerance. Further, an understanding of how the production of Chinese as 'other'

assumes a pedagogical function in legitimizing the sustained social exclusion of Chinese raises new questions as to how specifically to engage with the history of these stereotypes. Roy Miki asks, "is it possible to adopt a critical strategy that interrupts the structure by inhabiting the dominant representation, not as external frames of reference, but as internalized artifacts—artifacts that can be re-inscribed" (Miki 183)? Is it possible for contemporary representations of Chinese Canadian subjects to be (re)occupied?

By approaching the Canadian government's covert policy of inclusion as complicitous in the production of reflexive immigrant subjectivities during the Exclusion Era, we learn how to look for parallels in current government policies towards racial minorities. Although the federal government has indeed moved to introduce immigration policies designed to eliminate discrimination upon the basis of race or country of origin, its designation of so-called 'non-traditional' immigrants is ambiguous. Nowhere is that more clear than in the introduction of the official policy of multiculturalism which informs Canadian immigration policy and the state's attitude towards Chinese and other visible minorities living within the nation. The following chapter will examine the decline of selective immigration practices based on racial criteria and the genesis of Canadian multiculturalism. As we will see, the purported telos of multicultural policy to include all individuals within the state regardless of race exacerbates, rather than alleviates, the cultivation of psychic violence within Chinese and other visible minority subjects in Canada.

NOTES

[1] The analyses of the psychology of white racism against Asian immigrants detailed by Ward and Roy are concerned primarily with the white motivations for producing a vilified Asian 'other,' and do not extend to a discussion of the violent effects of racism upon the psyche of racialized individuals themselves.

[2] For details regarding the criteria used to determine which persons of Chinese origins were eligible for entry to Canada under the 1923 Act, see Cho, 17.

[3] Chan's article, "Orientalism and Image Making: The Sojourner in Canadian History" contains a concise discussion of the link between stereotypes of Chinese immigrants as sojourners and their positioning within a racial hierarchy in Canada. For a full length discussion of this stereotyping beyond the sojourner image, see Chan's book-length publication, *Gold Mountain*. For a theoretical discussion of the way in which colonial discourse produces subordinate racialized subjects, see Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism" in *The Location of Culture*, 70-71.

[4] In this passage, Miki is specifically discussing the racialization of Japanese-Canadian subjects in order to facilitate their marginalization during WWII. As he aptly notes, "how else could so many thousands of 'citizens' be rounded up, incarcerated, dispossessed, interned in prisoner-of-war camps, deported, and dispersed—all through legal actions that circumvented parliamentary and judicial accountability" (Miki 189-190). While the internment of Japanese-Canadians is a more extreme example of physical incarceration of individuals, the process of racializing immigrant subjectivities in order to better control a segment of the population deemed dangerous is also applicable to the situation faced by Chinese during the exclusion era.

[5] The following is a particularly vigorous example of the type of assaults against the Chinese appearing frequently in West Coast newspapers. Printed in the *Cariboo Sentinel* in Barkerville on May 16, 1867, it gives a long list of grievances against the presence of Chinese immigrants, most of which were related to the sojourner stereotype:

> First, because they the Chinese are aliens not merely in nationality, but in habits, religion, (and to such a degree that Christianity is deemed barbarism by them,) allegiance, and even to the extent of believing that the remains of their dead would be desecrated by resting in the country where they had gained their money. Second, because they never become good citizens, they never serve on juries or on fire companies, or in any way in which the citizens of any other country would lend a hand in cases of emergency. They never marry or settle in any country but their own, and are more apt to create immorality than otherwise hence they are a bad example, and their presence injurious. Third, they deal entirely with their own country-men and consume few articles of the production of the country in which they reside; their consumption in all cases is confined to articles of the first necessity, and they do little to assist in the accumulation of wealth in any country where they may be located. Fourth, they hoard their money with the intention of sending it away to the country whence they came, so that its accumulation and exploitation is an absolute loss to the people amongst whom it is amassed. Large sums are in this way yearly sent away from British Columbia that would otherwise, if circulated in the colony, add vastly to its prosperity. Fifth, they evade payment of the taxes to which the citizens of the colony are subjected, and thus are the most privileged class, while they are at the same time the most unprofitable. Sixth, they are inimical to immigration; they fill every position that could be occupied by a good colonist, and from their peculiar mode of living can afford to do it for much lower remuneration than any Europeans or Americans. The fallacy that all men are free in a free country in relation to Chinese, is as erroneous as it is destructive to the country that they inhabit. If they adopted the country as a home, and fulfilled all the duties of a

good citizen, then we should have no reason to object to them but when we know that they are filling the position of those who would bring wealth and population to the country, and at the same time carrying off our very life's blood in the shape of our gold, it is quite another affair. (printed in Roy 9)

[6] In 1885, Bill 156, the first piece of head tax legislation in Canada contained the following three clauses:
1. That it is expedient to impose an entry fee of duty of fifty dollars on every person of Chinese origin entering Canada.
2. That no vessel carrying Chinese immigrants to any part in Canada shall carry more than one such immigrant for every fifty tons of its tonnage.
3. That the master of any vessel bringing Chinese immigrants to any part of Canada shall be Personally liable to Her Majesty for the payment of such fee or duty in respect of any immigrant carried on the vessel

The 1900 and 1903 bills meanwhile contained only two clauses:
1. That it is expedient to impose an entry fee of duty of [one-hundred: 1900, five-hundred 1903] dollars on every person of Chinese origin entering Canada.
2. That the master of any vessel bringing Chinese immigrants to any part of Canada shall be Personally liable to Her Majesty for the payment of such fee or duty in respect of any immigrant carried on the vessel.

The tonnage restrictions present in the 1885 legislation are thus absent in subsequent 1900 and 1903 bills (Canada Parliament, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 1885, 1900, 1903, reprinted in Cho 12-13).

[7] Projects related to the construction of the CPR after 1885 include the Burrard Inlet expansion in 1897; the new double track on the Niagara Falls suspension bridge in 1889; the completion of the CP line from Lethbridge through Crows Nest Pass to the Kootenay Plains in 1900; the Kicking Horse grade relocation between Hector and Field, BC in 1909; the highest railway bridge in Canada, the viaduct on the Crows Nest pass line in 1914; an aqueduct between Winnipeg and Shoal Lake in 1914; and the Connaught Tunnel along the path to Selkirk in 1916 (Cho 10-11).

[8] Cho is specifically referring to the content of the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, in which Chapleau's arguments for allowing Chinese immigration appeal to a sense of the values of the former British colonial administration, under which BC had recently been ruled. His comments, while they suggest a desire to include persons of different races within the province, still insist upon a racial hierarchy in which the presence of the Chinese would be strictly regulated and observed.

[9] For a full discussion of the impact of Canada-China political relations upon the head taxes and Exclusion Act and how these negotiations were implicated in both British Imperial and war allegiance concerns, see F. J. McEvoy, "A Symbol of Racial Discrimination: The Chinese Immigration Act and Canada's Relations with China, 1942-1947."

[10] Hereafter, all references to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association will appear as CCBA.

Chapter 2: Invocation to Silence: Multicultural Policy and the Cultivation of Psychic Violence.

If we accept our cultural pluralism, then we assure our Canadian unity.

Hon. J.P. Guay, Speech
to The Canadian Consultive
Council on Multiculturalism

Like many of the studies of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century immigration legislation discussed in the previous chapter, studies of contemporary Canadian legislation concerning the presence of non-white individuals in Canada still operate on an understanding of *assujetissement* that presumes the ability of the state to constitute complete 'visible' subjectivities. How might a discussion of contemporary Canadian immigration and multicultural legislation benefit from a similar consideration of authority not as an interpellative force which subjects visible minorities through the act of naming, but one which cultivates reflexive subjects by prohibiting racialized Chinese and other non-white subjects from forming social attachments within the nation?

Since its inception, Canada's ideological and institutional commitment to multiculturalism has come under attack from activists, academics, politicians and the Canadian populace itself. Academics such as Himani Bannerji, Eva Mackey, and Peter Li claim that far from eradicating the distinction between visible and invisible ethnicities, Canadian multiculturalism functions as a management strategy in which acceptable forms of cultural difference are reconstituted as *diversity*, and co-opted into the service of

producing, ironically, a homogeneous national identity. This chapter will focus upon the evolution and institutionalization of multiculturalism in Canada: rather than concentrating on the ubiquitous and reductive debates over whether or not state multiculturalism is capable of fostering national unity, I will focus on how multiculturalism serves to produce and disseminate social designations of visible minorities as *others*, existing within the state as citizens but denied full participation as normal or "*Canadian*-Canadians"(Mackey 3).[1] I propose to modify contemporary materialist approaches to the interpellative powers of state and federal authorities through multiculturalism by way of a consideration of the psychic processes surrounding subjection. Are these representative categories able to engender complete racialized subjectivities, and if so, can such subjectivities be refused? How might the psychic violence incurred through the prohibition of desire among visible minority subjects be exacerbated, rather than ameliorated by the shift to multicultural policy? By reexamining the forms of social recognition available to visible minorities within the Canadian state today, I hope to strengthen the arguments raised by academics who see multiculturalism as a site of nationalist pedagogy in which the promotion of cultural diversity is a management strategy designed to maintain control of a culturally heterogeneous population. I further intend to investigate what possibilities for resistance might be offered by a psychoanalytic understanding of the formation of 'visible' minority subjectivities, and in particular Chinese Canadian subjectivities.[2]

Although the passage of the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act effectively halted immigration from China and further curtailed the social and political participation of

Chinese-Canadians within the state, the advent of World War II significantly changed the political situation of naturalized and native-born Chinese Canadians. Li claims that following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the public image of the Chinese improved steadily due to their participation in the war effort. Further, government attention to the Japanese 'threat' meant that it considered the latter race to be the greater danger.[3] Canada's military alliance with China against Japan made it "embarrassing...to maintain a discriminatory policy towards a racial group of an allied country." Further, Canada's commitment to the U.N. Charter in 1944 and the passing of the Canadian Citizenship Act in 1947 meant that the federal government was no longer able to defend a policy of explicit exclusion of the Chinese. In 1947, Parliament repealed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, but as Fleras and Elliot note in their history of Canadian multiculturalism, Canada's desire to reject "anglo-conformity as an exclusive ideal" was motivated primarily by an influx of Eastern European immigrants following the war: immigration restrictions against persons of Asian descent were still "essentially racist in orientation, assimilationist in content, and segregationist in intent" (Fleras/Elliot 40-41).

Li concurs with this assessment, noting that despite the repeal of the exclusion act, "Chinese immigration to Canada prior to 1962 was highly restricted in comparison with the relatively free migration from Europe and the United States" (Li, *Chinese* 88). Not until 1967 with the introduction of a universal point system were immigration barriers based upon race or country of origin removed, at least officially.[4] Despite continued social and economic discrimination, increased immigration from Asian nations bolstered the number of Chinese able to enter the country post-WWII, and more

importantly, relaxed restriction on Chinese women entering the country meant that the

previous sex imbalance in Chinese populations across the country began gradually to

achieve equilibrium (Li, *Chinese* 92; Fleras/Elliot 42). As Eva Mackey points out,

though, post war immigration policy was still designed "to maintain British cultural

hegemony": while the UN Charter prohibited immigration restrictions based upon race,

the federal government "still maintained selectivity through clauses concerning

unsuitability of climate and inability to become readily assimilated" (Mackey 52-53).

Despite moderate improvement in the position of Chinese Canadians within the state,

Canadian immigration policy was less reflective of genuine desire on the part of the

government to eliminate racial discrimination, than to respond "to the presence of

growing [primarily European] ethnic diversity coupled with the need to ensure social

peace during an era of unprecedented change" (Fleras/Elliot 48). Changes to

immigration legislation thus did not represent a profound anti-racist shift in government

policy, but "were a response by the elites of Canada to a dangerous and ambiguous

situation in regard to the cultural politics of difference in post-war Canada" (Mackey 50).

Although an increasingly diverse European demographic in the early 1960s

represented a significant risk to the anglo hegemony of the nation, earlier restrictions on

non-European immigration ensured that the perceived threat posed by visible minorities

was far less pressing than that posed by French separatism.[5] In the decades following

WWII, the need to maintain social stability was concomitant with Canadian nationalist

desire to differentiate itself from the U.S. and Britain: this resulted in an increase in "state

intervention in economic, social, political and cultural life" (ibid 53). Thus, the desire of

the state to manage an increasingly diverse and politically unstable population must be understood in the context of its simultaneous need to establish a distinct identity on the international stage.[6] Throughout the 1960s, the federal government sought to promote a unified nationalist discourse that would promote the inclusion of cultural difference but still maintain an implicit anglo-cultural hegemony. In order to placate the increasing threat of Québec separatism, the Pearson government "introduced the concept of Canada as an 'equal partnership' between French and English Canadians, and enshrined the concepts of 'cultural dualism' and 'two founding races' in an Order-in-Council" (Mackey 55). Pearson also personally promoted a series of nationalist symbols throughout the 1960s, designed to highlight a distinct national identity on the world stage. These included the adoption of the Canadian flag, a new national anthem and the prominent centennial celebrations of Expo 67. Mackey writes that "the international exhibition and the centennial celebrations as well as [the nationalist symbols mentioned above] played a pedagogical role, providing an opportunity to educate…citizens about Canada's identity as a nation" (ibid 55-59). All cultural discourses, be they national or locally based, employ pedagogical symbols for the purposes of producing knowledge about a supposedly unified or homogeneous culture. This production of knowledge is essential to authoritative institutions as a means of producing a set of "shared values embodied in language, ethnicity and custom" that can in turn delineate the boundaries of belonging or non-belonging (Chun 115-116). Since the maintenance of an ethnically homogeneous population is demographically impossible in Canada, nationalist symbols must appeal instead to a shared ideology and history. Cultural dualism thus represented the intent of

an "activist government, motivated by a vision not just of what society is, but what it should be," a society still implicitly coded as culturally anglo-white, but desiring to envisage itself as ideologically distinct from competing Western nations (Bissoondath 36).

While the promotion of cultural dualism was a means to placate the desire for recognition of collective rights in Québec, it was unable to effectively manage demands for the recognition of cultural difference asserted by Native or 'visible minority' communities. Living within an imagined nation supposedly founded upon the "two solitudes" of Canada's colonial history, persons of non-English or French ancestry questioned "whose imagined community" they belonged to, and "what the conditions [were for]…belonging to this state of a nation" (Bannerji 91).[7] Neil Bissoondath notes that "homogeneous Canada [was] a reality only so long as its minorities could be ignored" (Bissoondath 60); in the late 1960s, the federal government came to understand that previously marginalized communities of non-European Canadians "[could] not be successfully ingested or assimilated, or made to vanish from where [they were] not wanted"(Bannerji 90-91). The advent of multicultural policy was more an acquiescence to this realization than a desire to better represent Canada's burgeoning demographic diversity.

In order to address the concerns posed by non-European populations in Canada, the project of cultural dualism was abandoned, starting in 1971, in favor of an official state policy of multiculturalism. This policy provided an ideological platform that legitimated sustained government intervention in the cultivation of national identity:

> multiculturalism as an *ideology* refers to a normative statement of "what
> ought to be." Unlike multiculturalism as a "fact" that describes social
> reality, the ideology of multiculturalism prescribes a preferred course of
> thought or action commensurate with the principle of cultural pluralism…
> as an official ideology, multiculturalism embraces a set of idea and ideals
> about the nature and characteristics of Canadian unity, identity and self
> image (Fleras/Elliot 56).

As with cultural dualism, the federal government understood its commitment to cultural

pluralism as an ideological strategy that could effectively render diverse European

ethnicities into a coherent national polity. Trudeau's policy sought to officially recognize

"the contribution by other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada" and still

maintain a "bilingual framework" upon which state institutions would operate (Trudeau

1971, reprinted in Fleras/Elliot 281-283). Multiculturalism was promoted by the

government as a progressive liberal humanist step toward recognizing both individual

and collective rights. It also marked a shift in the national imagination from that of a

country founded upon British cultural values, to one in which multiculturalism signified

the benevolent and tolerant attitude of the state towards non-anglo, non-Franco citizens,

and a principle upon which the country defined itself as nationally distinct from the U.S.

and Britain. The pedagogical functions previously assumed by visible symbols of

national unity were now within the purview of state multiculturalism; competing cultural

interests were 'advised' as to how to organize themselves into a homogeneous state that

would confer upon them a non-partisan 'Canadian' identity. The question of 'belonging'

raised by Canada's non-white communities was supposedly answered by a policy

espousing liberal inclusion within an equal domain of power.

While Fleras and Elliot suggest that the politicization of ethnocultures within multiculturalism has the potential to facilitate the generation of social processes through the "interplay of these different competing cultures," such a configuration abstracts the process of negotiation from the reality of the unequal distribution of power characterizing the relationship between anglo and non-anglo ethnicities (ibid 9-10). It further elides the intentions of the federal government to employ multicultural ideology as a site of nationalist pedagogy in order to foster an environment in which non-anglo populations compete against one another while an unmarked anglo core authority remains unexamined. Indeed, as Mackey points out, the very act of "defining and recognizing immigrants as 'ethnocultural groups'…provided a means through which cultural difference became politicized [and] also politically manageable through the funding of 'cultural programs,' the main function of the early policy" (Mackey 65). Rather than providing a social space in which different cultures can productively engage with each other, Canadian multiculturalism obscures unequal relations of power between the white anglo majority and non-anglo populations. A productive critique of multiculturalism thus requires an examination of how difference becomes identified and yet still lacks the political agency to bring about real social change. Highlighting the psychic effects of such management of cultural difference allows important insight into the often-overlooked affective dimensions of such practices.

As Mackey points out, by advocating multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, linguistic and political rights were reserved only for English and French cultures: "members of ethnic minorities only [had] rights as individual citizens…[and

could not] authorize political changes to [the] dominant culture." The stated intention of the policy to "promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity" (Trudeau 282) insures that the relationship between particularized multi-cultures and the dominant anglo culture is that "the dominant culture simply exists, whereas minority cultures *exist for* the latter" (Mackey 67). The presence of minority ethnocultures within multiculturalism thus reinforces the centrality of anglo normativity in Canada. How, though, are categories of racial 'others' produced and disseminated within the Canadian polity, and in what ways do such subject categories impact upon the dominant culture they are created to serve?

