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Finding space : the marginalization of a gay East Asian male immigrant in Toronto's LGBTTIQ communities

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**FINDING SPACE: THE MARGINALIZATION OF A GAY EAST ASIAN MALE
IMMIGRANT IN TORONTO'S LGBTTIQ COMMUNITIES**

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By

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**A Major Research Paper
Presented to Ryerson University**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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in the Program of
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**Master of Arts
Immigration and settlement Studies
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the storytelling tradition of critical race (Razack, 1998; hooks, 2000, 1992) and feminist (Scott, 1992) scholars, I tell a personal story of immigration and sexual identity, and theorize that experience. Borrowing from 1960s feminism in which according to Carol Hanisch (1969) the phrase, 'the personal is political' was first used, I describe my experiences as a way to explore how unequal social relationships, racist practices, homophobia, and community institutions constitute my experiences as a gay East Asian male in Toronto.

Central to my storytelling as a gay East Asian immigrant in Toronto is understanding how racial and sexual identities are created. I explore how dominant groups construct identities that may appear to give me visibility in a multicultural society but also operate to reinforce oppression through institutional racism and homophobia.

Key Words:

1. Gay East Asian Male.
2. Racism.
3. Toronto.

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The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you.
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else,
if not here
in English.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat

Introduction

Drawing on the storytelling tradition of critical race (Razack, 1998; hooks, 2000, 1992) and feminist (Scott, 1992) scholars, I tell a personal story of immigration and sexual identity, and theorize that experience. Storytelling in academia has emerged as a feminist methodology for inserting voices that are usually silenced. Borrowing from 1960s feminism in which, according to Carol Hanisch (1969), the phrase, 'the personal is political' was first used, I describe my experiences as a way to explore how unequal social relationships, racist practices, homophobia, and community institutions constitute my experiences as a gay East Asian male immigrant in Toronto.

Central to my storytelling as a gay East Asian male immigrant in Toronto is in understanding how racial and sexual identities are created. I explore how dominant groups construct identities that may appear to give me visibility in a multicultural society but also operate to reinforce oppression through institutional racism and homophobia.

The importance of giving a voice to those who have historically been marginalized and whose voices and stories are rarely encountered within the mainstream has been discussed in particular by feminists in the women's movement in the context of epistemic privilege (Scott, 1992). As Bet-Ami Bar On (1993) states, some 'second-wave feminists' have argued that storytelling is not only perspectival, but that the perspectives of those who are socially marginalized in relation to dominant groups are more revealing than the perspectives of others. While this may be a strength of a

methodology such as storytelling, it is also important to note that telling a story of oppression may have limitations, or even be counterproductive in challenging oppression. Joan Scott (1992) points out the limitations of telling a story of oppression without acknowledging how privilege operates in that story. Scott (1992) argues that merely telling a story from a point of epistemic privilege may only result in evidence of the fact of difference. It can fail to illuminate how difference is established, how it operates and how it constitutes subjects as dominated or oppressed. Further, by telling the story and failing to look at the historical processes that construct dominance and oppression, the process of storytelling can preclude an analysis of the systems that create the conditions of domination and in fact reproduce those systems (Scott, 1992).

A story that does not acknowledge epistemic privilege may also have limitations when seeking to understand the sites of multiple oppressions (Bar On, 1993). While stories may be used as tools to assist in understanding the nature of multiple identities and oppression, those stories should also be critically understood in the context of the histories, social relations and conditions that structure groups unequally in relation to each other (Razack, 1998).

Methodology

Exploring my experiences as a gay East Asian male immigrant living in Toronto, I find that storytelling as a methodology enables me to analyze my experiences of racism and homophobia through an academic lens. I am also able to weave this analysis into the discussion of my immigrant experience of racism and homophobia in Toronto's multicultural society, and more specifically my experience in Toronto's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, Two-Spirited, intersex and queer/questioning (LGBTTIQ) communities¹. Following in the approach of autoethnographers (Magnet, 2006; Humphreys, 2005; Tedlock, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), I suggest that by candidly including some of my experiences through storytelling, I can begin to address the absence of gay East Asian voices in the academic literature of immigration studies.

Let me start by first referring to feminist and race theorist, Sherene Razack (1998), to provide a theoretical framework within which to account for my experiences of racism. Razack (1998) explains how critical pedagogy uses storytelling as a methodology to allow voices that have been traditionally suppressed in education to be heard. She critically examines the nature of subjectivity involved in such a methodology – “the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity” (1998:43). Razack (1998) suggests that the methodology should entail something more than

¹ There are multiple voices that make up the LGBTTIQ communities. Each is unique and provides a different insight into the complexity of issues, dynamics and challenges that exist when individuals as well as groups of individuals have varying outlooks, expectations and identities. My voice is one in the multitude of voices that exist in these communities. I do not try to speak for or know how each voice and group of voices would speak in this paper, but acknowledge that there are other voices including voices from lesbians, women, two-spirited, people of colour, disabled, and other gender and sexual identities.

simply 'giving voice' to a person who might not otherwise be heard. Storytelling is a political act. As the phrase 'The personal is political' (Hanisch, 1969) was to inspire women to be politically active in the issues that affected their lives of the 1960s and to make politicians pay attention to women's lives and how the laws ignored women, this methodology has the potential to be counterproductive if it fails to be undertaken critically. In particular, Razack (1998) discusses the need to critically reflect upon hierarchical differences within oppressed groups. From this critical analysis of the methodology of storytelling, I seek in this thesis to be cognizant of hierarchies of power, particularly when applying autoethnography as a research methodology.

For me and in this thesis, storytelling is a way to describe my personal experiences of racism, marginalization, homophobia, and being 'othered' using qualitative research described as 'autoethnography', an autobiographical approach to research and writing that allows for the personal experience to be discussed within a theoretical framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I draw on the works of Shoshana Magnet (2006), Michael Humphries (2005) and Barbara Tedlock (2005) in support of the use of autoethnography as a methodology that is useful in revealing an immigrant's experiences of racism, marginalization and homophobia in particular, the use of the autoethnographic vignettes as being capable of eliciting a profound and empathetic response from the reader.

Michael Humphries (2005) advocates the use of autoethnographic vignettes in order to make use of his personal story to show how research can be enhanced by autoethnographic detail. Humphries (2005) draws on his experience of mid-career change and seeks to address the absence of research in this area by using episodes from his own working life in the form of narrative vignettes to illustrate how autoethnographic accounts can illuminate his area of study. This, he argues, is possible because the autoethnographic vignette encourages reflexivity (encouraging the reader to ask questions about themselves) and is a valuable tool of empirical research (Humphries, 2005).

