

Université de Montréal

Performing Ethnicity in Recent Canadian Fiction

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Université de Montréal  
Faculté des études supérieures

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**Performing Ethnicity in Recent Canadian Fiction**

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## Résumé

Ce mémoire aborde la problématique de l'influence de la performance de l'ethnicité sur la formation de l'identité individuelle des protagonistes considérés des « minorités visibles » dans les romans des écrivaines Sky Lee, Dionne Brand, Hiromi Goto et Abla Farhoud. Étant donné que ces œuvres ont été publiées dans les seize dernières années et les quatre femmes sont soit des « minorités visibles » soit des immigrantes ou les deux à la fois, elles reflètent l'évolution des sociétés canadienne et québécoise, fort influencées par la politique du multiculturalisme canadien et le pluralisme québécois. Comme point de départ théorique, j'ai abandonné la perception désuète qui considère l'ethnicité comme une entité stable et primordiale en faveur de la théorie de la performance du genre sexuel de Judith Butler, adaptée aux notions de race et d'ethnicité. À partir des concepts de *misrecognition* et de *resignification* de Butler et du « zoo » et de « *coercive mimeticism* » de Rey Chow, j'ai analysé la performance de l'ethnicité des protagonistes par rapport à diverses dimensions de leur différence culturelle et physique et à la gestion de leur espace physique. Cette analyse m'a permis d'évaluer la condition du sujet ethnique dans les sociétés canadienne et québécoise contemporaines. Mon analyse m'a menée à la conclusion que les performances d'ethnicité des protagonistes démontrent une conscience aiguë de leur différence ainsi qu'une nécessité de réconcilier nombreuses appartenances culturelles. Dans cette perspective, l'appartenance ethnique devient quelque chose d'instable et de fluide qui remet en question les présupposés et les stéréotypes traditionnels et contribue à la création de nouvelles identités.

Mots clés : ethnicité, performance, *performativity*, *immigrant literature*, *ethnic minority literature*, littérature migrante, femmes

## Abstract

This study examines how the performance of ethnicity impacts the individual identity formation of visible minority protagonists in novels by Sky Lee, Dionne Brand, Hiromi Goto and Abla Farhoud. Abandoning the perception of ethnicity as a stable and foundational entity, I use Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity transposed onto race and ethnicity as my main theoretical basis. Drawing also from Butler's concepts of misrecognition and resignification and Rey Chow's notions of "the zoo" and "coercive mimeticism," I have analysed the various protagonists' performances of ethnicity in relation to their cultural and visible otherness and the mapping of their physical space in order to determine the state of the ethnic subject in contemporary Canadian and Québécois society. As the works of Lee, Brand, Goto and Farhoud are published within the last sixteen years and all four women write from traditionally marginalised positions, either as visible minority or immigrant women or both, they reflect the changing face of Canadian and Québécois society entrenched in the politics of Canadian multiculturalism and *le pluralisme québécois*. I have concluded that the protagonists' various performances of ethnicity reflect an intense awareness of difference combined with a need to reconcile numerous cultural affiliations. Consequently, ethnic belonging is shown to be fluid and unstable, thus challenging traditional stereotypes and assumptions in the process of creating new identities.

Key words: ethnicity, performance, performativity, immigrant literature, ethnic minority literature, *littérature migrante*, women

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## Remerciements

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## Introduction

Factors such as gender, sexuality, gestures and physical and discursive traits combine in creating and determining a subject's individual identity. Over the years, certain characteristics have been prioritised over others in identity formation as established social values and institutions change. Frequently, an important component in the construction of an individual's identity is ethnicity. However, the definition of ethnicity has proven to be highly problematic despite its evolution over the years. It is no longer exclusively considered a clear and stable entity, defined by such characteristics as language and physical attributes. With increased migration and contact between cultures, the notion of ethnicity has become more complicated as inter- and transcultural relationships create new and diverse cultural combinations and tensions. It is inclusionary when used to unite members of the same group and consequently, it is ethnicity's tendency to delimit one group from another that makes it also exclusionary. Moreover, different guidelines of ethnicity arise when applied to groups as opposed to individuals. Traditionally, "ethnic groups are typically imagined as if they were natural, real, eternal, stable and static units. They seem to be always in existence" (Sollors, 1989, xiv). Unfortunately, this essentialist and monolithic conceptualisation of ethnicity still exists in certain nationalist rhetoric even though new theories of ethnicity have been elaborated in recent decades.

Now, ethnicity is looked upon as being much more subjective and performative, just like gender, as it is defined in the works of the American theorist and philosopher Judith Butler on sex and gender. Thus, the essentialist and monolithic approach to ethnicity has been transformed into one where an ethnic identity is constituted based on the subject's words, acts and gestures within the context of hegemonic power structures.

Butler argues that there is a certain amount of freedom within these established structures in that if one does not perform her/his gender “correctly,” there is an opportunity for subversion and change through misrecognition and resignification. However, according to the cultural critic Rey Chow, it is precisely these structures that control and oppress the ethnic subject. She purports that “the gaze” of the dominant group and “coercive mimeticism” serve to, in Chow’s words, “keep [the ethnic subjects] in their place” (Chow, 2001, 95).

Working with Butler’s theory of performativity and Chow’s concept of “coercive mimeticism,” I will analyse novels by four Canadian women, all of whom are either immigrants to Canada, members of a minority ethnic group, or both. In the most traditional sense, they are all members of groups considered excluded from the dominant, mainstream, white majority in Canada and all authors include similarly marginalised characters in their novels. The works in question are *Disappearing Moon Café* by the Vancouver Island-based, Chinese-Canadian writer Sky Lee; *Chorus of Mushrooms* by the Calgarian and Japanese-Canadian author Hiromi Goto, *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* by Montréal-based and Lebanese-born Abla Farhoud and finally, *What We All Long For: A Novel* by the Torontonion of Trinidadian descent, Dionne Brand. My primary focus is to examine what role the performance of ethnicity plays in the construction of the individual identity of the protagonists. As all the novels contain characters from ethnic minority groups, ethnicity is constantly at the forefront of the creation of the protagonists’ individual identity. Through the analysis of the protagonists’ relationship to their own cultural and visible otherness and the protagonists’ interaction with and mapping of their physical space, many questions arise. In terms of the protagonists, do their performances of ethnicity subvert the traditional conception of minority ethnic

subjects in Canadian society or do they illustrate the predicament of the ethnic subject, that of being kept in her/his place, as elaborated by Rey Chow? Is there an opportunity for resignification? Also, how is their performance of ethnicity and consequently, ethnic identity, affected by their geographical surroundings and their relationship with the dominant white culture or with members of other minority ethnic communities?

In her explanation of gender performativity, Butler explicitly differentiates *performativity* from *performance* emphasising that in contrast to *performance*, *performativity* is never willed or chosen (Butler, 1993, 234). Although the *performative* nature of ethnicity is a significant component of my analysis, where the “abstract, hidden, unthinking, habitual ways [ethnicity] are *constituted*” (Nagel, 53), I feel that the theatrical element of performance is of equal importance. As demonstrated by a number of the protagonists, the various performances of their ethnicities can also reflect a very voluntary desire to play up their ethnicity in order to conform to societal expectations or for personal advancement. This element of conscious performance is especially evident in the protagonists who straddle two or more cultures. Often, time, place and context will influence the degree to which the protagonists’ ethnicity is consciously *performed* versus the more habitual and unconscious *performative* ethnicity. In *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*, Joane Nagel writes that “ethnic boundaries are constructed [...] through both conscious performances and unconscious performatives” (Nagel, 54). Arguably, as seen in the four novels, ethnic identities are also created through the relationship between the more theatrical *performance* and the retroactive attribution of the *performative* to a subject.

Since the works I have selected were written by ethnic minority and/or immigrant writers, my choice of novels may seem to have been guided by an interest in what the English Canadian literary institutions have called *Immigrant Literature*, *Ethnic Minority Literature* or simply, *Minority Writing*. In Québec, where the critical response to non-Francophone literary voices writing in French has increased in the last twenty-five years, this literature is called *la littérature migrante*. Although these categories reflect a growing interest in and recognition of literature produced by voices belonging to cultures other than the mainstream Anglo-Canadian or French-Canadian groups, they can also be problematic for many reasons.

Firstly, what is judged to be *minority* tends to change based on evolving social and geopolitical realities. Early in the twentieth century, Canadian writers of Scandinavian, Ukrainian, Mennonite and Jewish descent were marginalised compared to their Anglo/Celtic- and French-Canadian counterparts. Today, speaking of *minority writers* tends to imply visible otherness, encompassing black, South Asian or Asian authors. To explain the constantly evolving position of “the other” and ways of excluding her/him, David Theo Goldberg, in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, states that “instruments of exclusion- legal, cultural, political, or economic- are forged by subjects in relation to but never fully determined by specific local conditions as they mould criteria for establishing racial otherness” (Goldberg, 55). Thus, “the other” is never a fixed entity. This opinion is echoed by Linda Hutcheon in her introduction to *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, an anthology of works by Canadian ethnic minority writers. She writes, “‘ethnic’ always has to do with the social positioning of the ‘other,’ and is thus never free of relations of power and value” (Hutcheon and

Richmond, 2). Consequently, numerous factors come into play in determining who is included in mainstream society or more specifically, literary institutions, and who is not.

Secondly, in terms of literary reception and issues of canonisation, literary institutions create a trap when they accentuate the *otherness* of works produced by minority authors within the Canadian canon. On the one hand, the foregrounding of the non-mainstream origin of this literature achieves the well-intentioned liberal goal of recognition of difference, but on the other, it serves to further marginalise these works within the literary establishment. However, not recognising the particularities of this literature in comparison to mainstream English-Canadian and Québécois literature would be equally unjust and naive. As Marino Tuzi explains in his article “Theorizing Canadian Minority Texts: Cultural Specificity, Agency, and Representation,” English-language “ethnic writing presents many interpretations of ‘Canadianness’ and contests the varied and at time opposed English-centred readings of social reality” (Tuzi, 86). Referring to *la littérature migrante* in Québec, Pierre Nepveu writes: “le texte migrant donne ainsi à lire l’expérience de l’ici dans une ambiguïté, typique de tous les rituels, entre le sérieux et le ludique, le réel et l’imaginaire” (Nepveu, 208). The criticism has often been expressed that works by minority authors are valued more for their sociological contributions rather than their literary ones, “the stress on the sociological in the study of ethnic texts places these texts in a discrete category in terms of cultural production” (Tuzi, 86).

When selecting which novels I would include in my study, I decided to focus specifically on works written by ethnic minority women. In doing so, I realised that I risked falling into the trap that so many critics and minority writers alike have denounced, that of examining the texts from a sociological perspective rather than a

literary one. Inevitably, some sociological components come into play in my analysis although it is, primarily, a literary one. I do not consider the texts included in my study to be representative of any “objective” reality. However, I do believe that these works provide an insight into the world of traditionally-excluded members of Canadian society vis-à-vis its mainstream citizens and question assumptions of *Canadianness* and cultural belonging. Marino Tuzi, in discussing the marginality of ethnic minority literature, claims that “ethnic texts” “continually call attention to their ethnicity, to their cultural difference, and thus to their expressed or implied resistance to the hegemonic proclivities of the dominant culture” (Tuzi, 87) and the novels I have analysed are no exception.

As mentioned earlier, all four writers are either members of minority ethnic groups, immigrants to Canada or both. Like many women ethnic minority writers, they are preoccupied with themes of exile, identity, exclusion, family and the status of women and these issues appear often in their works. They are writing across cultures, generations and genders, provoking an examination into new and multiple identities. While none of the works analysed are autobiographical, it is important to recognise the importance of how these women’s various perspectives shape their writing (Howell, 4).

Of the four writers, Sky Lee is the lone Canadian-born woman. As a Chinese-Canadian author, she “is very conscious of herself as a marketable, ‘ethnic’ writer who is conforming to the expectations of the establishment in writing a multi-generational ‘ethnic’ novel” (Condé, 2000, 172). This awareness is embodied in *Disappearing Moon Café* through her protagonist, Kae Ying Woo, who also writes a “multi-generational ‘ethnic’ novel.” In Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, there is a similar parallel between the author’s real and fictional worlds as Goto recounts the story of Muriel, a Japanese-

Canadian girl growing up in the Alberta town of Nanton. Unlike Muriel, Goto was born in Japan and immigrated to Canada at a young age however; she was also raised in rural Alberta at a time where there were few other visible-minority inhabitants. Although *Chorus of Mushrooms* is not an autobiographical text, “Goto is acutely aware of her writing of the marginalized status of the Japanese Canadian, and her texts are framed by the desire to explore this status by analysing the position of the Japanese Canadian subject in contemporary society” (Libin, 2001, 94). Perhaps the most prolific and well-known of the four authors is Trinidadian-born Dionne Brand. Present on the Canadian literary scene for almost thirty years as a critic, poet and writer of short stories and novels, Brand’s texts often centre on the urban experience of the immigrant woman and tackle notions of difference, gender, sexuality and race. Finally, as the only representative of Québec’s *littérature migrante* in my analysis, Abla Farhoud “occupe une place de plus en plus importante dans l’écriture québécoise” (Lequin, 2004) In her article “Abla Farhoud et la fragilité du bonheur,” Lucie Lequin states: “il serait cependant erroné et réducteur de présumer qu’Abla Farhoud ne parle que des femmes libanaises. Certes, dans certaines de ses œuvres, le Liban, pays habité ou pays quitté, joue un rôle de premier plan” (Lequin, 2004). Novelist and playwright, Farhoud’s writing is often preoccupied with the situation of woman, primarily immigrant women and the interplay and tension between first- and second-generation Canadians.

In addition, these works provide a reflection on the consequences of Canada’s policy on multiculturalism. As expressed by Enoch Padolsky in his article “Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English,” “analyses of canonical issues for ethnic minority literature thus form part of the evaluation of Canadian social attitudes and practices related to the policy of multiculturalism and to other issues regarding Canada’s pluralistic

society” (Padolsky, 374). Furthermore, since I am specifically examining the performance of ethnicity and its role on individual identity formation, I feel that novels by ethnic minority women are valuable. Often, these women are victims of a double-layered marginalisation. On the one hand, they do not belong to the mainstream, dominant cultural group and also may display visible signs of otherness. On the other hand, as women, they may be confronted with gender-based discrimination from mainstream society and from within their own cultural group. While outlining the tricky context in which these women write in Québec, Lucie Lequin describes: “marginalisées et minoritaires, les écrivaines migrantes sont souvent inaudibles ou trop audibles, invisibles ou trop visibles” (Lequin, 1995, 130).

Overall, my selection of novels reflects various ethnic groups. Even though the focus is primarily on English-language novels set in English Canada, I feel that the inclusion of a French-language novel set in Québec is essential to understanding different aspects of ethnic identity formation by minority members in Canada. Although cities tend to attract minority members for their cosmopolitanism, broad-mindedness and accessibility to members of the same cultural group, and thus are the setting for many ethnic novels, the rural reality of Canada is very important to some writers. Thus, I have included one novel set in rural Canada, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, which takes place in the southern Alberta town of Nanton. The backdrops of the remaining works are Canada’s three largest cities, *What We All Long For: A Novel*, set in Toronto, *Le bonheur a la queue glissante*, in Montréal and finally, *Disappearing Moon Café*, in Vancouver. Furthermore, in order to present a more contemporary examination, I have chosen novels that are quite recent, published between 1990 and 2005. This textual diversity, I



feel, is essential in presenting a careful and well-balanced analysis of ethnic identity formation in recent Canadian fiction.

In addition to the authors of these novels belonging to ethnic minority groups traditionally marginalised in Canadian society, the works' protagonists also fall into this category. Generally, the protagonists are "visible minorities," a quality that sets them apart from the dominant, white, Canadian society and causes them to be highly aware of this difference. From their position on the periphery, these protagonists or "ethnic subjects are constituted by 'cultural overdeterminations' (Fuss, 75) from inside cultural communities, within the many structures of the dominant society, and in the interactions between ethnic enclaves and components of the cultural mainstream" (Tuzi, 91). These components all contribute to their performance of ethnicity and consequently, their individual identity formation.

Before proceeding any further, I feel it is important that I include some brief explanations about the terminology employed in my study. As I am dealing with a subject matter that tends to provoke a wide range of emotions and identifications, I feel it is essential to outline and clarify my choice of words not necessarily as a justification for their use but as an attempt to avoid offence and to recognise the contentious nature of ethnicity/race and its relation to members of marginalised groups. To begin with, as displayed in the preceding pages, I employ the term *ethnicity* more frequently than *race*. This choice of words highlights an endless and often-nuanced semantic debate that exists in this field of study. Some arguments maintain that race pertains to the "physical" differences between people and ethnicity to "cultural" differences (Sollors, 1996, xxx). Correspondingly, these definitions could be reduced to a simple matter of nature and nurture. Others prefer to view race as a category that falls within the broader

concept of ethnicity. Frequently, no distinction is made and the two terms are used interchangeably.

At the outset, I believed that the exclusive use of the term *ethnicity* would be sufficient in order to avoid confusion and keep the focus of my study clear. I had intended to justify the preference of the term ethnicity over race with the same explanation as Rey Chow who, in her work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* states “to my mind, however, it may actually be more productive not to insist on any absolute distinction between the two terms [race and ethnicity] at all times, for the simple reason is that they are, more often than not, mutually implicated” (Chow, 2002, 23). Although I agree with Chow for purposes of simplicity, I feel that such a reduction does not concur well with my analysis of certain protagonists in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*, where skin colour takes precedence over language, rituals and nationality. Thus, I feel that David Theo Goldberg’s explanation is more pertinent to justify my privileging the term “ethnicity.” As Sneja Gunew states in her article “Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism: Between Race and Ethnicity:”

it has also been argued by Goldberg that racial differences are in fact determined by ethnic choices, that is, that the arbitrary markers by means of which race is constructed are based on ethnic choices, whether this be religion, skin colour, or the wearing of headgear. (Gunew, 30)

She follows with a passage from *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* where Goldberg writes, “invoking the concept of race is invariably ethnocentric. Ethnicity is the mode of cultural identification and distinction [...] assigning significance to biological or physical attributes [...] it is a cultural choice” (Goldberg, 74-75, quoted in Gunew, 30). In view of this explanation, I feel that it can be assumed that my analyses of the performances of ethnicity by various protagonists include such race-related notions as skin colour.