The use of state multiculturalism to foster inter-group competition in the service of strengthening a unified national identity has been well noted in activist and academic circles. Numerous academics and politicians argue that the implementation of an official policy of multiculturalism in Canada was an attempt by the Canadian government to undermine Québec's claims to recognition as a distinct founding culture (Bannerji 93-94; Bissoondath 40; Gagnon 43; Mackey 64; Taylor 115). The positioning of minority subjects in relation to the "survival anxieties…[of the] two solitudes" was, and continues to be, essential to the elevation of anglo Canada as a transcendent frame upon which a multicultural nation can be constructed (Bannerji 93). The struggles between English and French Canada for control of the dominant culture are mediated by the production of visible minority communities that contrast with their shared 'Europeanness': "their visceral anxieties about loss of culture are offset by 'other' cultural presences that are minoritized with respect to both, while the commonality of Anglo-French culture

emerges in contrast" (ibid 99). The political organization of non-European individuals into collective 'ethnocultures' thus plays a pivotal role in maintaining entrenched white Anglo-French normativity in the Canadian imagination. The question still remains though as to *how* the state manufactures such 'others,' and more importantly how non-European immigrants and First Nations persons are encouraged to occupy these 'useful' subjectivities. The violent psychic effects of such positions upon their occupants should also not be minimized in such a discussion.

How do such subjectivities emerge from within official multiculturalism? Bannerji claims that within the Canadian state, "the ability and right to interpret and name the nation's others forms a major task of national intellectuals". In other words, the production and proliferation of ethnic subjectivities emanates in a 'top-down' fashion from the nation's political and intellectual elite (ibid 109). Central to the production of categories of ethnic 'others' is an "ideological Englishness/whiteness [which] is central to the programme of multiculturalism…[as] the point of departure for 'multiculture'" (ibid 110). Bannerji claims that under the pretence of reconciling cultural difference, the ideological apparatus of the state produces a certain reductive "nomenclature" that is extended to non-European citizens: she gives the example of the term "visible minority," "in which people from many histories, languages, cultures and politics are reduced to a distilled abstraction" by contrast with a core anglo culture. Such categories are interpellative in nature: they "capture the 'difference' from 'Canada/English/French Canada' and often signify a newness of arrival into 'Canada'…they are identifying devices, like a badge, and they identify those who hold no legitimate or possessive

relationship to 'Canada'" (ibid 111). Bannerji is unambiguous about how the state achieves this end:

> official or elite multiculturalism [is] an ideological state apparatus...
> [capable] of constructing and ascribing political subjectivities and agencies
> for those who are seen as legitimate and full citizens and others who are
> peripheral to this in many senses. There is in this process an element of
> racialized ethnicization, which whitens [Canadians] of European origins
> and blackens or darkens their "others" by the same stroke. This is integral
> to Canadian class and cultural formation and distribution of political
> entitlement (ibid 6).[8]

Bannerji acknowledges that the interpellative role of the state can be contested by examining the potential disparities produced by multiple hailings and potential misperformances. However, she also explicitly highlights the state's strength as an interpellative authority to designate and enforce subordinate racial subjectivities. The power of the state to name enables "[it] to extend its governing and administrative jurisdiction into civil society, while at the same time, incorporating the every day person into the national project. These names...are appellations for interpellation." While non-Europeans find themselves interpellated as citizens within the discourse of state governance, such "citizenship does not provide automatic membership in the nation's community. Living in a nation does not, by definition, provide one with a prerogative to 'imagine' it" (ibid 66). She maintains that both today and throughout the history of multiculturalism, the state has maintained a pervasive presence in the lives of those designated as visible minority subjects (ibid 90). Therefore, when examining essentialized categories of race and culture produced through multicultural discourse, it is critical not to underestimate the presence of the state within the lives of visible minority subjects when we consider the possibilities of resistance.

Several critics and writers ascribe a similar efficacy to the state apparatus in its production and proliferation of racialized subjectivities as diametrically opposed to an unmarked whiteness in Canada. Dionne Brand agrees that part of the strength of interpellative categories for visible minorities stems from the positioning of 'whiteness' as a pillar of the Canadian nation (Brand 173). The state, according to Brand, employs a flexible designation of whiteness that it chooses to bestow upon citizens of European decent, and withhold from all those it designates as non-white, non-European others. She maintains that whiteness in this country is synonymous with privilege: "when [Europeans] came to this country, they slipped into whiteness which the Canadian state-legitimating process had assigned as its main characteristic and which coincided with their race" (ibid 174-175). This whiteness upon which the country conceives itself "can work most efficiently with an other/enemy in its midst, constantly inventing new signifiers of 'us' and 'them'"(Bannerji 108). Brand also highlights the strength of the state as an interpellative authority: "access, representation, inclusion, exclusion, equity. All are other ways of saying race in this country without saying that we live in a deeply racialized and racist culture" (Brand 176). Her observations illustrate the fluid and ambiguous way in which race appears as a sign in multicultural Canada, implicitly coding white ethnicities as benefactors of economic and social entitlement, and denying the very same privilege to non-white subjects. But while Brand's contentions are astute as to the effects of racial classifications of Canadian citizens, she still presumes the ability of the state to interpellate racialized subjects into complete categories of 'visible' or 'invisible' ethnicities. Her conception of the state apparatus is unable to account for motivations

that compel 'visible' immigrants and citizens to turn towards such authority. Can we understand the force of identity categories produced through multicultural discourse not as operating upon minority individuals through the imposition of identity or interpellation within a predetermined category, but rather as cultivating psychic violence through the prohibition of attachments within the state? Further, how might the ability of racialized subjects to articulate or avow their loss be adversely affected by multiculturalism? Before turning to these questions, one further evolution in contemporary Canadian multiculturalism needs to be examined.

State multiculturalism has grown in the past three decades to become the defining feature of Canadian nationalism, eclipsing former efforts to distinguish this country from its southern neighbor through the promotion of white British cultural values, and the evocation of harsh geographic imagery as symbolic of the national character.[9] The 1971 policy gained increased political agency through its inclusion within the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 27 of the Charter states that "This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians," thus situating individual rights as relative to those of multicultural or collective rights in Canada (Fleras/Elliot 87-88). The 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act further enshrined multiculturalism in the national consciousness, obligating "all federal departments and agencies to implement multiculturalism as it applies to their mandates," and stating that "multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in the decision-making processes of the federal government" (Cardozo/Musto 11; Fleras/Elliot 75).[10] The result of the

integration of multiculturalism in Canadian law has been the emergence of a flexible strategy "to define and construct Canadian identity [that changes] in tandem with the project of managing the diverse populations of the country" (Mackey 71). The ability of state multiculturalism to shift in response to changes in demographics, political concerns and international relations means that the policy today has the dual responsibility of population management and the representation of diversity in the service of promoting Canada's international presence and economic viability.

Since the late 1980s, multiculturalism has been promoted as a marketable resource in the global economy: "policies and practices are [thus] concerned with the goal of managing diversity in the hope of minimizing potential disruptions to the social order yet maximizing the orderly accumulation of capital in Canada" (Mackey 68; Fleras/Elliot 95). Mackey points out that although recent incarnations of the original 1971 policy still stress the function of multiculturalism as a social ameliorative to national identity, they also promote the economic benefits of the policy as a uniquely Canadian resource in the emergent global economy (Mackey 68).

Arguments in support of the marketing of multiculturalism have been made by academics such as Fo Niemi, who maintains that Canada should be "exporting" its expertise in "diversity management" to better position itself within international markets that demand recognition of cultural diversity (Niemi 169). However, without expanding on how the government might achieve this goal, Niemi also suggests that "we can at the same time use the international stage to define and reinvent ourselves domestically" (ibid). Mackey is far less ambiguous about how this supposedly improved social policy

has emerged: "despite the expediency of cultural diversity for global capitalism, the limits of diversity must…be maintained" (Mackey 68-69). Bissoondath meanwhile suggests that the two goals are not incommensurable. He points out that one of the more "ironic" consequences of multiculturalism is its "simplification of culture." Rather than promoting culture as complex lived experience, the view of multiculturalism presented to the Canadian public and to the international community is one of superficial kitsch, culture reduced to easily marketable stereotypes that belie the complexity of the populations that live them. 'Culture' in this configuration, becomes "a fixed property of social groups rather than a relational field in which they encounter one another and live out social, historical relationships" (Gilroy 266-267). Mackey also addresses the phenomenon of cultural commodification, claiming that multicultural policy "mobilizes different definitions of 'culture' for minority groups and for national culture": the former appears as "fragments of cultures, constructed from folkloric and culinary remnants…conceptually divorced from politics and economics, and…[which] become commodified cultural possessions" (Mackey 66).   Quoting Fanon, Dionne Brand notes, "this is how European culture likes to see the culture of those it has conquered, as sentiment rather than meaning or action" (Brand 150).[11] By situating the presentation of cultural diversity in the context of colonial racial discourse, Brand calls attention to the cultural imperialism inherent in Canadian multiculturalism.

Homi Bhabha expands upon this phenomenon in his discussion of modern multicultural societies. He claims that in plural democratic societies, "the sign of the cultured or the civilized attitude is the ability to appreciate cultures in a kind of *musée*

imaginaire; as though one should be able to collect and appreciate them"(Rutherford 208). Once catalogued, the "various historical and social contexts" of these cultures are transcended by the unmarked dominant culture, implicitly coded in Canada as anglo-white. Here, cultural difference is reconstituted as cultural diversity; because an effective multicultural politics would require the generation of uneven and potentially unrecognizable racial identities, Canadian multiculturalism must instead *create* cultural diversity in order to *contain* cultural difference within a homogeneous frame. This latter conceptualization of imagined national character is highly amenable to the production of marketable ethnicities. The economic benefits surrounding the evocation of cultural diversity has the corollary effect of managing domestic inter-cultural relations. Bhabha claims that "A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the…dominant culture which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid" (ibid 207-208). Li Zong concurs with this assessment of the effects of cultural commodification, claiming that the abolition of policies of overt racism in Canada in favor of multiculturalism persistently entrenches what Frances Henry describes as *democratic racism*, "in which…commitments to democratic principles…coexist with attitudes and behaviors that include negative feelings about minority groups" (Zong 117-118).[12] Bannerji questions whether multicultural policy could ever be capable of combating racist attitudes towards non-European cultures, or whether the policy was ever intended to do so in the first place: "what can make it a truly multicultural state when all the power relations and the signifiers of Anglo-French white supremacy are barely concealed behind a straining liberal democratic façade?" (Bannerji 106)

The ethos of state multiculturalism discussed thus far does little to assuage this contention. Bissoondath attacks multicultural policy for showing "signs of a certain haste, [a] lack of long-term consideration [and a] promise of action with no discussion of consequence"(ibid). And yet, as Bannerji points out, the continued promise of racial critique *is in fact* the long-term and ever-delayed consideration of multicultural policy: its telos is *tolerance*, not acceptance of difference and as such, the latter goal must always be located in an ever-distant future (Bannerji 120). How then can we recognize and offset the injurious aspects of ethnic identity engendered by multiculturalism? Is the authority of the state to interpellate immigrant subjects absolute? Could it not be refused?

What is first needed is a reconsideration of how the discourse of multiculturalism prescribes racial subjectivities, and how these in turn act upon the individuals who occupy them. In the previous chapter, I argued that conceptions of 'ideological state apparatuses' were somewhat problematic, in that they were dependant upon a certain predisposition towards the force of law existing in the individual prior to his or her being hailed. However, I do not mean to underestimate the power of the state to engender restrictive raced appellations. As with earlier legislation, the specific design of these categories is to act upon racial minority subjects by *cultivating* a certain psychic violence; a "transposed aggression" that, if allowed latitude within the social realm, could threaten or destabilize the dominant anglo-hegemony underpinning the Canadian nationalist imagination (ibid 188). As Butler points out, "forms of social power" act upon subordinate subjects not through a unilateral application of power, but by "regulating what losses will and will not be grieved; in the social foreclosure of grief we might find

what fuels the internal violence of conscience" (Butler 183). In the context of the Canadian state, one particular *loss of a more ideal kind* appears for non-white Canadians as the loss of possibility for participation as a complete citizen. This attachment is not necessarily a singular attachment *to* belonging within the state, although desire to be fully 'Canadian' is most certainly denied to visible minorities. Rather, because non-white immigrants are forced to occupy inimical subjectivities that deny them full participation in social spheres, an uncertain host of desires related to social recognition are forcibly suppressed. The social space afforded to non-white individuals in Canada is "a specific territory…part of [Canada's] economy, subject to its laws, and member of its civil society. Yet, [these so-called 'others] are not part of [the country's] self definition as 'Canada' because we are not 'Canadians'" (Bannerji 65).

In a policy of outright exclusion of non-European and non-white individuals from the Canadian state, the loss of state would be easily discernable. The process of loss might be understood in this way: I desire to become part of this state; its population represented by its government denies my full participation, resulting in a certain loss; I internalize this prohibition in order to try to prevent this loss. But in Freud's configuration, recognizable loss does not result in melancholia but in *mourning*, a natural period of grieving that will be "overcome after a certain lapse of time" (Freud 244). Melancholia meanwhile results from the prolonged refusal or inability to acknowledge loss, resulting in a pathological withdrawal from the social realm (ibid). The ideological basis of Canadian multiculturalism is one of purported *inclusion*, regardless of racial descent, within the supposedly power-neutral social space of the nation. It disavows the

possibility that any people are refused equal opportunity within the state to express themselves as they desire or to form attachments to the considerable social resources of the state. The loss of belonging, which in the context of immigration to Canada is a decidedly exploitable loss, thus becomes a loss that *cannot be grieved* because it has been denied or rendered unrecognizable by the state.

Freud notes that even though the loss suffered by the melancholic is imperceptible to those around him or her, they still "feel justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but…cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost" (ibid 245). Visible minority individuals living within Canada experience this uncertainty through the sustained pedagogical influence of multiculturalism as a symbol of Canadian nationalist imagination. Brand points out that "this country…is faced with a stupefying innocence" that persistently denies that "there is racism in this country" (Brand 178). "It is this innocence that causes people of color to modify their claims to words such as 'access,' 'representation' and 'inclusion' instead of entitlement" (ibid). The integration of multicultural policy into all legislative, administrative and judicial levels of government in Canada is held by white Canada as evidence of its success in eradicating racism from the nation: but, as Bannerji notes, "we demanded some genuine reforms—some changes…and instead we got *multiculturalism*" (Bannerji 89, my emphasis). This disavowal of the ubiquitous presence of racism throughout Canada becomes ossified in public and government discourses, in radio and media representations of the nation, and in the ambivalent attitude of white Canadians towards the presence of 'visible

minorities.' Consider a recent speech by former Secretary of State and Liberal MP Hedy

Fry, given in Ottawa in May of 1996:

> In 1996, Canadians marked the 25th anniversary of Canada's becoming the
> first nation to adopt a multicultural policy—a policy that has helped bring us
> international recognition and opportunity. It has also brought variety,
> innovation choice and growth—culturally, socially and economically—while
> enhancing and promoting our shared Canadian values of fairness, justice and
> mutual respect. (Fry 35).

Fry's speech, steeped in the rhetoric of inclusion, evokes an imagined nation in which

social and economic opportunities are the fundamental possessions of all bearing

Canadian citizenship. She continues, noting that

> Multiculturalism *has always been* a building block for Canadian society…
> The Strategic Review of Multiculturalism which has been underway for the
> past year is focused on…making sure that multiculturalism programs are
> relevant to the needs of 1996 and the future (ibid 37-38).

Here, Fry evokes the ideological spectre of multiculturalism to efface the frequently

violent and racist history of Canada's development as a nation, a nation that did *not*

always define itself as a culturally diverse society, but sought to deny or contain

difference with a white British cultural hegemony. By refusing the loss(es) suffered by

visible minority subjects due to pervasive if implicit racism against non-whites, the

majority population in Canada represented by the federal government *exacerbates* the

transposed psychic violence in visible minority subjects that would previously have been

directed against a denied external object, the nation.

Liberal tolerance, as I argued previously, served to regulate the kinds of losses

that were avowable by Chinese and other visible minority subjects in Canada in the late

19th and early 20th century. As Butler points out, in the process of turning back upon

itself, "the ego… becomes a 'polity' and conscience one of its 'major institutions' precisely because psychic life withdraws a social world into itself in an effort to annul the losses that world demands."(ibid 181-182). Within this psychic topography, the conscience berates the ego or psychic object in place of the external object that was formerly in "the sociality from which he or she was withdrawn. One *would*…denounce the lost other if one could—for departing, if for no other reason" (ibid 182). Butler further argues that the sustained inability to avow loss compounds the degree of violence inflicted upon the ego by the conscience: "the unspeakability and unrepresentability of this loss translates directly into a heightening of conscience" (ibid 183). It is not the strength of the *inhibition* that determines the ferocity of the conscience, but rather "it appears that its strength has more to do with marshalling aggression in the service of refusing to acknowledge a loss that has already taken place"(ibid). Since multicultural policy premises itself upon a certain liberal inclusionism and simultaneously refuses to acknowledge uneven distributions of power within the nation, it actually effects an *increase* in psychic violence as it paradoxically claims to expiate prior racial discrimination. Where previous legislation regulating the participation of Chinese immigrants in mainstream Canada facilitated a desire to include these individuals within the polity in a marginalized capacity, multiculturalism purports to eradicate such restrictions, even as it further entrenches white normativity and disguises its inability to effect real social change.

* * * * *

If the telos of Canadian multiculturalism is tolerance rather than respect for cultural difference, what then is the solution to an apparent failure in the policy's stated intent? Numerous politicians and academics have suggested alternative ideological approaches to engaging with cultural difference: should multiculturalism be abandoned in favor of these new directions? In the final section of this chapter I will examine two different philosophical approaches to multicultural engagement suggested by Charles Taylor and Ian Angus, as well as Neil Bissoondath's own suggestions for how Canadian multicultural policy should be redirected.

In "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor engages with the desire for recognition underpinning nationalist movements such as Canadian multiculturalism, a movement in which "two conceptions of rights liberalism have confronted each other…playing a role in the impending breakup of the country" (Taylor 113). Taylor contends that human beings acquire a sense of individual identity through discursive interaction with others in social settings. In other words, the struggle to define oneself necessarily occurs through dialogic interaction with those in our respective communities (ibid 103-104). He describes what he sees as the politics of 'equal recognition,' a negotiation whereby individuals struggle to achieve a reciprocal degree of recognition through interactions with others upon whom the individual is dependant for their sense of social identity. Accordingly, misrepresentation or the denial of recognition can have adverse effects upon the individual's self-image, and thus the agitation of subaltern groups for recognition is a legitimate struggle (ibid 98-99). While the desire for

recognition is a valuable aspect of Taylor's theory, the way in which he conceives of achieving such recognition is somewhat problematic.