Whereas Humphries makes use of straightforward narrative to articulate experiences to assist the reader, Shoshana Magnet (2006) makes use of an autoethnographic methodology for a more introspective and critical purpose. Through a dialogue made up of multiple and 'layered' voices (references to voices of various friends over a number of years), Magnet explores her understandings of racism, homophobia/heterosexism and anti-Semitism. She sees knowledge not as a constant state of mind but as a process that develops through the stages of the dialogue (Magnet, 2006). One of the strengths of Magnet's writing is the element of 'reflexivity' that Humphries (2005) discusses – emotion, such as feelings of failure, with which the reader can identify. Magnet (2006) looks deep within herself to interrogate her white privilege and her willingness to hide behind her own minority

identities and the consequences of doing so. By doing this, Magnet goes further than Humphries in using autoethnography to explore and explain personal experiences.

Magnet (2006) points to another valuable element of an autoethnographic methodology in that it allows the writer to engage in a self examination or as she states, interrogation of both our dominant and marginalized positions in society. In Magnet's (2006) analysis, the methodology leads to self revelation and acknowledgement of positions of power. This allows her to better understand the interlocking hierarchies that make up domination, and provides her reader with a methodology to do likewise (Magnet, 2006).

Barbara Tedlock (2005:467) describes autoethnography as a new genre of ethnography in which authors seek to reconcile the autobiographical impulse (the gaze inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward). At its best, she argues, autoethnography "is a cultural performance that transcends self-referentiality by engaging with cultural forms that are directly involved in the creation of culture" (Holman Jones, 2005:764). The value of this genre, as Holman Jones (2005) sees it, is that the writing is able to reflect closeness, subjectivity and engagement rather than distance, objectivity and neutrality. It is a genre or methodology that, in Tedlock's eyes, is well suited to personal and taboo subjects, which can be treated as social science data. This appeals to someone like me; someone who is gay, East Asian and an

immigrant, and who is required to deal with a subject matter that is both taboo and personal, and therefore underrepresented in academic writing.

To address the under-representation in academic writing of the experiences of a gay East Asian immigrant in Canada, I incorporate in this paper several autoethnographic stories as an approach in qualitative research. Acknowledging that autoethnography has been the subject of a wide range of academic writing and a range of definitions, I borrow from Reed-Danahay's (1977) definition of autoethnography, which includes forms of self narrative by an autobiographer who places her or his life stories within a story of the social context in which it occurs. This sharing of personal experiences also presents reflexive and poignant illustrations of 'being there' (Geertz, 1988), allowing the reader to enter the story and vicariously experience the events portrayed (Bruner, 1990).

In using autoethnography as a storytelling methodology, I am in agreement with the approach of Humphries (2005) that 'autobiographical ethnography' which places the autobiographer's story within the social context in which it occurs, can serve the dual purposes of text and methodology. The text of the stories allow me to convey experiences of 'othering' that may be revealing to those who do not identify as a gay East Asian immigrant. Tami Spry (2001:712) noted, "Autoethnographic texts reveal the fractures, sutures and seams of self interacting with others in the context of researching lived experiences". The methods of autoethnography and storytelling

may suggest an appropriate qualitative way for academic writers to enable voices that are often marginalized within mainstream academic studies to be validated. By inviting the reader to reflect on the deep and intimate details of my experiences, my aim is to encourage a greater level of understanding.

Ultimately, my intention is to weave storytelling with an autoethnographic methodology and to “draw an audience into a collective experience in which a version of truth is demonstrated for the collective to judge” (Butler, 1997:928), in order to bring forth a perspective that is unique and different from existing literature in this area.

This method of qualitative research is not without risk. As Spry (2001:713) notes, “Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory”. A review of the literature in this area provides further insights into the problems in relying solely upon a position of epistemic privilege, if a story is to do more than simply provide evidence of difference (Scott, 1992). If storytelling as a methodology is nothing more than a self indulgent form of writing, a mere expression of victim-hood or a mere confession, then the methodology is of limited use in the context of a research paper (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I remain conscious of this risk, but seek to balance this by using analysis (rather than mere narrative) and providing historical and political context to the experiences, and, where appropriate, drawing upon the material referred to in the literature review in the next section.

The paper explicitly does not draw on oral interviews with other gay East Asian immigrants, or explore the emotional and political experiences of 'coming out'² and coming to terms with sexuality or dealing with family members. However, as I make use of autoethnography as a methodology, this allows me to focus on racism from an individual and personal perspective with broader societal implications.

I now turn to the literature that I reviewed which highlights racism in Canada and in North American LGBTTIQ communities³, as well as the historical shaping of ethnic differentiation in Malaysia that led to the marginalization of certain racial groups. In each of these areas, I will provide an overview and review of the literature.

² A term used to describe the process of coming to terms with one's sexuality and coming out to oneself and others.

³ I generalize the LGBTTIQ experience to North America and not only Canada or Toronto because I will also draw from American literature, especially those from the Asian/East Asian communities.

Literature Review

Racism in Canadian Society

Sherene Razack (1998), in her book titled, *Looking White People in the Eye*, reveals how a storyteller can become disempowered rather than empowered if the storyteller identifies as or becomes identified as 'the victim'. Razack (1998) considers the role of each player and in particular the role of 'victim' and how race and racism forces us to view groups of people (those perceived as victims) in assumed and controlled ways. Victims are then forced to comply within these prescribed roles. Razack (1998:10) argues that in Canada, "... we are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another ... and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies". For Razack (1998), whites in Canada have both assumed and subsumed the role of dominant culture.

If, as Razack suggests, we have become complicit in reproducing systems of oppression (whether as 'victim' or 'oppressor') then it is also possible that the identities that we adopt or that are conferred upon us may also be suspect in reproducing existing social hierarchies. On the other hand, Himani Bannerji (1996) explains the importance of deconstructing the identities or classifications with which we might identify. Bannerji (1996) identifies that categories such as 'immigrant', 'visible minority', and 'new Canadian' are each assigned by the state and serve important ideological functions that reinforce inequalities and power differences based

on race and gender. Bannerji (1996) further suggests that state conferred categories such as 'visible minority' creates difference, without establishing any plausible framework in which to understand why and how this difference requires recognition. The notion of domination is further supported by Bannerji's (2000) view of differences, in which cultural differences are encoded through structured power relations that manifest oppression.