Another issue of terminology that I would like to address is my use of the word *minority* as an adjective to qualify groups, authors and other members of society. Some debate has been raised regarding the characterisation of groups or people as *minority* and with valid reason. Originally used in order to differentiate a group or individual from the *majority*, whether ethnic, national, gender or otherwise, many socioeconomic factors have influenced this terminology, causing it to be increasingly ambiguous. For example, when referring to a *minority* group, many socioeconomic factors that exist within that specific group may be tacitly recognised, such as income level. Therefore, as a blanket term, it can be highly problematic. Furthermore, in situations where many minority groups co-exist, there is often a hierarchy within that grouping. From a psychological perspective, characterising a group or person as *minority* can also connote inferiority in comparison to the dominant group and is sometimes considered less empowering than descriptions such as *diverse* or *multicultural*.<sup>1</sup> In light of this debate, I have chosen to continue employing the term *minority* when describing non-dominant ethnic groups and their members in my thesis. Based on my research, *minority* tends to be the predominant adjective when speaking of ethnically non-mainstream writers and their works. I will be using this qualification with that intention and do not wish to imply any inferiority or disempowerment whatsoever. As is usually the case, terminology will continue to evolve in order to reflect the social and political realities of the times and the literary field will respond accordingly with its own new vocabulary.

In “Theorizing Canadian Minority Texts: Cultural Specificity, Agency, and Representation,” Marino Tuzi claims that “as part of the cultural production of

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<sup>1</sup> For this explanation, I am grateful to the website <http://www.sagepub.com/Paniagua%20I%20Proof%20Chapter%2014966.pdf> for providing an insightful examination into the use of *minority*.

meanings, ethnicity interrogates prevailing constructions of reality by foregrounding a fragmented and discontinuous socio-political landscape which is steeped in competing and overlapping cultural ideologies” (Tuzi, 91). Through my analysis, I hope to take this idea even further by reflecting on ethnicity and its performative nature as displayed by the protagonists in works by four Canadian authors who, in the most conventional sense, occupy marginal positions. As visible minority women living in Canada, these authors come from very different social realities than white, Anglo-Canadian and Québécois writers and their works reflect a linguistic, cultural and literary diversity. The pervasive presence of ethnicity in their novels highlights its importance in the individual identity formation of their protagonists and their relationships to their culture, their customs and their surroundings.

## Chapter 1:

### Judith Butler and the Performance of Ethnicity

In seeking to analyse the formation of ethnic identity by various protagonists in Canadian and Québécois society, I will examine how old and new definitions of and approaches to ethnicity influence identity formation. Furthermore, I will discuss whether the performance of ethnicity challenges the boundaries of traditional cultural identities and its influence on new subjectivities, both individual and collective. My primary theoretical support will come from Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Originally conceptualised in the context of Michel Foucault's discussion of the relationship between subject formation and power structures, Butler's theory focuses mainly on gender and sexual identity. However, critical theorists, sociologists, philosophers and anthropologists have used her theory of performativity to elaborate on new hypotheses on the construction and perception of individual ethnic identity. Nonetheless, transposing ethnicity onto a theory primarily construed in the context of gender and sexuality creates debate and some lacunae which I hope to expose. As is the case with theories of constructed and performative ethnicity, questions regarding the illusions of essentialism and authenticity abound, in addition to discussions on agency. In order to approach these issues, I will refer to the writings of Max Weber, Werner Sollors and Rey Chow, which are very pertinent to my analysis of ethnic identity formation. Initially though, it is important to elaborate on the traditional and still prevalent notions of ethnicity and how they affect the creation of an individual ethnic identity.

In his essay entitled *Ethnic Groups*, the German sociologist Max Weber writes:

race creates a “group” only when it is subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens only when a neighbourhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some common experiences of members of the same race are linked to some antagonism against members of an *obviously* different group. (Weber, 52)

From this passage, two interesting issues arise, in addition to highlighting the semantic debate concerning *race* and *ethnicity*.

First, Weber focuses on the creation of a collective ethnic identity which is very different from its individual counterpart. Often, collective ethnic identity is perceived as something inherent and natural, used to unify a population and consequently, delimit it from others. Conversely, recent scholarship has characterised individual ethnic identity as constructed and performative. The notion of ethnicity as constructed and imaginary has also been attributed to group identity; however politically, it does not have the same unifying resonance as maintaining an essentialist definition of ethnicity.

Second, Weber’s declaration that a common ethnic affiliation is “subjective” challenges the traditional notion of ethnicity as something “always already in existence” (Sollors, 1989, vix) and underlines the *constructed* nature of ethnicity. Later in *Ethnic Groups*, Weber defines his “ethnic groups” as “those human groups that entertain a *subjective* belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration” (Weber, 56, my emphasis). Weber’s use of the word subjective in his definition of ethnic groups is important as it underlines the highly personal nature of the perception of physical difference, a view that is often used to argue against established “phenotypal” or “innate” cultural boundaries. In the forward to *Theories of Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors explains, “the notion of ‘visibility’ [...] rests on culturally shaped sensory ‘perception,’ hence *not* on ‘objective’ factors” (Sollors, 1996, xxxii). As such, Weber’s statement that

“almost any kind of similarity or contrast of physical type and of habits can induce the belief that affinity or disaffinity exists between groups that attract or repel each other” (Weber, 55) confirms the imaginary and constructed nature of ethnic belonging and the formation of collective ethnic identity. This concept is also echoed in recent theories on nationhood, notably in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* where he defines the nation as “an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 6).

Although recent scholarship places more and more emphasis on the subjective and constructed nature of ethnicity and nationhood, monolithic and essentialist discourse is still prevalent in the political domain. In the era of globalisation and expanded cultural and national borders, politicians and cultural leaders are relying on essentialist theories of ethnicity to further polarise populations and to establish new cultural boundaries in promoting their nationalist ideals. In her analysis of Weber’s *Ethnic Groups*, Rey Chow explains:

from Weber’s social scientific perspective, ethnicity appears to be a category with mythic potential (since it is a kind of narrative of belonging) and is therefore manipulable (it is by appealing to people’s sense of where and with whom they belong that political states manage to exert control over them). (Chow, 2002, 25)

When examining individual ethnic identity formation, the concept of ethnicity as a willing or chosen performance or an unconscious *performative* is widely supported by many theorists. Originating in Judith Butler’s investigation of gendered identity in the context of Michel Foucault’s discussion of power structures, the theory of performativity was initially limited to the spheres of gender and queer studies. However, its pertinence in analysing the formation of ethnic identity in addition to gender and sexual identities has expanded its reach into the domains of cultural studies and anthropology.

Butler's theory of performativity arises from a strong linguistic and philosophical base, combining concepts previously explored by J.L. Austin, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. She first elaborates on the performative nature of gender in her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. An important distinction is made early on in her work as Butler analyses the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, two terms that are often mistakenly used interchangeably. By *sex*, Butler refers to the category male/female whereas *gender* is qualified by the adjective masculine/feminine.

Traditionally, gender was viewed as a consequence of sex, itself a stable entity. As such, the male was assumed to be masculine and the female, feminine. Where Butler's originality lies is that she questions the relationship between sex and gender upheld by traditional feminist critics; specifically, the notion of gender as "culturally constructed" (Butler, 1999, 10) and sex as a natural and pre-discursive entity. She writes, if gender is considered culturally constructed, "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1999, 9-10) and as a result "if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (Butler, 1999, 10).

In recognising the disjunction between sex and gender, Butler challenges stable identity categories established by the heterosexual and predominantly masculine power structures. She states explicitly in her introduction "the task of this inquiry is to center on- and decenter- such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1999, xxix) and as such, she creates a space for those who are situated outside these institutions to subvert and question established expectations of



gendered identity. Later on, in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Butler expands on her earlier discussion and further examines the concept of "sex."

Arising from Butler's analysis of the problematic relationship between sex and gender is the proposal that gender is performative. By employing the term *performative*, Butler adopts the term coined by the British linguist, J.L. Austin in his speech act theory. A *performative* is a statement that is in itself accomplished through its utterance. For example, the acts of marriage and betting are performative actions in that the speech acts enact what is being said and "do it in the moment of that saying" (Butler, 1997, 3).

When applied to gender, Butler qualifies it as performative based on this explanation:

in other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never, reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (Butler, 1999, 173)

As a result, Butler suggests that there is no gender identity that exists prior to the performance of gender attributes thereby challenging the notion of true and established gender identities. In other words, Butler illustrates gender as something one *does* rather than simply who/what one *is*. She states that if gender is performative then "there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction" (Butler, 1999, 180). This idea creates a space for a free movement of gender identities in that performativity is unattached to any "true" or "essentialist" definition of masculinity or femininity.

However, Butler qualifies her theory with an important point. In order for gender to be truly *performative*, it must be repetitive and not limited to one act. Gender

performativity is a ritual and a “constituted *social temporality*” (Butler, 1999, 179). It is the repetition of gendered acts, such as the way one walks or the way one dresses that leads to their normalisation and the perception that they are gender-specific, socially-expected behaviours and customs. Thus, according to Butler, dominant and hegemonic social structures remain in place and are further fossilised because of these repeated performances of gender.

Although this aspect can be viewed as potentially oppressive and restricting for those whose performances do not perpetuate set and *normal* gender identities, Butler’s theory of performativity does provide an opening for the recognition of these marginalised subjects. In *Bodies That Matter*, she explains “the normative force of performativity- its power to establish what qualifies as ‘being’- works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well” (Butler, 1993, 188). It is through these very “exclusions” that the marginalised subject comes into being and “the political terms that are meant to establish a sure or coherent identity are troubled by this failure of discursive performativity to finally and fully establish the identity to which it refers” (Butler, 1993, 188). As such, these areas of exclusions allow for new categories and identities to be created, a very important development in the debates pertaining to feminist, queer, gay and lesbian politics.

In addition to the importance of repetition or reiteration to the theory of performativity, Judith Butler underlines the value of distinguishing *performativity* from *performance*, in the theatrical sense. She stresses that gender is not like a piece of clothing that one can choose from a variety of options and where a different garment can be chosen depending on the day or mood (Butler, 1993, x). Moreover, there is not a role that the performer assumes; rather a gendered identity is attributed to the subject after

the act has been performed. The performer's identity formation is thus retroactive. Jeffrey T. Nealon, in his article "Between Emergence and Possibility: Foucault, Derrida, and Judith Butler on Performative Identity," confirms that "the performative subject does not and cannot merely found its own conditions or its own identity, but at the same time this subject is not merely determined in some lock-step way" (Nealon, 433). In her later introduction to *Gender Trouble*, published after ten years of scholarship and reflection on her theory of performativity, Butler recognises this area of possible confusion. She writes, "my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical" (Butler, 1999, xxv). An attempt at differentiating the two concepts is made in *Bodies That Matter* where Butler explains that "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (Butler, 1993, 234). These norms are produced by the hegemonic power structures. She concludes her explanation by saying, "the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" (Butler, 1993, 234).

If the subject does not ultimately choose or will her/his gendered acts, then how does Butler's theory impact agency? According to Butler's description of gender performativity, it seems as though the subject is condemned to perpetuating constricting societal norms through the act of repetition. However, Butler recognises the necessity of established norms and conventions to identity formation in that it is precisely these oppressive structures that create and potentially empower the performing subject. This is also true for those who situate themselves outside the hegemonic power structures and are forced to challenge established norms. She explains,

the paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power. (Butler, 1993, 15)

A consequence of being part of society compels the subject to be automatically involved in hegemonic power structures. Thus, rather than calling for a destruction of these structures, Butler understands their importance to identity formation and finds an opening for subversion and recognition within them.

Another important aspect of the relationship between performativity and agency deals with interpellation and misrecognition. In many of her books and articles, Butler refers to Louis Althusser's notion of *interpellation* in order to illustrate the possibility of opposition to and subversion of established expectations and structures and the creation of new subjectivities. According to Althusser, the subject comes into being through being hailed or addressed. Therefore, there is no subject until she/he is recognised by another subject or, the *other*. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler uses the example of the law, as the interpellating authority and the performative, the resulting interpellation, to demonstrate how the failure of performativity is linked to agency. When a subject is addressed by the law, the interpellating party in this example, she/he can choose to answer, thus completing the "*performative call*" (Butler, 1993, 121) by assuming that identity. Or, rather than responding to the interpellating call, the subject "may well fail to hear, may well misread the call, may well turn the other way, answer to another name, insist on not being addressed in that way" (Butler, 1995, 238-9), resulting in *misrecognition*. This challenge to the interpellating call allows for the creation of new and unconventional identities and at the same time, it forces the law "into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation" (Butler,

1993, 122). Furthermore, “it is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience” (Butler, 1993, 122). As the object of a misrecognised interpellating address, the subject is indeed created through its very opposition and “draws what is called its ‘agency’ in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose” (Butler, 1993, 123).

It is evident how Butler’s theory of performativity is important to the formation of gendered identities but can it be applied to illustrate the formation of ethnic identities? In her introduction to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler recognises the influence of her theory of performativity on studies of race and ethnicity. She refers to the debates questioning whether race is “constructed” in the same way as gender and cautions against using race and gender as “simple analogies” (Butler, 1999, xvi). Butler writes, “I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race” (Butler, 1999, xvi).

Similarly to gender, the notion of ethnicity as true, stable and essentialist has been challenged, as was described earlier in this discussion. Currently, collective ethnic identities are viewed as “subjective” and “imagined,” where “the presumable ‘purity’ of the identities of both dominant and ethnic culture is construed, albeit relationally between communal self and other, through the ascription of exclusive qualities whose oppositional homogeneity can only be guaranteed by a maintenance of symbolic boundaries” (Siemerling, 15). However, on an individual level, ethnic identity is analysed more so in terms of performance. Thus, the subject’s ethnic identity is constituted by her/his acts and gestures within the context of social and political hegemonic power

structures. For Butler, there is also a historical component to ethnic identity formation because “‘race’ is partially produced as an effect of the history of racism, that its boundaries and meanings are constructed over time not only in the service of racism, but also in the service of the contestation of racism” (Butler, 1993, 18).

If ethnicity is to be considered performative, what happens when one’s ethnicity is displayed physically? Visibility-wise, how can one deny the reality of the *ethnicised* body? Both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, in dealing with the nature/culture debate regarding sex and gender, raise important points in how to approach the body when discussing performativity. It seems natural to assume that the body is the material reflection of “sex,” assuming that “sex” is the corporeal male/female difference. Likewise, I would posit that the body reveals physical signs of ethnicity. However, in her introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler questions this assumption in her discussion on “sex” and the body. She asks, “if one concedes the materiality of sex or of the body, does that very conceding operate- performatively- to materialize that sex?” (Butler, 1993, 11). In other words, the very act of acknowledging the physical differences of “sex” is performative in that it immediately creates and defines these very differences. The same, I propose, can be said about ethnicity. Butler continues, “how is it that the reiterated concession of that sex [...] constitutes the sedimentation and production of that material effect?” (Butler, 1993, 10). As such, the assumption and identification of natural physical differences or “materiality” of sex or ethnicity perpetuates Discourse created by dominant structures of power. By purporting that sexual (ethnic) differences are pre-discursive and that boundaries and exclusions are naturally established by the bodies themselves, this Discourse “produces the bodies it governs” and “demarcate[s], circulate[s], differentiate[s]- the bodies it controls” (Butler, 1993, 1). On the whole,

Butler writes, “we may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put” (Butler, 1993, 29).

When dealing with ethnicity, I would argue the same, that discourse is what creates and sediments the *ethnicised* body. For Michel Foucault, as analysed by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, “the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription” (Butler, 1999, 165). Consequently, the body is subjected to and destroyed by history (Foucault, 1980; quoted in Butler, 1999, 165), described as “the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice” (Butler, 1999, 165) which “is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations” (Butler, 1999, 165). However, if the body is acted upon by history, Foucault argues for the materiality of the body before “cultural inscription.”

What is interesting though is that the body must be destroyed or “fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values” (Butler, 1999, 166) for it to display or embody cultural inscriptions. In other words, the existence of a pre-discursive body is challenged by both parties. Although Foucault’s notion of inscription requires a body upon which to “inscribe,” the necessary demolition of this body for it to display such regulating and disciplining concepts as gender, ethnicity and the law problematises the existence of an anatomically stable and natural body. Evidently, Butler forgoes any proposal of a pre-discursive body in that she interprets discourse as the determining factor in imposing sex and gender on bodies. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler maintains that the gendered body is constructed through “a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences” (Butler, 1999, 172), “the prohibitions that produce identity along the culturally intelligible grids of an idealised and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1999, 172).

The ramifications are “that false disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (Butler, 1999, 172). As such, the ideal gendered body, regulated by the heterosexual dominant discourse, is perpetuated in order to maintain that very discourse in a position of power. It is also by similar disciplinary means that ethnicity is imposed onto the body and perceived within society. This notion is echoed by Rey Chow in her analysis of ethnic subjects, or more specifically *ethnicised bodies* that/who do not perform their ethnicity discursively or speak the language of the majority. She writes, “without the authentication (however unsatisfactory) of the ethnic language, these bodies bearing the signs of otherness are adrift in a society that will only recognise their existence through the strategy of continual, systemic, marginalisation” (Chow, 2002, 125).

When analysing ethnicity however, the discussion of sex and gender is never far away as they are all integral components in identity formation. Much like Butler’s interpretation of sex and gender, ethnicity is also a notion constituted by discourse in order to create and maintain structures of power. It can be argued, similarly to sex and gender, that everyone is “ethnic,” that everyone belongs to one group or another. This universalising appropriation of the term “ethnic,” often done in an attempt at inclusion or equality by members of a dominant group, downplays the historical and political injustices committed on the basis of ethnicity. In her collection of essays *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow states that “articulations of ethnicity in contemporary Western society are thoroughly conditioned by asymmetries of power between whites and nonwhites” (Chow, 2002, 31). In North America, Europe and Australia or, more commonly, “the West,” ethnic is often used to denote the non-white



subject in contrast to the white dominant group<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the *ethnicised* body is trapped in structures of power that regulate cultural norms and values according to the dominant group. Chow explains that

ethnicity exists in modernity as a boundary- a line of exclusion- that nonetheless pretends to be a nonboundary- a framework of inclusion- only then to reveal its full persecutory and discriminatory force whenever political, economic, or ideological gains are at stake. (Chow, 2002, 30)

Like sex, ethnicity exists as a means of exclusion by which the dominant group, whether intentional or not, must perpetuate and maintain its symbolic boundaries in order to preserve its domination.

When applying performativity to ethnicity, the subject's ethnic identity is thus constituted through her/his "corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler, 1999, 173). Her/his identity is attributed based on these repeated performances and is regulated by established social norms to which the subject is expected to conform. In the same way as gender, ethnicity is regulated "punitively" (Butler, 1999, 178) for, if the subject does not perform her/his ethnicity or gender "correctly," she/he is condemned to the margin, to society's outside. Such marginalisation is not performed exclusively by the majority ethnic group with respect to the non-majority member. Individual subjects who situate themselves outside the expected norm can also be punished by members of their own ethnic group for failing to assume their own version of a "correct" ethnic identity.

In "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," an essay included in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this distinction between "white" and "non-white" is extremely problematic with very fluid boundaries. How a society delimits whites from non-whites has changed over the years according to evolving power structures, demographics and increased miscegenation. As an example, "Ukrainians in Canada and Greeks and Italians in Australia were designated 'black' at various historical stages" (Gunew, 1997, 23).