The key to discovering one's "authentic self," according to Taylor, is to engage in the practice of "judgment" within these dialogic engagements. It is here that he introduces two concepts related to the need for equal recognition: the "politics of equal dignity," which espouses the equal worth of all individual citizens, and the "politics of difference," in which "what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, its distinctness from everyone else"(ibid 105). Taylor claims that these politics are inherently in conflict with one another, because while the former supposes a certain universalism among human beings, the latter demands attention to particularity: "the reproach the first makes to the second is that it violates the principle of nondiscrimination. The reproach the second makes to the first is that it negates identity by forcing people into a homogeneous mold that is untrue to them," a mold that is necessarily biased by the material conditions from which it was produced (ibid 108). He claims that in the Canadian context, these oppositional politics have come to the forefront in which equal rights entrenched in the 1982 Charter find themselves in conflict with Québecois and First Nations demands for collective distinctness (ibid 113-114). The only way to reconcile these two politics is to distinguish between *fundamental* human rights and rights that could be revoked under certain social conditions (ibid 118). He claims that:

> A society with strong collective goals can be liberal…provided that it is
> respecting of diversity, especially when dealing with those who don't share
> its common goals; and provided that it can provide adequate safeguards
> for fundamental rights. There will undoubtedly be tensions and difficulties

in pursuing these objectives together, but such a pursuit is not impossible (ibid).

He describes this vision as a "non-procedural liberalism," in which the need to protect individual rights are balanced against the need for collective survival.

It is here that Taylor begins his main criticism of Canadian multiculturalism. Contemporary multiculturalism, in its desire to expiate the prior marginalization of vast segments of the population, demands a preemptory assumption of "the equal value of different cultures," an assumption he claims is highly problematic and condescending to cultural difference (ibid 120-123). The demand for such a presumption extends from the application of universalist principles of a politics of dignity that he claims is incommensurable with the need to negotiate cultural difference in a multicultural society. Instead, Taylor advocates a "fusion of horizons," in which individuals whose 'horizons of understanding' are determined by the material conditions of their own cultural experiences "learn to move into a broader horizon, where what [they] once took for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the unfamiliar culture" (ibid 123). In other words, the formation of a Canadian nation could occur through the negotiation of different ethnocultures, the fusion of which could produce entirely new "vocabularies of comparison" that could hold evaluative sway in determining culture standards with which to imagine the nation (ibid 125). Respect for other cultures in this configuration "is derived not from positive knowledge of all cultures—who could claim such a knowledge…but from a reflexive sense of one's own limitation," the knowledge that one's own horizon of meaning through which one understands the world is one of but many (Angus 153). Taylor

contends that while current institutional multiculturalism proliferates surface levels of cultural diversity, his non-procedural liberalism would be capable of recognizing deep level diversities. The inherent values of his conception of intercultural relations would include the balancing of individual versus collective rights in a manner beneficial to both, and the engendering of evaluative criteria of cultural worth that would not rely upon unmarked hegemonic norms.

Taylor's attempt to envisage a conceptual space in which cultural difference can be negotiated in a comparative cultural study is somewhat similar to Ian Angus' project in "Multiculturalism as a Social Ideal". Angus sets out to rethink the relationship between universalism and particularism through a "recovery of particularity that is connected to a discourse of legitimation with universalizing dimensions"(Angus 135-136). In other words, he theorizes that the seemingly antithetical natures of universalism and particularity could in fact be commensurable with one another. Angus sees multiculturalism as a "key location to address such a rethinking…[because] it combines a recovery of a pre-rational sense of belonging with a claim to collective rights that must be articulated in universal terms" (ibid 136). Like Taylor, Angus argues that in modern Western nation states, political participation in the state has been seen as "solely an activity of individuals," while collective rights have been relegated to the realm of civil society (ibid 137). In state multiculturalism though, "particularities" or "collective rights" have been brought into the public domain. "In emerging from the private, particularities are articulated…in a universalizing form" (ibid). He maintains though that in Canada's current variation of multiculturalism, the ideality of cultural interaction is

reduced to a) "the kind of variation that is normal between different individuals", b) "mere belonging within a single subculture" or c) "intercultural communication, as if one were to be fully formed within a single ethno-culture and were then to encounter others"; the latter reduction is how he describes Taylor's configuration (ibid 140-141). With "multiculturalism as a social ideal," Angus seeks to redefine the relation between "ethno-cultural affiliations" and "national ones," so as to relocate the two in non-competitive domains of influence (ibid 144).

What is key in Angus' configuration is his use of the term 'particularity,' which he defines as a certain "pre-rational belonging" or "exclusive loyalty to the tribe" (ibid 135-136). He argues that particularity, which he equates with ethno-cultural identity, must "involve *embracing* ethno-cultural identity," rather than simply inheriting it (ibid 161). Within the paradigm of multiculturalism as a social ideal, cultural understanding is produced not by opposing particularity and universalism, but by conceiving the individual as the link between them: "particularity is not the opposite of universality but its condition, as universality is not the transcendence of particularity but its articulation" (ibid 162). In other words, cultural respect is facilitated by the taking of one's own cultural identity as an *object*, and in justifying its worth to oneself, coming to *understand* the existence of, rather than epistemologically *know* cultural difference (ibid). Angus conceives of the process this way:

> I *feel* my own belonging; I *know* the other's difference; I *justify* my
> own belonging; I *justify* the other's belonging; we *understand* that human
> life is about identities; we *engage* each other in the construction of a common
> culture that illuminates human universality. In this way, an us/them relation
> that always contains the possibility of turning violent as a result of its
> exclusion of the other is mitigated and surpassed through a we/us relation

(ibid 161).

For Angus, the positioning of one's own culture within a field of representative possibilities requires the individual to 'step back' from his or her own understanding of the world, and accept that "something of what is essential to humanity will escape [them]" (ibid). Universalism becomes not homogenizing in this configuration, but rather is only achievable through the recognition of the limits of one's own cultural specificity (ibid 162). "The goal of a fully multicultural philosophy is to open all aspects of the common institutional axis to critique from the particularities of plural cultures" (ibid 168). Angus' configuration, like Taylor's, attempts to resist the homogenization of cultural difference within an anglo cultural hegemony by forcing English Canada to position itself as one culture among many. It further forces anglo ethnoculture to recognize its particularity rather than assuming a normative position in relation to peripheral 'others' within the nation. Understanding of a universal human condition is thus only accessible through the lens of particularity.

While certain elements of these theoretical approaches to multiculturalism appear seductive at first, their conception of how the nation is imagined or negotiated is somewhat problematic. Bannerji points out that Taylor "sees 'nation' primarily as an expression of civil society, as a collective self-determination and definition," an assessment I would argue is equally applicable to Angus' theory (Bannerji 97-98). Both theorists subscribe to a certain "nationalist logic," in which "the source of authentic nationhood is seen to originate in 'a people,' and ideally the state should reflect this authentic and natural notion" (Mackey 117). It is obvious from the language of both

theorists though that they have trouble locating cultural difference within their frames of reference. That is, while they posit a certain discursive space in which a shared vision of nation can be negotiated, they both assume a prior commonality of vision. Taylor elaborates further on this concept in *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*: "there are great differences in culture and outlook and background in a population that nevertheless shares the same idea of what it is to belong to Canada" (Taylor, *Reconciling* 182). As Bannerji points out, "Taylor must be speaking of those who are 'Canadians' and not 'others'" (Bannerji 99). What sort of imagined nation might arise from the participation of non-European voices in such a discussion?

Indeed, Taylor claims that "real judgments of worth suppose a fused horizon of standards, where we have been transformed by the study of the other so that we are not simply judging by our old familiar standards" (Taylor 125). But this statement presupposes that some entrenched standards *already exist*: in this configuration, negotiations with 'the other' appear not as a genuine desire to engage in an equal imagining of nation, but rather the desires of the 'other' appear as intrusive, an unfortunate reality, but one that must be accommodated or tolerated in order to maintain an existing social order. Taylor is unwilling or unable to engage with critics who insist upon asymmetrical relations of power, stating that he finds such "subjectivism…shot through with confusion," arguing that such "half-baked, neo-Nietzschean theories…claim that all judgments of worth are based on standards that are ultimately imposed by and further entrench structures of power" (Taylor 124). Bannerji rightly criticizes this sort of erasure, noting that "this utopian state formation of Taylor's founders…on the rocky

shores of the reality of how different 'differences' are produced, or are not just forms of diversity…he does not ever probe into the social relations of power that create the different differences" (Bannerji 102). His attention to the negotiation of culture in civil society disregards the role of authoritative apparatuses in proliferating subordinate racial subjectivities.

While Angus attempts to circumvent Taylor's reliance upon standards of universalism by suggesting that such standards are only accessible through the particular lens of cultural difference, he nevertheless encounters many of the same difficulties as the former theorist. As a precondition of his formulation, he claims that it is important to remember that "the nation-state cannot legitimately extend throughout the whole lives of its citizens" (Angus 136). However, at no point does he ever address the fact that in contemporary Canada, the state *does* extend its influence into all aspects of the lives of its visible minorities (Bannerji 89). His efforts to "rethink the relationship between state and civil society" are already burdened by his failure to address this unequal balance of power before embarking upon his project (Angus 137). Angus' theories are mired in many of the same assumptions as Taylor's essay, namely that "a consensus already exists on the matter of the distribution of wealth and power" (San Juan Jr. 65-66). Any theoretical approach to multiculturalism that fails to account for real relations of power will necessarily reinscribe the position of the dominant culture in a hegemonic relation to minority cultures within the Canadian state.

While Angus criticizes Taylor for presuming already fully complete ethnocultures that engage with each other in a broad "horizon of meaning," it is unclear whether or not

his conception of reaching universalism through particularity truly departs from this paradigm. He claims that Taylor's figuration is primarily concerned not with a respect for all cultures, but with guaranteeing that "*my own culture* be accorded equal respect with those that are now recognized" (Angus 155). He claims that by demanding that each individual justify rather than inherit his or her own cultural traditions, one would be forced to recognize that one's own cultural heritage "*is* endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended, and that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (ibid 160). The telos of such an endeavor would thus be "a respect for the otherness of the Other...[and] a letting go of the desire to be completely in charge of human universality" (ibid 161). In this statement, Angus reveals that even in his attempt to redefine the concept of the universality of human experience, he cannot fully divorce such a discussion from its reliance upon designations of 'otherness.' His arguments in support of "divergent cultures coexisting together harmoniously depends on all of them accepting a shared...ethics of reciprocity" that on close examination still appears to be "the Western Enlightenment view of tolerance" (San Juan Jr. 72). The fundamental flaws in both Angus' and Taylor's theories is thus their failure "to address the inequality of power and ...control of resources [in Canada, which]...will only reinforce stereotypes, racist theory, and racialist practice," and their inability to address the way in which whiteness constructs itself as normative through the ec-centric positioning of 'visible others' (ibid 70). Further, their entrenchment of inclusionary ideologies within theories that supposedly envisage space in which cultural difference is respected will have no effect upon the disavowed loss of attachment that fuels psychic violence in reflexive

subjects. In fact, by further disguising hegemonic norms within a supposed reciprocal system, their theories are in danger of intensifying the psychic violence fostered among visible minorities. As E. San Juan Jr. points out, "it is clear that conflicts in the political, legal and economic fields cannot be glossed over by postmodern language games in a hyperreal space" (ibid 71).

The shortcomings of these two theories demonstrate that in order to alleviate the psychic violence cultivated in visible minority subjects living in this country, what is needed is not an ideology or policy that attempts to redefine concepts of universalism so that it is more commensurable with the fragmentary nature of cultural particularity. The same can be said about arguments such as Bissoondath's that attempt to privilege a coherent nationalism at the expense of cultural specificity. He claims that "multiculturalism has failed us…[by] eradicating the center and evoking uncertainty as to what and who is Canadian," and he calls instead for the promotion of an inclusive national character engendered through the promotion of pedagogical symbols of national unity such as the 1982 Charter (Bissoondath 55-70). But since the politics of liberal inclusion in Canada do not interrogate the core of white anglo normativity undergirding their operation, they persist in refusing to allow visible minority subjects to voice the loss of social belonging they experience through their designation as 'outsiders' within the nation. Since the strength of conscience exercising violence upon the reflexive ego is directly proportional to the prohibition against the avowal of loss, such arguments allow for the continued proliferation of psychic violence in the service of promoting national unity. It would follow that what is needed is a means by which these subjects can insist

upon the existence of this loss. Canadian multiculturalism in its current incarnation is fraught with contradictions regarding the very cultural difference it purports to protect. While earlier legislative restrictions on Chinese immigrants and other visible minorities contained a discernable preference for the segregation of these populations, current legislation claims to eradicate such racist practice. As a result, the psychic violence experienced by those designated as visible minority subjects is thus exacerbated by the persistent refusal of the state and the white majority population to recognize restrictions of social participation for non-white persons living within the country. The question remains as to how best to approach such a rethinking of community politics. Homi Bhabha claims that what is needed today is "the notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and *potentially antagonistic* political identities" (Rutherford 208). He maintains that this sort of politics is essential for the multiple identities present within multicultural societies to articulate cultural difference "in challenging ways, either positively or negatively, either in progressive or regressive ways, often conflictually, sometimes even *incommensurably*" (ibid 208-209). This imagining of a potentially non-repressive community structure is ideal, but in the interim, how might the present configuration of Canadian multiculturalism best be remade? Despite demanding that visible minority Canadians "put together a strategy of articulation that …reverses the direction of our political understanding and affiliation—against the interpellating strategies of the ideological state apparatus," Bannerji does not advocate a simple reversing of the process of naming (Bannerji 119). Rather than seeking to confront or dismantle Canadian multiculturalism outright, she approaches it "not as a 'thing'" or a

"cultural object," but rather as "an expression of an interaction of social relations in dynamic tension with each other, losing and gaining its political form with fluidity" (ibid 120).

In the subsequent chapters, I will turn to examples of Chinese-Canadian literature, and examine how such texts function as sites of nationalist pedagogy; fluid sites in which the dominant racist representations entrenched in the current incarnation of multiculturalism can be productively engaged, (re)inscribed and (re)occupied. The nature of reflexive ambivalence is a key theme within each of these texts, and both Wayson Choy's and Fred Wah's exploration of its ethos provide key sites in which anti-racist activism can be pursued.

NOTES

[1] This chapter will concentrate upon the multicultural policy and ideology followed by the federal government, and not Quebec's policy of 'Interculturalism.' For a discussion of provincial initiatives towards an official multiculturalism, see Fleras/Elliot 73-85, with specific discussion of Quebec's Intercultural policy on pages 83-84. See also Gagnon, "Bloc Québécois: Integration Rather Than Multiculturalism".

[2] This chapter will not discuss the situation faced by First Nations communities in Canada today. Although concerns faced by First Nations persons are central to any discussion of Canadian politics and identity, this particular discussion focuses on Canada's ideological and institutional commitment to multiculturalism: I recognize multicultural ideology as being unable to accommodate the deep violence inherent in the history of First Nations interactions with colonial cultures in North America, and will limit my discussion of First Nations politics to delegitimizing the moral authority of the Canadian state to privilege two 'founding' solitudes in discussions of state multiculturalism. I would, however, consider the theoretical framework detailed in this chapter to be useful to a separate discussion of Native rights in Canada, but recognize that a limited discussion of Native politics within the context of multiculturalism is counter productive.

[3] The 1940 Special Committee on Orientals in B.C. focused almost entirely upon the Japanese living in Canada and "considered the problem of the Chinese to be neither difficult or urgent" (Li, *Chinese* 86).

[4] For a full discussion of restrictions on Chinese and Asian immigration, as well as restrictions on naturalized and native-born Chinese Canadians from 1947 until 1967 see Li, *The Chinese in Canada*, 88-92. For a full discussion of evaluative criteria and trends for immigration after 1967 see Fleras/Elliot, 43-48.

[5] For statistics illustrating immigration to Canada by place of birth from 1945-1986, see Fleras/Elliot 42.

[6] State intervention in the production of national identity included four Commissions following WWII: The Massey Commission in 1949 investigated the arts, letters and sciences, The Fowler commission in 1955 examined radio and television broadcasting, The O'Leary Commission in 1961 investigated magazine publishing, and most significant, the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission in 1963 invesitaged Bilingualism (Mackey 54).

[7] For a discussion of the differences between 'official' and 'popular' nationalism, see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. In particular, see "Concepts and Definitions" in the introduction to Anderson's text, and "Official Nationalism and Imperialism" (chapter 6). For a brief contrastive study of multiculturalism in Australia as well as in New Zealand, the United States and Britain, see Fleras/Elliot 251-268.

[8] Throughout the essays contained in *The Dark Side of the Nation*, Bannerji suggests that considering concepts of class can help to refract the seemingly essential categories of race and gender upon which Canada as a nation is constructed. While this would certainly be a fruitful avenue to pursue, this paper shall take the aforementioned alternative route of using psychoanalytic criticism to problematize totalizing categories of identity presumed in Althusserian models of interpellation. This, in tandem with a reconsideration of the role of pedagogical symbols of national unity and community belonging engendered by multiculturalism will provide an alternative mode of refraction of essential racial subjectivities.

[9] For a full discussion of the use of Canada's natural environment and First Nations populations as representative symbols of national unity, see Mackey "Settling Differences: Managing and representing

people and land in the Canadian national project" in *The House of Difference*, 1999. For examples of the use of symbols of Canada's northern geography in literary representations of the nation, see Atwood, *Survival*, 1972, and *Strange Things*, 1995. Also see Frye, with a new introduction by Linda Hutcheon, *The Bush Garden*, 1995 (original publication 1971). Finally, for a discussion of the use of geography and women in the production of the Canadian nation see Bannerji, "Geography Lessons: On Being an Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation" in *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 63-86.

[10] For a full discussion of the establishment of government offices and agencies concerned with the implementation of multiculturalism in the institutional framework of the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, see Fleras/Elliot 73-85.

[11] Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Charles Lam Markmann trans. (New York, Grove Press, 1967).

[12] For an illustrative survey concerning the often-contradictory attitudes among persons of European decent towards non-European immigrants see Zong, 119-121. Also see Mackey's field interviews with participants at various Canada 125 festivals in 1992.

Chapter 3
Sites of Recognition: *The Jade Peony*, *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*, and the Discourse(s) of History, Ethnicity and Nation

If I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics.