Bannerji's argument that the state conferred identities and categories can be deeply ideological and can create difference without a framework within which to understand the difference, is illustrated in a more specific immigration context by Lisa Marie Jakubowski (1997). Jakubowski (1997) discusses how race and racism continues to inform Canadian immigration laws, policies and practices. Jakubowski (1997) provides examples of how race and racism can co-exist within a nominally non-discriminatory immigration policy, such as the distribution of Canadian immigration offices in certain parts of the world and the discretionary powers given to Canadian immigration officers that enable assimilationist assumptions to influence decision-making. Jakubowski (1997) argues that assumptions about how an immigrant looks, reflect how the immigrant does or does not integrate into Canadian society, and that this reinforces racism, classism and established western (read: white) social hierarchies.

Jakubowski (1997) shows that since Confederation, Canadian immigration laws and policies have been in place to maintain control, with the term 'race' conveniently appearing and disappearing in law. The initial appearance of the term 'race' was associated with Canada's implicit 'White Canada' policy (Roy, 1999). Peter Li (1990, 1998, and 2003) reviews historical and current Canadian immigration policies and procedures, and shows how racist language has been used and continues to be used in official documents to create and maintain differential treatment, in particular, towards Chinese Canadian. Li (1990) describes racism in Canada as institutionalized and gives as an example the way in which information is provided and used in official Canadian Immigration documents. Li (1998) then describes the process whereby government officials, policy makers and eventually the Canadian public make use of this information in describing Chinese immigrants. He further describes that through the implementation of unspoken and unwritten racist policies, Chinese experience something close to being on the outside of society. Finally, Li (2003) expands on the notion of 'othering' of the Chinese in Canada by emphasizing how historical stereotypes of Chinese are used within the dominant white culture to reinforce difference and otherness of the Chinese from the mainstream.

This notion of othering is picked up differently by Frances Henry, Carol Tater, Winston Mattis and Tim Rees (1995) when they discuss how a hegemony of 'Whiteness' perpetuates inequality for, and oppression of, the socially and

economically disadvantaged. They explore how 'whiteness' acts as an invisible social process by which power and privilege is exercised in a society divided by colour, as well as other social markers such as gender, class and sexual orientation. It is to the social marker of sexual orientation that I now turn to in my review of literature relating to racism in LGBTTIQ communities.

Racism in LGBTTIQ Communities

June Y. Yee and Gary C. Dumbrill (2003) maintain that an understanding of privilege is essential to anti-oppressive practice. As such, their study into social work practice in Canada reveals that 'Whiteness' transcends race to represent the multiple sites of advantage and privilege of being White, male, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied. This perspective is supported by David Eng and Candace Fujikane's (1998) *Queer in Asian America* in which racialized and gendered stereotypes pervasive in heterosexual communities were found to be duplicated in LGBTTIQ communities that disfigure representations of East Asian LGBTIQ. The LGBTTIQ communities include those who have, and those who have not; those who can and those who cannot; those within the 'boundaries' and those outside (Eng and Fujikane, 1998). Luann Good Gingrich (2003) calls this a binary dichotomy of 'us and them', in which those who are perceived as not part of the dominant culture or not included in the dominant culture because of race, colour, disability, gender or sexual orientation, are

automatically seen as part of 'them'. Following this line of reasoning, a gay East Asian would not only fall in the latter categories because of race in LGBTTIQ communities, but also fall in the latter categories in mainstream Canadian society because of heterosexism and homophobia. Evelyn Huang (1992) in looking at Chinese Canadian experiences, also found that the racial make up of an individual is used to determine individual as well as group ability to access participation and/or categorization within a type of mould.

Eric C. Wat (2002) in looking at the history of North American gay East Asian culture, found that prior to the establishment of mainstream LGBTTIQ organizations and legal protection by reason of human rights legislation and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, 1982 decisions by the courts, social segregation along racial lines was manifested primarily in bars, where Asians, First Nations, Blacks or those deemed others were subjected to differential treatment. Gay East Asians in the LGBTTIQ communities were generally not seen as individuals, but only as part of a culture of otherness, devoid of personalized identity (Eng, 1996). David Eng (1996) states that this creates an invisibility about individuality and racial identity for gay East Asians in North America.

Invisibility of racial identity is not unique to the gay East Asian experience and has been the subject of a wider literature that critically analyzes the categorization and stereotyping of Asians by whites. Edward Said (1978) states that western and

European perspectives of Asians have been fraught with problems of invisibility and histories with Orientalist stereotypes in which Asians (and more specifically, Asian males) are seen as feminine, weak and passive.

Whereas Said (1978) articulates an orientalist perspective that is perceived as feminine, Richard Fung's articulation of the gay East Asian extends this further through an analysis of how the feminization of the gay East Asian is portrayed in mainstream media and in LGBTTIQ communities. Fung (1996) found that mainstream LGBTTIQ portray gay East Asians in either one of two categories: the feminine lotus blossom-dragon lady or the kung fu master/ninja/samurai. Fung (1996) states that the gay East Asian is sometimes seen as dangerous, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism.

Gay Asians Toronto's (GAT, 1996) oral histories reveal how racism and homophobia for gay East Asians were manifested socially, politically and culturally in Toronto. A 2005 study in Toronto reinforced these oral histories, by documenting the more recent experiences of racism of gay East Asians in Toronto within the LGBTTIQ communities (Poon et al, 2005). According to GAT (1996), Toronto's LGBTTIQ communities reflect the dominance of whites in media, advertising and as role models. GAT reveal that the whiteness of the dominant culture is "even more exaggerated and biased" in the LGBTTIQ communities where "gay culture focuses on the white male, who is usually blonde, blue-eyed, tall, and muscular" (GAT, 1996:iii-iv). According to

Eric Wat (2002), gay East Asians have been excluded from the white model of masculinity, which essentializes the white/masculine and Asian/feminine binary.

Under this dichotomy model, gay Asians are relegated to the role of becoming 'beautiful drag queens' (Fung, 1995). Overall, gay Asians are expected to be "passive and submissive, to be obedient, docile, effeminate and smooth" (GAT, 1996:iv). The feminization of Asian men becomes naturalized and their masculinity erased is supported by research and literature in Canada and in the United States (Poon et al, 2005; Wat, 2002; Eng, 1998; Fung, 1996 and 1995). Just as the above literature helps me to tell a political story (race, sexual identity), the next section locates my childhood experiences being racialized in Malaysia.

Experiences of Differentiation in Malaysia

Barbara W. Andaya and Leonard Andaya's (2001) research into the *History of Malaysia* reveals that during British colonial rule⁴, a form of racism was instituted in Malaysia through the recruitment of foreign labour from India and China and the division of labour based on ethnicity. Their conclusions relating to the division of labour are supported by another study of Malaysia and Malay culture, which finds that under British Colonial rule, the Chinese worked primarily in tin mines and

⁴ The British colonized Malaysia in 1786.

commerce, the Indians⁵ performed manual labour in the plantations, and the Malays undertook clerical work (Spaan, Van Nerssenm, and Kohl, 2001). As such, for a period of over one hundred and seventy years, the British colonial rulers encouraged ethnic tensions and separated communities based on ethnicities in Malaysia (Emerson, 1964).