Chow examines the predicament of the non-majority individual when faced with expectations of ethnicity from the majority group and from within their own ethnic community. First, she argues that the non-majority individual, or ethnic subject in Chow's words, is always the object of the "gaze" of members of the dominant group. Likening ethnic subjects to caged animals found in zoos, Chow states that these subjects

are the products of a certain kind of gaze to which they are (pre)supposed to play *as*, to act *like*, to exist *in the manner of* something[.] This something may be an idea, an image, or a stereotype, but the point remains that the objects under scrutiny are dislocated and displaced to begin with, and subordinated even as they appear as themselves. (Chow, 2002, 100)

Here, Chow shares some affinity with Butler in that she recognises that the subject is constructed within and constrained by dominant structures of power. For the ethnic subject, she/he must perform her/his ethnicity in a "(pre)supposed" way in order to fulfill the expectations set out by the "gazers." Much like gender, norms dictating ethnicity precede the subject and as a result, the subject's ethnic identity is constituted according to these criteria. However, when it comes to subversion and challenging these established norms, Chow is not nearly as optimistic as Butler in her analysis. For Chow, the ethnic subject is bound by the gaze for as long as she/he displays evidence of difference, with little or no possibility of release. Whereas for Butler, performativity allows the subject the possibility of subverting such norms through misrecognition and resignification, where the subject "is repeatedly constituted in subjection; and it is in the possibility of a repetition that repeats against its origin that subjection might be understood to draw its inadvertently enabling power" (Butler, 1995, 237).

Second, as one of the direct results of being the object of the "gaze," the ethnic subject feels the need to assume this identity expected of and imposed on her/him by

the majority group. Chow calls this phenomenon “coercive mimeticism” and defines it as:

a process (identitarian, existential, cultural, or textual) in which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected, [...] to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics. (Chow, 2002, 107)

In many ways, Chow’s “coercive mimeticism” embodies aspects of Butler’s theory of performativity, where a pre-set norm, established by structures of power, is cast as a template for the subject’s resulting identity formation. Where Butler uses the performative example of a doctor “girling the girl” through the exclamation “It’s a girl!” (Butler, 1993, 7) to illustrate how “that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect” (Butler, 1993, 8), Chow’s “coercive mimeticism” similarly implies that the interpellating gaze or expectation propels the ethnic subject to fulfill the anticipated role. However, if this role is not fulfilled, for failure of authenticity or a categorical refusal, the ethnic subject is punished by both members of her/his ethnic group for “forgetting her[/his] origins” (Chow, 2002, 117) and by the majority group as a result of the subversion of the “imagings of [her/him] as ethnic” (Chow, 2002, 107).

Conversely to Butler, who proposes misrecognition as a possibility for contestation and liberation of the subject who does not respond conformingly to interpellations launched by the established power, Chow views interpellation in the same way as the gaze, a subjugation with no chance of agency. In referring to the dual perpetrators who interpellate the ethnic subject, the majority and minority ethnic groups, Chow states, “the ethnic is being hailed not only from within the ghetto but also predominantly from the outside, by the cultural critics (the zoo gazers) who are

altruistically intent on conferring on her[/him] and her[/his] culture a radical meaning, one that is different from the norm of their own society” (Chow, 2002, 108). She does not view misrecognition as an appropriately enabling response to an interpellative demand, not willing to attribute to the subject an agency that “exists outside, before, or after the hailing” (Chow, 2002, 109).

Instead, Chow cites Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of Althusser’s interpellation. According to Žižek, the subject will always answer the interpellation in order to “avoid and postpone the terror of a radically open field of signficatory possibilities” (Chow, 2002, 110). Although Žižek recognises resistance, it is more so a resistance to freedom rather than the “ideological, institutional process of being interpellated” (Chow, 2002, 110). As such, identity’s only means of “legitimacy and security- and, ultimately, its sense of potentiality and empowerment” (Chow, 2002, 110) according to Žižek, is in its avoidance of freedom in favour of an “unconscious automatization, impersonation, or mimicking” of the interpellated demand. Chow’s use of Žižek’s interpretation is in no way an endorsement. More so, Chow alludes to Žižek in order to illustrate the futile position of the ethnic subject and to ask such questions as “does the ethnic have a choice of not responding [to the interpellation]?” (Chow, 2002, 110).

Furthermore, Chow situates ethnicity much in the same way as Foucault does sexuality in his “repressive hypothesis.” In order to justify this point, she writes: “chief of all is the belief that in ‘ethnicity’ is a kind of repressed truth that awaits liberation” (Chow 1998, 101). Chow attributes the need for confession as an opportunity to “actively resuscitate, retrieve, and redeem that ‘ethnic’ part of us which has not been allowed to come to light” (Chow, 1998, 101). Although the confession can be considered a liberating mechanism, a view perpetuated by the Catholic Church among

other institutions, Chow adheres to Foucault's paradoxical analysis of confession in her discussion of ethnic identity formation. Foucault proposes that the goal of confession is not to free the "truth," instead it is "the symptom of a collective subjection" (Chow, 2002, 114). Foucault writes that "truth is not by nature free- nor error servile- but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this" (Chow, 2002, 114).

In "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation," Chow examines the state of the representation of the ethnic subject in cultural production and its ramifications in light of the "epochal transformation of the ethics of representing others" (Chow, 2002, 112). She signals the increased production of confessional and autobiographical works which supposedly sidestep the contentious issue regarding the representation of others that many genres encounter. This "non-representational" (Chow, 2002, 113) approach however, so-called due to the erroneous perception that it is somehow above the limits of representation, proves to be equally problematic. Chow maintains that "resorting to the self-referential gesture as an ethnic and/or sexual minority is often tantamount to performing a confession in the criminal as well as noncriminal sense" (Chow, 2002, 115). Thus, in responding affirmatively to a given interpellation through self-referential genres, the ethnic subject becomes the victim of "coercive mimeticism." She continues,

it is to admit and submit to the allegations (of otherness) that society at large has made against one. Such acts of confession may now be further described as a socially endorsed, coercive mimeticism, which stipulates that the thing to imitate, resemble, and become is none other than the ethnic or sexual minority herself [himself]. (Chow, 2002, 115)

For Chow, there is no power in otherness and even in cultural production, since the performance of the ethnic subject's identity is completely controlled by society's

expectations of her/him. On one hand, she/he is compelled to perform a preconceived ethnic identity and the repetition of this performance will further perpetuate the same stereotypical norms that also repress her/him. On the other hand, if this performance does not display the “pre-scripted, pre-read, and pre-viewed” (Chow, 2002, 116) ethnicity, the ethnic subject is either considered disloyal to her/his culture or condemned yet again to the periphery for her/his presumed lack of authenticity, as a non-ethnic ethnic.

In addition to Chow’s reluctance to fully endorse Butler’s theory of performativity when discussing ethnicity, other concerns arise when transposing a theory primarily pertaining to sex and gender onto ethnicity. The primary unease resides in that Butler’s theory is heavily focused on the discursive aspects of performativity which, although extremely important, are not necessarily privileged in dealing with ethnic identity formation. Even though Butler specifies gestures and enactments in qualifying her theory, as identitarian parts that are involved in the performance of gender, it is difficult to deny the paramount importance she confers to discursive elements. However, in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Butler states, “no act of speech can fully control or determine the rhetorical effects of the body which speaks” (Butler, 1997, 155). By referring to the “speaking body,” Butler acknowledges that separate from the act of speech, there is a high level of importance in corporeal language. While referring to the work of Shoshana Felman, Butler writes that “in speaking, the act that the body is performing is never fully understood; the body is the blindspot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said, but which also acts in and through what is said” (Butler, 1997, 11). This is especially important in dealing with ethnicity as it is not necessarily performed linguistically or discursively. Putting physical signs of ethnicity

aside, the body itself is perhaps the most visual and crucial exhibitor of ethnicity through corporal language, gait and dress. Often, these aspects create the first impression of a performance of ethnicity and elicit an immediate reaction on the part of those faced with this body, perhaps recognising the presence of otherness. Moreover, stereotypical expectations of an ethnic subject may attribute to her/him a certain aura. As a precursor to the *speech* act, which performs what it names, the body is the initial perpetrator of difference and as such, boundaries may be established prior to any speech act based solely upon its performance. Where discourse is of supreme importance is in its role with respect to established norms dictating and regulating ethnicity, which are later conferred on the performing ethnic subject.

Like sex and gender, ethnicity's role in identity formation is of paramount importance. It is intimately linked both to the subject herself/himself and the societal structures which regulate it and control its embodiment. What criteria determine ethnic subjects are bound to evolve according to the hegemonic power structures that, in order to reinforce their dominance, create the boundary between majority and minority. An ethnic identity is not created in a vacuum and the discourse that surrounds and constitutes ethnicity is the direct result of relations of power. In applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity to ethnic identity formation, the relationship between the individual subject and ethnicity can be further understood and analysed within the broader examination of such societal power structures. According to Butler, performativity "describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes" (Butler, 1993, 241) and is a "crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well" (Butler, 1997, 160). Although the subject is constituted and subjugated by relations of power, Butler feels

that these same structures can be the tools of their empowerment. However, as demonstrated by Rey Chow, this possibility of empowerment is not universally shared as both majority and minority groups can prove to be equally guilty in controlling the ethnic subject. Nevertheless, Butler's theory of performativity is an integral tool in explaining ethnic identity formation and by expanding it to include more corporeal elements in addition to gestures and discourse; it will pertain better to ethnicity.



## Chapter 2:

### Ethnicity and the Individual

The first part of my study of the performance of ethnicity and its role in individual identity formation centres on the relationship between the individual and her/his ethnicity/race. This is a broad concept as it includes physical aspects that denote ethnicity, implying the existence of an *ethnicised* or *racialised* body in addition to the usual factors such as customs, language and food. Interestingly, the protagonists of the four novels that I have chosen all have very personal and different relationships to their ethnicity, relationships that exclude them from the majority group and at the same time, can also push them to the peripheries of their own ethnic group. Much like Rey Chow's analysis of the position of the ethnic subject in white, Western society, the ethnic subject is often at odds with those thought to be most like them, members of the same minority community and with members of the dominant group. While many of the minority protagonists are very conscious of this exclusion, it is not the only aspect of their relationship to their ethnicity that is demonstrated. Their inclusion in both groups proves to be equally problematic as they are often in a complicated *in-between* position of sharing many aspects of both the minority and majority Canadian cultures, thus being part of both but neither one at the same time. What is remarkable in all the novels is that ethnicity is never trivialised and reduced to stereotypes or clichés. Although most of the works draw attention to these false perceptions in order to accentuate the position of otherness felt by the protagonists, the authors all present ethnicity in very individual and nuanced ways, providing the necessary framework for my analysis of ethnic performativity's impact on individual identity formation.

In Sky Lee's multi-generational and multi-perspectival novel *Disappearing Moon Café*, the position of Chinese immigrants and first- and second-generation Chinese-Canadians is examined. Primarily situated in Vancouver's Chinatown, Lee also sets her novel in the interior of British Columbia and Hong Kong. The novel chronicles four generations of the Wong family with almost all the characters having some link to the patriarch, Wong Gwei Chang, who came to British Columbia from China at the end of the nineteenth century. Originally arriving in order to recuperate the bones of Chinese railroad workers who died working for the Canadian Pacific Railway, Gwei Chang meets Kelora Chen, and never returns to China, except briefly to marry Mui Lan. Although he does not stay with Kelora, an Aboriginal woman adopted by another Chinese immigrant, Chen Gwok Fai, her presence is felt throughout the novel, mainly in the form of her and Gwei Chang's illegitimate son, Ting An. As the product of this interracial relationship, Ting An embodies many examples of exclusion and *in-betweenness*. Since he is "local-born," Fong Mei, Choy Fuk's Chinese-born mail-order bride, finds Ting An "peculiar, to her way of looking at things, and his friendliness used to make her nervous at first, but he certainly wasn't as brash as white ghosts" (Lee, 54). Later in the novel, it is revealed that "people remarked that [Ting An] spoke english [sic]<sup>1</sup> like a native speaker; he behaved much like a ghost too, never very visible" (Lee, 113).

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout *Disappearing Moon Café*, I was intrigued by Sky Lee's decision to not capitalise the names of ethnicities, nouns denoting certain ethnic groups and languages. Since it is a feature that is consistent all through the novel, it is definitely not an oversight on behalf of the editor. What then is the significance of this intentional grammatical mistake? Indeed, is it a mistake and what are the implications? In the general introduction to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, a distinction between English and english [sic] is made. Referring to their earlier work, they state, there is a "need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english [sic], which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world." (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 4)

In Lee's case, the most common reference is to chinese [sic], both the language and the people. For both contexts, I feel that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's explanation are justifiable in that, for the most part, Lee

Working at the Disappearing Moon Café, Ting An serves as a liaison between his Chinese employers and the white community that surrounds them. He is frequently relied upon to take care of business and immigration matters with white contacts because of his ability to speak English without an accent. Speaking to his mother Mui Lan, Choy Fuk confirms this fact by stating “A Ting is native-born. He knows how to deal better with ghosts” (Lee, 35). However, as useful as Ting An is for business, he is certainly not wholly embraced by the Wongs as part of their family. Even though he is Gwei Chang’s son by Kelora Chen, information only revealed later in the novel, he is considered a “nameless nobody who’s been trying to get in good with [Gwei Chang] for years” (Lee, 35). Ting An, like the rest of the Wong family, is unaware of his lineage and during Gwei Chang’s confession to being his father, says: “I want to thank you for the protection of the Wong name, sir” (Lee, 233). He had been under the impression that Gwei Chang had “given [Ting An] the name Wong to make [him] look like a relative [...] or until [Gwei Chang] wanted to sell the name to someone else” as “Chinese bought and sold their identities a lot in those days” (Lee, 232). As such, he does not view his appropriation of the Wong name as a sign of patriarchy and familial and cultural belonging.

More so, the Wong name is a convenient and protective affiliation that provides Ting An with the necessary entrance into the Vancouver Chinatown community, without which he would not be afforded the same status due to his mixed-race heritage. As described by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, Ting An does not “do” his ethnicity

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is referring to the Chinese language spoken outside of China and Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Canadians in Canada. Obviously, depending on the context, the definition of what is considered *Chinese* changes as it is a very fluid concept that can be subverted, transformed and exaggerated. However, where Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin’s explanation falls short is in Lee’s refusal to capitalise *canadian* [sic] as in the examples ‘canadian immigration’ [sic] (Lee, 41) and ‘small-town canadian’ [sic] (Lee, 164). Perhaps her refusal to capitalise *Canadian* reflects an ever-changing and illusory perception of national and cultural affiliation.

*correctly*. Physically, he is seen as being part of the Chinese community rather than belonging to the “ghosts,” or the white majority as they are referred to by the Chinese-born characters. However, his fluent English and his low-visibility both perplex and alienate his Chinese neighbours. The identity conferred upon him depends on personal interest. When it suits the Chinese-Canadian community, he is one of them. When his behaviour is deemed unbecoming, he is excluded. For Ting An, this is a source of confusion which leads him to float unaffiliated between the two groups. Ultimately, his alcoholism and marriage to a French-Canadian woman secure his place on the outside of Chinatown.

As the main narrator of *Disappearing Moon Café*, Kae Ying Woo is essential in recounting her family’s story and as an aspiring writer; she demonstrates many of the predicaments faced by ethnic writers discussed by Rey Chow in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Although Kae’s voice does not frame *Disappearing Moon Café*, she is the storyteller of her family’s past and with the exception of chapters devoted to Suzanne, also written in the first person, she is assumed to be the main narrator. Her account is non-chronological and as Suzanne’s chapters demonstrate, multi-perspectival.

In the chapters dedicated specifically to her, mostly under the title “Kae” followed by the year, Kae gives the reader access to her reality as a successful Chinese-Canadian woman struggling with her departure from the working world in favour of motherhood. For Kae, becoming a mother has been accompanied by an immersion into traditional Chinese customs mainly encouraged by her mother, Beatrice Wong. In the first chapter dedicated to her, after giving birth to her son Robert, Kae’s mother gives her ginger water to “chase the wind away” (Lee, 20) and she mentions that “by applying attention to all the important events such as the births and the deaths, the intricate

complexities of a family with chinese [sic] roots could be massaged into a suant, digestible unit” (Lee, 19). After she is home from the hospital, she is showered with advice from different aunties regarding drinking beer and stories about how “in the old days, chinese [sic] women and their babies weren’t allowed to take a bath or leave the house until after the full-month celebrations” (Lee, 123). Although initially distrustful of these traditions, she soon discovers their practicality and refuses to further challenge them.

Kae’s reluctance to yield to Chinese traditions is not surprising as she expresses discomfort with her Chineseness throughout her life. In a way, her desires to recount her family’s past and discover the intricacies of their stories are a type of reconciliation and newfound appreciation of her Chinese-Canadian heritage, one that she had been ashamed of. While discussing the past scandals in Vancouver’s Chinatown with Morgan in the library, she explains: “I cringed and glanced nervously around the stacks, hoping no one had heard his embarrassing comments. Chineseness made me uncomfortable then” (Lee, 66). For Kae, being a teenager in 1960s Vancouver is further complicated by her Chinese heritage. In addition to struggling with the usual teenage desire for belonging among her peers, she is faced with the extra obstacle of visibly being a member of a marginalised ethnic group trying to blend in with the white majority. To accentuate her contempt of all things Chinese, she explains that she never

go[es] to Chinatown except for the very occasional family banquet. And [she] certainly wouldn’t ever let any dirty old man touch [her]! Those little old men were everywhere in Chinatown, leaning in doorways, sitting at bus stops, squatting on sidewalks. The very thought gave [her] the creeps. (Lee, 67)

For Kae, the uncomfortable Chineseness encompasses not only the traditions and history but also the physical space “Chinatown,” where many Chinese businesses and

members of the community are concentrated. Occasionally however, this unease and disdain is challenged as she encounters situations that make her reconsider her associations with her ethnicity. As a young woman studying in Peking, Kae meets “an overseas chinese [sic] from Switzerland named Hermia Chow” (Lee, 38). Kae explains how she “used to marvel at how carefree [Hermia] was and wondered how anyone chinese [sic] could be that lighthearted” (Lee, 39). Here, it is Hermia who performs her Chineseness in a way that defies Kae’s expectations, creating a kind of resignification and liberation from traditional established assumptions of Chineseness.