Ien Ang

I am Canadian and I am also of a Chinese background. I don't want to be invisible: in the first place because I can't be, and secondly, because I'm not ashamed to be visible.

Wayson Choy

As discussed thus far, the discourses of official nationalist history and Canadian multicultural policy in particular obfuscate the real existence of racism against non-European citizens evident in the attitude of the state and the white majority population towards those designated as 'visible minorities' in Canada. While state multiculturalism purports to depart from the overt discrimination endemic to past immigration and citizenship legislation, its mandate to promote an ideology of liberal inclusion of cultural diversity actually serves to exacerbate psychic violence among racialized subjects by promoting a national culture in which the existence of racist attitudes is persistently denied by both government authorities and the white population.

But how then, might we begin to counteract such violence? Is it possible to approach Chinese Canadian writing as a fluid site in which psychic violence can be

ameliorated through the articulation of recognizable and representative cultural

subjectivities? Wayson Choy's novel, *The Jade Peony*, and his memoir *Paper Shadows:*

A Chinatown Childhood have enjoyed popular reception in both mainstream and

academic circles. Both texts also deal extensively with the history of the Chinese in

Canada, and the community influence of Vancouver's Chinatown upon the development

of Chinese Canadian identity.[1] These texts were written partially through the financial

support of organizations such as the Canada Council and the Toronto Arts Council, which

are required under Bill C-88 to promote Canada's multicultural heritage. It is therefore

tempting to categorize them, as Maria N. Ng has done with *The Jade Peony*, as

orientalized representations of Chinese culture in Canada which pose as 'authentic'

accounts of Chinese Canadian life (Ng 179). However, while both texts do contain

detailed accounts of the physical setting of Chinatown and its members in addition to

extensive themes of both Chinese and Chinese Canadian cultural practices, can it be

assumed that these representations are somehow 'inauthentic' by virtue of their financial

support by the Canadian government, or their choice of setting or subject matter? Might

not representations of a 'visible' community offered by a writer who is a product of the

material conditions of that community provide the means by which to (re)occupy and

subvert formerly entrenched signs of race or ethnicity? This chapter will argue that Choy

challenges received notions of Chinese Canadian subjectivity by problematizing

representative modes of mainstream history and language through which Chinese

Canadians have been previously (mis)represented. In *The Jade Peony*, the voices of three

child narrators refuse the possibility of a unified or established Chinese Canadian voice,

while *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* employs the traditionally realist form of memoir to destabilize notions of family and community history as easily-recoverable sites of essential identity and to explore the ways in which the psychic dimensions of racism have conditioned the relations between the author and the members of his family. In both texts, the history of exclusion faced by Chinese Canadians is omnipresent and inescapable, determining the lives of the protagonists even as its own status as a definitive record of a minority population in Canada is destabilized. Both texts seek to articulate a previously submerged, multivalent Chinese Canadian voice as an alternative means of self-expression to dominant discursive sites of race, ethnicity and nationalism within Canada.

The shifting ethnic and racial sign of 'Chinese' appears in both texts through the author's treatment of the way in which these signs are contingent upon language and the discourses of history. But how should we, as critics, engage with this deconstructive approach? In *The Jade Peony*, language and history appear not as immutable entities, but as unstable mediums of representation. In his discussion of *Obasan*, Donald Goellnicht notes that "texts [and minority texts in particular] are historically mediated and mediating forms that must situate themselves in history at the same time that they insist on some degree of fictional and linguistic autonomy" (Goellnicht, "Minority" 299). *The Jade Peony* is set in Vancouver during World War II and the Chinese Exclusion Era. As such the material trace of Chinese history in Canada during this period is intrinsic to the plot of the text and the development of its characters. The text is comprised of three intersecting accounts told by three Canadian-born Chinese children, Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum and Sek-

Lung. While Choy includes historical details concerning immigration restrictions within Vancouver's Chinatown, international political developments in China, and inter-ethnic relations between the Chinese and Japanese following Pearl Harbor, these elements supply the background to the subjective development of the three child-narrators. The discourses of official history, those of both Canada during the Exclusion Era and China during the occupation of the Japanese, do not appear as abstract intrusions into the narrative, but rather are accessible only through the subjective and frequently unreliable perspectives of the children. As the characters develop psychologically, the discourses of history conversely become a determining, but not totalizing, influence upon their perceptions of themselves and their community.

While the context of Choy's works requires recognition of the impact of historical context upon the lives of his characters, his refusal to privilege these discourses raises questions as to how the text might actually challenge or refine methods of official historiography. As Marie Vautier points out, the simple acknowledgement that there are different and potentially incommensurable or contradictory versions of history can lead to a questioning of the authority of 'official history' as a single, unified account of past events (Vautier 28). Canada, she claims, "has long perceived itself to be a country with multiple historical truths," resulting in a "blurring of the boundaries between fiction and history" in Canadian literature (ibid). Vautier maintains that in Choy's text, the conflation of fiction and history is indicative of what Linda Hutcheon describes as "historiographic metafiction"(ibid). Such texts highlight the parallels between historiography and the writing of fiction:

> no history presents absolute truth, for all history is textualized, and while it may form our concept of past 'reality,' inherent in language lies the possibility—the necessity even—of manipulation through selection, judgment, choice of rhetorical tropes, and so on, so that 'reality' becomes distorted, 'truth' biased. Such self-consciousness does not deny the existence of past events, but recognizes that the only way we know those events is through texts, themselves a form of fiction making (Goellnicht, "Minority" 290).

Vautier quotes Rudy Weibe's assertion that Canadian history in particular requires the presence of a "story" in order to make history tangible and relevant. In response to this, historiographic metafiction "thematizes its own interaction both with the historical past, and with the historically conditioned expectations of its readers" (Hutcheon 231). The author and the reader are not considered as separate agents in the production of meaning within the text, but rather the "entire context of the production and reception of the text" becomes the critical focus (ibid 228). In a novel like *The Jade Peony*, which is comprised of multiple, autonomous perspectives of a shared family and community, the reader must assume critical agency in assembling the varied points of view not as separate representations, "but in a new or at least newly articulated mode" (ibid). Since the perpetuation of psychic violence in minority subjects is facilitated by the persistent refusal to allow the subject to articulate grievance, and the discourses of national history are frequently employed by government authorities to efface the often violent attempts to assimilate raced subjects into, or exclude them from the nation, might the emergence of a multivocal self-awareness, engendered through the destabilization of authoritative discourses provide the means by which such psychic violence might be undone, or at least addressed?

The value of a text that forces the reader to confront the subjective and often fictional aspects of historical discourses should not be underestimated. However, it is oftentimes misleading to approach Chinese Canadian texts through the abstract lens of postmodernist literary theory. While a text like *The Jade Peony* certainly demonstrates many of the more salient qualities of historiographic metafiction, the theoretical frame posited by Hutcheon can belie the specificity of purpose underlying the destabilization of representative discourses in Chinese Canadian texts. Misunderstanding the revisionism practiced by writers of color renders their attempts to articulate voice from the margins of authoritative discourses as a "curious exoticism", voyeurism, or postmodern abstraction rather than an informed political act (Miki, "Asiancy" 137). Such inattention to the historical and contextual specificity of Chinese Canadian literature also extends the reductive practice of exoticizing cultural difference practiced through state multiculturalism and, as such, exacerbates psychic violence among visible minority subjects.

While this need for close attention by no means invalidates many of the literary techniques indicative of historiographic metafiction, in Choy's writing as in all Chinese Canadian literature, it is necessary to more closely examine the revisionist ethos of the text without categorizing its dissonance as quintessentially postmodern (Lowe 100). Lisa Lowe claims that Euro-American postmodernism seeks to challenge the Western conception of a homogeneous 'nation' enlivened through nationalist historical discourses by highlighting the difference and subjectivism inherent in the imagining of such entities (ibid 107-108). In both Asian American and Asian Canadian texts, such destabilizing is

more indicative of "decolonization," a "multileveled and multicentered assault on specific forms of colonial [subjection]…that is antagonistic to existing institutions of representation, aesthetic and literary as well as constitutional or political" (ibid).[2] While the two modes share numerous characteristics, decolonization "does not emerge…from a terrain of philosophical or poetic otherness with the West, but out of the contradictions of…the colonial mode of production" (ibid 108). While postmodernist frameworks such as Hutcheon's are effective in disrupting the philosophical underpinnings of representation in texts and social discourses produced by white European writers, they are less effective in conceptualizing the deconstructive practices of 'visible minority' writers as stemming from the material conditions of a community determined in part by a history of racial exclusion.[3]

In his discussion of the theoretical potential of Asian American literature, Goellnicht suggests a more text-based approach to Asian North American writing. He maintains that such works must be approached "as theoretically informed and informing," rather than as raw material in need of an interpretive theoretical framework (Goellnicht, "Blurring" 340). He further quotes Barbara Christian as claiming that "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing…is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language" (ibid 342). How then, might *The Jade Peony* contribute to a theorization of the effects of psychic violence upon visible minority subjects? The development of characters through the mediating forces of history, language, and community in this novel demonstrate that the expiation

of psychic violence among Chinese Canadian subjects is possible only through a recognition of cultural difference by and for individuals who have been formerly represented by mainstream discourses within the state. Choy's nuanced approach to character development illustrates that this worth must necessarily be determined through the shared experience of community, but must also allow for the liminal position of the characters on the boundaries of rigidly delineated cultural spheres. While Butler's theory explores the process by which the topography of the psyche can be formed through a certain reflexive violence, she does not expand on how this might be counteracted through the enunciation of a community-based voice. The way Choy explores the manner by which concepts of 'community' are imagined through language and history thus becomes critical to developing a theoretical understanding of the way in which racism operates upon the psyches of Chinese Canadians.

As a writer, Choy is constantly aware of the nuanced linguistic features of his texts, claiming that "English is my main language, the one in which I create and interpret the world" (Davis 281). However, in conversation with Glenn Deer he expands upon the difficulties he has experienced in attempting to render aspects of the Chinese dialects of his childhood into a text written in English. He claims that:

> My first language was Chinese, and I was raised by Chinese-speaking members of the community. Toisanese was the main dialect, but what was interesting to me was what I discovered when I spoke to a Chinese language expert about the Chinatown voices I hear in my head…I would say certain sounds, certain phrases, and not only their voices, but the faces of some of the people would come back to me. She, and another knowledgeable person…identified about a dozen dialects that are in my head. (Deer 34-35)

Choy's comments are significant, because they indicate that his writing is informed not by one or another self-contained linguistic system, but rather by a variety of dialects and competing languages. He claims, "I seem to know the meaning of some of those sounds just as, so long ago, I reacted as a child to their resonance, their sense of directly communicating something to me" (ibid 35). His texts are written primarily in English with transliterated Chinese scattered throughout in order to try to convey the "the tapestry of languages…[that] was part of the reality of that human community" in which he was raised (Davis 280). Choy's rendering of written language(s) not as autonomous or hermetically sealed discourses, but as fluid and interpretive sites of directly-transmitted sounds allows him to occupy the semiotic space of English in which he writes and to challenge its ability to fully articulate Chinese Canadian subjectivity even as he employs it as his primary medium of expression. It is arguable that were he fully literate in any one dialect of Chinese, he would find it too to be inadequate as a means of expression. Bhabha claims that the value of employing hybrid representations to affect political change lies "in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One…nor the Other…but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both" (Bhabha 28). Choy's use of language in both texts leaves the reader with the sense that the narratives they present appear at first to be linguistically homogeneous, but which cannot be fully explained by the either/or designations of 'Chinese' or 'Anglo-Canadian' and which assume rather a more hybrid form. This form is never divorced from the historical context of Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1940s, nor can it be

separated from its Chinese or English antecedents. Rather, it is determined by the socio-political and linguistic confluence of that particular time and space.

While Choy insists upon the insertion of his own transliterated Chinese into an English text as a means of signaling the inadequecy of English as a signifying system, his treatment of language is mostly thematic, engendered through the trope of identity conflict. In *The Jade Peony*, cultural boundaries established through language are traversed by the children and linked to their mediation between cultural boundaries. In the first section of the novel, Jook Liang recognizes the connection of language to relations of power within the family as she describes Poh-Poh's command of multiple dialects:

> Poh-Poh spoke her *Sze-yup*, Four County village dialect, to me and Jung, but not always to Kiam, the First Son. With him, she spoke Cantonese and a little Mandarin, which he was studying in the Mission Church basement. Whenever Stepmother was around, Poh-Poh used another but similar village dialect as many adults do when they think you might be the village fool, too worthless or too young, or not from their district. The Old One had a wealth of dialects which thirty-five years of survival had taught her, and each dialect hinted at mixed shades of status and power, or the lack of both (16)

This passage illustrates how language is deployed within the family as a means of maintaining control over others, particularly women and the young. Her designation of the two younger children's biological mother as 'Stepmother' relegates the woman to a position of social inferiority. Ironically, the patriarchal authority intrinsic in Chinese family appellations is compounded by the imposition of legal immigration restrictions upon Chinese immigrants, as Poh-Poh justifies the designation by claiming that "the name 'Stepmother' kept things simple [for immigration status papers]" (14). Sek Lung repeats his grandmother's sentiments, quoting her as saying "in Canada, one husband, one

wife" (131). However, he immediately juxtaposes the benign English title with its more nuanced meaning in Chinese: "Third Uncle told me that 'Stepmother' was a ranking much more respectable than 'family servant,' more honorable than 'concubine,' but never equal in honor or respect to the title of First Wife or Mother" (ibid). The need to provide authorized family designations to the English-speaking immigration officials allows Poh-Poh to bestow what is a relatively innocuous appellation in English, but an inferior status position in Chinese culture onto the children's mother (Lee 23). As Christopher Lee points out, the structure of the family functions in the text as both a "survival strategy," and "a key tenet for inclusion within the community, and [is] thus...intricately bound up with Chineseness itself" (Lee 21). The mother's subjection is constitutive: her Chinese Canadian subjectivity, validated officially through her immigration status and ossified through extended and exclusive utterance in the family, becomes a necessary condition for existence within the Chinese Canadian community. Survival thus precludes her from demanding recognition of her entitled position as Jook-Liang and Sek Lung's biological parent.

In addition to the deployment of various spoken dialects to engender social divisions, Cantonese and Mandarin assume a particular pedagogical ethos as the language in which one is instructed upon being 'Chinese' in the new world. Poh-Poh's use of official Chinese over regional dialects with Kiam signals his privileged position as First Son, while it simultaneously interpellates him within an idealization of Chinese ethnicity: he is the first born son who will one day return to China. The ideal of 'Chineseness' as expressed through official language recurs in the third section of the text as Sek Lung

juxtaposes his perceptions of his brother with another 'student' of Chinese, Meiying:

"Meiying knew enough Mandarin, for example, to explain a phrase or two to Kiam, who

was studying the dialect because Father felt it would be the official language of any New

China 'when the people win'" (207). Thus these dialects, coded as official signs of

Chinese ethnicity interpellate both Kiam and Meiying as primarily 'Chinese' rather than

Canadian subjects.

This positioning, although regarded as a audible marker of Chinese subjectivity, is

not assumed unproblematically by either Kiam or Meiying, and even less so by the

Canadian-born children who find the sites of 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' "diametrically

opposed" in the field of language (Lee 24). For the narrators who oscillate between

English and various Chinese dialects, the supposedly homogeneous Chinese ethnicity

underlying the polyphony of Chinatown's dialects never becomes fully visible because it

never exists as a singular entity. The youngest of the children, Sek Lung, has the most

difficulty absorbing the meanings encoded in the shifting dialects and appellations of

spoken Chinese. Like his Canadian-born siblings, Sekky occupies a hybrid position

within both the family and Chinatown proper, "neither this nor that, neither Chinese nor

Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no*—no brain" (135).

When the elder Mrs. Lim asks "who are you Sek-Lung? Are you *tohng yah*," he simply

responds "Canada," even though he is uncertain of the answer and inquires constantly as

to how he should refer to himself (ibid). Although hesitant about his Chinese ethnicity,

Sek-Lung has no illusions about his social standing within the Canadian community at

large: "even if I was born in Vancouver, even if I should salute the Union Jack a hundred

million times, even if I had the cleanest hands in all the Dominion of Canada and prayed forever, I would still be *Chinese*" (ibid). Not only is he prohibited from forming attachments in the mainstream Canadian social sphere, he is visibly marked as 'Chinese' by Canadian authorities, a subject position that proves unfamiliar and often linguistically inaccessible to him. As Lee notes, Chineseness frequently "acts as a disciplinary tool that mediates the relationship between the individual and the power elite in the text": however, it is not a single authoritative 'Chineseness' that acts upon Sek-Lung, but multiple idealizations and stereotypes stemming from both the mainstream Canadian and Chinatown communities (Lee 25).

Although she remains always off-stage in China throughout the text, Stepmother's childhood friend Chen Suling appears as such an idealized representation of Chinese ethnicity engendered through Stepmother's recounting of her friend's impeccable command of Chinese familial honorifics, elegant calligraphy, and stoic composure. Stepmother employs the possibility of Suling's arrival as a weapon against her son, elevating her command of languages and in particular the English language in order to attempt to gain control over Sekky. Ironically, Suling becomes idealized as a Chinese woman who can speak flawless English and *still* remain essentially Chinese, the perfect icon for English-speaking Canadian-born Chinese children to emulate. Stepmother chides him for his inability to comprehend the nuances of Chinese ethnicity reflected in title and dialect choice: "*Mo no* Stepmother said, shaking her head at me. Suling will teach you proper Chinese" (138). Sekky conceives of resistance to his mother's admonitions through the very languages she uses to subordinate him. He responds to his

mother's chiding by declaring "I'm going to speak and write only in English…I would conquer my second language. I would be a Master of English" (136-138). While confined within the discourse of oral Chinese at home, Sekky imagines emancipatory possibilities within the English language (Lee 24). He even subverts his designation as a *mo no* by fantasizing about intentionally misnaming Suling at the immigration office: "*Oh*, I thought, *what if I called her by the wrong title at the very first meeting at Customs?* Any slip in our very first greetings to her, and the White Demon immigration officers and their translators would pounce. Ship her back on the very next steamer" (137). Here, Choy conflates the authority of language and the material history of immigration restrictions against the Chinese in Sekky's daydream of subverting one authority through an appeal to another. Although he ultimately decides against this course of action, his phantasmic imagining of freedom momentarily satisfies his distress at being continually misrecognized by those in his family as having 'no (Chinese) brain.'