Amarjit Kaur's (2004:11) analysis of ethnic tensions in Malaysia after independence in 1957 reveals that Malay nationalists⁶ sought to transform post-colonial Malaysia into a predominantly Malay state and describe how the nationalists shaped national policies on citizenship, labour migration and rights based on Malay ideology and experiences. Souchou Yao (2003) explains how the psychological entrenchment of the dominant values that have defined the Malay subjectivity led Malaysia's nationalism to become synonymous with Malay (rather than Malaysian) culture, language and society. Finally, Eddie Tay's (2005) *Hegemony, National Allegory, Exile: The Poetry of Shirley Lim*, describes the construction of a Malaysian identity as an identity subsumed by ethnicity and race.

In summary, while the act of telling my story as a racialized and sexualized individual may appear to have intrinsic value, feminist theorists such as Joan Scott (1992) remind me of the need to acknowledge the limitations of relying upon epistemic

⁵ South Asians in Malaysia are referred to as Indians. Most arrived in Malaysia from southern India and Sri Lanka during British colonial rule.

⁶ It was the Malay intellectuals and nationalists who initiated the struggle for an independent Malaysia. Since they were the primary participants in this process, the Malay nationalists were also able to ensure that their interest were protected and maintained (Kaur, 2004).

privilege as an end in itself. Similarly, identities that may appear to offer the means of personal and collective empowerment might also, as Bannerji (1996) argues, serve to reinforce historically created categories of difference, without providing the means to ask why and how that difference has been constructed. These theorists argue that there is a need to look beyond mere experience to understand the processes that position and shape experience. It is with the benefit of this theoretical analysis that in discussing my identity as a racialized and sexualized individual, that I seek to explore how historical processes are key in the construction of my experiences and the identities which I claim. I also consider whether dominant culture reinforces a social and political hierarchy that favours whites and perpetuates racism in 'other' communities, including the LGBTTIQ communities.

The next sections of this thesis are divided into three areas, in which I articulate my experiences of (I) racism, (II) homophobia, and (III) analyze these stories through the academic literature. I draw on feminist and autoethnographic storytelling methodology to show how racism and homophobia reinforces existing hierarchies and perpetuates institutional practices of othering.

SECTION I:

Experiences of Racism: A Story of Immigration and Racialization

In 1976, Canada introduced a new Immigration Act that changed entry requirements and procedures for immigrants to Canada. These changes made it easier for potential immigrants to qualify for landed immigrant status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). The changes included the establishment of an annual global quota for the number of immigrants to Canada (as opposed to a regional or place of origin quota), admission procedures based on a first-come-first-served basis, a presumption that a person satisfying the points requirement would qualify for landed immigrant status until the quota was filled, an expanded sponsorship category, and a points system that favoured applicants from Commonwealth nations and French speaking countries (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2000). The introduction of these new measures allowed immigrants, such as my family, to qualify more easily for landed immigrant status in Canada.

On February 16, 1978, my family and I left Malaysia to immigrate to Canada. Before I start with my immigration story to Canada, let me move back in time in order to provide a historical and political context to my pre-immigrant constructs of race and identity in Malaysia. I show that I was overtly racialized in Malaysia and 'knew' my place in society. Yet the kind of racialization I experienced growing up in Malaysia

was explicit, unlike my Canadian immigration experience of racism, which was implicit.

Lisa Marie Jakubowski (1997) observes that an immigrant to Canada comes already marked with identities that play into the power structures that exist in the new country. I was marked as different from the moment I was born in 1962 as a citizen of the recently formed nation state of Malaysia, a former British colony.⁷ Historically, the country had emerged only after the division of the ethnically dominant Chinese Singapore from the ethnically dominant Malay Malaysia, following two decades of racial tension (Chakravarty and Abdul-Hakim, 2005). Within the complex hierarchies of race imposed in Malaysia by the white Portuguese, Dutch and then British colonialists⁸, covering a period of over four hundred years, (Emerson, 1964) the position of politically and socially dominant race was always occupied by whites. Through laws and social programs, the colonial state placed the ethnic Chinese in the position of preferred non-white race in employment opportunities and administrative duties above the other non-white races (such as the Malays and Indians) but below the white Europeans (Rowley and Bhopal, 2006). As a child growing up in a Chinese family in the 1960s and early 1970s, I understood race to confer a particular status and identity in Malaysian society.

⁷ Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957. At the time, Singapore was part of the independent Malaysia. In 1965, Singapore became an independent nation.

⁸ The Portuguese arrived in 1511, followed by the Dutch in 1641 and eventually the British in 1786 (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

In 1969, after a federal election in which the ruling Malay party won a slim majority and the opposition Chinese and non-Malay political parties gained substantial political ground, race riots broke out in the capital, Kuala Lumpur (Tay, 2005). Many Chinese were killed and Chinese businesses destroyed (Tay, 2005). This led the government to impose a state of emergency and develop a plan to address the long-standing ethnic tensions (Tay, 2005). In 1971, the Malaysian government instituted formal race based laws and policies in which the 'Bumiputras'⁹ were given priority over other races economically, politically and socially (Tay 2005). The laws and policies were implemented to 'right the wrongs' of one hundred and seventy years of British colonial rule that had favoured Chinese immigrants (and to a lesser extent Indian immigrants) over the majority Malays and the Indigenous people (Sewell, 2004). The laws and policies were intended to last twenty-five years, but have become so entrenched that they remain to this day a part of modern Malaysia's political, social and economical life (Sewell, 2004). Malay culture, literature, and politics came to be equated with Malaysian nationalism, at the expense of the other minority groups in Malaysian society, in particular the Chinese and Indian culture, literature and politics (Spaan, Van Nerssenm, and Kohl, 2001).

These affirmative action laws and policies, in which Malays in particular, were given priority over other races, were intended to level the playing field for all the

⁹ A term meaning "Sons of the Earth" and used only to describe those who are of Malay and/or Indigenous ancestry. All Malays and most Indigenous peoples are Muslims.

racism, but the real impact has been to institutionalize a new form of differentiation based on race (Sewell, 2004).