In fact, Hermia is not the only one who encourages Kae to question notions of ethnicity. As a child, she is confronted with her mother’s housekeeper, Seto Chi, who proves to be chameleon-like in her ability to assume and perform different ethnicities without explanation or apology. Born in Malaya and adopted by a Hindu diplomat, Sky Lee describes Chi as having “unmistakably chinese [sic]” features with a “long, well-oiled single braid down her back, she smelled of curry, and she barely spoke english [sic] at all except with a thick tamil [sic] accent” (Lee, 129). In response to Kae’s child-like challenges of her knowledge, Chi’s justification is a simple “people from China just know!” (Lee, 128). This answer proves to be especially confusing when Kae finds out that “Chi didn’t come from China any more that [she] did” (Lee, 128). Kae explains:

in a way, [Chi] wasn’t even pure chinese [sic] (as if that were important), and she had learned her chineseness [sic] from my mother, which added tremendously to my confusion. All my life I saw double. All I ever wanted was authenticity; meanwhile, the people around me wore two-faced masks, and they played their lifelong roles to artistic perfection. (Lee, 128)

Kae discovers that being Chinese is not necessarily innate and can be acquired and performed. Thus, not only are her assumptions of ethnicity put into question but she also realises that any search for authenticity is futile.

Being faced with the illusionary nature of authenticity serves as a loss of innocence for Kae as relying on authenticity often provides stability and security in the formation of individual identity. Theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, in her work *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, explains that “authenticity as a need to rely on an ‘undisputed origin,’ is prey to an obsessive *fear*: that of *losing a connection*” (Trinh, 1989, 94). By letting go of the assumption of an authentic ethnicity, Kae is able to accept different expressions of Chineseness and from there perform her own version of it. Kae’s realisation that ethnicity is a performance can be seen on the one hand, as a benefit to her career and on the other, a constraint as she learns to “be the token, pregnant, ethnic woman; act cool, powdered, inhuman” (Lee, 123). As a visible minority woman working in Vancouver, Kae seems to benefit from her difference in the form of attending high profile meetings and being given higher visibility within her company. Of course, having a visible minority woman in such a position is also beneficial for her employer as it can be interpreted as a reflection of openness to difference and egalitarian hiring practices within the workplace. It appears as though Kae is conscious of the symbiotic structure of her professional life as she refers to herself as “token,” implying her presence is above all, symbolic.

Although such tokenism is, in the short-term, favourable for the visible-minority individual, it has been harshly criticised by Trinh T. Minh-ha among others as being a means of increased control and oppression on behalf of the majority group. This is especially true for the visible-minority female as she is often fighting for recognition on two, often conflicting, fronts. Trinh explains that “the idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or precisely female), again, partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics”

(Trinh, 1989, 104). Frequently, the ethnic minority woman is forced to choose her battles, deciding whether to fight gender battles or ethnic ones. From her description, Kae's role as the "token, pregnant, ethnic woman" categorises her, robbing her of her humanity, individuality and voice, essentially subject to the gaze of the white majority. Just like Chow's likening of the position of ethnic subjects to zoo animals, Trinh echoes this by asking: "have you read the grievances some of our sisters express on being among the few women chosen for a 'Special Third World Women's Issue' or being the only Third World woman at readings, workshops, and meetings? It is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo" (Trinh, 1989, 82). It is perhaps this reduction to a token that propels Kae to give herself, her family and her community a voice through writing.

In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Kae's storytelling and desire to uncover the past is integral to her reconciliation with her ethnic identity. However, it also serves as the plot line for her book. Throughout the novel, Lee lays the foundation for Kae's journey into writing. Even as a young woman, she is fascinated by her family's stories but refuses to entertain this passion in favour of a career in economics. Responding to a story about Kae's grandmother, Hermia states: "I don't have to tell you this. Kae, your chinamen [sic] stories are about, how shall I say- trying to fit in any way we can" (Lee, 138) followed by the encouraging "Sweetie, why don't you write about women trying to fit in any how they can do it?" (Lee, 138). Here, Hermia recognises the essential theme to all of Kae's stories, that of belonging and overcoming difference and pushes her to expand on these themes. Later on in the novel, in the section entitled "The Writer," Kae sheds light on her hesitation to delve into her family's past. She explains:

maybe this is a chinese-in-Canada trait [sic], a part of the great wall of silence and invisibility we have built around us. I have a misgiving that the telling of



our history is forbidden. I have violated a secret code. There is power in silence, as this is the way we have always maintained strict control against the more disturbing aspects in our human nature. (Lee, 180)

Within her family and her ethnic community, storytelling is not common and drawing attention to their history is avoided. In this passage, Kae wittily alludes to “the great wall of silence and invisibility” erected by Chinese-Canadians most likely as a protection mechanism. By remaining invisible and attempting not to attract undue attention, the Chinese-Canadian community tries to blend in as much as they can and avoids fanning the flames of the white community’s racial prejudice. This form of self-censorship and erasure from public life proves to be an imprisonment for many Chinese-Canadians, as they keep quiet in order not to provoke any kind of racist reactions on the part of the white majority. Furthermore, this silence permeates the family unit causing unease among those, like Kae, who expose the past.

Naturally, this reaction is not surprising as the history of Chinese-Canadians is filled with injustice and racial barriers. Although originally welcomed to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, Chinese labourers were tolerated if they remained on the periphery of Canadian life and kept to themselves. This geographical exclusion translated into the creation of Chinatowns throughout major Canadian cities. After the construction of the railway was finished, the Canadian government passed a law to limit Chinese immigration by imposing a “head tax” on every Chinese immigrant entering the country. As the labourers were mostly male, the inability to bring their families to Canada created a bachelor society with very few women. In 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act further curbed Chinese immigration and placed increased restrictions on Chinese immigrants already living in Canada. Thus, Kae’s retelling of her family’s past is important as it exposes the discrimination suffered by her family and community and

gives them a voice after years of invisibility. However, Kae's inclination towards writing about her family and creating an epic Chinese-Canadian melodrama could be interpreted in many ways. More pessimistically, Kae could be considered a victim of the process described by Rey Chow as "coercive mimeticism." Since she is a Chinese-Canadian whose ethnicity is visible physically, she is performing her ethnicity through writing. As a Chinese-Canadian female writer, it is expected that she write about themes surrounding this community. In referring to the position of the Third World female writer, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes "now, i [sic] am not only given the permission to open up and talk, i [sic] am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they have been cheated" (Trinh, 1989, 88). To a degree, Kae realises this trap and is amused by it. While musing about possible titles for her work, she suggests *House Hexed by Woe* or *Temple of Wronged Women* playing with words on many fronts.

Nonetheless, is Kae's decision to write about her community an attempt at resignification and misrecognition that could dispel certain stereotypes surrounding Chinese-Canadians or does she fall victim to "coercive mimeticism?" Referring to Asian-American authors writing in English, Rey Chow writes: "because many of them no longer have the claim to ethnic authenticity through the possession of ethnic languages, Asian Americans are perhaps the paradigmatic case of a coercive mimeticism that physically keeps them in their place-[...] in their *genre* of speaking/writing as nothing but *generic* Asian Americans" (Chow, 2002, 125). Therefore, according to Chow, Kae is trapped. If she chooses to write about Chinese-Canadians, she is giving into society's expectation of her and desire for her to express her difference and devote her writing to Chinese-Canadian themes. Conversely, if she were to avoid Chinese-Canadian themes

altogether, she would be criticised as well. Similarly to Trinh's description of the Third World woman writer, Rey Chow exposes concerns regarding the ethnic critic avoiding so-called *ethnic* themes. She writes, "if an ethnic critic should simply ignore her own ethnic history and become immersed in white culture, she would, needless to say, be deemed a turncoat (one that forgets her origins)" (Chow, 2002, 117). Chow paints a very dreary picture of the position of the ethnic subject in Western society, one which is filled with oppression, subjugation and erasure. An equally pessimistic view of Kae is echoed by Mary Condé in her article "Marketing Ethnicity: Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*." She writes that in *Disappearing Moon Café*, "the tragedy is not only that Kae has no valuable links with China, but also that she is successful as a Canadian only by selling a Chinese identity she does not really possess" (Condé, 2000, 182).

Whereas this is one possible interpretation of Kae's decision to write about Chinese-Canadian themes, I feel that Sky Lee, while always fully recognising Kae's marginal position within Canadian society, presents a more optimistic vision. Not only is she going against the norms of the Chinese-Canadian community by telling their stories and wanting her voice to be heard, but she also breaks the wall of silence and invisibility imposed on her community by the white majority. In the chapter "The Writer," Kae states: "but what about speaking out for a change, despite its unpredictable impact! The power of language is that it can be manipulated beyond our control, towards misunderstanding. But then again, the power of language is also in its simple honesty" (Lee, 180). Not only is Kae's novel important for her community, but also for her own discovery of the past and reconciliation with her Chinese-Canadian heritage. Although discussing specifically Chinese-Canadian themes in her writing may be performing her ethnicity in a way that plays into conventional expectations, Kae's writing

influences how she performs her ethnicity in a way that provides her with more comfort and pride. After all, speaking about one's own community is not exclusively detrimental to the ethnic subject. In *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Trinh states "i [sic] do feel the necessity to return to my so-called roots, since they are the fount of my strength, the guiding arrow to which I constantly refer before heading for a new direction" (Trinh, 1989, 89).

Essential to the performance of ethnicity and individual identity formation is contact with others. Consistent with Butler's theory of performativity, ethnicity is conferred onto the subject based on her/his gestures, acts and words dictated by criteria established by the dominant structures of power. Thus, it is often the members of the majority that interpellate the ethnic subject, grouping her/him as *ethnic* according to these norms. In *Disappearing Moon Café*, contact between the Chinese-Canadian and white communities is problematic and contentious. However, this difficult relationship is integral in creating a Chinese-Canadian identity and affects how subjects perform their ethnicity. What is interesting in *Disappearing Moon Café* is that Sky Lee portrays the contact between the two communities on a group level and on an individual one, mainly through Morgan and Beatrice. Witnessing the racial tension on these two levels exposes the many factors that come into play in individual and group ethnic identity formation and the interplay between them.

As a group, the Vancouver's Chinese-Canadian community faced strong adversity upon their arrival to Canada which lasted for several decades and to a lesser extent, still exists today. In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Lee uses the sensational murder of a white woman, Janet Smith, as the context in which to expose the racial prejudice experienced by the Chinese-Canadian community as a group. The story is first retold by

Morgan, the son of Ting An and a French-Canadian woman, and later, it is given its own chapters in addition to being discussed in the chapters devoted to Gwei Chang. What implicates the Chinatown community in this case is that the leading suspect is a Chinese houseboy, elevating the scandal to titillating levels. Lee describes the situation as such: “those whites who hated yellow people never needed an excuse to spit on chinese [sic]. So the idea of a young, lone, yellow-skinned male standing over the inert body of a white-skinned female would send them into a bloodthirsty frenzy” (Lee, 70). Conflicting factors like ethnicity, class and sex all combine to create a sense of urgency among the Chinatown elite who seek to control the greater fall-out from the case. Intent on preserving their thriving businesses and on avoiding more race riots, community leaders engage in a strenuous fight to divert the spotlight thrust upon the community by the case. Through the scandal, Lee illustrates the blatant racist attitudes and discrimination encountered by the Chinese-Canadian community starting with a law prohibiting “chinese [sic] men from working too closely with white women, and vice versa” (Lee, 68) and the Chinatown elders’ various accounts of racial taunting. Mainly due to personal interest, the elders unite to preserve the houseboy’s reputation in order to avoid unwanted attention from the white community and the police. The wall of silence around the community is thus reinforced, creating further distance between the Chinese-Canadian and white communities.

This distance is depicted first-hand through the interaction between the Chinese-Canadian protagonists and their white neighbours. Interestingly, it is an exclusion that is perpetuated by both parties and has a direct influence on individual ethnic identity formation, especially for the Canadian-born protagonists. Perhaps the best example is Beatrice Wong, the second-generation Chinese-Canadian and Kae’s mother, who grows

up trying to balance these two important influences during a time of increased tension between the two communities. A high school student during the Second World War, when Japanese-Canadians were sent to internment camps, Beatrice is forced to affirm her Chinese heritage by sporting “a mandatory button which shouted ‘China’ (vs. jap [sic]) to the satisfaction of current social exigencies” (Lee, 130). This is one of the few occasions where being Chinese-Canadian is advantageous, as racial prejudices at that time were primarily directed towards Japanese-Canadians due to Japan’s alliance with the enemy forces during World War II. However, she is forced to wear the button in order not to be mistaken for a Japanese-Canadian, of which there is another such incident in *Disappearing Moon Café*. Essentially, Beatrice is a victim of government sanctioned interpellation as she is compelled to assume an identity that is in opposition to what is communicated by “Japan” and in conjunction with what corresponds to “China.” As a Canadian-born woman, she must perform this ethnicity as a form of protection for if she does not perform it “correctly,” it could have serious repercussions. Furthermore, as a tool of identification, the button also serves to create further distance between two minority communities, the Chinese- and Japanese-Canadians.

Later on in the novel, Beatrice’s Chinese heritage proves to be detrimental as she is refused entry into the music programme at the University of British Columbia on the basis that her English marks were not good enough. Told from Suzanne’s perspective, it is revealed that the “stinking old man who was supposed to be the head of the department couldn’t even look at Bea without hate oozing from every pore,” and professors apologised to Beatrice saying that “it was a shame such talent might be wasted because of prejudice” (Lee, 202). Nonetheless, being Canadian born also subjects Beatrice to prejudices from within the Chinese-Canadian community. Lee

explains that “racial prejudice helped disconnect Beatrice from the larger community outside of Chinatown. Then, the old chinamen [sic] added their two cents’ worth by sneering at the canadian-born [sic]: ‘Not quite three, not quite four, nowhere’” (Lee, 164). Racial prejudice from Vancouver’s white community confines her to Chinatown where she is equally discriminated against by her Chinese neighbours for her *in-betweenness*. Moreover, it is not exclusively the white community that limits Beatrice to Chinatown, it is also her mother. Fong Mei hates Vancouver and Canada, “which had done nothing except disqualify her” (Lee, 164). As a result, despite living in one of Canada’s largest cities, Beatrice grows up “thoroughly small-town canadian [sic]” (Lee, 164). Fong Mei is also distrustful of her white neighbours, encouraging her daughter Suzanne not to play with her white friends. She states, “the less you see of those white girls, the better off you’ll be. They don’t make good friends. Just be polite enough to get along with them at school!” (Lee, 151).

For Morgan Wong, the situation is a bit more complicated. His relationship to his Chinese ethnicity is problematic, much like Kae, tending to shift from shame and resentment to fascination. As Ting An’s son, his Chinese roots are even further diluted yet he has a Chinese surname and longs to belong to the Chinese community. In an aptly-named chapter “Identity Crisis,” Morgan responds critically to Kae’s wish to be a writer. He states, “that’s not very pristine chinese [sic]! Remember, if nobody speaks of it, then it never existed. Damn clever, those chinese [sic]. Like I don’t exist. Never have, have I?” (Lee, 161). Here Morgan refers to his complicated relationship with the Chinese-Canadian community, first a result of the life led by his father Ting An, which was considered unacceptable by the Chinatown elders and second, due to the unfortunate outcome of his relationship with Suzanne, Beatrice’s sister. Like his father

before him, Morgan's presence was essentially erased from Chinatown life as his actions were deemed disreputable and his outsider position further condemned him to the periphery. However, Lee writes that "Morgan never stepped into Chinatown [...] but he was more afraid he might get mistaken for a chinaman [sic] himself" (Lee, 172).

At the same time he is intensely drawn to all things Chinese-related, such as the women and the history of Chinatown, as demonstrated by his research into the Janet Smith murder case. In a chapter told from Suzanne's point of view, she describes that "Morgan could have had anybody. Drove of white girls hung around him. With them, he wouldn't have to be chinese [sic], but he said that he couldn't talk to them" (Lee, 172). Through this quote, the performative nature of Morgan's Chineseness is revealed. Depending on his audience, Morgan's ethnicity slides between the mainstream, white one and the Chinese-Canadian one. His ethnic identity is ever-changing as it is defined by whoever interprets his performance. At the same time, his performance will vary depending on the context and audience where certain signs of ethnicity may be more significant than others.

In the novel *What We All Long For*, Dionne Brand tracks the daily goings-on of four, young, urban Torontonians, all seeking to carve out their futures while dealing with their pasts. All four hail from visible minority groups and they are very aware of this fact as they come face to face with Toronto's daily multicultural reality. Brand writes that as students, "they settled in as mainly spectators to the white kids in the class" (Brand, 20). Although Toronto is one of the world's most pluralistic cities, tension exists among different minority groups and between the dominant white majority, a majority that is increasingly diminishing. For Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie, "they were born in a city from people born elsewhere" (Brand, 20).



The main protagonist is Tuyen, a young artist who is one of only two Canadian-born children in her family. Non-conventional, homosexual and fiercely independent, Tuyen is consistently at odds with her traditional Vietnamese family in her quest to establish a life separate from her family's. Over the course of her life, she has rebelled against all things Vietnamese, yet she is unable to and does not aspire to penetrate the white community due to her numerous differences. Traditionally marginalised on many levels, as a woman, a lesbian, an artist and a member of a visible minority group, she occupies a space where battles are fought on many fronts. As such, her relationship to her Vietnamese background is problematic on many levels.

Growing up, Tuyen spent many long nights helping out in her family's Vietnamese restaurant where "eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city wouldn't know the differences [between good and bad Vietnamese food]" (Brand, 67). She refuses to speak Vietnamese, having rebelled against it as a child, and while working at the restaurant, "bawl[s] the customers out if they [don't] use English" (Brand, 68). Brand describes that "at five [Tuyen] went through a phase of calling herself Tracey because she didn't like anything Vietnamese" (Brand, 21). However, she questions her unease with her Vietnameseness, knowing that it is not a discomfort that has been passed down from her parents or her community. This is especially evident when Tuyen meets Binh's girlfriend Hue who goes by the name Ashley. Upon meeting her as Ashley, Tuyen asks, "where'd you get a name like that? What's your real name?" (Brand, 143) and henceforth, refuses to call her Ashley. Perhaps this is Tuyen's most fervent affirmation of her Vietnamese heritage in the novel as otherwise, she is quick to downplay and devalue this quality. During her childhood, she equated perfection with non-Vietnamese parents and resented her role as a mediator between the Canadian and

Vietnamese cultures, between English and Vietnamese. Whereas her older brother Binh accepts this task and conforms to his parent's expectations, Tuyen is reluctant to do so.