The final resolution of Chen Suling's threat to Sek Lung occurs through the "demythologizing and neutralizing" of her supposed command of English (Lee 23). At the moment in which both Sekky and his mother learn of Suling's death in China, he becomes cognizant of the discrepancy between his mother's representations of her, and the reality of Suling's deficiencies in the English note she forwards to them:

> TO SEK-LUNG, SUN OF LONGTIME FRIEND LILY. I NEVER
> FORGET HER. LEAF JACKET AND BOOK WITH GOD.
> BLESSINGS. CHEN SULING. (142).

Although he does not disillusion his mother as to the reality of Suling's English competency, Sek Lung realizes his own individual agency as the static designation of

'Chinese' embodied by Suling unravels. He attains a small degree of resolution, noting that "the dragon in my stomach unclenched—twisted once—and flew away," denying the possibility of further subjection within this particular Chinese subjectivity (ibid). Though he fails to attach to the national referents of either 'China' or 'Canada,' his own linguistic abilities expose a certain alternate space of social identity at the limen of official languages around him.

A similar negotiation occurs through the discourses of history that surround the three narrators in *The Jade Peony*. The setting of the novel during World War II allows Choy to situate his characters in a context in which their negotiation of social identity must necessarily engage with a contingent understanding of 'Chineseness,' subject to the shifting positions of both the Chinese community and its leadership, and the Japanese Canadian and mainstream communities around them. Christopher Lee suggests that Choy problematizes the manner in which 'Chinese' as a sign of ethnicity is linked to relations of power surrounding the Vancouver Chinese community by posing Chinese ethnicity as an ideological apparatus that seeks to interpellate the narrators as Chinese subjects (Lee 19). But while I consider that Chinese ethnicity is inextricable from historical and linguistic power relations of the time, the notion of Chineseness as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus is somewhat problematic.

Lee's assessment of the fluidity of 'Chineseness' in the text is quite astute; however, his framework depends upon the presumption of a bounded or essential Chinese culture that can be possessed and transmitted from the elder members of the Chinese community to its youth. Critics such as Lynne Van Luven who engage with Chinese

culture in *The Jade Peony* as static and unproblematic make a similar assumption, and thus risk ascribing an orientalist vantage point onto the text by implying that the process of negotiating Chinese Canadian subjectivity is a simple matter of oscillating between two fully bounded and enclosed cultures, one naturalized and one exotic or alien. Van Luven identifies "Grandmama as the 'enforcer' of Old China history and folklore," and that "as autocratic matriarch in [the text], Poh-Poh decrees the order of life in the family" (Van Luven 265-266). While it is certainly true that Poh-Poh exercises a considerable degree of influence over the social boundaries of the household, it is important to remember that she, like all of the other elder characters in the text, is also bound by the material exigencies of life within 1940s Chinatown. The negotiation of culture between 'old' and 'young' in *The Jade Peony* never appears as a direct transmission from China proper, but is rather mediated by the experiences of first generation migrants to Canada. As such, Chinese 'culture' in the text is itself a hybrid construct; a "set of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations" (Lowe 67).

For example, Father also occupies an 'elder' position within the community as representative of 'old China.' When the children meet the elder Wong Bak in the first section of the book, it is Father that acts as 'cultural enforcer,' demanding that the children "must use the formal term *Sin-saang*, Venerable Sir, as if Wong Bak were a 'teacher' to be highly respected, as much as the Old Buddha or the Empress of China" (19). However, Father is also an immigrant to Canada who has been denied the possibility of social participation in mainstream society. As such, he forms a psychic

attachment to an idealized China he associates with the country he has left behind. However, China during this period was politically, socially and economically in flux due to the Sino-Japanese war and continued cycles of famine, drought and floods. It was a country that would be nearly impossible for Father to return to even if that were truly what he desired. Allan Chun notes that in overseas Chinese communities, first generation immigrants frequently make such a nostalgic identification, attaching to a geopolitical referent rather than an a priori cultural referent that they equate with the China they left behind (Chun 122). Father's relations with his children and community are thus conditioned by both local and international politics: Jook-Liang remarks that "Father always editorialized in one of the news sheets of those Depression years how much the Chinese in Vancouver must help the Chinese [in China]. Because, he wrote, 'No one else will'" (17). Despite his desire to see his children absorb aspects of traditional Chinese culture, Father is clearly cognizant of his family's new circumstances in North America, asserting that "we are also Canadian" (133). As I will describe further on, Father's demands that his children show various allegiances as 'Chinese' or as 'Canadian' fluctuate wildly in response to the local and international political climates in China, Japan, Canada and the United States in World War II.

It is therefore more productive to focus upon *how* material circumstances determine the production of ethnic signs than to debate the degree of cultural authenticity presented in the text. "The factual substance of culture is…less important than the rhetorical form it takes"; *who* is speaking, to *whom* and for *what purpose* are pressing concerns for any author or individual attempting to define themselves in relation to a

cultural community (Chun 115). Miki claims that definitions of self and the production of self-representations in non-white literature must be performed "with regard to a community or ethnic group...[and] mediated by a determined effort to revise and rewrite official history" (Miki, "Asiancy" 140). In *The Jade Peony*, Choy engages with the coeval production of racial and ethnic signs of 'Chinese' and 'Japanese' as they exist within discourses of official Canadian history and even in official accounts produced by authorities within the Chinese Canadian community at large, and he demonstrates their unstable nature by refracting these discourses across the subjective accounts of the child narrators.

The instability of racial and ethnic signs is most prominent in the third section of the text, where Sekky explores his allegiances as a Chinese subject amidst the shifting historical influences of Sino-Japanese and Sino-Canadian relations during World War II. As he attempts to understand the authorities to which he should pledge allegiance, his limited perceptions as a child ensure that he is largely unaware of the sources of power determining these signs in wartime Vancouver. This naïveté allows Choy to demonstrate both the constructed nature of such stereotypes and their ability to shift in relation to specific circumstances. Throughout the third narrative, Sek Lung's attempts to understand his allegiances are mediated by the opinions and ethnic and racial boundaries delineated by his siblings and elders, as well as those offered through mainstream media discourses:

> the enemy was everywhere. The *Vancouver Sun* newspaper said so. News-reels said so. Hollywood and British movies said so. All of Chinatown said so, out loud...Kiam and Father agreed with the series of editorials in the *Sun*:

the Japanese along the coast were potential spies and traitors...they're killing Chinese boys in China, Father said. (171)

The scripting of raced Japanese bodies within public discourse(s) as "enemy aliens" is internalized by Sekky (Miki, *Broken* 207): "I absorbed Chinatown's hatred of the Japanese, the monsters with bloodied buck teeth, no necks, and thick Tojo glasses; I wanted to kill every one of them" (196). Demonstrating his allegiance as 'Chinese' comes to include accepting racialized representations of Japanese Canadians as threatening bodies "that had to be displaced for the sake of social order" (Miki, *Broken* 190). As the elder residents of Chinatown attempt to galvanize a 'loyal' Chinese Canadian presence through the discursive production of an internal enemy, Sek Lung begins to imagine himself as a 'soldier' in this project. When Meiying takes him to Powell Ground to meet her Japanese boyfriend Kazuo, he reacts by telling her "we shouldn't be here...we're not Japs" (210). At this point Meiying performs multiple disruptions of ethnically entrenched behavior, violating both the ethnic sign of 'Chinese' by consorting with the Japanese 'enemies,' as well as transgressing sexual-racial boundaries through her relationship with a Japanese boy. Having abrogated well-defined norms of proper behavior, Meiying leaves Sek Lung disoriented and confused, forcing him to question the supposed stability of the racial and ethnic signs around him.

In light of this disorientation, the attempts by Father and Kiam to reaffirm ethnic boundaries appear even more confusing. Sekky asks his father, "Are all Japs our enemy, even the ones in Canada?" to which his father replies "yes...all Japs are potential enemies" (224). Kiam tries to clarify the difference between Japanese and Japanese Canadians by claiming "the ones who are born here are only half enemies" (225). While

this seems reasonable to Sek Lung, the flawed logic of Father and Kiam's positions are immediately apparent to Liang and Stepmother. Liang responds "that's stupid," while Stepmother implores Sekky to consider such opinions carefully by asking him "Are you enjoying your after-school hours with Meiying?" (ibid) By suggesting that Sek Lung examine his experiences with Meiying in order to determine his loyalties, Stepmother invites him to explore sites in which he can identify himself as Chinese, but not subscribe to the oppositional and vested rhetoric of 'us' and 'them' espoused by Father and Kiam. Because she is also aware of Meiying's affair, her actions constitute an intentional subversion of the patriarchal structures that have relegated her to a virtually silent subject position as a Chinese female.

The process by which Sek Lung attempts to reconcile the stereotypes of Japanese Canadians offered to him by Father and the elders of Chinatown with his encounters in Powell Ground illustrates how the concepts of ethnic or national loyalty can complicate the articulation of one's subjectivity. Despite Father and Kiam's instruction, Sekky has difficulty understanding the disparity between the representations of the Japanese as 'enemy' and the benign physical presence of Kazuo. He notes, "[Kazuo] looked like a Chinese movie soldier, a Good Guy, in one of those films we saw at the China War Effort Fund Drive. But he was *Japanese*"(211). By drawing parallels between the raced representations of Asian bodies in propaganda films, Choy illustrates the history of subjection shared by both the Chinese and Japanese in Canada, whereby the production of the Asian "body as a sign of the monstrous Asiatic" assisted in maintaining a white normativity that extends to the nation (Miki, *Broken* 208). Ironically, Sek Lung's

perplexed attempts to demonstrate his 'Chinese' loyalty present him with the quandary: how can he attach to a 'Chinese' identity when he encounters fissures within its ethnic sign? His Father and eldest brother define Chineseness as loyalty to "one's own kind," and yet Meiying, the idealized icon of Chinese femininity, has clearly rejected such notions (214). Sek Lung thus finds himself stranded between multiple definitions of Chinese ethnicity, none of which provide him with an adequate means by which to express his self-identity.

By the conclusion of *The Jade Peony*, neither Sek Lung nor Meiying have been able to attach themselves to the abstract notion of 'Chineseness' circulating among the residents of Chinatown. For Meiying, the persistent inability to express her desire for Kazuo within the confines of Chinese ethnicity results in her death. For Sek Lung, a limited possibility for resolution comes through the refusal of essential discourses of race and the assertion of an unspoken but nevertheless fulfilling attachment to his mother and grandmother, an attachment that forms a sense of shared experience, while it disavows official designations of race, ethnicity or nation. In the final scene in the novel, he joins his Stepmother, addresses her as "mother," then "presses into her palm the carved pendant Grandmama had left to him"(238). At this moment, Sekky refuses the family appellations that have subordinated his mother by voicing her entitled name, while he passes her his Grandmother's jade peony, a non-verbal and non-political symbol of the elder woman's connection to old China. The passing of a family heirloom symbolizes how cultural objects can represent shared experience as the defining rubric of culture. The ambivalence cultivated within Stepmother through misnaming and enforced silence

within the family is reminiscent of the loss Grandmother suffered when she was forced to leave her own lover, the one who gave her the peony, behind in China. Sek Lung's choices of attachment and rejection indicate a desire for a connection to a shared communal history from which he can garner a sense of his belonging, while they also show a desire to dispose of cultural practices that silence or marginalize other members of his community. It is not so much a moment of resolution as a moment in which recognition is possible for Sek Lung as both a Chinese and Canadian subject, yet neither one entirely.

By refracting official discourses of history and ethnic identity across the experiential accounts of three children who come to understand their subjectivity in vastly different ways, Choy manages to present a revisionist history while he simultaneously suggests avenues in which cultural identity appears more as a matter of "becoming," an attachment to a series of "unstable points" that are "subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power rather than grounded in the [unproblematic] recovery of a past" (Stuart Hall, reprinted in Chun 128). Instead of assuming a pre-existing cultural identity or stereotyped representation, the use of multiple narrators demonstrates a sense of the subjective and contingent nature of these authoritative discourses. They also show that any attempt to recover a historical or linguistic 'voice' is a problematic process that must necessarily be multivalent in order to express adequately the experiences of a marginalized community.

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Choy's problematizing of recovered history and language is extended in *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* in an alternative approach to the recovery of personal, family and community history through the genre of memoir. The text was begun in response to a request to Choy from PEN to "write something about 'home'" (Davis 273). What demands are implicit in such a request made to a 'visible minority' writer? How might a Chinese Canadian author respond to such a challenge? Choy argues that:

> This memoir is a work of creative non-fiction. In order to recreate past times and personalities, I had to select details and various points of view, and I am solely responsible for these choices. No doubt, other views and opinions exist about the same persons and events. This book is, however, about the people and stories as I remember them—from my own life (preface).

Prefacing the text by signaling his subjective bias allows Choy to distance himself from any pretence of writing an 'authentic' experiential account of a childhood in Vancouver's Chinatown. How then might we approach the form of this text, and in what ways does it contribute to the project of rendering a 'voice' that is recognizable as stemming from a particular cultural context, but dissociated from authoritative discourses of ethnicity or nation? Choy claims that in writing, he "wants to tell the truth that is at the heart of the stories…I am [therefore] willing to sacrifice factual cultural details" (Davis 283). What is the nature of the 'truth' he recovers in this text, and how does the manner in which he presents a more radical form of historiographic memory challenge both traditionally held assumptions about autobiographical writing and entrenched representations of Chinese Canadian culture?

Autobiographical writing as a genre is presumed to possess certain common features such as a central autobiographical figure, and the narrating of one's past in a

linear or chronological, although frequently fragmentary presentation of events. It is also

assumed by popular definition to be "an unadorned factual account of a person's own

life" (Wong, *Autobiography* 249). However, a discussion by Louis A. Renza about the

specific features and constraints of memoir writing in particular complicates such a

definition. He claims that self-referential writing is necessarily an act of self-

investigation, for the purposes of educating the writer as to the nature of the life he or she

describes (Renza 279). The act of writing one's past through memoir involves taking

oneself as both subject and object simultaneously, and is determined at least in part by the

material conditions of the present:

> the writer in effect tries to suppress his evocation of pastness by surrendering
> to the present-oriented and public currents of language and literary convention,
> notably to the way they conspire with the writer's specific historical situation
> and its ideological parameters of 'self' to determine how one tends to represent
> oneself before contemporaries (Renza 280).

He continues, noting that the writer of a memoir organizes the events of his life in "a

teleological pattern…treating one's life as a story…[and] viewing his life as having a

beginning, middle and end" (ibid 281).

A close examination of Choy's text reveals that while Renza's configuration of

memoir offers valuable insight into the form of Choy's text, it needs elaboration in order

to describe its function. Unlike *The Jade Peony*, there is only ever one narrator. Rather

than presenting himself as a static subject whose life evokes a certain realist ethos and

risks assuming a metonymic role as a authoritative representative of Chinese Canadian

culture, Choy instead articulates his subjectivity in a manner that is "at once both *symbol*

and *allegory*…located in social relations and dialectically placed within historical process

and struggle"(Lowe 35). Understanding the subject/object of the text requires "not only a formal analysis of the social and historical conditions [from which both text and author emerge], but also the simultaneous comprehension of a displacement, a break, or even an absence—all signaling the impossibility of totality" (ibid). In this way, the text functions as a means by which Choy can organize the events of his life in narrative form in order to elicit a recognizable Chinese Canadian subjectivity for himself, identify with and vocalize the shared historical experiences of Chinese Canadians living in the Exclusion Era, and yet still not assume a undesirable position as ethnic representative or realist exemplar of Chinese Canadian life.

It is Renza's understanding of the function of the past in memoir that is most incommensurate with Choy's project in *Paper Shadows*. Choy is aware of contemporary concerns surrounding the publication of Chinese Canadian writing in English, as well as the particular obstacles facing Chinese Canadian writers who produce autobiographical texts. In fact, the third section of *Paper Shadows* fractures any semblance of chronological or authentic recounting by oscillating between details of Choy's childhood, an investigation of his ancient family history across two continents, transcriptions of interviews undertaken in the near past, and present reminiscences upon his life and the lives of Chinese Canadians around him. He thus forces his readers to refract any expectations of genre across prose that assumes multiple forms, often layered one upon another. However, while Renza's description of the interpretive possibilities of the autobiographical subject is somewhat amenable to Choy's project, he underestimates the degree to which the material circumstances of the past condition and inform writing

about Chinese Canadian communities in the present. Writing about the past is not, as Renza's understanding would suggest, a site in which the author can enjoy complete interpretive freedom. For Chinese Canadians whose history still bears multiple unresolved grievances, the past makes a far greater demand on the articulation of a present subjective voice than Renza's configuration would suggest.

Choy must necessarily be selective in his choice of which aspects of his personal, family and community history to include in his text. However, he does not choose to 'suppress' elements of the past. On the contrary, he frequently includes intrusive documentation of the legislative restrictions against early Chinese immigrants to Canada: poor living conditions endured by bachelor men, the racist attitudes of the dominant white majority population towards the Chinese, and the lasting effects of such restrictions on both those who lived through that era, and their contemporary descendants (72-75). Further, such narrative intrusions are implicated in Choy's first hand experiences. The record of hardships endured by early Chinese in this section is immediately linked to those around him who personally struggled: he refers to these bachelor men as "Third Uncle's generation, [who] dreamed of one day sending for their wives and children, who would all have enough to eat in Gold Mountain" (75). The presence of history in the text as both subjective accounting and raw intrusion suggests that Choy is actively engaging with a racialized history that he himself is not fully in control of. Instead, the submerged histories he encounters through the research and writing of his text force him to concede the material and affective impact of such history on the way in which he structures his

text. In what ways, then, is the mediation between the past and the present in Choy's text

a more multidirectional and less controlled process?

In his essay, "The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," Georges Gusdorf

suggests that the relation between history and the present in autobiographical writing is

somewhat more complex. He maintains that the "anthropological prerogative" of such

writing is satisfied by the practice of situating one's present life in the perspective of

what has transpired before: a recapitulation of one's life from a present position allows

the individual to render a "truer" vision of experience through a consciousness of one's

prior existence in hindsight (Gusdorf 38). Since the purpose of autobiographical writing,

he claims, is to achieve a certain "recognition of the self by the self…temporal

perspectives thus seem to be telescoped together and to interpenetrate each other" in the

service of engendering a self-awareness of one's life in its entirety (ibid 44). His

characterization of the relation between past and present as a sustained fluid exchange is

far closer to the revisionist processes operating in Choy's text. However, while Gusdorf

does provide a more flexible conception of the exchange between individual and

collective history on one hand, and the present concerns and circumstances of the writer

on the other, his configuration still cannot accommodate the specificity of purpose

underlying the inclusion of 'raw' and personal history in *Paper Shadows*. His

classification of autobiography and memoir as outside of the realist mandate of historians

forecloses upon the possibility of such genres to critique the practice of representation in

official historiography. It also underestimates the degree to which the insistence upon

historical grievance in Chinese Canadian texts constitutes a certain necessary and valuable catharsis.