To the extent that one can speak of a Malaysian identity during my childhood, it was an identity subsumed by ethnicity and race. Chris Rowley and Mhinder Bhopal (2006), in discussing employment opportunities and ethnic issues in post-colonial Malaysia and Indonesia, describe ethnic segregation in terms of who got opportunities and who did not. The ethnic Malays were afforded political, social and economic opportunities because they constituted the majority racial/ethnic group in Malaysia (Rowley and Bhopal, 2006). Other ethnic groups, including the minority Chinese, were given opportunities only after all opportunities for the ethnic Malays were exhausted (Rowley and Bhopal, 2006). In this way, the race of an individual in Malaysia determined their potential for political, social and economic opportunities, and upward mobility.

As a child growing up in Malaysia, the racism I experienced was state imposed but in my social interactions, it was not overt. That is, the experience of being officially racialized influenced my daily life but there were no racial slurs or derogatory comments made about my race. I watched as Malay classmates received government assistance in the form of monthly allowances, schoolbooks, free transportation to and from school, subsidized classes and sessions for community events and first choice in employment opportunities. Malaysians of Malay origin were and continue to be

entitled to government support and assistance in schooling, business opportunities and employment contracts (Rowley and Bhopal, 2006). The income distribution policies, which were part of the Bumiputras policies promulgated in Malaysia, did improve the economic conditions of the Malay community, but at the expense of most Indians and one-third of the Chinese (Chakravarty and Abdul-Hakim, 2005).

Within the context of Malaysia's policies of institutionalized affirmative action since 1971, the Chinese were marked as being inferior to the Malays. While this differentiation based on ethnicity and race was significant enough to encourage my family to emigrate, the experience of being racialized in the Malaysian context resulted in a far lesser degree of marginalization than I was to experience as an immigrant to Canada. In principle, the policies of the Malaysian state were directed at empowering a formerly disempowered racialized group, rather than reinforcing pre-existing privilege of a dominant race. The policies were meant to bring equality to the Bumiputras and to level the playing field for all races in Malaysia, thereby correcting the racial inequality which had resulted from colonial rule. This is different from the experience of a person of colour encountering differential treatment from whites in Canada, who have historically assumed the dominant role based on racial hierarchies that place all races beneath whites (Li, 1998).

Having described my experiences of differential treatment growing up in Malaysia, I now move forward to the time when my family and I immigrated to

Canada. At the time, I was a sixteen year old boy with limited experience in dealing with bureaucrats, government officials and whites. After a thirty-six hour plane flight, we disembarked and were directed by immigration personnel to enter a room and wait to be called. There were insufficient chairs, leaving many of us to stand against the walls, waiting for our turn to be called. My family and I stood for about an hour, after which we were finally called by a white male immigration officer.

While we remained standing, the officer began to question my father. Realizing that my father and mother did not have facility in English, the officer turned to me as a possible translator. I had no choice but to translate the very private and personal details demanded by the immigration officer. The questioning was done in a public space so that the information was audible to others in the room in two languages. For my father as the head of a Chinese family, to have such personal details discussed in a public forum and to be so questioned through me, his son, as translator and mediator, was a deeply humiliating and shaming experience. The private details of how much my father earned, how much money we had with us, whether we had planned where we were going to live, and what provisions were made for accommodation became public information in the context of the Canadian immigration process. The officer, addressing my father through me, bluntly stated, "Canadian society does not encourage over-crowding in housing", and "This is a developed country with established rules and regulations." Interestingly, Peter Ward (1990) stated that white

Canadians made assumptions and generalizations about early nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese in Canada. These included that the Chinese were unclean, had bad personal hygiene, were physically offensive and foul smelling, and thrived in over-crowded housing (Ward, 1990).

Through this experience, a message of enormous significance was relayed to my family. We began to understand the hierarchies of power and race in this new country. The discussion had taken place prior to any confirmation of our status as landed immigrants. Accordingly, we experienced this exchange from a position of powerlessness where we were seeking an approval from an immigration officer with apparent discretion to determine our right to be allowed or denied entry and landed immigrant status. Culturally, both my father and I had borne the shame for our whole family. My father had lost face by being unable to conduct the interview and by being reliant upon his adolescent son to convey personal family details to a government official. I had been forced to speak on behalf of the family without an opportunity for my father to choose and to be entrusted with private information about my father's and my family's financial circumstances. Furthermore, the officer's reference to 'overcrowding' played upon one of the more offensive stereotypes of the Chinese in Canada as an unclean and decadent race (Li, 1998). This racialization of the Chinese was deeply alien to us as Malaysians, and was an aspersion that shamed us deeply. Furthermore, according to previously described literary researchers into the history of

the Chinese in Malaysia, the racialization that the non-Malays in Malaysia experienced were never overt, but systemic and institutionalized.

Implicit in the immigration officer's assertion that Canada was a developed country with rules and regulations was that we were from a less civilized country and seemingly of a less civilized race. 'Canadian society' was referred to as something to which we did not belong and which we did not appear worthy to be a part of. That there would be 'rules and regulations' to govern the civilizing process that we would need to subject ourselves, seemed beyond doubt. The assumptions of the immigration officer reflect a 1910 Canadian government document which outlined that the Chinese immigrants of the nineteen and early twentieth centuries were considered unassimilable because they were non-white, and had different customs and ideas from white Canada (Manpower and Immigration Canada, 1974b).

In this respect, race as a criteria for immigration was made as explicit as it had been ninety-six years earlier under the xenophobic legal category in Section 38 (c) of the *Immigration Act* of 1910 (Jakubowski, 1997). According to Jakubowski (1997:16), this section of the Act created a class of immigrants (including the early Chinese immigrants) considered undesirable, including those "deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life, methods of holding property and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian Citizenship within a reasonable time after their entry".

Notably, this section of the Immigration Act, even after modification in 1952, provided wide discretions to immigration officers to prohibit or limit eligible persons from entry into Canada (Jakubowski, 1997).

Although the immigration officer acted under a law and policy that notionally rejected the earlier white Canada policies, the same discretionary matters that the officer chose to bring to our attention suggest that race and racism, and the racializing of the coloured immigrant (James, 1996), continued to play a role in immigration practices in 1978. Canadian immigration practice cannot eliminate deeply held and entrenched racist and colonialist ideology (Simmons, 1998).

The administrative and legal process of 'landing' was completed when our passports were stamped with the date of arrival and the words 'landed immigrant approved.' The officer then told my father, again looking at me as the translator, that my family was now permitted to reside in Canada, but that we could not depend on the government for financial assistance for the next seven years, and that we needed to ensure that we did not cramp ourselves with others in a one-bedroom apartment. Just as Carl James (1996) has noted that people of colour learn about racism when they come to Canada, my experience of dealing with the immigration officer taught me about Canadian racism and my 'place' in Canada.