Similarly to Ting An and Beatrice in *Disappearing Moon Café*, both Binh and Tuyen straddle the border between two cultures, belonging to both but to neither one at the same time. Brand explains the importance to Tuyen's parents of having Canadian-born children. She writes, "as if assuming a new blood had entered their veins; as if their umbilical cords were also attached to this mothering city, and this made Binh and Tuyen not Vietnamese but that desired ineffable nationality: Western" (Brand, 67). From early in her childhood, it can be seen that Tuyen is expected to conform to and perform what each community, the Vietnamese and the white "Canadian" one, holds as other. As Canadian-born, Tuyen is relied upon by her parents to be "Western," serving as a facilitator between the two cultures, "translating the city's culture to [her] parents and even to [her] older sisters, [she was] responsible for transmitting the essence of life in Toronto to the household" (Brand, 120). At the same time however, her father is uncomfortable with the extent to which Tuyen has discarded traditional Vietnamese customs, primarily that of living with her parents. He asks Tuyen at one point, "how do you think a family works? Same house, same money, same life" (Brand, 57). In the family-owned restaurant, Tuyen is expected to perform her Vietnamese identity in order to authenticate the restaurant in the eyes of Toronto's "eager Anglos" who are looking to indulge in some exotic, multicultural cuisine. In both cases, she does not perform either role very well. Brand explains that Tuyen "only felt exposed in the restaurant when European clientele were present, and when the customers were Vietnamese or Korean or African or South Asian, she hated, then, the sense of sameness or ease she was supposed to feel with them" (Brand, 130).

Like Tuyen, the remaining protagonists in *What We All Long For* all manage to associate some of their marginality to their ethnicity. The exclusion they suffer as visible minority individuals is heightened by their personal eccentricities that serve to push them even further to the periphery. As a young, black man and the son of West Indian immigrants, Oku must contend with the numerous stereotypes imposed on him by both the black community and the white one. A poet, he is content to spend time with Tuyen, Jackie and Carla rather than “hanging with the guys” (Brand, 163). By being the “cool poet,” he does not “have to get involved in the ordinary and brutal shit waiting for men like him in the city” (Brand, 166). He finds himself torn between trying to challenge stereotypes surrounding black masculinity and perpetuating them. Brand writes that “yes, [Oku] could become the bad public hard-ass kind of black man everyone appreciated” (Brand, 164) but he is unable to embrace the lifestyle that accompanies that persona. Being exposed to his father’s bitterness and a victim himself of racial profiling by the Toronto police, Oku is well aware of the societal implications of being a young, black man. Nonetheless, there are certain stereotypes that he sustains. Hopelessly in love with Jackie, another member of their inner circle, Oku resents her boyfriend Reiner, a white, German man whom he calls “Nazi boy.” Intent on luring Jackie away from Reiner, he relies upon his blackness as one of his primary tools, perhaps hoping that as a black woman, she would be looking for a black man. He resorts to his virility as a means of empowerment in comparing himself to Reiner by stating, “well, if she don’t want it hard, it’s not me, right?” (Brand, 214) and is perplexed by Jackie’s attraction to a white man.

Moreover, even though he is tired of his father’s racially-motivated bitterness, he actively feels that he is victimised, along with all other young, black men in Toronto.

This victimisation figures heavily in his resentment towards Reiner. While analysing Carla's brother Jamal's imprisonment, he proclaims it is a "rite of passage in this culture [...] Rite of passage for a young black man" (Brand, 46). In fact, it is Jackie who puts him in his place by scoffing at his claims of victimisation. Referring to her status as a black woman, she states "don't bring me that endangered-species shit 'cause I'm the most endangered species, all right?" (Brand, 48). Another challenge to Oku's claim to victimisation is embodied by the mentally-ill black musician whom he meets in Kensington Market. Subject to even more layers of marginalisation than Oku, the musician remains proud and refuses to indulge Oku's fraternisation. Brand describes, "thinking the musician was an ordinary black guy, [Oku] said to him, 'Hey, bro, what's happening?'" to which the musician answers "I'm not your brother" (Brand, 171). The musician rejects Oku's attempt at solidarity based on skin colour, something that Oku has not been entirely able to do in his relationship with Kwesi and his street gang.

Perhaps the most salient example of straddling the line between the black community and the white one is Carla. Intensely private and less outgoing than the other protagonists, she is haunted by her mother's suicide and the responsibility for her brother's upbringing that that event imposed on her. The daughter of a white, Italian-Canadian woman and a black, Jamaican father, Brand describes Carla as "not phenotypically black" (Brand, 106) although

[Carla] always found it odd and interesting that most black people recognized her anyway. They were more attuned to the gradations of race than whites. Whites generally thought she was Spanish or Middle Eastern. So to disappear into this white world would have been possible. (Brand, 106)

However, this connection to the white world is intensified by her deeply-rooted resentment of her father for his role in her mother's suicide and his lack of guidance towards her brother Jamal. She feels uneasy shopping for ingredients for Jamaican food

at Kensington Market with her step-mother, Nadine. Brand explains that she “hate[s] Nadine’s exotica” (Brand, 130) and while at the market, “[Carla’s] ears registe[r] discomfort at the sound of accented voices pausing in self-derision, in boastfulness, or in religious certainty. She hate[s] this language that she made herself unhear, unthink, and undream” (Brand, 131).

Her desire to disregard all things associated with her father, including her black heritage, is sharply contrasted with the behaviour of her brother Jamal who, in addition to partaking in illegal activities, bears the burden of his ethnicity, that of being a black man in Toronto. Carla is fully conscious of this reality, having repeated to Jamal numerous times: “Jamal you realize that you’re black, right? You know what that means? You can’t be in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Brand, 35). Whereas Carla is able to assume her whiteness more easily, Jamal is unable and unwilling to do so. He affects a Jamaican accent, “something he’d picked up with his friends on the street. He did it to assume badness” (Brand, 30). In response, Carla “[pronounces] every word, denying his newfound accent” (Brand, 31). Through Brand’s depiction of Carla and Jamal, two distinct performances of ethnicity are illustrated, each one being influenced by society’s expectations and both personal and social prejudices. Jamal plays up his Jamaican heritage by adopting an accent and although he is mulatto, his relationships with other black men, skin colour and accent create certain assumptions of him based on social inequality and prejudice. According to Toronto’s racial dynamic, Jamal’s guilt is reflected by his skin colour.

Through her depiction of Tuyen, Oku, Carla, Jamal and Jackie, Dionne Brand provides insight into how essential the performance of ethnicity is to individual identity. The protagonists’ gestures, words and actions all combine to create a certain ethnic

persona that is responsible for either their admittance into mainstream, Canadian society or their banishment to the periphery. Excluded due to their skin colour, sexuality, vocation or gender, all the protagonists display an uneasy and conflicting relationship with their ethnicity that is strongly influenced by their past, the gaze of others and Toronto's multicultural and racially-conscious ambiance. For Tuyen, Oku, Carla and Jackie, Brand makes clear that:

they'd never been able to join in what their parents called "regular Canadian life." The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren't the required race. Not that that guaranteed safe passage, and not that one couldn't twist oneself up into the requisite shape; act the brown-noser, act the fool; go on as if you didn't feel or sense the rejections, as if you couldn't feel the animus. (Brand, 47)

Here, Brand's description touches on the performativity of race as she evokes "twist[ing] oneself up into the requisite shape" in order to perform correctly and conformingly.

In contrast to Brand's cosmopolitan setting of Toronto, Hiromi Goto depicts rural settings as the backdrop for ethnicity-related exclusion and resignification. In her 1994 novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Goto tells the story of Muriel Tonkatsu or Murasaki, as her grandmother Naoe calls her. Non-linear and multi-vocal, Goto weaves a tale that floats between the past and present, reality and fantasy and Japan and Canada. Mainly told from the points of view of Muriel and Naoe, *Chorus of Mushrooms* follows the relationship between a Japanese-Canadian child and her Japanese grandmother in the small Alberta town of Nanton. Although Muriel does not speak Japanese as a child, only learning it as a young adult, and Naoe does not speak English, the two are able to communicate through signs, emotions and food. Naoe describes: "[Muriel] cannot understand the words I speak, but she can read the lines on my brow, the creases beside my mouth. I could speak the other to her, but my lips refuse and my tongue swells in

revolt” (Goto, 15). Even after Naoe’s disappearance, Muriel and she remain in contact albeit on a fantastical and non-physical level.

As the only Japanese-Canadian child in Nanton and one of only few visible minority children, Muriel is confronted with her difference in many ways, creating an interesting and sometimes confusing relationship with her ethnicity. Throughout the story, Goto contrasts Naoe and Muriel with Keiko, Naoe’s daughter and Muriel’s mother. Whereas Naoe’s Japaneseness is overt, Keiko does all she can to erase any trace of Japaneseness in order to blend into small-town Canadian society. Although Goto does not specifically situate her narrative in time, it can be inferred that the Tonkatsu family arrives in Nanton during the late sixties or nineteen seventies as the movie *Shōgun*, released in 1980, is evoked during Muriel’s adolescence and Nanton welcomes the arrival of Vietnamese immigrants who arrived in Canada after the Communist takeover of Vietnam.

During this time, the presence of visible minorities would have been minimal in Nanton and it is not surprising that Keiko would have wanted to lessen her difference in order to ease the transition into Canadian life. Muriel explains,

it was hard grouping up in a small prairie town, the only Japanese-Canadians for miles around. Where everybody thought Japan was the place they saw when they watched “Shōgun” on TV. Obāchan laughed when she saw it. I thought it was a good story. (Goto, 121)

What is interesting is that Keiko all but abandons any non-visible trace of her Japanese heritage. She chooses not to teach Muriel Japanese and speaks only English, even with her mother and her Japanese-born husband, Sam. Furthermore, she never cooks any Japanese dishes at home, “converted from rice and *daikon* to wieners and beans. Endless evenings of tedious roast chicken and honey smoked ham and overdone rump roast” (Goto, 13). Muriel’s only exposure to Japanese food is through Naoe’s clandestine late-

night snacks, having received dried squid and *sake* in a package from her brother in Japan. Thus, in addition to not being able to speak the language, her relationship to her Japanese heritage is deprived of another one of the senses, taste. This ignorance is commented upon when Muriel ventures to Calgary to buy ingredients at a Japanese food store. Surprised at her lack of knowledge, the storekeeper asks, “is your mom white?” (Goto, 138), followed by, “eating’s a part of being after all” (Goto, 138) evoking the strong relationship between ethnicity and food.

Throughout her adolescence, Muriel discovers the lacunae in her Japaneseness and seeks to become more acquainted with them in the creation of her individual identity. As a young adult, she confronts her father about the absence of everything Japanese during her upbringing. He explains his and Keiko’s desire for their children: “sure, we couldn’t change the colour of their hair, or the shape of their face, but we could make sure they didn’t stand out. That they could be as Canadian as everyone around them” (Goto, 207). By eliminating all but the physical traces of Japaneseness, Sam and Keiko attempt to assimilate into “Canadian” society. Muriel informs the reader that Keiko all but confines Naoe to the house, as Naoe is perceived by Keiko to be the one barrier to total assimilation.

Interestingly, it is as though Keiko disregards the physical signs of Japaneseness that identify Muriel as an ethnic subject, as Japanese, as other. During one episode, Muriel describes how she ate a whole box of Mandarin oranges causing her hands to turn yellow. When she shows her orange-stained hands to her mother, Keiko “grab[s] [her] wrists and drag[s] [her] to the sink” (Goto, 92) and proceeds to scrub her hands violently with a scouring pad muttering crazily, “yellow, she’s turningyellow she’sturningyellow she’s-” (Goto, 92). In a possessed state, Keiko tries to erase all signs



of difference staining Muriel's body, as though she did not exhibit any of them before eating too many oranges. Keiko's desire to blend in and her complete disregard for Muriel's physical signs of ethnicity are touched on again later in the novel when Muriel recalls the time she was asked to play Alice in the school operetta *Alice in Wonderland*. While meeting with Muriel's teacher to discuss the role, Keiko enthusiastically agrees to dye Muriel's hair in order to appear more like "an English girl with lovely blonde hair" (Goto, 177) because "you simply cannot have an Alice with black hair" (Goto, 177). For Muriel, her mother's behaviour is extremely unsettling and uncomfortable, provoking her to suggest "I'll be the Mad Hatter, that way, I can just wear a hat. Or the Cheshire Cat! Cats have slanted eyes" (Goto, 177). Muriel is acutely aware of her difference and is confronted with blatant discrimination to which her mother fully yields. At the beginning of that section, Muriel describes the incident as:

a time when I came to realize that the shape of my face, my eyes, the colour of my hair affected how people treated me. I never felt different until I saw the look crossing peoples' faces. I don't know if it's better to come to realize, or not realize at all. (Goto, 175)

She feels betrayed by her mother's full participation in this prejudice and wants no part in it. Later that evening, Keiko serves baked ham, Jell-O and weak milk tea to celebrate Muriel's accomplishment and indeed, her loss of innocence.

Throughout the novel, Goto shows that despite Muriel's lack of connection to her Japanese heritage, the physical signs of her Japaneseness betray her. Goto displays how Muriel is denied access to her Japanese culture by her parents, Naoe being her only source of Japanese identity, and at the same time, the white community consistently reduces her to the image of the "Oriental." She is confronted with this reality early on where, as a student, she dreads Valentine's Day because she always receives the cut-out valentine with an

Oriental-type girl in some sort of pseudo kimono with wooden sandals on backwards and her with her hair cut straight across in bangs and a bun and chopsticks in her hair, her eyes all slanty slits. (Goto, 62)

She states, “I knew there was something wrong about me getting these cards” (Goto, 62). Even as a child, Muriel understands the unjust assumptions of her and is uncomfortable with this objectification. Although she does not vocalise this discomfort, she does make some attempt to recuperate her identity. In response to racial taunts by other schoolchildren labelling her as Chinese, she asserts that she is indeed, not Chinese. Her identity is thus formed in reaction to being called Chinese rather than affirming her Japanese identity, much like Beatrice’s “China” button in *Disappearing Moon Café*.

Later on in the novel, Muriel is once again Orientalised in her relationship with Hank, her first boyfriend. Muriel is confused by his demand for “Oriental sex,” which he describes as “the Oriental kinky stuff. Like on ‘Shōgun’” (Goto, 122). In his article “‘Some of My Best Friends...’: Befriending the Racialized Fiction of Hiromi Goto,” Mark Libin writes that “since the episode occurs when Muriel is in high school, it is understandable that her adolescent persona is confused at the ease with which she is transformed into a representative stereotype” (Libin, 2001, 102). Being compared to a geisha girl puzzles Muriel, to which she can only reply “I think I’m Canadian” (Goto, 122). After relating this account, Goto shifts back to the adult Muriel who has just told the story to her Japanese lover. Muriel appropriates this racial slur by asking her lover “do you want to have Oriental sex?” (Goto, 123). As they are both ignorant of that concept, they decide to “make [it] up together” (Goto, 123). “The lovers mitigate the past by satirizing Muriel’s memories in the present, reclaiming the racist slur and incorporating it into their sexual pleasures” (Libin, 2001, 102).

Although Muriel is able to empower certain discriminatory episodes from her past, Goto illustrates that Muriel's physical difference is not only a childhood reality but also very present in her adult life. While perusing the vegetables in the "ethnicChinesericenoodleTofupattiesexotic vegetable section of Safeway" (Goto, 90), Muriel is asked the Chinese name for Japanese eggplants by a woman with "a kindly face. An interested face" (Goto, 90). She responds by saying "I don't speak Chinese" and points out the handwritten sign to the woman while thinking "leave me in peace. Let a woman choose her vegetables in peace. Vegetable politics" (Goto, 91). Libin, in another article entitled "Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*," summarises that "although ostensibly more benevolent than the schoolboy's taunts, the shopper's curiosity effaces Muriel's cultural identity by reducing it to the generalized image of the 'oriental' [sic]" (Libin, 1999, 129).

Assuming and accepting her position as the "Oriental" is further problematised by numerous degrading comments that are directed at Muriel where stereotypical expectations of Japanese people are evoked. For example, as a child, her friend Patricia says "you're Japanese, but I still think you're pretty too" (Goto, 96) as though being Japanese and pretty were mutually exclusive. This episode can be likened to a similar one earlier in the novel as the adult Muriel is waiting for a flight to Japan. She is told by another traveller that she is "pretty cute for a Nip" (Goto, 53) as "most Nips are pretty damn ugly. All that inbreeding. Even now" (Goto, 53). Reflecting on the comments, Muriel says "and I felt really funny inside, him saying Nip and everything. Because he was one too" (Goto, 53). Once again, Muriel is confronted with the seemingly common equation of Japanese being equal to ugliness and is even more shocked that it is someone of Japanese descent who is perpetuating this stereotype.

Perhaps in direct relation to her burgeoning awareness of her own difference, Muriel becomes disturbed when her friend Patricia comments on the smell of her house. Rather than accepting the comment as minor and innocent, Muriel internalises it as a reflection of her otherness, of her Japaneseness. When asked about her “house smell” (Goto, 61), Muriel anxiously responds “what house smell?” (Goto, 61) while thinking “we didn’t eat foreign food at all. Only meat and carrots and potatoes like everyone else. And Obāchan hadn’t sneaked any squid for months” (Goto, 61). “The sudden realization that her house might smell ‘foreign’ alarms Muriel and disturbs her sense of identity, making the house ‘strange’ to her (61), compelling her to ask Patricia if the smell is ‘gross’ (61)” (Libin, 2001, 111). As naively as the comment was made, Patricia acknowledges that all houses have their own particular smell and suggests that the two go out and play. Even though Patricia has easily dismissed the question of smell, Muriel cannot help but go back and analyse what the source is of the particular “warm toes” (Goto, 61) smell. Upon realising that it is due to her father’s work clothes, soaked with the odour of the family’s mushroom farm, she reflects:

for all that Mom had done to cover up our Oriental tracks, she’d overlooked the one thing that people always unconsciously register in any encounter. We had been betrayed by what we smelled like. We had been betrayed by what we grew. (Goto, 62)

In this episode, the naivety of Patricia’s question about the smell of the Tonkatsu household provokes Muriel to reflect on yet another dimension of otherness. She had already been confronted with the physical and linguistic aspects but not the olfactory one which, as Mark Libin notes, “is commonly perceived as a symptom of cultural difference in racist discourse” (Libin, 2001, 119). Although Patricia regards the comment in relation to the “inevitable distinctions between different families” (Libin, 2001, 112),

Muriel cannot help but view it as another obstacle to her assimilation to rural Canadian society.

Throughout *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Hiromi Goto elaborates on sensory themes in order to illustrate Muriel's relationship to her ethnicity. Other than Naoe, possibly the most significant experience that connects Muriel to her Japanese heritage is her first attempt to cook a Japanese meal. Deprived of any type of Japanese fare during her childhood, with the exception of Obāchan's late-night snacks, Muriel decides to venture into Japanese cuisine while caring for Keiko, who has had a breakdown due to Obāchan's disappearance. Thanks to the departed Obāchan's subliminal advice, Muriel attempts to heal her mother through food, exposing herself to a new cultural dimension. On this cultural and flavourful journey, Muriel learns of her father's secret connection to his Japanese culture and the history of their last name, taken from a popular Japanese dish of breaded deep-fried pork cutlet. As Mary Condé explains, in her article "Japanese Generations in Hiromi Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*," "Murasaki (Muriel) rediscovers her Japanese heritage through a conspicuous act of consumption: actually cooking and eating the family name *Tonkatsu*" (Condé, 2001, 136). Although her meal of *Tonkatsu* pork is a catalyst for Keiko's recovery, Muriel forces the point numerous times that their shared meal did not create a fairy-tale reconciliation between her and her mother nor did it provide the final missing piece to a puzzle. Muriel explains that her mother returns to the routine of cooking roast chicken and lasagne "but sometimes, on a holiday weekend, [Keiko] would ask [Muriel] to whip up something from '[her] little cook book'" (Goto, 191).