Like Renza, Gusdorf presumes one's personal or collective history to be a source of understanding, a site where the individual can attempt a recovery of the self by simply reviewing the events of his or her life from a temporally distant position. But for racialized populations whose histories include a legacy of exclusion, misrepresentation, and silence, such an investigation can be complicated or even impossible. Further, although Gusdorf does reject the notion of autobiographical writing as an objective account of an individual life, he presumes that such writing involves transferring topographic elements of one's psyche into the public sphere, wherein they can be received as a creative or interpretive act rather than a historical record. The end result is not a verifiable representation of lived experience, but rather an interpretive act that projects the interior realm of the individual "into exterior space where in becoming incarnated it achieves a consciousness of itself" (ibid). But as Butler points out, when a denied or prohibited desire is withdrawn into the psyche, the topography of this 'interior realm' is contaminated by, in fact is *constituted* by, the loss of the formerly external object or social circumstances to which the individual had tried to attach (Butler 180-181). Would not the uncritical re-externalization of the psyche, whose conscience bears traces of the material values that in part caused the violent reflexivity which constituted the subject simply validate such a social apparatus by reinscribing its cultural ethos as a superficial 'creative' or 'artistic' cultural product? Worse still, might not the trace condemnations of the conscience, instilled within such newly externalized cultural

artifacts, impose violence that was formerly directed against the individual psyche upon representations of the individual's ethnic community? That is, might not the formerly internalized violence suffered by the racialized minority subject extend to their entire community if externalized without first attempting to nullify its self-abasement?

In order to avoid this trap, Choy needs to develop ways in which to ease the reflexive violence cultivated within Chinese Canadian subjectivities before he presents them in a social form. One way he can achieve this end is to occupy the expected space of 'ethnic representative' in a 'visible minority' autobiographical text, and to reinscribe the subjectivities it engenders so that they disrupt expected or authorized representations of Chinese Canadian culture. Gusdorf is right to assert that self-recognition is a key motivation for autobiographical writing. As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is also essential to unraveling the pattern of self-reflexive violence cultivated within minority subjects in Canada. As Miki points out, the articulation of Asian Canadian subject positions is complicated by the need to articulate a subjectivity that has not existed before, an articulation motivated by "an urgency to speak back to the barrier of a denied personal and communal past" (Miki, "Asiancy" 142). Genre disruptions can function as effective strategies of resistance in this regard. By "deterritorializing" the aesthetic norms governing the writing of autobiographical texts, Choy is able "to advance theoretical principles malleable enough to account for the foreignicity of [his text] and the enactment of [a Chinese Canadian subjectivity] that cannot be codified by mainstream [or essential Chinese] critical standards" (ibid 145-146).[4] *Paper Shadows* thus appears a site in which the representative authority of language and the discourses of history are

contested, and the notion of recovering an 'authentic' self-representation through autobiographical reflection is abandoned in favor of producing a newly-recognizable subjectivity that exceeds categorization as either 'Chinese' or 'Canadian.' This critical offering of his memories allows Choy to present an interior self in the public sphere without fear of reproducing authorized representations of Chinese Canadian culture.

Paper Shadows is predicated upon the revelation that he was in fact adopted, a revelation that prompted him to revisit his childhood in memoir form. By beginning the text with the possibility of an alternative personal history, Choy destabilizes his existing memories as exclusive sources of personal identity. The investigative ethos underpinning his desire to recover a historical inheritance is galvanized by "a phone call from a stranger [that] pushed me towards a mystery. The past, as I knew it, began to shift" (5). In the first two sections of the text, Choy frames his discussion of his childhood in relation to pedagogical influences around him. In section one, his mother and his Chinatown aunts and uncles contribute to an 'oral education' whereby his instruction in 'being Chinese' occurs amidst a fluid field of official languages and dialects. In section two, Choy relays his experiences in formal education and both English and Chinese schools. Again, languages appear as pedagogical sites infused with static racial and ethnic signs of 'Chinese' or 'Anglo-white' that he is expected to emulate, and figure prominently in the way Choy 'learns' to be Chinese, and subsequently refuses such identification in favor of a more hybridized subjectivity.

Choy at first attempts to dissociate his personal experiences from both family history and the material context of Chinatown during the nineteen thirties and forties,

claiming that "when I think of my earliest memories, I do not worry about family history, nor do I think of the *five-times-as-hard* hard times my parents endured" (6). As the section progresses though, it becomes clear that this is an impossible task:

> [Those] early memories…send me on a search for other remembered moments. Some come in dreams, mere fragments, weighted with a sense of mystery and meaning. At such times, a sadness pervades me. I close my eyes: older, long-ago faces, a few of them barely smiling, push into my consciousness. I hear voices, a variety of Chinatown dialects, their sing-song phrases warning me: "You never forget you Chinese!" (12).

His attempts to traverse memory in search of a recognizable subjectivity will therefore necessarily involve an engagement with a troubled collective history and essentialized racial identity. But how to approach such a recovery? Choy begins his search by documenting the 'raw' facts of his life as he knows them:

> I was born Choy Way Sun, on April 20, 1939, in Vancouver, in the Province of British Columbia, to Nellie Hop Wah, age thirty-eight, and Yip Doy Choy, age forty-two, the *gai-gee meng*, the *false-paper names*, officially recorded in my parents' immigration documents (14).

Even as he begins his investigation, the history of restrictions that forced Chinese immigrants to assume false paper identities in order to gain entry into Canada insures that factual evidence will be of little value to his project. Instead, the remainder of the first section consists of a series of memories involving first-hand experiences in Chinatown from which he can reassemble a coherent sense of his personal and cultural past.

The ethnic sign of 'Chinese' is as problematic in *Paper Shadows* as in *The Jade Peony*. The narrative voice Choy offers in this text is in fact two voices operating simultaneously: a child's voice that relays the process by which he absorbs or assumes the cultural practices that connote Chinese identity in Canada, and an adult's voice that is

cognizant of the relations of power determining how such practices become coded as 'Chinese.' He is thus able to convey both the instability of a supposedly homogeneous sign of Chinese ethnicity, and still emphasize its ontological authority over a child unsure of his own self-definition. He recalls Third Uncle explaining the practice of shipping bones back 'home', "which was always a village or city in Old China, the place where they still wanted you...where you belonged" (31). 'Home' for these first generation immigrants is an imagined alternative to prohibited social belonging in Canada. Centered upon a distant geographic location, 'Chineseness' becomes as much a survival strategy in response to marginalization within the state as an attachment to a reachable physical space. The claims made by the elders that "it's so Chinese to long for home...for the children to still be Chinese and go back to China" demonstrate the effects of denied attachment to the mainstream Canadian nation, while they simultaneously indicate the impossibility of belonging within such an ethnic identity for children for whom China proper cannot be 'home.'

With this impasse in mind, Choy begins to recall the way in which he became aware of fissures and slippages in how to behave 'Chinese.' When out with one uncle, he learns to 'slurp' his drinks because "raised in the old peasant style, this uncle believed slurping was the way you took in a balance of *feng-shui*" (78). In front of his father though, he's told that "in Gold mountain, it's rude for children to slurp." Faced with contradictory codes of behavior, Choy concludes that "the habits of East and West all depended upon who you were with and what the circumstances were" (ibid). As he becomes increasingly aware of such discrepancies in cultural codes, Choy begins to

actively manipulate vehicles of cultural pedagogy such as oral and written stories in both

Chinese and English. He claims that:

> The Sunday school and kindergarten stories, the stories the elders told me
> of the Monkey-King, or of the wily Fox Lady , or of Heavenly Hosts, the
> tales told to me by Leong Sim and Fifth Aunty, occupied my mind as
> naturally as did the Cantonese opera stories (117).

He is conscious of the cultural traditions from which these stories emerge but

misinterprets their educational value. As a child, he is able to engage with politically

charged pedagogical systems and explore ways in which they could be reimagined or

resigned. He ascribes ritualistic meaning to English copyright notices, rubbing their

characters and making wishes (124). He disregards "the temptation to ask a grown-up

what the letters meant," preferring instead to assign his own understanding to these

written codes (123). Choy thus employs his childhood voice to explore expressive

possibilities at the boundaries of Chinese and Anglo culture, possibilities that would be

more difficult to transgress as an adult.

While his imaginative child self explores and challenges linguistic and ethnic

boundaries, Choy also insists upon the beneficial aspects of possessing multiple dialects

and languages. He describes how his mother, disadvantaged by her inability to speak

English, came to rely upon him to translate during outings. He reflects, "Father seemed

to approve of my English vocabulary…[and] as for me, I reveled with the new words I

could now decipher"(84). Choy describes himself at this stage as "a banana: yellow on

the outside and white on the inside," a generally derogatory term directed at Asian

bodies, that privileges biological markers of racial homogeneity (ibid). But by prefacing

the use of this descriptor by illustrating how his command of both English and Toisanese

allow him extended movement and ability, Choy effectively re-signs its deprecatory meaning and instills instead a sense of hybrid possibility within it.

In section two, the confining borders of official language become visible when Choy details the way in which his education was polarized between the ethnically signed spaces of his English and Chinese schools. He demonstrates that his desire to attach to, and succeed in, his English school was concomitant with his desire to remain 'Chinese.' Upon receiving a poor report card, his father chides him by asking, "What would Grandfather think of you?" (169) Choy responds by noting that "for the rest of the term, I looked at Miss Barber with great uncertainty…I wanted to please Gung-Gung and Miss Barber" (ibid). What is key in this scene is that for Sonny, the desire to please Miss Barber and his Grandfather are commensurable, rather than antithetical. He does not recognize the boundaries erected by either the English school or the essential Chineseness his father is appealing to, but instead equates the shared desire for success evident in both.

Choy articulates the process of forming social attachments through descriptions of writing lessons in the separate schools. Learning to write in the English school is a joyful experience for him. He proudly recounts his success at winning an award for having "the best writing for this month" in his grade three class, detailing the way in which he emulated his teacher's "large hand sweeping in chalky white curves between grey lines on the blackboard" (188-189). In contrast, his experiences in his Chinese school, where "all respectable Chinatown families felt obliged, even coerced, to send their sons and daughters…[to] be taught Chinese, in the formal Mandarin or Cantonese dialects," were

far less liberating (214). Choy is careful to note that it is not the fluid and imaginative Chinese dialects of his younger years that constrain him; in fact, "village dialects like Toisanese were not taught at all" (ibid). Rather, it is the way in which education in the Chinese schools are laden with pedagogical symbols such as a "Republic of China flag and a picture of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China" that causes Sonny distress (217). He finds the "clipped, formal Cantonese sounds authoritative [and] imposing" and remarks that "trying to make the stroke-and-dash markings [of written Chinese] wore out my patience" (219). The essentialized Chinese ethnicity that accompanies learning to write in formal Chinese proves to be entirely inaccessible to Sonny, leaving him to seek recourse in his English writing: "how could ten thousand complicated ideograms compete with the clarity of twenty-six letters of the alphabet?" (ibid). His father is unable to understand his son's inability to adapt to this environment, telling him, "you will finish this term...you Chinese" (226). The frustration of this task eventually leads Sonny to fume that "if I could not read or write the language, if I could not learn to speak the Sam Yup Cantonese dialect that was being taught, how could I ever be Chinese? I thought right away of giving up on being Chinese" (238). The young narrator's exasperation at being unable to assume the ethnic identity engendered through lessons at his Chinese school illustrates the frequently ambivalent attachment he feels towards his ethnic identity.

But where the young Choy is unable to understand fully how to belong within the Chinese school, the adult narrator is fully aware of the futility of any such attempt. He notes:

> At the Kwomintang Chinese School, not one of the China-born teachers understood that kids like me were simply different. Many of our Chinatown parents came from the poorest districts of Old China…but the teachers themselves, many of them refugees from the Sino-Japanese War, came from the modern cities of Canton and Hong Kong. They were barely able to tolerate our Sze Yup dialects. They saw our peasant Chinese faces, but not our in-between souls (234).

Thus the adult Choy emphasizes not only the difference between the children and the teachers at the school, but also the varied historical circumstances mediating the way in which the teachers and other Chinatown immigrants adapt to the new world and articulate ethnic signs of Chineseness. His present reflections illustrate the way in which the shifting ethnic designation of 'Chinese' proves impossible for Chinese Canadian children to attach to, while his child narrator articulates the degree to which this impossibility fosters a frustrated sense of non-belonging within their own ethnic community. This appears to be an impassable junction in the book until the third section, when Choy's externalization of his interior identifications results in an all-together different treatment of his Chinese Canadian history.

Choy's externalization of his conscious memories in written form involves an intricate shuttling between the enunciation of 'voice' and a critical engagement with contemporary racial signs. This process also involves the foregrounding of historical injustices against the Chinese that still impact upon Chinese Canadian communities to the present day. Freud notes that the natural condition of mourning involves severing one's attachment to a denied social object and thereby with the onset of melancholia—and reattaching to another in the *social* realm (Freud 252, my emphasis). But could there be an extended way in which the disruption of melancholia might assist previously

marginalized individuals in a project of expiation? As Butler points out, "the revolt in melancholia can be distilled by marshalling aggression in the service of mourning" (Butler 190). In other words, there is disruptive potential that can threaten authoritative structure of ethnicity and nation in the re-externalization of psychic violence, if it is channeled towards an insistence on social loss. The marginalization and discrimination faced by early Chinese immigrants to Canada certainly constitutes such a loss. In the final section of *Paper Shadows*, Choy's explorations shift from a recollection of his childhood, to a tracing of his genealogical history. His reflections upon this history reveal that there are multiple recognitions in the text that contribute to a common goal of ameliorating psychic violence.

The reflective and explicitly investigative ethos of the third section signals that it is here in particular that Choy's attempts to articulate a valid subjectivity must acknowledge the way in which Chinese immigration history in Canada has affected his community and family. This is not to say that the histories explored in this section are any more authentic or accurate than his childhood experiences. Rather, Choy again refuses to accept any authority to depict Chinatown or its residents, asking "how could I have written a novel about the secrets of Chinatown and...failed to notice my own Chinatown secret?" (278). He further reminds the reader of the instability of his text as an authoritative record, claiming that "one single phone call had shifted all the pieces; I felt trapped between fact and fiction...nothing of my family, of home seemed solid and specific" (280). What then is his project in this third section and epilogue? If he is trying

to undercut the theme of investigation by lamenting the inaccuracy of available records, how might we approach the sense of self he imparts to the reader at the end of the text?

It is significant that the 'climax' of Choy's text involves not only the discovery of family secrets, but also the voicing of the psychic damage that has accompanied their silence for decades. It is in this section that Choy learns of the details of his adoption, the feud that estranged his father from his family in Victoria, and the long submerged tale of his grandmother's disappearance in China. The revelation of Choy's adoption is rather anti-climactic: Hazel informs him of how he was "a China baby, just a few weeks old" who obtained a birth certificate through the work of a sly midwife (280). This proves deeply unsettling for Choy, but he does not dwell on it at length: "I didn't spend much time wondering why they decided not to let me know…*that was just the way things were. The past was another country where they did things differently*" (282-283). Choy's catharsis occurs rather through the act of inquiring after his family history, and imagining the way in which the participants of the stories he hears would have felt. In this way, he articulates his experience of loss in his own life by vocalizing the frustrations and anguishes of his adopted Chinese ancestors. In his own words, "I had not realized that there were ghosts who do not always care for silence, who will not stay unremembered. With our shared Chinatown background, Father or I should have seen the signs that the ghosts were drawing near" (307).

The story of his grandmother, Yune-Shee, illustrates the doubly marginalized hardships endured by Chinese immigrant women in the early nineteenth century. Arriving just before the 1923 Exclusion Act effectively shut the borders to Chinese

immigrants, "she [was] given a middle-class lady's education," from which she gleaned

an expectation of high standing (291). Choy's depictions of her are not kind: he

describes her as a head-strong and vicious woman, who when her husband moved to

Vancouver threatened to "throw...out" any of his children who went to visit him (309).

He notes how she used to threaten the women in her family, screaming "*in China, I

would sell you girls cheap! Sell you today!*" (302). But despite this characterization,

Choy's telling of her story is balanced with an understanding of the way in which this

woman would have been marginalized as both a despised Chinese immigrant and a

woman within a patriarchal household. When he tells of her jealousy of his own father's

financial success, he notes how she "feared the rigid Chinese tradition that would have

[Choy's father] inherit everything, leaving herself...indeed all her children destitute"

(301). When he tells of her dissatisfaction with the house his grandfather provided for

her, he notes that:

> There was some craziness in almost every ghetto family in those days, a
> tension exacerbated by the racism that forced a whole community to live
> among their own kind. Choy King, Yune-Shee King and my father could
> not run away from one another's dreams and hopes. They lived in the in-
> between world of those first immigrants who, unable to compromise or
> fully understand their circumstances, were doomed to *yum foo-chai, drink
> bitter tea.* (296)

Here, Choy illustrates the way in which racial marginalization restricts social

participation, the denial of which results in psychic distress. Yune-Shee appears not as a

vindictive matriarch, but rather as a woman whose own desires have been forcibly

suppressed by the subordinating forces of racism and patriarchal tradition. The

intersection of gender and ethnic tradition in the production of subordinate subjectivities

is echoed in the story of Choy's lost grandmother, who Choy discovers disappeared from her family and village after having an affair. He expounds upon the stigma this would have carried in China, noting that "adultery was the worst betrayal any woman could commit against her husband…in those days they thought a woman who betrayed her husband cursed the whole village" (316). By acknowledging the way in which patriarchal tradition caused his lost grandmother to abandon his father, Choy is able to articulate a loss that his father never could. He notes, "My father's history had somehow been passed on to me, father to son, however long and circuitous the journey. Why should this story finally fall into my heart and brain? Ghosts are to be wrestled with, if not subdued" (317-318). By employing the metaphor of ghosts to symbolize the way in which the recognition of loss can unravel the psychic pain endured both by oneself and one's family or community, Choy implicitly emphasizes the necessity of the project for populations such as the Chinese who have endured a collective history of silence(s) both in Canada and in China.