As a sixteen year old boy, how was I to make sense of this awkward experience of being pushed into the forefront to assume the role of child-interpreter for my

family? How was I to make sense of the bureaucratic processes and understand the complexities when addressed in a manner that assumed my family and I were at risk of engaging in undesirable and deviant behaviour? The immigration officer appeared to assume that as immigrants of colour, my family were inferior to him and would behave in a manner that was typical of 'others' who looked like my family (Roy, 2003). He embarrassed us and made us feel small and insignificant. He established a framework in which I understood that we were considered to be less than him and that he and other white Canadians would represent the authority to which we would need to conform without question. This was in contrast to my experiences of growing up as a middle class citizen in Malaysia, with the privileges of economic power and wealth.

In order to further understand the assumptions made about immigrants by the immigration officer, I now turn to the historical development of Canada's immigration systems and the impact of these systems on immigrants of colour.

SECTION II:

Experiences of Racism: The Canadian Immigrant Historical Context

In seeking to understand the connection between the role of race in colonial Malaysia and the role of race in multicultural Canada, it is important to examine how both experiences illustrate how racism and racialization are more than an individual personal experience (Bannerji, 1996).

The immigrant officer was in a position to exercise his authority to ask questions that fell within the legitimate ambit of his role (to determine that my family had the means to support itself or to be supported financially). However, the way in which he exercised his authority revealed something about how the Canadian border was being regulated. I suggest that consistent with Jakubowski's (1997) analysis, racism manifested itself in the immigration officer's authority to control my family's entry, based upon assumptions and stereotypes about our potential to assimilate to dominant cultural and social practices. I further suggest that at this point of entry, the hierarchies of 'white' insider and 'coloured' outsider were implicitly and firmly established. They were established at a time when my family was extremely vulnerable to the exercise of state authority (that is, subject to the discretion of the officer to determine our eligibility or otherwise for landed status). Furthermore, by assuming that we would be living in a one bedroom apartment, the officer made assumptions about the kind of people/immigrants we were.

The positions of racial dominance and subordination experienced at the point of entry into Canada were reinforced by my family's prior experience of colonialism in Malaysia, where all non-white races were presumed, on the basis of colour alone, to be inferior to and under the control of a dominant white ruling class (Emerson, 1964). Colonialism is the context or entry point that helps me to explore how my initial experience with the immigration officer was not an isolated experience. Himani Bannerji (1996:53) states that colonialism is the starting point to look at the social relations and cultural forms, which characterize relations between so called visible minorities and the state. For Bannerji (1996), the category of 'visible minority' is constructed in Canada by the multicultural policies of the state. The category of 'visible minority' and the ideology of multiculturalism, according to Bannerji (1996), are each used by the state to seek to provide an ideology of a pluralist single nation. In this sense, she sees the category of 'visible minority' as being incidental to the predominant political and ideological debates that only include difference between the English and French Canada (Bannerji, 1996). It is through colonialism that an unspoken hierarchy is established throughout the colonized world. Whites, the race that dominated the globe economically, politically and socially through colonization, reinforced racial hierarchy wherever they colonized (Ang, 2001). Peter Li (1998) states that, while it may be unclear who is at the bottom of the hierarchies of power in Canada, it is clear that whites are at the top.

In seeking to understand how race and identity for an East Asian immigrant is constructed as inferior and different, it is essential to understand the history of Chinese and East Asian immigration to Canada and the role of the state in creating and perpetuating not only racist immigration policies, but also in racializing particular groups of persons based on their place of origin or colour. I now move on to look at how race has and continues to play a part in Canadian immigration policies.

Racism: Canadian Immigration Policy

Canada's immigration policy has historically been one in which race played a part in determining which types of immigrants could become citizens and which ones remain outsiders (Kelly & Trebilcock, 2000:3). While immigration policies continued to evolve and develop from 1858 to 1967, the underlying constructs of race and the assumption of an 'us' and 'them' prevailed. It is useful in the context of understanding how racism is complicit in the construction of experience and identity to review how Canada's immigration policies have historically marginalized non-white immigrants, especially those of Chinese origin.

According to Peter Li (1998), when Chinese immigrants first arrived in Canada in the 1860s, assumptions about race and resulting stereotyping were based on European theories and accounts of European visitors to China. In her work on Vancouver's late nineteenth century Chinatown, Kay Anderson (1991), states that the concept of the

Chinese revealed the categories and consequences of white European (Canadian) cultural hegemony, which revealed more about the insider (whites) than it did the outsider (non-whites).

Early twentieth century Canadian immigration policy is probably best summarized by a 1910 federal government report that stated:

The policy of the Department (of Interior) at the present time is to encourage the immigration of farmers, farm labourers, and female domestic servants from the United States, the British Isles, and certain Northern European countries, namely France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. On the other hand, it is the policy of the Department to do all in its power to keep out of the country undesirables ... those belonging to nationalities unlikely to assimilate and who consequently prevent the building of a united nation of people of similar customs and ideas. (Manpower and Immigration Canada, 1974b: 9-10)

The above statement evidences an immigration policy under which immigrants 'belonging to nationalities unlikely to assimilate' were assumed to be those who were non-Whites (Li, 1998). White immigrants, regardless of when they immigrated to Canada or from which European ethnicity, became invisible in Canada, while others remained immigrants generations later (Bannerji, 1996).

In 1923, the federal Parliament passed the Chinese Immigration Act, a comprehensive Act to exclude Chinese from entering Canada, control those in the country, and legalize the inferior status of those already in the country (Tan & Roy, 1985). While Canada continued to fund promotion of and even subsidize emigration of the 'preferred' type from Great Britain, continental Europe and the United States, it limited and/or stopped emigration from other parts of the world (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2000).

The small Chinese population in Canada in the early twentieth century faced overt racism, hostility and limited employment opportunities (Roy, 2003). On top of these social hostilities, their housing was segregated from other communities (Roy, 2003). Eventually, the Chinese immigrants became a predominantly male community, who lived in cramped housing with poor sanitation and amenities (Roy, 2003). It is within the context of this historically virulent and overt racism, accepted and fostered by the state, that the shaming effect of the immigration officer's reference to accommodation arrangements when processing my family's immigration application in 1978 needs to be understood. In stereotyping my family, the officer drew upon the stereotypes of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese bachelor living arrangements in Canada (Li, 1998). The stereotype was the early Chinese immigrant pioneers wanted to live in cramped housing, rather than the effects of poverty, imperialism and impose ostracization.

The 'whites only' Canadian immigration policy that existed until 1962 was deeply rooted in the mid-nineteenth century mentality of racial hierarchy (Jakubowski, 1997). Yet, after Canada abandoned this 'whites only' policy, the immigration practices of bureaucrats and officers continued to reinforce stereotyping and discrimination based on race (Jakubowski, 1997).