By way of Muriel, Goto creates a protagonist whose own problematic relationship with her ethnicity has a direct impact on her own personal identity. Faced

with contrasting expectations from her parents to assimilate to white, rural Canadian society and her community, which regards her as the stereotypical image of a geisha girl/Oriental, Muriel must balance these two extremes that disregard her individuality, her physical appearance and ultimately, her own identity. Over the course of the novel, Goto shows that Muriel does appropriate certain aspects of each culture and uses them as tools of empowerment in order to assert her own identity as a visible minority female. This empowerment is especially evident in her relationship with her Japanese lover who, in contrast to her, “survives in Canada as a kind of professional ethnic person, or acceptable representation of Japan abroad, teaching flower arranging and the art of the Japanese tea ceremony for Calgary Continuing Education” (Condé, 2001, 140).

Though Muriel’s experience of growing up in a minority position thoroughly shapes her, her grandmother Naoe provides her with a strong example of a Japanese woman that is contrasted with her equally strong but assimilated mother, Keiko. From the outset, it is evident that Naoe does not conform to the stereotypical image of the quiet, demure and obedient Oriental woman. Her presence in the Tonkatsu household is noisy and overt and she is the only reason anything Japanese still exists in Muriel’s childhood. She refuses to speak to Muriel in English, mindful of the fact that Muriel does not speak Japanese, which creates an unspoken subliminal bond between the two that remains intact even after they are physically separated. Goto portrays Naoe as non-conventional and strong-willed, having divorced her husband as a young woman, something uncommon in post-war Japan.

As an older woman, Naoe “exceeds and subverts Western representations of the elderly” (Libin, 2001, 107) as she refuses to be silenced, embarks on an adventure in order to break the monotony of rural life and expresses her sexuality in numerous ways.

Mark Libin points out that “Naoe exceeds not only conventional Western representations of the elderly woman as feeble and devoid of desire but also conventional Western structures of narrative in that her character defies linearity, consistency, and stable identity” (Libin, 2001, 107). At the end of the novel, after having followed Naoe through a road trip with a younger, Western truck driver, with whom she “enjoys imaginative sex” (Libin, 2001, 107) and eats delicious food, the story ends with the fantastical account of her riding a bull in the Calgary Stampede. She adopts the rodeo name “The Purple Mask,” which is symbolic in that she calls Muriel, Murasaki, which literally means purple in Japanese but is also the name of the important Japanese female author Murasaki Shikibu who wrote *The Tale of Genji* in the late tenth century. She also requests that Tengu, her truck driver lover, call her Purple. True to Naoe’s form, Goto explains that The Purple Mask “gives bullriding a whole new meaning” (Goto, 217) and that she is “plumb mysterious” (Goto, 217), consistent with her numerous transformations over the course of the novel. Libin notes that “the idea that identity, like story, is multiple and fluid. The structure of Goto’s novel is deliberate in demonstrating effortless shifts in voice, between Obāchan Naoe, Keiko, and Murasaki, and Naoe and Murasaki both articulate the position that identity is as easily translatable as languages” (Libin, 1999, 128).

Arguably, this point is also illustrated through the character Tengu, Naoe’s Western truck-driving lover. Initially conveyed as a stereotypical, Western Canadian, truck-driving cowboy who speaks with a drawl, Tengu defies stereotypes and proves to be a well-educated, Japanese-speaking, sensitive fellow. His character is contrasted by Muriel’s reflections on other Western Canadians referring to “Hairy Carrie” (Goto, 89) and other Orientalised and “Shōgun-ised” versions of Japan. Between Tengu and Naoe,

there is a certain fantastical linguistic confusion as Tengu starts speaking English with a heavy Western drawl, switches to Japanese and then it is ambiguous what language they speak together. At one point, Naoe exclaims “you keep changing, you know, [...] or how I translate you. I don’t know who you are from one moment to the next. Are you still the same person who can *sukōshi* speak Japanese or was that something I made up on my own?” (Goto, 196) to which Tengu replies, “What do you mean? *Eigo hitotsu mo hanashitenal to omou kedo*. Haven’t we been talking Japanese all along?” (Goto, 197). Thus, both characters shift between languages and identities and at the same time they are part of a resignification that subverts stereotypes and expectations.

In a similar vein, Montréal author Abla Farhoud provides insight into the life and thoughts of Dounia, an older Lebanese immigrant woman in her novel *Le bonheur a la queue glissante*. Although Dounia does not possess the stubbornness, adventurous spirit and rebellion that Goto’s Naoe has, Farhoud embodies Dounia with an inner strength and calm that is reflected in her role as the quiet matriarch of her family. Set mainly in Montréal with brief escapes to regional Québec and Lebanon, Farhoud’s novel is told through the eyes of Dounia who, in the later stages of her life, reflects on her life, her family and her mortality. Whereas Lee’s, Brand’s and Goto’s protagonists tend to foreground the issue of ethnicity, Farhoud is far more subtle in her treatment of it and its influence on individual identity formation.

Through Dounia’s glimpses into and reflections on her past, she reveals how her experiences have changed her and more importantly, her views on immigration, belonging, the status of women and family. Whereas Naoe stubbornly refuses to communicate with Muriel in English, Dounia is unable to speak to her grandchildren in



English and French. Like Muriel calling Naoe *Obāchan*, Dounia's grandchildren call her *sitto* and they are able to communicate on many non-verbal levels. She explains:

mes petits-enfants ne parlent pas notre langue. Ils disent grand-papa et grand-maman en arabe, c'est à peu près tout. Moi, ça ne me dérange pas. Nous arrivons à nous comprendre pour l'essentiel. L'essentiel n'a pas besoin de beaucoup de mots. (Farhoud, 19)

Dounia's main communication with her grandchildren is through physical affection, minimal French and most importantly, food. Her love is expressed through elaborate Lebanese dishes and favourites such as stuffed vine leaves and *boummos bi tabini*. She describes that cooking for her family is "ma façon de leur faire du bien, je ne peux pas grand-chose, mais ça, je le peux" (Farhoud, 14). However, this expression of affection is also firmly linked to ethnicity and she provides her grandchildren with a dimension of their cultural heritage that they do not receive with their mother.

Nonetheless, in Dounia's family unit, language proves to be a recurring theme where Dounia, ashamed by her inability to speak English or French and by her own limited knowledge of Arabic, feels distanced from her children whose Arabic has suffered due to their assimilation to Québécois society. She feels out of touch with her daughter Myriam, who searches awkwardly for words in Arabic and who has a "manière de penser [qui] ne ressemble pas à la mienne" (Farhoud, 25). Moreover, *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* is interspersed with Arab proverbs which Dounia resorts to in order to adequately express herself when her vocabulary fails her. She explains, "je réponds par un dicton, un proverbe ou une phrase toute faite quand mes enfants me posent une question sur mon passé, c'est plus facile que d'avoir à chercher la vérité, à la dire, à la revivre" (Farhoud, 30). Interestingly, it is not until after Dounia immigrates to Québec that she is

confronted with her own ignorance and how it limits her, stating: “je ne me serais même pas aperçue que je suis ignorante si je n’avais pas émigré!” (Farhoud, 82). However, for Dounia, language is also linked to belonging and otherness, as she is afraid to display her inability to speak French or English which also reveals that she comes from elsewhere (Farhoud, 124).

Despite this discomfort with linguistic belonging, felt shortly after her arrival to Québec, Dounia’s perception of belonging transcends ethnic affiliation and national belonging. For her, she feels she belongs where her family and loved ones are, rather than where she was born. She explains, “mon pays, ce n’est pas le pays de mes ancêtres ni même le village de mon enfance, mon pays, c’est là où mes enfants sont heureux” (Farhoud, 22). Having moved locations numerous times throughout her life, from leaving her village for her husband’s and then immigrating from Lebanon to Canada, Dounia’s reflections on immigration, nostalgia and belonging are pragmatic, with little emotional intonation whatsoever. Speaking of immigration, she explains that:

émigrer, s’en aller, laisser derrière soi ce que l’on va se mettre à appeler *mon* soleil, *mon* eau, *mes* fruits, *mes* plantes, *mes* arbres, *mon* village. Quand on est dans son village natal, on ne dit pas *mon* soleil, on dit *le* soleil, et c’est à peine si on en parle puisqu’il est là, il a toujours été là, on ne dit pas *mon* village puisqu’on l’habite. (Farhoud, 42)

Farhoud contrasts this opinion with the position of Dounia’s husband Salim, whose nostalgia is so strong that he desires to return and eventually die in Lebanon. In comparison to Dounia and much like Tuyen’s father in *What We All Long For*, he laments his children’s disregard for Lebanese traditions and customs and disparages the Canadian ones. For instance, he is disapproving when he learns of his daughter Myriam’s divorce. Dounia explains that “même si nous vivons ici depuis de nombreuses

années, les coutumes de ce pays lui paraissent toujours inconcevables [à Salim]. Surtout quand il s'agit de ses filles" (Farhoud, 13). Dounia follows this comment with the observation that in Lebanon, there is also divorce and that the shift in attitude is not confined only to Canada (Farhoud, 13).

However, Dounia's remarks are not limited to her family. She is very aware that Salim's feelings are common among immigrants. Upon passing a Greek grocery store, she notices that the shopkeeper has erected a fig tree in the store. She reflects, "mon Dieu, que d'effort pour ne pas tout perdre. Pour ne pas trop souffrir du manque. Pour garder son passé vivant" (Farhoud, 42). Although Dounia is not as subversive a protagonist as Naoe in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, she discerningly questions notions of national and ethnic belonging and introduces new interpretations of them. Conformist and obedient throughout her life, Dounia's reflections exhibit a refreshing awareness and a wisdom that can only be attributed to her age and experience.

Dounia's refusal to fall into the stereotypical role of the nostalgic immigrant, despite her own admitted ignorance and inability to assimilate to Québécois society on many levels, stems from her feeling of *in-betweenness*. In contrast to many of the other immigrant protagonists in the other novels included in my study, Dounia exhibits few characteristics of first-generation Canadian protagonists. She does not long for Lebanon and does not despise nor resent Canada, like her husband, Fong Mei and Oku's father. Nor does she wish to forget Lebanon entirely and abandon her traditions, as was seen through Keiko in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. She realises this precarious position upon her return to Lebanon, after having lived in Canada for numerous years. While in Lebanon, she does not feel at home, commenting that "la langue n'était plus un obstacle et pourtant, je me suis aperçue que je n'avais pas d'affinités avec les gens qui parlaient ma

langue” (Farhoud, 108). Furthermore, her family is referred to as “les Américains” (Farhoud, 109) by the locals, further distancing them from the mainstream society. She contrasts this point by explaining that she felt this alienation even when she changed villages within Lebanon and also when her family was called “les Syriens” (Farhoud, 109) upon their arrival to Québec. She is acutely aware of this exclusion and even witnesses it in relation to her children. While in Québec, her sons are referred to as “les frères syriens” (Farhoud, 107), once again displaying a lack of sensitivity and education on the part of Québécois society. Similar to Muriel’s interpellation as Chinese, the members of Dounia’s family are forced to assume a role that is not their own and they are not accepted as part of mainstream, Québécois society.

Within her family however, Dounia sees different levels of *in-betweenness* among her children. Consistent with Salman Rushdie’s idea of “stradd[ling] two cultures; at other times, [falling] between two stools” (Rushdie, 15), Dounia describes that:

Farid et Samir n’étaient pas assis entre deux chaises comme Abdallah et Samira, mais debout sur le dossier d’une chaise au milieu de la rue, prêts à chavirer. On aurait dit qu’ils n’avaient plus d’attaches. À l’extérieur, ils étaient vus comme des étrangers, “les frères syriens” comme les jeunes de leur âge les appelaient, et à la maison, ils se considéraient comme des étrangers. (Farhoud, 107)

Thus, she realises that her children are also in an in-between position, wishing to belong to and blend into Québécois society. However, having herself experienced exclusion on many levels, she is well aware of their difference, their otherness. She likens the position of the other or “l’étranger” (Farhoud, 124) to that of Rey Chow’s zoo, where “quoi qu’il fasse, l’étranger attire les regards” (Farhoud, 124). She elaborates on this statement with an Arabic proverb where

on dit qu’il est impossible de se dissimuler quand on est amoureux, enceinte ou monté sur un chameau [...] Plus il essaie de se fonder dans la foule, plus

il se sent remarqué, comme une femme enceinte qui voudrait cacher son ventre. (Farhoud, 124-25)

Although Dounia's experience in Québec touches on many points raised by Rey Chow in regards to the marginal position of the ethnic subject in Western society, she does not view these necessarily as obstacles to her life in Québec. She admits that her minimal linguistic skills impede her and she is conscious of her position of other within Québécois society, but her approaches to belonging and group affiliation are important to her identity formation. Her performance of her ethnicity is conventional and very personal and as she leads a very private life, mostly confined to her family. However, her open-mindedness and love for her family create notions of belonging that challenge traditional attachments to ethnicity and nation.

## Chapter 3:

### Ethnicity and Physical Space

When examining the performance of ethnicity and its effects on individual identity formation, it is difficult to ignore the important role played by physical space. As described earlier with the help of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the performance of ethnicity always exists within but is not restricted to certain societal norms created by hegemonic power structures. These same power structures also influence the construction and destruction of physical spaces where all individuals, including the ethnic subject, live and work.

When referring to physical space, I am including both public and private areas in urban and rural settings which an individual may experience and occupy. The manner in which an individual navigates and maps these spaces is also in conjunction with elements of power and discipline that determine exclusion and inclusion. In the introduction to his thesis *Spatial Exclusion and the Abject Other in Canadian Urban Literature*, Dominic Beneventi writes that "recent developments in human geography and urban studies have shown that spaces are socially constructed, and that individuals and collectivities that occupy them are inevitably interpellated by such formulations" (Beneventi, 8). This is especially true in the case of ethnic ghettos and racialised neighbourhoods such as the numerous Little Italies and Chinatowns that exist in many major cities around the world.

David Theo Goldberg, in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* claims that:

racialized space positions people in public political space, just as racialized identity circumscribes social space, as they identify the included from the excluded, the (relatively) empowered from those (largely) powerless and peripheral, the enfranchised from disenfranchised and disinherited. (Goldberg, 207)

As such, those living in such spaces are branded and categorised according to their physical space.

In addition to race and ethnicity, class frequently plays a role in demarcating physical space, although more often than not, classism and racism tend to blend together in spatial organisation as has been demonstrated by the experiences of African Americans in the United States and Aboriginals in Canada. Although racialised spaces do exist in rural areas, their creation is predominantly urban, as cities tend to attract larger numbers of immigrants than rural areas because of their cosmopolitanism, job opportunities and proximity to members of the same cultural group. However, Goldberg points out that “racialized urban sites throughout Europe and the United States are distanced, physically or symbolically, in the master plan of city space” (Goldberg, 196). He also writes that “in every case the construct of separate (racial) group areas, in design or effect, has served to constrain, restrict, monitor, and regulate urban space and its experience” (Goldberg, 196).

Consequently, is the creation of such ethnic enclaves and racialised spaces in Canada a means of government-sanctioned exclusion that separates white, mainstream Canadians from ethnic minority ones or is it an attempt to celebrate cultural diversity in the vein of Canada’s policy of multiculturalism by allowing such areas to exist? Of course, any answer would have to strongly consider historical, political and economic factors that have influenced the construction, destruction and evolution of such spaces. Interestingly, despite the disciplinary and discriminatory aspects that racialised spaces may embody, Goldberg argues that “the politics of racial identity and identification constitute rather the sphere(s) of subjection and subjugation, the spaces in and through which are created differences, gradations, and degradations. By extension, they become

the spaces from which resistance and transformation are to be launched” (Goldberg, 203). Similar to Butler, Goldberg sees an opportunity for resistance and subversion within organised, established societal norms and specifically, urban planning.

As illustrated in the four novels that I have included in my research, physical space plays an important role in the performance of the protagonists’ ethnicity and the formation of their identities. Their relationship to their physical spaces, whether rural or urban, public or private, is central to their perception of their own exclusion and inclusion in Canadian society as members of ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, an individual’s cognitive or mental mapping is directly reflected in her/his relationship with her/his physical space. Graham Huggan, in his book *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction* uses Roger Downs and David Stea’s definition of cognitive mapping<sup>1</sup> to conclude that “mental maps are embodiments of specific cultural attitudes, and as often as not they are significant registers of cultural prejudice” (Huggan, 16). While discussing the Canadian critic Arnold Itwaru’s analysis of Canadian immigrant fiction, Dominic Beneventi concludes that:

Arnold Itwaru identifies a similar “displacement” of the meanings attached to Canadian space in his study of immigrant fiction. Already marked as “other,” these new arrivals to the country must in turn “invent” a sense of self which involves the integration of ethnic difference into Canadian territory by employing spatial images and metaphors. (Beneventi, 26)

For the majority of the authors in my study, their immigrant status makes them especially sensitive to geography as it can be used as a tool of integration or alternatively, a means of further exclusion and othering. In the case of Sky Lee, the only Canadian-

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<sup>1</sup> Downs and Stea’s definition of cognitive mapping refers to “those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organize, store, recall, and manipulate information about the spatial environment” (Downs and Stea, 6; quoted in Huggan, 16).



born author in my study, the role of physical space is very important as *Disappearing Moon Café* recounts the evolution of Vancouver's Chinatown in conjunction with the tales of the multi-generational Wong family. Like Goldberg's assessment that racialised spaces are cradles of resistance to and subversion of traditional societal norms, Beneventi echoes this notion in the context of Canadian immigrant/ethnic writing. He writes that:

in its fictionalization of the ethnic ghettos embedded within the Canadian metropolis, immigrant/ethnic writing effectively points to the inadequacies of applying reductionist spatial discourses on Canadian territory. The ethnic ghetto provides possibilities for reading place as resistance, disjunction, and slippage- a "heterotopic" space which generates meaning beyond itself in referring to other, absent spaces. (Beneventi, 27)

How, then, does the protagonists' interaction with and mapping of their physical space affect their performance of ethnicity and individual identity formation? Do these spaces facilitate resistance and resignification or do they impede it?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, physical space is of paramount importance in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*. Mainly set in Vancouver's Chinatown, Sky Lee also situates important episodes in the British Columbia interior, where sparse population and dense wilderness are in sharp contrast with Chinatown's urban reality. The novel begins and spiritually ends in the wilderness. As a young man, Gwei Chang commences the Canadian chapter of his life in the British Columbia interior and in his dying moments, he is transported back to his Canadian beginnings while conversing in his mind with his Aboriginal lover, Kelora Chen.