The trope of recognition thus constitutes an integral way in which Choy begins to confront the psychic violence that is the result of over a century of racial marginalization. In *The Jade Peony*, his narrators transgress supposedly rigid boundaries of race and ethnicity in order to articulate recognizable subjectivities that are neither essentially Chinese or (Anglo)Canadian, but rather a hybrid substance formed at the margins of both. It is the very unreliability of the children as narrators, their inability to comprehend the implicit codes of race and ethnicity that allows them the freedom to perform such subversions. In *Paper Shadows*, recognition connotes both the way in which Choy

problematizes expected or authorized representations of Chinese Canadian life through the genre of memoir, and adapts the historiographic ethos of the form itself to produce a history that insists upon a recognition of the loss of social participation suffered by the entire Chinese Canadian community. Neither text ends with a well-defined or complete resolution for either the child narrators or Choy himself. Rather, his texts represent the process by which the restoration of valid Chinese Canadian subjectivities may progress in a manner in which the project of articulating subjectivity is concomitant with anti-racist critique. In the next chapter I will examine the way in which Fred Wah utilizes the violence endemic to his racially mixed subjectivity to pursue a similar political goal.

NOTES

[1] *The Jade Peony* was the co-recipient of the 1996 Trillium Book Award and winner of the 1996 City of Vancouver Book Award. It received funding from both The Canada Council and the Toronto Arts Council. *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* was shortlisted for the 1999 Governor General's Award, the 1999 Drainie-Taylor Biography Prize and the 1999 Charles Taylor Prize for literary Non-Fiction. It received funding from the Canada Council and the Writer's Trust of Canada.

[2] Lowe's definition of "decolonization" is taken from Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. She advocates its usefulness as a non-Eurocentric theoretical lens through which to approach the deconstructive practices of Asian American literature. While the term does indeed reflect many of the deconstructive practices occurring in both of Choy's texts, I will not be fully investigating the nature of the term as it appears in Fanon's essay. Rather, I believe that a consideration of the texts themselves as theoretical models for deconstructive practices in minority literature allows me to limit my discussion to the primary texts in this study, with limited references to comparable practices in other discussions of Asian Canadian and Asian American literary theory.

[3] For example, in her essay "Coming Across Bones: Historiographic Ethnofiction", Janice Kulyk Keefer defines her own process of negotiating family and community history using a postmodernist approach remarkably similar to Hutcheon's (although grounded in her own specific Ukrainian ethnicity). Her approach centers upon her desire to mediate the 'hyphen' in her Ukrainian-Canadian identity not as a link "between two distinct ethnic or national identities forcibly stapled together, but as a hybridized mediation," which she describes as "a third terrain...even a home ground of imagination" where she could further negotiate her ethnic identity. However, as Keefer points out, her mediation is informed by a desire to reconcile her present Canadian identity with a history located in Europe during the mid twentieth century. The project of negotiating racialized identities and confronting a history of exclusion and racism on Canadian soil would present a different set of concerns from those of a Chinese Canadian writer. Since the revisionist ethos of Choy's text is a product of the specific historical and geographic circumstances in which he grew up, it is important to recognize key differences in the material realities determining each project. This is not to disparage the type of revision practiced by Kulyk Keefer, but rather is a caution against theorists such as Vautier who would include both Chinese Canadian and white Canadian texts under a shared study of a postmodernist concept.

[4] Miki's usage of the term 'deterritorialization' is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's discussion of Kafka in "What is a Minor Literature". Deleuze and Guattari discuss Kafka's use of a dominant language, Prague German, despite the fact that he was a Jew whose first language was in fact Czech. What is valuable in their discussion for the purposes of this study is the way in which they conceive of a minority writer who must, due to socio-historical circumstances, articulate subjectivity through the language of the subordinating majority. In order to do this, the minority writer must produce a disrupted usage of language and genre in order to fracture expected or common significations of meaning within the dominant discourse itself. Choy's destabilizing of the traditional genre of memoir in English constitutes just such a disruption, in which expected aesthetic norms are (re)occupied by the racialized writer, resulting in a resignification of a dominant mode of literary expression. In the next chapter, I will turn to the way in which Fred Wah employs a similar tactic by disrupting not only the aesthetics of autobiographical writing, but also the medium of written English itself.

Chapter 4: Ambivalent Poetics and the Melancholic Nation— Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* and the Political Potential of Chinese Canadian Writing

We would rather be anywhere, as long as we are somewhere. We would rather be anyone, as long as we are someone.

Cook your silence, but don't let it simmer.

--Diamond Grill

In the previous chapter, I examined Wayson Choy's texts as a means by which the psychic violence cultivated in Chinese Canadian subjects could be disrupted by destabilizing the representative authority of official ethnic, racial and nationalist discourses and by resignifying supposedly homogeneous categorizations of racialized subjects. By offering texts in which he enunciates a hybrid Chinese Canadian voice that hovers at the borders of mainstream Chinese and Anglo identities, Choy not only gestures towards a way to prevent further cycles of violence from characterizing current or future racial subjectivities, but also offers a way to begin to expiate the violence suffered by silenced Chinese immigrants in this country by insisting firstly upon the loss of self that resulted from nearly a century of institutional marginalization and secondly upon the necessity of a multivalent Chinese Canadian voice that can exceed this history. His texts thus function as sites in which the record of grievance suffered by Chinese Canadians is visible and salient, providing both an avenue for his own self-expression, and a voice to

which other Chinese Canadian subjects can gravitate in the enunciation of their own individual and cultural identities.[1] While his writing presents one means by which to improve the subjective position occupied by Chinese Canadian subjects, it is by no means the only way that psychic damage can be confronted or healed. Despite the hybrid nature of the subjectivities engendered in Choy's writing, he nevertheless responds to the specific plight of subjects for whom racial homogeneity is unproblematic in the first instance; that is to say, ethnic subjects who already possess a valid racial identity that is recognized either by themselves, or by the members of their respective communities, from which they can begin the process of negotiating subjectivity. What additional problems must be confronted by racially mixed subjects, ones who because of 'mixed blood' are unable to swear loyalty to any one ethnic community? Do contemporary definitions of subjectivity, even ones characterized as 'hybrid,' allow for such multiple positionings?

Fred Wah's biotext *Diamond Grill* explores just such possibilities. As a Canadian citizen and an inheritor of Chinese and Swedish lineage, Wah recounts his childhood spent on the margins of both the Chinese and mainstream white communities of Swift Current, Calgary, Trail, Vancouver, and in the diner called the Diamond Grill in Nelson. Able to pass as white and possessing a Chinese last name, he finds he can move within both communities but does not fully belong to either. How might Wah's self-explorations provide a site in which to deal with the effects of psychic violence upon racialized minority subjects? My adaptation of Butler's configuration of psychic violence identifies the sustained condition of prohibited social attachment, a loss that

cannot be acknowledged, as constitutive of minority subjects who reflect violence back upon themselves as opposed to mounting insurrection against a repressive social authority. However, while the acknowledgement of loss, or alternately, the allowance of social attachment are ways in which psychic violence can be unraveled, such a process is complicated by the need to articulate a loss that is specifically cultural through coherent or unified subjectivities linked to well-demarcated communities. Is such a recovery possible for individuals who cannot claim a subjectivity that derives from any single ethnic or racial community? This chapter will explore the ways in which Wah's text both problematizes the amelioration of psychic violence through recourse to a legitimate ethnic or racial subjectivity and explores ways in which the condition of psychic reflexivity itself can provide modes of political resistance or anti-racist activism in non-white writing.

Although an autobiographical/biographical text, Wah's desire to problematize traditional modes of (self) representation is clear from the acknowledgments of *Diamond Grill*. "These are not true stories," he writes, "but rather poses or postures, necessitated, as I hope is clear in the text, by faking it" (acknowledgments). The trope of 'faking' is central to the negotiation of identity in the text. As a racially mixed individual, Wah finds the process of articulating a community-based subjectivity fraught with deep ambivalences. As such, the text is comprised of a series of boundaries that must be negotiated by the narrator and those around him: physical spaces within the café are assigned racial value and are subsequently traversed by the narrator; food functions as a metaphor for cultural hybridity; and language itself appears as fluid and uncertain. As

Julie McGonegal points out, Wah's primary intention in this text is to "reconstruct racialized identity to account for racial mixedness…by exposing how concepts and practices of identity that privilege coherence and wholeness actually affect the lived experience of racially mixed subjects" (McGonegal 207). This reconstruction requires that he first disrupt or challenge the ways in which coherent identity categories are delineated within language and official cultural discourse(s).

Wah is acutely aware of the way in which the medium of the text itself is a site of representation and thus must not employ common narrative devices such as a linear progression of events and a coherent development of characters within recognizable archetypes. To do so would risk reinscribing the cultural and literary values associated with such structures. He foregrounds this textual awareness, writing that "the journal journey tilts tight-fisted through the gutter of the book, avoiding a place to start—or end. Maps don't have beginnings, just edges. Some frayed and hazy margin of possibility, absence, gap" (1). He further signals the connection between textual representation and family genealogy by musing that "what's already in the ground, the roots of another body…[become a] *punctum* of metaphor camouflaged into the leaves of the page" (121). These sections signal that his articulation of an adequate subject position must necessarily take place within the spaces or gaps between cultural discourses and within the structure of language itself. In order for this to occur, Wah must actually create such fissures by destabilizing the autobiographical text itself as a representative structure, an act of genre disruption that, as with Choy's texts, functions as resistance to dominant representation. *Diamond Grill* appears autobiographical in content only, evidenced through Wah's use of

an autobiographical 'I' and through the inclusion of family history as narrative material.

As with *Paper Shadows*, this method of writing constitutes a certain

"deterritorialization," an exploration of "variations in form that undermine aesthetic

norms...challenge homogenizing political systems, and...articulate subjectivities that

emerge from beleaguered communities" (Miki, "Asiancy" 145). In their discussion of

Kafka's writing strategies, Delueze and Guattari maintain that a "minor literature doesn't

come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major

language"(Deleuze & Guattari 16). An analogous process occurs in Wah's text: he

disrupts established norms governing both the reception of 'visible minority' literature

and the production of Chinese Canadian subjectivities in order to conceive of alternative

subjectivities from within the spaces and silences left by dominant representative modes.

At the heart of Wah's reconstructive project is a reconsideration of the way in

which hybrid subjectivities are configured as emancipatory sites of expression.

McGonegal claims that Wah mobilizes the hyphen in his text as an alternative to

traditional understandings of hybrid subjects. Conceiving of hybrid subjectivities as "a

biological combo concocted from the synthesis of previously pure racial parts" is

problematic on multiple levels (McGonegal 207).[2] First, the very presumption of the

existence of primordial static cultures belies their experiential ethos and their contingency

upon historical, political, and socio-economic pressures determining their existence.

Second, this conception of hybridity has of late been co-opted and exoticized through

Canadian multicultural policy, which conceives of hybrid constructs as emerging from "a

consumerist exchange of cultures" that elides asymmetrical relations of power between

racial groups (McGonegal 205). As McGonegal points out, Wah's utilization of the hyphen contests such configurations, and functions as a metonym for the "conflicted movements of racially mixed subjects," while it simultaneously problematizes "racial designations constructed through opposition" (ibid 206). Articulating subjectivity through hyphenation as opposed to hybridization requires movement *between* discursive and linguistic spaces, rather than articulating difference by moving from one bounded space to another (ibid 213). The disruptive potential of hyphenation ensures that the subjectivities it engenders function not only as a means by which to articulate individual identity, but also as a critical anti-racist politics.[3]

Wah employs numerous devices to highlight the constructed and contingent nature of supposedly homogeneous discourses of racial identity. He is particularly cognizant of how racially mixed individuals identify with such constructions. In one passage, he muses about the specific percentages of blood that mark identity in his family:

> I'm just a baby, maybe six months (.5%) old...on the ground in front of us are...two daughters, 50% Scottish...there is another little 75% girl cousin, the daughter of another 50% aunt who married a 100% full-blooded Chinaman (full-blooded, from China even)...we all grew up together, in Swift Current, Calgary, Trail, Nelson and Vancouver (27% of John A's nation) and only get together now every three years (33%) for a family reunion, to which between 70% and 80% of us show up. Out of fifteen cousins, only one (6.6%) married a 100% pure Chinese (83).

Here, Wah manipulates residual colonial notions of blood as a marker of racial identity still prevalent in contemporary Canada and conflates it with additional markers of national history and geography. The ironic tone in which he deconstructs the possibility

of racial purity within either family or nation suggests a more engaged critique of the way

in which Canada was founded upon such presumptions.

Elsewhere in the text, food functions as another metaphor for racial mixedness,

with varying degrees of humor and somber presentation. "Mixed grill" is a dish he

describes as:

> your typical improvised imitation of Empire cuisine…the Chinese café
> cooks…know the authentic mixed grill alright. It is part of their colonial
> cook's training, learning to serve the superior race in Hong Kong and
> Victoria. But, as the original [dish] edges its way onto every small town
> café menu, its ruddy countenance has mutated into something quick and
> dirty, not grilled at all, but fried (2).

Like Wah himself, the diner's cuisine is revealed as layered, influenced by colonial

history in China and Canada and settling as an entirely unique entity once it arrives in

Prairie diners. While this particular concoction finds a relatively 'free' space upon the

diner's menu, not all dishes in the book are so easily separated from codes of racial

identity. Wah notes that "ginger becomes the site of an implicit racial qualification"; he

dislikes the taste, and angers his father when he will not eat it, as if the rejection of

ingredients symbolizes a disavowal of community. Food even comes to symbolize

longing for community connection. He describes his rediscovery of *lo bok* in a Chinese

grocery, claiming that "for years…I've had a craving for some Chinese food taste that I

haven't been able to pin down. An absence that gnaws at sensation and memory. An

undefined taste, not in the mouth but down some blind alley of the mind" (67). Thus the

relationship between food and Chinese identity illustrates how the latter is a malleable

entity that shifts in response to the necessity of survival. Wah highlights the instability of

such an identity even as he emphasizes its ability to place demands of filial attendance and a desire for belonging upon him.

Wah's peripatetic exploration of his subjectivity is particularly evident in his treatment of language and physical spaces within the text. As with the trope of food, both language and the physical spaces of the café become spaces in which seemingly homogeneous sites of identity come into contact with one another, and the exploration of alternative spaces at their margins becomes possible. Wah specifically references Mary Louise Pratt's conception of *code-switching* and *contact zones.* The former describes the process by which bilingual speakers "switch spontaneously and fluidly between two languages," a technique that "lays claim to a form of cultural power: the power to own but not be owned by the dominant language" (68). The latter describes "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect," resulting in the constitution of subjects "in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (69-70). Both of these concepts highlight Wah's emphasis upon the interchange of cultural products and understandings as essential to redefining the ways in which a subject can become hybridized. McGonegal notes that code switching, like the hyphen in Wah's text, "connotes the mutual contributions that cultures make to a new language as well as the singular inadequacy of the 'original' languages that come together to constitute it" (McGonegal 210). The resulting 'product' of cultural exchange exceeds the contributions of the original languages and cultures, even as it is indebted to their material history. What is

important in this exchange, and what remains the focus of Wah's explorations are not the

specific natures of the cultures involved in exchange, but rather the process of exchange

itself and the way in which it can conceive of new forms of subjectivity and identity.

The cultural negotiation associated with 'contact zones' is extended to various

physical settings within the text. McGonegal focuses specifically on the function of

doors as boundary markers between spaces explicitly coded as 'Chinese' or 'Canadian.'

Doors, she claims, operate as metaphors for the marginalization of racialized groups in

Canada, particularly the Chinese community (ibid 211-212). She links the degree of

noise Fred Jr. produces as he crosses these thresholds to the theme of boundary

transgression, which can be crossed vocally as an act of subversion, or silently as a

camouflaged and inconspicuous act which she claims fosters a degree of "psychic

discomfort" within him (ibid 211). Wah describes the subversive potential of the diner

doors:

> *Whap*! What a way to announce your presence. You kind of explode,
> going through one door onto the customers, through the other onto the
> cooks... When I first start working in the café I love to wallop that brass as
> hard as I can. But my dad warns me early not to make such a noise because
> that disturbs the customers, so I come up with a way of placing my heel
> close to the bottom and then rocking the foot forward to squeeze the door
> open in a silent rush of air as I come through (21).

In this passage, the boundaries between the (Chinese) kitchen and the (Anglo White)

diner are policed by a set of rules governing the way in which Fred Jr. is expected to

behave both within them and *between* them. Rather than choosing to upset either space,

he accommodates his father's demands, and moves covertly and unobtrusively. But how

are we to read the inculcation of social rules within Fred Jr.? How might the injunction

to move silently, an act which cultivates psychic violence within the racially mixed subject, result in a sense of the frustration felt by such individuals? Fred Sr.'s demands that his son restrain his desire for sound in order to maintain the atmosphere of the diner is reminiscent of the way in which Canadian multicultural policy encourages racialized non-white subjects to occupy authorized non-threatening ethnic molds. In both cases, the demand of silence and conformity to maintain a certain 'social good' results in the exacerbation of psychic violence by further restricting avenues through which the racialized subject can articulate his or her grievance. In what ways then might Fred Jr.'s temporary occupation of this position within the text constitute an act of disruptive politics? Before answering these questions, an investigation of how reflexive subjects in Wah's text engage with the community and nation around them is necessary.

In her essay, "The Melancholy of Race," Anne Anlin Cheng investigates the contribution that an attention to the psychic effects of racism upon non-white subjects could offer to a field of race criticism traditionally dominated by materialist socio-political approaches to race relations in America. Cheng argues that intangible or psychic effects of racial marginalization, while traditionally minimalized in racial studies in favor of highlighting the more tangible effects of discrimination upon racialized communities, are key to an understanding of the deep despair suffered by minority subjects. To render these effects in materialist terms belies the complexity of their influence upon and determination of the subjectivity of non-white individuals (Cheng 9). Such an approach is equally valuable to the study of racism and race relations in Canada, where multicultural policy has made it increasingly difficult to articulate grievance amidst the

continued practice of articulating an obfuscating nationalist identity through a discourse of enlightened liberal inclusion.