Even after the overhaul of immigration laws and policies in 1967, stereotyping and the assumption that the Chinese were inherently incapable of assimilation

continued to underlie the ostensibly 'neutral' points system (Li, 1998; Roy, 2003). The language used in the policies included coded messages of racism, so that the general Canadian public understood the phrase 'most likely to assimilate' to mean 'people who looked white' (Li, 2003). The phrase also mandates a culture of whiteness by giving a preference to immigrants whose cultural practices are more in line with 'Canadian' (white) culture. Jakubowski (1997) describes how immigration law, policy and practice since 1910 have always retained a 'personal suitability' category, which has been used to exclude individuals based on race, or to confer discretion for individual officers to consider race as a factor in immigration decisions. For example, Jakubowski refers to section 11(3) of the Immigration Regulations, which grants immigration officers the discretion (whether or not a person achieves the prescribed number of units) to reject an application if the unit rating "does not accurately reflect an immigrant's chances of becoming successfully established in Canada" (1997:21). While officially Canada's immigration policies have been non-discriminatory since 1967 (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2000), there remains sufficient discretion both in government policy (in terms of where to locate immigration offices internationally) and in individual immigration officers (using the 'personal suitability' category), to allow for race to be used to determine eligibility for entry (Jakubowski, 1997). Racist immigration practices have perpetuated a subordinate class of citizens through institutional practices (Simmons, 1998).

To maintain a subordinate class of citizens, stereotypes are based on simplification, generalization and the denial of individual variability (Tator, Henry & Mattis, 1998). This creates a system of social typecasting and results in the othering of certain groups from the white mainstream (Tator, Henry & Mattis, 1998). Frances Henry, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis and Tim Rees (1995) point out that 'everyday racism' is experienced by people of colour in their interactions with white people, manifesting itself in ways that may be difficult to objectively identify, such as glances, gestures, physical movement and eye contact. Dominant cultures use racism in ways that can be so subtle that in some cases, the objects of the racism are unaware of it (Li, 2003). In the context of the white immigration officer's processing of my family as landed immigrants, there is much that the white observer would find unremarkable. The same story could be construed in terms of a duly authorized immigration officer implementing procedures based upon established laws and practices that represents Canada's non-discriminatory immigration policies. Both my father, as a non-English speaking person at that time and I, as a young Chinese-Malaysian adolescent newly arrived in Canada, would have found it difficult at the time to identify grounds upon which we had been treated unequally or to understand that we were being racialized and othered. Yet we knew instinctively that our race was a factor in the treatment and comments made by the officer.

The experience of being racialized by the immigration system of a predominantly white country is not unique to Canada. According to Philomena Essed (1991), whites in the Netherlands were privileged and merely 'tolerated' others. She states that whites maintained this privilege by ensuring that the 'other' races conformed to the established norms and values of the dominant culture. Since Canada was established by white Europeans who shared similar ideas about non-whites, Essed's (1991) comments similarly apply to the experiences of non-whites in Canada. The relationship between the Canadian government, its bureaucracy (including the immigration department) and visible/racial minorities is a tenuous one in which the visible/racial minority is asked for input in policy direction and then excluded from the decision-making process (Bannerji, 1996). In this way, racism is reinforced through social and political control with persons of colour and immigrants (of colour) placed in a lower status than whites, and decisions about the lives of persons of colour and immigrants (of colour) made by whites (Ang, 2001; Bannerji, 2000). It is in this way that autoethnographic storytelling methodology provides a specific example of reflexivity (Humphries, 2005), by encouraging the reader to ask whether immigration policy as experienced might be different from the ideological representation of immigration policy as neutral and not based on race. However, by also explicitly discussing race and differential power relations, I acknowledge the role of privilege (Scott, 1992) so that the conditions that lead to racialization of immigrants are

discussed. The story should evidence or reveal the processes that lead to dominance and oppression so as to avoid the story reproducing systems of dominance and oppression (Scott, 1992).

In summary, given the racist conditions under which the early Chinese arrived in Canada, it is not surprising that my immigration experience in 1978 was one marked by generalizations and stereotypes about what Chinese immigrants were like and how Chinese immigrants would act in Canada. For someone who is Chinese and from a country such as Malaysia, which is perceived as a less developed country, assumptions were made about me and about my family based on historical colonial perceptions of non-whites, and in particular Chinese.

In the next section, I address the category of 'social deviants' in Canadian immigration policies and how this impact negatively on LGBTTIQ-identified people (see footnote #1).

SECTION III

Sexual Identity Context: Sexuality and Marginalization

It is important for this paper to draw attention to immigration practices that discriminated against those who were categorized by officials as sexual minorities – LGBTTIQ. Canadian immigration policies initially identified ‘homosexuals’ as undesirable migrants under the category of ‘social deviants’ (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2000). In 1952, ‘homosexuals’ were expressly listed in Canadian Immigration policies as a category of undesirables (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2000). It was another twenty-four years later before the category of ‘homosexuals’ was removed from the Immigration Act (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2000). In this way, Canadian immigration policy, either explicitly or implicitly, created a hierarchy in which race and sexuality reinforced the ideal of a preferred white heterosexual immigrant. There was no room at the top for non-whites, and especially non-whites who were considered social deviants, such as homosexuals. This was coded language as stated by Peter Li (2003) to mean white heterosexual culture. As stated by Jakubowski (1997), while officially the Canadian immigration policies and procedures were non-discriminatory, immigration officers continued to have discretionary powers that ensured an individual’s ‘suitability’ to ‘adapt successfully’ in Canada.

In the context of immigration policies that excluded on the basis of sexual identity, I further explore white dominance and this time in relation to LGBTTIQ communities, ensuring that racialized LGBTTIQ continue to remain apart.

Canadian LGBTTIQ Rights & 'Gendered' Identity

My arrival in Canada coincided with an era of significant advancement in the recognition by the state of the rights of some sexual minorities. In her work on *Diversity and Identity in the Non-Profit Sector: Lessons from LGBT¹⁰ organizing in Toronto*, Miriam Smith (2005) identifies the LGBT community organizing in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s with networks of LGBT emerging in the era of sexual freedom of the 1960s. Toronto was the site of important human rights struggles around sexual freedom and gay rights in the 1970s and early 1980s, including what has come to be known as the 1981 Bathhouse Raids. During those raids, the Toronto police raided four gay bathhouses in Toronto and arrested over three hundred men (Smith, 2005). 1981 was also the year in which indecency charges were laid against Toronto's only gay newspaper, *The Body Politic*, which after long and costly court battles, led to the paper being censored (Smith, 2005).