Although Gwei Chang's relationship to the Canadian wilderness is an important one and as Mary Condé suggests, in her article "Marketing Ethnicity: Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*," "[it] is the one positive abiding reality" (Condé, 2000, 180), it is also an unforgiving and brutal introduction to Canada for many other Chinese labourers who arrived in Canada to build the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Labelled Gold Mountain

by the Chinese, the Pacific coast attracted Chinese labourers for the prospects afforded by the gold rush and the up and coming railroad. However, their dreams of prosperity were overshadowed by racism, exploitation, homesickness and the harsh conditions they experienced at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sky Lee illustrates this reality through the eyes of Mui Lan, who arrives at Chinatown as Gwei Chang's wife "full of warmth and hope" (Lee, 26). The dearth of women increases Mui Lan's loneliness and makes her "los[e] substance" (Lee, 26). For the male labourers, their everyday lives were marked by "the backbreaking task of survival that all of them shared" (Lee, 13) with the exception of Gwei Chang who is "allowed admittance" into the "barren wasteland around him" (Lee, 4) by Kelora Chen.

At the time, the British Columbia interior was also an area of marginality, inhabited by outcasts, Aboriginals and foreign labourers, kept at a far distance from the modern, white and cosmopolitan city of Vancouver. All the characters that Lee situates in the wilderness are considered different and do not conform to societal expectations on many levels. Kelora, Gwei Chang's Aboriginal lover, is raised by Chen and speaks Chinese. As for Chen himself, he decided to take Kelora's mother as his wife instead of returning to China. Furthermore, Song Ang, the waitress at Disappearing Moon Café charged with the task of bearing Choy Fuk a son, lives in a hovel "on the muddy fringes of False Creek" (Lee, 93) after having suffered numerous indignities at the hands of her husband. According to Chinatown's inhabitants, her job as a waitress makes her no better than a prostitute (Lee, 94). Furthermore, it is important to note that Fong Mei is all but banished to Lillooet, in the British Columbia interior, to carry out Mui Lan's baby-switching plan, conceived to preserve the Wong family's reputation. She is saved

from this fate by her own pregnancy and ironically, it is Song Ang who gives birth to a baby boy in “an isolated cabin” (Lee, 133) in Lillooet.

While Lee’s British Columbia interior proves to be an area of exclusion, populated by people deemed outcasts by Vancouver’s mainstream white society, Chinatown arguably fulfils a similar role but from within Vancouver. Interestingly, by contextualising Vancouver’s Chinatown at numerous points throughout the twentieth century, Lee documents its evolution within the social fabric and history of Vancouver.

Originally emerging in response to the influx of Chinese labourers working for the Canadian Pacific Railway, Chinatowns throughout Canada were set apart from the mainstream but still situated within the cities themselves. David Theo Goldberg writes that “Chinatown is at once of the city but distanced from it, geographically central but spatially marginal” (Goldberg, 198) due to “idealized racial typifications tied to notions of slumliness, physical and ideological pollution of the body politic, sanitation and health syndromes, lawlessness, addiction, and prostitution” (Goldberg, 198). Ironically, Vancouver’s present-day Chinatown, like many others across North America, has acquired a new and different role. Goldberg points out that “the exoticism of Chinatown’s marginality may be packaged as a tourist attraction and potential urban tax base” (Goldberg, 201).

Spanning the majority of the twentieth century, *Disappearing Moon Café* portrays Vancouver’s Chinatown in its formative stages. At the outset of the novel, it is a peripheral area of Vancouver, home to homesick, Chinese male labourers and very few women. While recounting the 1924 murder of Janet Smith to Kae, Morgan describes that, at that time, Chinatown

had become quite the thriving, respectable little establishment. The streets were clean. Mostly paved. They even had street lamps. It was a self-

contained community of men: sold its own suspenders, had everything from its own water pipes to its own power elite. There were a few things in short supply once in a while, like when registration cards for chinese [sic] were suddenly deemed necessary [...] And only one thing missing- women! (Lee, 68)

Set apart from Vancouver both geographically and socially, the inhabitants of Chinatown create their own community complete with its own hierarchy and internal problems. As victims of racial hatred and violence from Vancouver's white community, Chinatown's inhabitants become insular and protective of their community and fellow citizens. Not wanting to stoke the flames of "white hate" (Lee, 71), Chinatown's elders move quickly to contain any possible threat to their tranquillity and autonomy as is demonstrated during the Janet Smith murder case where Wong Foon Sing is accused of the crime. Indeed, "if there was misconduct on the part of the Wong boy, then the whole community faced repercussions" (Lee, 77).

Evidently, the Chinatown elders are well aware that they are under scrutiny from Vancouver's white community or, as Beneventi describes, victims of an "Orientalizing gaze" (Beneventi, 55). In addition to evoking Rey Chow's concept of the gaze, this coincides with the disciplinary element of racialised spaces that Goldberg describes in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. He writes that "spatial constraints, after all, are limitations on the people inhabiting that space. These delimitations extend discipline over inhabitants and visitors by monitoring them without having to bother about the intraspatial disciplinary relations *between* them" (Goldberg, 197). Consequently, the inhabitants of Chinatown are subjected to a "panoptical discipline" (Goldberg, 198) that does not factor in the various power structures and social hierarchies that exist within the Chinatown community itself. Dominic Beneventi echoes this sentiment, writing that "the Orientalizing gaze not only effaces the distinction between Japanese

and Chinese, but the specificities of class, status, gender and regional cultures within these communities” (Beneventi, 63). In *Disappearing Moon Café*, Lee examines these specificities, illustrating how both members of the Japanese- and Chinese-Canadian communities become interchangeable victims depending on the prejudice of the day, and within Chinatown, how gender and pre-immigration social status in China affect social relations and hierarchies in Canada.

Given the social and historical contexts in which Lee’s portrayal of Vancouver’s Chinatown emerges, it is difficult to ignore the impact of Chinatown on the protagonists’ performance of ethnicity. The marginal origins of Chinatown and its various levels of exclusion over the years by mainstream Vancouver society reflect a profound othering and “Orientalizing gaze” that influence how each protagonist performs her/his Chineseness. In the part of his thesis discussing Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* and Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony*, Beneventi writes that “throughout the novels there is a distinction between ethnic identity within the boundaries of Chinatown and the ‘performative’ aspects of identity outside of Chinatown” (Beneventi, 54-5). By emphasising the performative nature of ethnic identity exclusively outside the boundaries of Chinatown, Beneventi explains that “this ‘performative identity’ strategically tempers ethnic differences and assuages the orientalizing [sic] gaze of white middle-class Vancouver” (Beneventi, 55). This is especially true in the cases of the Canadian-born protagonists, mainly Ting An, Morgan and Kae, who are able to float between the Chinese and white communities more easily than the Chinese-born characters. Culturally and linguistically, they are able to bridge the gap between Chinatown and the rest of Vancouver by downplaying or exploiting their affiliations to the Chinese and white communities in a manner that provides the most inclusion.

Although I agree with Beneventi's point, I would argue that ethnicity is not exclusively performed outside of Chinatown's boundaries, but also inside them. Within the confines of Chinatown, inhabitants are influenced by spatial controls and how they choose to navigate them. Furthermore, in as much as they are subjected to the gaze of white Vancouver, they are also watched by the Chinese community itself and must perform according to its expectations or otherwise be banished from Chinatown. The latter is illustrated clearly in the cases of Ting An and Morgan, whose exclusions are facilitated by their mixed heritage and their relationships that are frowned upon by the Chinatown elders. In the case of Ting An, it is his marriage to a "fallen woman" (Lee, 232) rather than a "real wife from China" (Lee, 233) and for Morgan, his turbulent relationships with both Suzanne and Kae.

Moreover, early Chinatown's physical space is even more problematic for its female inhabitants, as many establishments such as whorehouses and Chinese Benevolent Association meetings are restricted to men, adding yet another layer to their exclusion. While describing her grand-mother Mui Lan's experience and that of Chinatown's women in general, Kae says:

there probably were no halfway houses for women, no places to hide out from a rocky marriage. Ejected from a cloister of women into the stony society of Gold Mountain men must have been a bit like being smashed against a brick wall. (Lee, 31)

Even the Disappearing Moon Café itself is patronised by a predominantly male clientele, mainly due to the lack of women in Chinatown but also because it is considered a male space. Referring to an article by the Chinese-Canadian writer Lydia Kwa, Mary Condé discusses "the sexism of the traditional Chinese café, reserved as a place for men to relax and enjoy themselves" (Condé, 2000, 180). At Disappearing Moon Café, while the men are relaxing, it is both Mui Lan and Fong Mei who all but ensure the survival of the

restaurant with their endless hard work. Consequently, both Mui Lan and Fong Mei are caught in a cycle whereby maintaining the restaurant contributes to their own exclusion.

In addition to being “an appropriately male-oriented social space” (Condé, 2000, 180), Disappearing Moon Café is a “nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned chinese [sic] teahouse, which account[s] for its popularity not only amongst its homesick chinese [sic] clientele but also outsiders who came looking for oriental exotica” (Lee, 32). It is thus a refuge for the homesick and the excluded, all “idle loafers” (Lee, 26) who converge to gossip, stare and absorb the illusion of Chineseness it creates. Condé draws a connection between the adjective “disappearing” and the “insubstantial” (Condé, 2000, 180) Chineseness the café provides as “it operates not only to feed the unreliable nostalgia of the homesick overseas Chinese” (Condé, 2000, 180) but also for the desire for exoticism of many outsiders. What adds to the “insubstantial” character of the Disappearing Moon Café is that it is divided into two parts, the dining room which mimics the Chinese tea house and the “counter-and-booth section” (Lee, 32) where the Chinese customers are concentrated, although “there was nothing chinese [sic] about it” (Lee, 32). Overall however, Chineseness is present throughout Chinatown and as Beneventi indicates, “ethnicity is manifested through the visual language of the ghetto, through identifiably Chinese physical characteristics” (Beneventi, 68).

Possibly the most pertinent example where physical space directly impacts the performance of ethnicity is illustrated through Beatrice. Essentially, she is a “small-town canadian [sic]” (Lee, 164) girl, having grown up exclusively in Vancouver’s Chinatown. As mentioned in the second chapter of my study, “racial prejudice helped disconnect Beatrice from the larger community outside of Chinatown” (Lee, 164). Consequently, she and those like her, born and bred in Chinatown, are “allies, necessary for survival;

for those times they ventured out of 'their place,' and came back fractured" (Lee, 164). Through these two passages, Lee describes how Beatrice and the other inhabitants of Chinatown are essentially confined there for fear of the consequences brought on by crossing into the rest of Vancouver. When members of the Chinatown community cross the border separating Chinatown from the rest of Vancouver, they are faced with the harsh reality of racism and a society that is situated outside of their comfort zone. For the white, middle-class Vancouver society of the 1950s, "separation is a part of the process of purification- it is the means by which defilement or pollution is avoided- but to separate presumes a categorization of things as pure or defiled" (Sibley, 37), and they of course, are presumed to be "pure." Consequently, the garrison mentality is ingrained in Chinatown's inhabitants, especially the Chinatown-born ones, and leaves its mark on Beatrice. Lee appropriately writes of Beatrice: "you can take the girl out of Chinatown, but you can't take Chinatown out of the girl" (Lee, 164).

Where *Disappearing Moon Café* is an examination of the evolution of Vancouver's Chinatown, Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* describes with fascination the geographical and cultural diversity offered up by Toronto, one of the most multicultural cities in the world. Through the daily lives of her band of protagonists, Brand depicts a living and breathing Toronto, home to people from all over. Early in the novel, she writes: "name a region on the planet and there's someone from there, here [in Toronto]" (Brand, 4). However, even though she lists the "Bulgarian mechanics" and "Eritrean accountants" (Brand, 5) among others, she recognises that although they all inhabit the same city, it is not always a comfortable coexistence. Brand explains that "in this city, like everywhere, people work, they eat, they drink, they have sex, but it's hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension" (Brand, 5). Certainly,



“misapprehension” exists in all cities but Brand situates this statement following her enumeration of Toronto’s cultural diversity, linking the two and setting the stage for the important role ethnicity plays in the lives of her protagonists and their navigation of Toronto.

Throughout the novel, Brand explores different areas of the city from its urban core to its suburbs through the eyes of her four, visible-minority protagonists. The way that they navigate the city and absorb its energy is directly related to how they perform and conceive their ethnicity, their inclusion and their exclusion. Goldberg’s racialised spaces are evoked through Brand’s descriptions of “Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods [...] Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones” (Brand, 4), all integral components of Brand’s Toronto. The protagonists move through the different areas, sometimes in fascination and appreciation and at other times, in discomfort. This is particularly evident in Tuyen, whose resistance to her family and to culturally-defined expectations of her are reflected in her relationship to different areas of Toronto. As the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants, Tuyen’s first spatial memories of Toronto are of her parent’s Vietnamese restaurant in Toronto’s Chinatown. Brand writes that, for Tuyen and her family, “the restaurant became their life. They were being defined by the city. They had come thinking that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain” (Brand, 66). She continues: “it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food” (Brand, 67). Here, the Vu family is crudely reduced to what their ethnicity and profession translate, their restaurant complying with the desires of “eager Anglos ready to taste the fare of their multicultural city” (Brand, 67). However, how

Tuyen internalises and manages this conception of them is radically different from the rest of her family.

After years of living in metro Toronto, in rooming houses and housing developments where “the rooms were never warm in the winter, and they were sweltering in the summers” (Brand, 55), the Vu family moves to Richmond Hill. A suburb of Toronto, Richmond Hill is described by Brand as “beyond all that drama of material poverty” (Brand, 55). Compared to the hustle and bustle of Chinatown, Tuyen regards it as “artificial,” “antiseptic,” “rootless and desolate” (Brand, 55). Whereas in Chinatown the Vus are reduced to “Vietnamese food,” Richmond Hill allows them the chance, like many other immigrants, to “flee to rangy lookalike desolate suburbs [...] where the houses give them a sense of space and distance from that troubled image of themselves” (Brand, 55). Evoking the concept of “white flight” where a mass exodus of white, middle-class city dwellers went to the suburbs, looking for larger properties and an escape from housing projects and racialised spaces, Brand depicts Richmond Hill as the point of arrival for the immigrant equivalent to “white flight.” She writes that Richmond Hill is:

one of those suburbs where immigrants go to get away from other immigrants, but of course they end up living with all the other immigrants running away from themselves [...] They hate that self that keeps drawing attention, the one that can't fit in because of colour or language, or both, and they think that moving to a suburb will somehow eradicate that person once and for all. (Brand, 54-5)

For the members of the Vu family, Richmond Hill is a place where they can attempt to escape the “coercive mimeticism” that they are forced to exhibit in Toronto. In the suburbs, the sterile and uniform landscape allows them a small chance at assimilation, at inclusion, at not standing out. Furthermore, they are able to reap the rewards of their

hard work and years of uncomfortable living arrangements by living in a “giant house” (Brand, 54).

Ironically, Tuyen decides to live apart from her family, on College Street, where her parents “had lived when they first arrived from Vietnam with their two daughters” (Brand, 55). Young, urban and living on the sexual and professional fringes, Tuyen’s decision to complete the circle by living close to Chinatown is a way to affirm her independence and an attempt to distance herself from the identity her parents wish to confer upon her. For Tuyen and her neighbour Carla, their apartments are “places of refuge, not just for their immediate circle but for all the people they picked up along the way to their twenties” (Brand, 23), including graffiti artists, “Tuyen’s friends from the gay ghetto” and a few “hip-hop poets” (Brand, 23). It is a meeting place for those excluded from the mainstream, urban society due to their profession, ethnicity or sexuality.

Through Tuyen’s ambling, Brand emphasises the different racialised spaces in Toronto and their individual features. During the World Cup, an event that rouses so many affiliations and emotions, Tuyen revels in the energy it excites. Brand writes:

every four years, June in this city is crazy. Cars speed about flying emblems of various nationalities. Resurgent identities are lifted and dashed. Small neighbourhoods that seemed at least slightly reconciled break into sovereign bodies. It’s all because of soccer. (Brand, 203)

People feel free to display signs of ethnic belonging and nationality in the name of sport as the parameters in which they are normally judged and categorised are temporarily altered. Furthermore, limitations and expectations of ethnicity are contained as fans are able to affiliate themselves and identify with certain teams regardless of their conferred ethnicity. As Vietnam does not have a soccer team playing in the World Cup, Tuyen decides to cheer for Korea. “She wasn’t Korean, of course, but World Cup made her

feel that way. No Vietnamese team had made it, so today she was Korean” (Brand, 204). She celebrates in Korea Town, where “the Koreans have erupted in a street party too sweet to mean anything less than world domination” (Brand, 203).

In addition to Tuyen’s wanderings, Carla’s daily job as a bicycle courier opens up numerous geographical environments. Although Carla “love[s] the city” (Brand, 32) and “love[s] the feeling of weight and balance it [gives] her” (Brand, 32), Toronto is also “a set of obstacles to be crossed and circled, avoided and let pass” (Brand, 32). As a mulatta, Carla is aware of the challenges and expectations that the city imposes on her. For instance, she feels uncomfortable at Kensington Market among “the pawpaws, soursops, plantains, goat, fish, gizadas, and cans of ackees” (Brand, 131). Carla is so overwhelmed by the market that as a young girl, “she vowed never to [go there] when she grew up” (Brand, 131). Instead, Carla is comfortable floating from neighbourhood to neighbourhood on her bicycle, just as she drifts between her Jamaican and Italian-Canadian heritages, her job reflecting her borderlessness (Brand, 213). This approach to Toronto is in direct opposition to that of her brother Jamal who views the city more as “something to get tangled in” (Brand, 32) revealed by his numerous stints in jail.

Brand also exposes Toronto’s project housing, mainly through Jackie, who grew up in Alexandra Park, an “urban warren of buildings and paths” (Brand, 92). It is not unintentional that Brand uses animal imagery to describe Alexandra Park with its “small alleyways and walkways” (Brand, 258). It is the “turf in the low-level war for such places waged by poor people” (Brand, 257). Jackie’s Alexandra Park, predominantly inhabited by Afro-Canadians and West Indians, corresponds to Goldberg’s description of project housing where “the racially marginalized are isolated within center city space, enclosed within single entrance/exit elevator buildings, and carefully divided from respectably

residential urban areas” (Goldberg, 198). Devoid of beauty and colour, Alexandra Park is plagued by violence and poverty which Brand suggests are correlated. She writes, “the sense of space might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of well-being. God, hope!” (Brand, 262).