Like Butler, Cheng founds her study upon Freud's conception of the condition of melancholia. Because melancholia is a sustained "condition of endless self impoverishment," it effectively legislates grief as a precondition of subjectivity (Cheng 8). As argued previously, the individual becomes melancholic through the introjection of a lost or prohibited object, which can be a physical being or a "loss of a more ideal kind" such as that of family, community or nation (Freud 251). This internalized social object emerges as a psychic object, or the ego itself, the constitution of which is dependant upon this internalization of loss. The state of melancholia sustains itself on the basis of two conditions: 1) the subject must continue to deny, or be unable to acknowledge, that a loss has occurred, and 2) the subject must ensure that the object never returns to disrupt the psychic manifestation of itself as the ego or psychic object (Cheng 9). Cheng draws parallels between the refusal of the melancholic to reject the object as constitutive of his/her own ego and the manner in which white normativity maintains itself by refusing to acknowledge that its own centrality is dependant upon the production of an internal 'other,' namely the raced non-white body as ec-centric or abnormal (ibid 12). "White racial melancholia" is thus sustained by its denied relationship to raced 'others' in the same way that the melancholic subject is sustained by its inability to acknowledge that its own ego is formed by a certain constitutive loss of a social object (ibid). How might this refusal become reified within a national identity seeking to found itself upon a certain white normativity?

Cheng's conception of "white racial melancholia" is valuable as a means by which to engage the current form of the Canadian nationalist imagination. As Mackey points out, Canadian history up to the present day is articulated as a national narrative in which Canada imagines itself as a nation founded the principles of benevolence, tolerance, and multicultural diversity (Mackey 1). However, the histories of 'visible immigrants' and First Nations populations within this country undermine this imagined identity. The near genocidal appropriation of Native lands and culture, and the indenturing of Asian and in particular Chinese laborers for use on projects of nation building and industrial and infrastructure expansion are antithetical to the ideal of a benevolent Canada founded upon the noble principles of the British legal system. How, in the face of this discrepancy between imagined identity and material history, can the nation persist in presenting itself as a liberal democratic model of racial harmony to the international community?

Cheng argues that the denial of loss that sustains the melancholic subject is comparable to that which sustains the imagined nation (Cheng 11). Canada, is in fact, 'melancholic.' By denying the loss of the ideological ideal of liberal tolerance, Canada is able to sustain its international character in spite of itself. Multicultural policy becomes the means to maintain this condition. Because the sustenance of melancholia requires that the lost object or ideal remain unacknowledged, the presence of racialized and marginalized 'others' who demonstrate bodily evidence of discriminatory practices must remain submerged. By producing and proliferating authorized forms of racial diversity that non-white subjects must occupy in order to achieve political voice within the state,

the Canadian authorities are able to supplant potentially antagonistic constructions of racial difference with sanitized and commodified forms of non-threatening ethnic diversity. The raced 'other' becomes a phantasmic ghost, implicitly present in the emergence of white Anglo normativity in Canada, but denied any recognizable social presence through a "racial myopia" that prevents the emergence of the compromised national ideal (Cheng 16).

The way in which melancholia can become a strategy of deliberate denial is evident in the way in which much of Wah's writing has been received by Canadian literary critics. Jeff Derksen notes how much earlier criticism of Wah's poetry in the 1960s "separated his racial identity from his poetry," evaluating him instead within the rubric of nationalist debates surrounding the *Tish* poets (Derksen 63). Derksen references Frank Davey's contention that "Canadian criticism (during the 1960s and early 1970s) was predominantly thematic, paraphrasing texts for cultural consumption" and explicitly eliding literary offerings that were antithetical to the nationalist project (66). A key assumption of this project was "that Canada must define itself as culturally distinct from the U.S. and also as separate from, yet holding onto the values of British heritage," a heritage explicitly coded as Anglo-white. Wah's poetry collections such as *Lardeau* (1965) and *Mountain* (1967) were thus positioned as rebellious *Tish* projects and set against Eastern Canadian poetics centered in Toronto or Montreal, rather than considered writing by a Chinese Canadian who saw fissures in the way in which national identity was imagined (ibid 65).

Much of this practice continued beyond the nationalist fervor of the 60s and 70s. Even criticism that was cognizant of Wah's racial heritage tended to extend the multicultural practice of equating ethnic difference as a common 'Canadian' condition. George Bowering's introduction to Wah's 1980 poetry collection, *Loki is Buried at Smokey Creek* notes, "his father's side of the family was Chinese, & his mother's side Scandinavian. Thus his background was atypical, but symbolic for the creation of our west" (Bowering 9, reprinted in Derksen 70). Here, Bowering implicitly privileges Wah's Scandinavian heritage to include him within the tradition of European settlement of Western Canada. Even later criticism that recognized the theme of racial mixedness in *Waiting for Saskatchewan* and *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* still tended to summarize Wah's articulation of racial difference as "adding up to a Canadianness: 'I like it because it is so Canadian—the subject and the voice is from here and nowhere else" writes Gladys Hindmarch (Derksen 71). By claiming that the condition of ethnic diversity is a shared one connoting a commonality of 'Canadian' experience, such approaches designate the manipulation of language practiced in Wah's poetics as a mere aesthetic postmodernism, rather than an anguished response to racial injustice. In order to maintain the mandate of debating the nature of Canada's unique national identity, racial aspects of his writing that are incommensurable with the project of fostering national identity must be ignored, the experience of loss suffered by Chinese Canadians and articulated in Wah's work denied.

How then, to unravel this structure? How might contemporary criticism avoid the homogenizing practices promoted by multicultural ideology, and instead focus upon the

racially disruptive potential of Wah's work as an offering by a Chinese Canadian writer? How does recognition of the melancholic ethos of the Canadian nation help those who have been 'othered' in its genesis (Cheng 13)? Cheng claims that rather than conceiving of racial subjects as interned within the structure of the nation, they are more accurately conceived as "suspended" within the national imagination. Conceptualizing racialized Asian subjects as constituted through a certain loss risks naturalizing this condition as an ongoing state of being (Cheng 14). However, it is equally dangerous to remain silent, for refusing to acknowledge the psychic violence endured by minority subjects entails the risk of complacently accepting official representations of ethnic diversity in the discourses of multiculturalism and Canadian nationalism. Instead, Cheng suggests a reconsideration of the way in which we understand the *agency* of racialized individuals. She emphasizes that the condition of self-reflexivity in racialized subjects "is the *result*, not the *cause* of social relations," and as such the occupation of self-deprecating subjectivities by individuals of color need not perpetually determine the relationship between whites and non-whites. Agency, she claims, must be understood as "a convoluted, ongoing, generative, and at times self-contradictory negotiation with pain" (Cheng 16). Racial melancholia for the raced subject involves "the internalization of discipline and rejection"; however, this internalization is not surrender, but a "condition of negotiation, agency and abjection" (Cheng 17). It can function as both a *sign* of rejection and negativity, and a psychic *strategy* in response to that rejection. Thus, the vocalization of the anxiety and despair cultivated within racialized subjects can function as an anti-racist political act in itself, an informed and deliberate act of resistance in

which the racist practices of the Canadian state can be highlighted, while new conceptions of subjectivity and identity can be generated and explored.

Diamond Grill constitutes just such a resistant act. Wah explicitly foregrounds the anxiety and psychic pain engendered by his ambiguous position as a racially mixed individual, while he simultaneously explores the liminality of racially mixed subjectivities. This act of vocalizing the personal ambivalence cultivated through the denial of a coherent subjectivity leads him to foreground the history of racist exclusion and marginalization endured by Chinese immigrants during their first century in Canada and thus to highlight the unstable 'melancholic' construction of both Canadian national identity, and the identities of those whose attempts to belong have been denied by the nation-state. He intersperses narratives of history amidst his tales of the diner, such as stereotyped representations of the Chinese:

> a trouble maker, that one, a yellow peril, an Amor de Cosmos Pariah, a Celestial, a John A, Macdonald mongrel, an Onderdonk question mark, a Royal Commision cuckoo, an Asiatic Exclusion League problem...a depraved opium addict, a slant-eyed devil...a Chinkie-Chinkie Chinaman... just another hungry ghost, just another last spike. (59)

He frequently employs stories of friends' and relatives' passages to Canada to illustrate inequities in immigration legislation, noting that "The whole country, Canada, the States, everywhere, Europeans. At the same time Chinese were prevented from coming here, white families, sons and daughters and everybody, could get boat passage and even more" (85). Other times, he employs the histories of his father's and grandfather's immigration to Canada in order to highlight the ways in which the exclusion faced by the

Chinese during that period foreclosed upon their possibility of social belonging within the nation proper. He details his ancestors' interest in the politics of China proper, writing:

> no wonder my grandfather, my father, and their kin continue to look back at China. Canada couldn't be an investment for them. The 1923 Chinese Act Of Exclusion isn't repealed until 1947. Even though my dad was born in Medicine Hat, he wasn't allowed to vote until 1948. Nor are any of the other *orientals* in Canada. (110)

The foregrounding of histories that are antagonistic to homogenizing projects of national identity allows Wah to insist upon the loss of national belonging suffered by the Chinese Canadian community and thus to disrupt articulations of national identity that demand an elision of the history of racial discrimination in this country. He even goes so far as to explicitly attack critics and nationalists who have appropriated his own writing, and the work of other writers of color in Canada:

> Another chip on my shoulder is the appropriation of the immigrant identity…Even one of the country's best-known writers has said we are all immigrants to this place, even if we were born here. Can't these people from *central* leave anything to itself…Those of us who have already been genetically diluted need our own space to figure it out. I don't want to be inducted into someone else's story, or project. Particularly one that would reduce and usurp my family's residue of ghost values to another status quo. (125)

Wah's insistence upon the violent psychic effects of nationalist projects upon racialized subjects in this country manifests itself as an explicit call for resistance to such practices.

Indeed, it is the voicing of the violent ambivalences cultivated in racialized subjects, particularly racially mixed subjects, that makes the most prominent political statement in the text. Wah's recounting of his own problematic negotiation of racial identity recognizes both the inimical effects of such positioning and its subversive

potential through an admonition to "cook your silence, but don't let it simmer", a warning

he expands upon later in the text when he details his ambivalent desire to identify with, or

be identified as Chinese (92). He employs his own childhood stories to illustrate how

community or racial belonging is never an uncomplicated attachment for racially mixed

subjects. He recalls that:

> When I was in elementary school we had to fill out a form at the beginning
> Of each year. The first couple of years I was really confused. The problem
> was the blank after Racial Origin. I thought, well, this is Canada, I'll put down
> Canadian. But the teacher said no Freddy, you're Chinese, your racial origin
> is Chinese, that's what your father is. Canadian isn't a racial identity. (53)

The national sign of 'Canadian' further complicates Fred Jr.'s attempts to understand his

identity, because although it does not function as a racial sign itself, it demands racial

purity of its non-white citizens. 'Chinese' in this instance is a genealogical marker, an

identity inherited by blood rather than assumed through the shared experience of cultural

practice. This official recording of static categories of race facilitates the containment of

potentially fluid sites of ethnicity within an unobtrusive classification. Wah is unabashed

in his distaste for the "underbelly panavision of racism and bigotry across this country"

that privileges racial purity in its production of white normativity (ibid). His text is laden

with demands to "stop telling me what I'm not, what I can't join, what I can't feel or

understand...sometimes I'd rather be left alone" (54). This recourse to the supposedly

anodyne position of unintelligibility, a position of non-being that attempts to resist the

binary of belonging or not belonging illustrates the degree to which the demand to

occupy a position of racial purity can produce an intense frustration within a racially

mixed subject.

But while Wah experiments with the possibilities of invisibility or escape from recognizable ontologies of race, he recognizes that such a position is neither preferable nor even possible for him. He describes the experience of entering unfamiliar Chinatowns, commenting that "when it comes to Chinese cafes and Chinatowns, I'd rather be transparent. Camouflaged enough so they know I'm there but can't see me, can't get to me" (136). But to do so would deny experiential aspects of Chinese ethnicity that he does not want to reject entirely: he notes how he "loves [*sic*] to wander into Toronto's Chinatown and eat tofu and vegetables…and then meander indolently through the crowds, listening to the tones and watching the dark eyes, the black hair," even as he "knows I'm not (Chinese)" (ibid). Constrained by physical markers that render him "racially transpicuous," unrecognizable and suspect because of it, he finds himself wracked with uncertainty:

> The food, the names, the geography, the family history—the filiated dendrita of myself displayed before me. I can't escape and I don't want to, for a moment…all my ambivalence gets covered over, camouflaged by a safety net of class and colorlessness—the racism within me that makes and consumes that neutral (white) version of myself, that allows me the sad privilege of being, in his white, white world, not the target but the gun. (137-138)

The ambivalence emphasized in this passage illustrates the degree to which the violence of racial exclusion has manifested itself in Wah's psyche. His ambivalence implicates him not only in the 'melancholic' subjectivities occupied by Chinese Canadians, but in attempting to ignore or elide the violence endemic to his subject position, he also participates in the melancholic myopia of white mainstream Canada. But even as he recognizes this victimized position, he insists upon its subversive potential as a literary weapon against the racist practices of the nation. He suggests that although he has been

'suspended' between the racially homogeneous categories engendered by Canadian multiculturalism, this position nevertheless supplies him with a degree of agency with which to critique and refuse the possibility that our nation is free from racism. As McGonegal points out, Wah's engagement with racial ambivalence is a "space of ongoing cultural contestation" that belies any easy resolution within established racial or ethnic categories (McGonegal 212). Rather, his alienated position outside of multiple ethnic communities functions as "a creative innovative relationship," in which the articulation of incipient subjectivities is an ongoing and often tumultuous process (ibid 215). Thus, *Diamond Grill* does not conclude with a resolution or restoration of recognizable subjectivity for Wah, but rather emphasizes the way in which he can employ his status in anti-racist critical discourse.

While Wah's desire to critique the privileging of racially homogeneous subjectivities in Canadian multiculturalism comprises the main thrust of his text, he also offers a means by which to critique theoretical models, including Butler's, that operate on a similar presumption of unified subjectivities. Butler recognizes that the external source of social authority that cultivates the condition of reflexivity in subordinate subjects is subsequently "enshrined in the workings of the conscience" of the individual. The evaluation of the ego thus proceeds under the auspices of the external authority (Butler 191), in this context the Canadian authorities or those within 'ethnic communities' who seek strength through the preservation of essentialized notions of racial purity, even though this power is rendered invisible through the formation of the subject. She further recognizes that "the aggression instrumentalized by the conscience against the ego is

precisely what must be reappropriated in the service of the desire to live" (ibid). Thus, the ambivalence generated within Chinese Canadian subjects is a source of energy that can be marshaled in the service of resistance against the state (ibid 192). Survival thus becomes a matter of "redirecting rage against the lost other," and "avowing the trace of loss that inaugurates one's own emergence" (ibid 195). However, she also insists that the unfortunate effect of subjection is that "no final severance [can] take place without dissolving the ego"; that is, since the subject is constituted through loss *within* the terms of social authority, it cannot exist otherwise: "to persist in one's being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one's own" (ibid 196-198). But this configuration leaves racialized subjects in a somewhat inimical position: either they persist in occupying subjectivities created for them through the actions of authorities who do not have their best interests at heart, or they avow the loss that has occurred, thus entering into a condition of mourning after which can follow further attachments to more healthy social objects.

For racially mixed subjects though, the possibility of future social attachments is presently impossible, because under existing conditions, any such attachment would require an acceptance of racial purity. What Butler does not address, and indeed cannot address, is the way in which racially mixed subjects can employ their suspension within the condition of melancholia or reflexivity to critique the very notion of subjectivity as dependant upon coherent racial identities. Wah recognizes the absence of a single cultural identity to which he can attach, and in fact, recognizes that any attempt at such attachment would necessarily fail to provide him with an adequate site of expression.

Instead, he employs the temporary stasis of ambivalent reflexivity to critique the way in which Canadian multiculturalism and ethnic essentialism privilege coherent categories of race. Affecting political change through the exploitation of the very condition of his subjection does not preclude him from future social attachments or belonging. Rather, Wah turns his condition of racial ambivalence into a temporary, but necessary and productive stasis, one that suggests the future possibility of movement and healing upon the dissolution of inimical categories of race and ethnicity.

* * * * *

The earlier chapters in this thesis illustrate the long material history of racial exclusion and discrimination endured by Chinese Canadians in this country. They also illustrate the way in which the shift in government policy towards official state multiculturalism has in fact strengthened racist attitudes towards non-white individuals by concealing asymmetrical relations of power beneath a veneer of liberal tolerance. The potential of Chinese Canadian writing to function as alternative sites of active resistance against the homogenizing practices of the Canadian government and essentialist community leaders is evident in the texts discussed in this study. The different strategies employed by Choy and Wah also illustrate that although there are numerous shared qualities to Chinese Canadian writing, including the insistence upon the historical record of racist practices on the part of the federal and provincial governments and the exploration of a subjective voice that is at once articulated through their respective communities, their irreducible differences function as a warning against the practice of relegating them to genre classifications based upon essential categories of race and

ethnicity. The ability of both Choy's and Wah's texts to modify, extend or even check the theoretical configurations of subjection offered by white theorists like Butler illustrates the importance of listening for the ways such texts critique white Euro-American based literary and cultural theory, illustrating its fissures and potential biases within the historical and cultural specificity in which each text is located.

None of these texts offers a complete teleological resolution to the psychic violence cultivated in Chinese Canadian subjects through the racist actions of the state. This lack indicates both an impossibility of such resolution within existing understandings of subjectivity and a recognition that racist practices are continuing today through multicultural policy. They do suggest, however, that such resolution *is* a reachable goal and that the recognition of valid cultural subjectivities is an essential aspect of any such project. However, such a goal is impeded by social restrictions entrenched through Canadian multiculturalism, or rather the lack of desire on the part of the dominant white anglo population to address issues of racial inequities in a way that would affect real change in race relations in this country. This project similarly is unable to offer definitive recommendations on policy change; although I can offer respectful criticism of the way in which structures of authority subordinate racialized minority subjects, as a white male academic I cannot suggest specific ways in which racial representations must necessarily be (re)occupied by those who have suffered the most from them. Instead, I hope that by advancing a theoretical model and textual analysis that elucidate the extent to which psychic violence conditions the daily existence of racialized minorities in this country, I can raise awareness of the need to consider change

in the hegemonic positioning of anglo-white normativity so that both the subjective and

political voice of non-white individuals can be heard and respected.

NOTES

[1] Although the theme of historicism is implicit in both of Choy's texts, he makes more explicit mention of the way in which such revisionist approaches to history are essential for the rendering of a personalized Chinese Canadian voice in interviews with both Rocío Davis and Glenn Deer.

[2] For a discussion of how students of Bhabha's conception of hybridity should exercise caution when engaging with government and other authorities, see Giroux.

[3] For a specific discussion on the political potential of the hyphen itself, see McGonegal.

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