Instead, Alexandra Park corresponds to Goldberg’s project housing where its “external visibility serves at once as a form of panoptical discipline, vigilant boundary constraints upon its effects that might spill over to threaten the social fabric” (Goldberg, 198). In many ways, Alexandra Park echoes Chow’s zoo, where the ethnic subject is constrained by the gaze of others and that of the law, which is embodied by two “salt-and-pepper cops” (Brand, 98) in an attempt at racial harmony. Throughout her childhood, Jackie witnesses how Alexandra Park’s harsh environment eats away at her parents. Arguably, her successful business and German boyfriend reflect how she is able to overcome and react against certain odds presented by racial and economic stereotypes.

Despite illustrating the exclusionary elements that Brand’s Toronto imposes upon her visible minority protagonists, she is also intensely aware of the freedom and inclusion it offers. It is all-consuming and exhilarating in its diversity, where borders of geography and identity are explored, transgressed and questioned. Brand recognises and praises Toronto’s enigmatic quality as such:

it’s like this with this city- you can stand on a simple corner and get taken away in all directions. Depending on the weather, it can be easy or hard. If it’s pleasant, and pleasant is so relative, then the other languages making their way to your ears, plus the language of the air itself, which can be cold and humid or wet and hot, this all sums up into a kind of new vocabulary. No matter who you are, no matter how certain you are of it, you can’t help but feel the thrill of being someone else. (Brand, 154)

In the other two novels I analysed, physical space is privileged in a different manner. Whereas Lee and Brand situate their novels within the context of Vancouver and Toronto and their racialised spaces, Farhoud and Goto rely on the contrast and interplay between urban, rural and private spaces to show how exclusion and inclusion influences ethnic performativity. Both *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* are centred around strong, matriarchal figures whose lives are revealed non-chronologically throughout the novels. Portrayed in their later years, Dounia in *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* and Naoe in *Chorus of Mushrooms* are both relied upon to preserve the link to their original countries and cultures in order to educate succeeding generations that have been raised in Québec and Canada. They are the authentic ethnic subjects that act as foils to the rest of the characters and offer insight into varying levels of assimilation and acculturation. Although Dounia and Naoe have lived outside of Lebanon and Japan respectively for many years, they do not communicate in the languages of their grandchildren and have watched their children increasingly assimilate to their adoptive societies. Through these two protagonists, Farhoud and Goto offer differing portrayals of elderly, immigrant women and while issues of ethnicity and immigration are foregrounded, special attention is also given to the challenges they encounter as women living in societies and periods where males were privileged, as was the case in *Disappearing Moon Café* as well.

Even though Abla Farhoud's *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* spans decades and continents, a point of constant focus is the home. Ironically, what frames the story is Dounia's insistence upon spending her final days in an old-age facility and having that wish granted, thus not even dying at home. Over the course of the novel, Dounia changes houses numerous times and although she is aware that as a woman, she will be

forced to move, she does attach a sense of permanency to her home. Upon moving to a “maison d’été” (Farhoud, 69) in Terrebonne, she states “pour moi, une maison est une maison. On y habite toute sa vie. Celle des parents d’abord, puis celle du mari qui devient notre maison si tout va bien avec le mari” (Farhoud, 69). At first, this appears in opposition to the Québécois, who surprise her by how often they move (Farhoud, 88). However, she is astounded by the fact that upon settling in their new homes, “[qu] ils s’installaient comme s’ils allaient rester là toute leur vie. Ils repeignaient les murs, décoraient et accrochaient leurs rideaux” (Farhoud, 88). Like Dounia, her Québécois neighbours attach a similar stability to their homes. Ultimately, in acquiring what she misunderstands the most in her new society, a set of curtains like what her neighbours have, makes her truly feel settled in Québec. For her, the trivial notion of having curtains means “s’installer vraiment, appartenir au pays, être comme les autres, se sentir chez soi” (Farhoud, 87).

Where her home is a symbol of inclusion and assimilation to Québécois society, reinforced by her curtains, it is also a place of refuge and arguably imprisonment, where she is able to avoid the stares and the exclusion of the outside world. Unable to speak English or French, Dounia does not leave her house. Shortly after arriving at her mother-in-law’s house in Ste-Thérèse, she recalls: “je ne connaissais pas la langue du pays, je ne sortais jamais de la maison, je n’avais ni parents ni amies” (Farhoud, 31). This persists throughout her life as, even as an elderly woman, Dounia feels most comfortable in her house or at her children’s houses. She rarely goes out, and “rentrer seule dans un café, dans un cinéma, dans un magasin, [elle] ne l’[a] jamais fait” (Farhoud, 123). She regrettably wonders “est-ce qu’on peut encore changer ses habitudes à mon âge?” (Farhoud, 123).

Unfortunately, Dounia's reluctance to leave her comfort zone reflects her feelings of uneasiness and exclusion brought on by the gaze of her neighbours and her own shame in regards to her poor linguistic ability. Leaving home alone makes her feel "toute nue" (Farhoud, 124) as opposed to inside where she is "protégée par les murs, par le toit, par tout le travail qu'[elle avait] à faire, par Salim qui parlait la même langue qu'[elle]. À la maison, [elle avait] une raison d'être, dehors, [elle n'était] plus rien" (Farhoud, 124). Even though Dounia is quick to recognise that it is her own fear that excludes her from Québécois society, by internalising this otherness and difference, she is geographically confined to her home and those of her children.

The enclosure and protection represented by Dounia's homes in Québec diverge greatly from her childhood house in Lebanon where it was "comme on dit, une maison ouverte" (Farhoud, 27). She describes that she "ne l'[a] jamais vu vide, ou avec juste [sa] famille, il y avait toujours des gens. C'était un presbytère, un salon, un café, parfois même un tribunal, et pour ceux qui venaient d'ailleurs, un hôtel et un restaurant puisqu'il n'y en avait pas au village" (Farhoud, 27).

In addition to illustrating how Dounia's relationship to her private space reflects a feeling of inclusion or exclusion, Farhoud also demonstrates this through her various moves between rural and urban societies. Always pragmatic, Dounia's only sentimental attachment is to her family. She does not exhibit the same nostalgia for Lebanon as her husband Salim and affiliates herself not to land but to her family, a common trait among immigrant woman. Married at a young age, Dounia must leave her family and her village to go live with Salim's family, thus providing her with her first experience of immigration and exclusion. In an attempt to understand Dounia's definition of immigration, her son



Abdallah compares her to the Prophet Mohammed “[qui] a émigré de La Mecque à Médine, deux villes de la même region où l’on parlait la même langue” (Farhoud, 42).

Besides speaking with a different accent and “stealing” one of the village’s most eligible bachelors (Farhoud, 43), she describes that “le paysage n’était pas celui qu’[elle avait] connu. Le village était entouré de montagnes, il y faisait plus chaud, l’air était moins bon” (Farhoud, 43). Since leaving her childhood village, Dounia explains how in no other place has she been able to contemplate the horizon (Farhoud, 43), with either Montréal’s houses or Beirut’s mountains blocking the view. This could also be a reflection of how Dounia feels stifled by her outsider position in addition to the expectations of her as a woman in a culture where men are privileged. Although she has lived her life according to society’s expectations of her as a Lebanese woman, she recalls regrettably while internally addressing her daughter: “tu m’as vu plier, tout accepter, me taire, est-ce un exemple de vie pour mes filles?” (Farhoud, 120). Dounia evokes an incident where, close to delivering her third child, Salim kicks her in the mouth from atop a horse in order to stop her pleas for him to stay for the child’s birth. Hurt and degraded, she is further insulted by her father’s condoning of Salim’s violence. She summarises the injustices faced by Lebanese women of the day as such:

laisse ton mal dans ton coeur et souffre en silence; le mal dévoilé n’est que scandale et déshonneur [...] Toutes les femmes étaient pétries de ces mots et les murmuraient en silence. J’étais l’une d’elles et je le suis encore! (Farhoud, 143)

Like Mui Lan and Fong Mei in Chinatown, Dounia is unable to break the cycle of oppression that continues to imprison and exclude her throughout her life.

Finally, Dounia’s relationship and opinion of Beirut is admittedly influenced by her experience in Québec and her village upbringing. She describes “après des années au Canada, Beyrouth m’a donné l’impression d’une ville collée avec des raisins secs”

(Farhoud, 110). Despite being there before the civil war that would decimate many parts of Beirut, Dounia finds that “les façades étaient chic tandis que l’arrière des maisons était délabré, malpropre, des bouts de murs manquants, démantibulés” (Farhoud, 110) reflecting that “seule l’apparence comptait” (Farhoud, 110). Refusing to be fooled by pretension and luxury, Dounia attributes this scepticism to her village upbringing that “ne [la] laisse pas aveugler par les apparences” (Farhoud, 111). Evidently, Dounia’s perception of physical space is highly influenced by her past experiences.

Whereas Dounia’s confinement to her house is somewhat voluntary, as she prefers the safety of her home over the daunting outside world, Hiromi Goto’s Naoe is a reluctant prisoner. Restricted to the family home by her daughter Keiko and the sheer isolation of her rural environs, Naoe is vocal and disobedient, refusing to let her spatial conditions further limit her. Contrary to Dounia, Naoe does not wish to be sent to a “h-o-m-e” (Goto, 4) explaining that “no time now to learn new dust in a new home” (Goto, 4). For her daughter Keiko, Naoe represents the Japanese culture that she left behind upon immigrating to Canada and her only obstacle at complete assimilation into Canadian society. Mark Libin writes that “Goto’s Obāchan Naoe is always in control, a woman who unleashes her perpetual flow of Japanese words as a reminder to her family of their heritage” (Libin, 1999, 138). By keeping her indoors, Keiko makes her own daughter’s “life easy and easy to assimilate if [her] grandmother is skinny enough to be stuffed in a closet” (Goto, 68). Muriel explains: “not that she ever did and not that Obāchan would ever allow it. But in Mom’s mind, the closet door never opened” (Goto, 68). Here, Goto depicts a situation where any sign of Japaneseness is confined to the private space and the ethnic subject, Naoe, is literally boxed in by her own family. To Naoe, the only way out of her physical and emotional confinement is by escaping

from the house in the middle of the night. Armed with her daughter's credit card, food and beer, Naoe leaves Keiko's house and her family on her way to "inscrib[ing her] name across this country" (Goto, 108).

By means of her unforeseen departure and ensuing journey, Naoe debunks stereotypes of immigrants and the elderly from her fantastical encounter with the Calgary Police to her sensual affair with Tengu. This is consistent with her character as she divorced her husband and raised her daughter alone in Japan, a very unconventional move for a Japanese woman at the time. Towards the end of the novel, before competing at the Calgary Stampede as a bullrider, Naoe clarifies: "easy enough for a woman to slip by security. If you're quietly Oriental and carrying a *furoshiki* packed with cowboy equipment and starkers as the day you were born, people are glad not to notice you" (Goto, 215). Ironically, it is by not being "quietly Oriental" that Naoe is able to eventually compete in the rodeo and create a new life for herself.

Consistent in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is the importance of private space in the performance of the protagonists' ethnicity. Whereas Naoe's displays of Japaneseness were controlled by Keiko and limited to the private, both Muriel and her father, Sam, only rely on enclosed private spaces to express their Japaneseness. Although both Sam and Keiko decide to "put Japan behind [them] and fit more smoothly with the crowd" (Goto, 207) upon their arrival to Canada, Sam is not able to do so entirely. In trading in his Japanese-speaking persona for an English-speaking one, Sam also abandons a major part of his personality, his "chatter and [his] jokes" (Goto, 207). When he stumbles on the fact that he is still able to read Japanese and understand it after years of neglect, he and Keiko keep it hidden from Muriel, not wanting to "stir things up when it was all settled" (Goto, 208).

Consequently, his office at the mushroom farm becomes his refuge, where he can immerse himself in his remaining Japaneseness. Never having considered it an accessible area, Muriel's only entrance into this office is towards the end of the novel when she tells her father she is leaving for awhile. After entering his office, she notices that "the books were all in Japanese" (Goto, 206) and immediately feels angry and betrayed. It is only then that she is able to really discover the motives behind her parents' choice not to expose her to the Japanese culture and its customs. Through this discovery, she is able to make sense of why her father "spent a lot of time in his office," noting that she "never asked to go inside" (Goto, 60). For Sam, his office is the only place where he can express and explore this fundamental component of his identity that has been suppressed both voluntarily, by his wife and ultimately, by the rural-Alberta society in which he lives.

Muriel's case however, is more problematic. Having been raised with a somewhat surface understanding of Japanese culture based on a television miniseries, her grandmother's late-night snacks and her automatic imposed affiliation to it due to her physical traits, Muriel only truly begins to embrace and explore her Japaneseness as a young adult. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Goto uses Muriel and her Japanese-born lover's home, especially the bedroom, as the haven where she can openly and comfortably discover, recall and perform her Japaneseness. Slipping in and out of sleep on their futon, oblivious to the outside world, Muriel weaves together a narrative combining childhood recollections, subliminal discussions with her long-disappeared Obāchan and the real-time interaction with her lover. With him, she is able to re-appropriate the racially stereotypical "Oriental sex," "mak[ing] it up as [she] go[es] along" (Goto, 123). Libin explains that through her own interpretation of "Oriental sex," "Muriel

counteracts the disabling nature of racist representation, reasserting agency in the act of constructing various identities” (Libin, 2001, 102). Furthermore, various facets of her lover’s Japaneseness are performed and revealed in their home such as flower arranging and cooking Japanese dishes. Arguably, Muriel’s lover could be considered a willing victim of what Rey Chow calls “coercive mimeticism” as he earns a living by embodying various stereotypes of Japanese culture, similar to how Kae benefits from tokenism in *Disappearing Moon Café*. According to Mary Condé, it is precisely due to this “coercive mimeticism” and exaggerated Japaneseness that Muriel “ultimately rejects this lover, rather to her own surprise, because he has not yet achieved her own integration into Canadian society” (Condé, 2001, 140). For Muriel specifically, coming from an ethnically confused past, it is the privacy and intimacy offered by her and her lover’s home that allows her the opportunity to explore and invent another aspect of her identity.

Throughout all four novels, physical space is occupied, navigated and mentally mapped by the various protagonists. Their relationship to these spaces, whether public or private, urban or rural, is often influenced by their gender and has a direct impact on their integration into and attitude towards Canadian and Québécois society. As members of ethnic minority groups, the protagonists are marginalised from mainstream, Canadian and Québécois society from the beginning. However, their physical surroundings can push them further to the periphery by living in rural areas or racialised spaces for example, or create a greater feeling of integration. Inevitably, an individual’s spatial surroundings will influence the performance of her/his ethnicity and the parameters in which an ethnic identity is conferred. Although a certain physical space may evoke certain preconceived notions of its inhabitants on behalf of society, the

majority of the protagonists analysed use their geographical surroundings as tools in their attempts at subverting and questioning established assumptions of ethnic identity. Ironically, it is often these geographical barriers created in order to exclude those deemed undesirable that are inverted and resignified in the protagonists' appropriation of their physical surroundings.

## Conclusion

Over the course of my study, I have attempted to demonstrate how the performance of ethnicity affects individual identity formation through the analysis of four novels written by traditionally marginalised women in Canadian and Québécois society. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity transposed onto race and ethnicity and her notions of misrecognition and resignification combined with Rey Chow's "coercive mimeticism" and her concept of "the zoo," I was equipped with the necessary theoretical basis to carefully analyse the performance of ethnicity by the various novels' visible minority protagonists. In doing so, I examined whether these fictional representatives of ethnic minority subjects in Canadian and Québécois society, through their assorted performances of ethnicity, confirm or challenge stereotypical perceptions of ethnic subjects in Canada and Québec or if they validate Rey Chow's claim that the ethnic subject in Western society is always kept in her/his place. Although this can be looked at from many perspectives, I decided to concentrate on how they perform their ethnicity through their relationship with their own visible and cultural otherness and through their interaction with their physical space. As all the novels are fairly recent, they reflect a refreshing candour and insightfulness when approaching ethnicity against the backdrop of the Canadian government's endorsement of official multiculturalism and *le pluralisme québécois*.

On the whole, I found that Lee, Brand, Goto and Farhoud present ethnicity as complex, nuanced and ever-present in the lives of their ethnic minority protagonists. Although each protagonist's relationship to their ethnicity is different, they are always aware of their difference vis-à-vis mainstream Canadian and Québécois society. As such, I feel that each of the authors reflects some of the concerns raised by Rey Chow

regarding the ethnic subject in Western society, primarily those of the gaze and their precarious placement between both mainstream and minority cultural groups. Many protagonists are faced with the task of reconciling affiliations to two or more cultural groups and the expectations that each one confers upon them. Despite the discrimination and difficulties faced by the visible minority characters in Canadian and Québécois society, a common thread throughout the four novels is an element of optimism with regard to the condition of the ethnic subject. From Kae's ability to expose her family's story through writing to Muriel's exploration of her Japaneseness, the works are generally devoid of Rey Chow's cynicism without ignoring or sugar-coating the realities faced by visible minority individuals in Canada and Québec. Instead, the various performances of ethnicity often serve to challenge racial stereotypes and destabilise established notions of ethnicity especially through misrecognition and resignification. Consequently, new cultural identities and more fluid affiliations are created as subjects may not perform their ethnicity *correctly*. In an age where both Canada and Québec are embracing immigration and promoting notions of multiculturalism and pluralism, these four novels offer interesting insights and reflections on the state of the ethnic subject in these societies.

Unfortunately, owing to the narrow scope of my study, I was unable to explore certain elements that, I feel, merit further investigation. For instance, another interesting component in analysing the influence of ethnic performativity on individual identity formation is through memory and exploration of the past. A common theme throughout all four novels, I had initially planned to examine how the performance of one's ethnicity is reflected through and influenced by the past and memory. Furthermore, on an altogether different level, I am interested in how the writing of



novels containing ethnic protagonists and themes could be considered a performance of the individual authors' ethnicity. Although I touched upon this aspect briefly in the fictional realm in relation to Kae's recounting of her family's saga, additional analysis would be needed in order to determine whether these authors, by writing about ethnic minority themes and characters, are therefore victims of "coercive mimeticism" as is described by Rey Chow. Conversely, would these authors receive the same critical reception if they were not writing about ethnic themes and protagonists?

Certainly, while having answered many questions in my analysis, it is inevitable that many more arise. For example, would the same conclusions be reached had I analysed male ethnic minority authors? Or, what would be the result of a more comparative analysis between ethnic minority literatures from English Canada and *littérature migrante* from Québec? These are just some important questions facing critics and scholars of Canadian and Québécois literatures and more specifically, of immigrant/ethnic minority literatures and *la littérature migrante*, whose production and audience is expanding steadily. At a time when debate is escalating over governmental funding of ethnic minority authors, selection for literary prizes and the canonisation of these works, it necessary to recognise the literary value of these texts and their contribution to our understanding of the inner workings of Canadian and Québécois society. Although the past twenty years have seen significant progress in interest and scholarship surrounding ethnic minority/immigrant writing and *la littérature migrante*, there are still many intricacies of this writing that deserve further investigation and appreciation.

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