By the early 2000s there had been significant progress in the recognition by the courts and all levels of government in Canada of the formal equality rights of lesbians

¹⁰ In the following sections, I use different terms such as 'lesbian and gay' or homosexual or LGBT to describe LGBTTIQ. In part this is intentional to show that the LGBTTIQ communities were not always inclusive and also to acknowledge that the referenced author described the LGBTTIQ communities at that particular time in that particular way.

and gays, and Toronto saw important political mobilization in the LGBTTIQ communities (Rayside, 1998). While some within the LGBBTIQ communities benefited from the successes of such political mobilization, not all benefited equally. The gains appeared in large part to be more accessible to and of greater benefit to whites and more specifically, gay white men. Tim McCaskell (2005), a long time Toronto advocate for anti-oppression and equity for LGBT rights, acknowledges that LGBT who also belong to visible, cultural or faith minorities, or who are new immigrants or have disabilities, may be less likely to access or to benefit from formal equality rights.

An example of how dominant social constructs maintain and reinforce white superiority can be found in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon's (2001) book *Who's Who in Lesbian and Gay History*. David Rayside coordinated the Canadian biographical entries, in which all entries were of white Canadian lesbians and gay men. The exclusion of non-white LGBTTIQ community members from those entries marked a failure to reflect the multicultural and diverse nature of the LGBTTIQ communities at that time, and reinforced the perception that LGBTTIQ communities and their leaders are white.

The early years of lesbian and gay movements in Toronto were also the years when bars were the locations in which most lesbians and gays socialized and politicized (Warner, 2002). Yet there was an unspoken segregation whereby particular bars became primarily places for Asians, First Nations, Blacks or those deemed others

(Cho, 2001). Mainstream gay bars and the 'other' bars were clearly delineated, especially for gay East Asians (Wat, 2002)¹¹. Many of these racially segregated gay bars became identified as racialized gay bars (Asian gay bar or Black gay bar), while a white gay bar was *just* a gay bar (Bérubé, 2001:238)¹². It is within this racialized and segregated gay world that I came out as a gay man.

While LGBTTIQ in Canada have made significant political gains by obtaining visibility and formal equality rights over the last twenty-five years, non-white LGBTTIQ, and in particular, non-white gay men, continue to experience racism. The exclusion of non-white voices and non-whites in social settings (e.g., in gay bars) reinforces the marginalization experienced by non-whites in heterosexual Canadian society.

I now move into the development of my sexual identity as a gay East Asian in Toronto. Here, the layers of race and sexuality become more complex and non-linear. Within the heterosexual East Asian communities in Toronto, my sexual identity has been greatly marginalized. This marginalization is experienced in ways ranging from tolerance of my difference to outright banishment from my family. Often I experience marginalization through silence or denial – the refusal by family and friends to acknowledge or discuss my 'social deviant' sexuality. By their acts of denial or silence,

¹¹ It should be noted that some East Asian literature referenced in this section such as Wat are from American sources. This is because the experiences of gay East Asians in the U.S. and Canada were somewhat similar and also because of the limited Canadian resources available from gay East Asian writers.

¹² While Bérubé's work is predominantly in an American context, the concepts and ideology that he refers to can be generalized to include the Canadian experience.

I am denied the identity I have assumed (Cho, 2001). Ironically, I become a visible minority with an invisible sexual identity.

Racialized Queer Space: A Story of Race and Sexual Orientation

In 1981, I began to explore my emotional and physical attraction to men. My feelings and the experience and expression of same-sex attraction were contrary to what I understood to be the expectations of East Asian and Canadian societies (Christian values, negative media coverage and no positive role models); yet the desire to locate others like me (gay, oppressed, marginalized) was overwhelming (Fung, 1995). Through the mass media and classified advertisements in newspapers, I learned of the existence of a gay counter-culture in downtown Toronto, centered on gay bars, saunas and bathhouses. This was also the time, in the early 1980s, when the police were cracking down on 'deviant' social behaviours, by raiding gay bathhouses and filing charges against the proprietors of the gay newspaper, *The Body Politic* (Smith, 2005).

My first visit to a gay bar took place in the summer of 1981, in a bar on St. Joseph's Street in downtown Toronto. My expectation in venturing out to a gay bar was that I would find a safe place within which to explore my sexuality. At the most basic level, my understanding of a safe place for a gay male was a place free from the threat of physical violence (gay bashing was a real fear). I also expected a place where

my sexuality would not be considered deviant. My expectations had been shaped by magazines and publications freely available in Toronto's 'gay village' that targeted a gay audience and the gay consumer. They seemingly promised a place of sexual liberation for all, including me. They seemingly promised a place where I could be myself and not encounter the marginalization that I experienced elsewhere. The publications seemed to me to be inclusive and I was not alerted to the fact that they might be promoting white only spaces. However, these publications were all targeted at a white gay reader.

Once inside the bar, my excitement turned to disappointment as I learned that my 'type', my 'Asianness', was not attractive or interesting to the other patrons of the bar. I was ignored, pushed to the back and made to feel unwelcome by most of the other patrons. The only people who showed any interest in me were men who were twenty to forty years my senior. In time, I would learn that this had nothing to do with me, and everything to do with my race and what it represented for these older men. My smooth, soft skin was my calling card to same-sex male attraction. My almond-shaped eyes; my black hair and my skin colouring were my credentials of acceptance into a sub-culture within the gay white community in which race and sex were commodified.

The older gay white men would 'cruise' (a term used when gay men seek other gay men for sexual partners) while most Asians stood back, lined up against the wall

like beauty pageant queens waiting to be chosen (Cho, 2001; Fung, 1995). The Asian clients, as described by Song Cho (2001) and Richard Fung (1995), were positioned as objects of desire, to be selected or rejected, but not permitted to be an active part of that transaction. Asians rarely had the power to choose and would always be the one chosen (Cho, 2001:2). It is not a large leap to see this transaction as a near complete objectification and commodification of the Asian as 'other'. That the Asian object is treated in these circumstances by white men as 'other' and possibly as less human (or less than human) is illustrated by the demeaning and dehumanizing analogy of the Asian object to food groups. Wayne Yung (1995:14) refers to this by quoting an oft repeated joke in bars in the 1990s: "What do you call an Asian who likes white guys? Potato queen. What do you call a white guy who likes Asians? Rice queen. What do you call a white guy who likes other white guys? Normal". The minority gets named first because it is the minority that requires an explanation (McCaskell, 1998). Also significant in the process of othering is that multiple different races are subsumed by the identity 'Asian'. This is not a category or identity that I choose, but is invariably one with which I am identified within the white LGBTTIQ communities (I discuss this point further in the next section).

Gay East Asians share problems of invisibility specific to Western histories fraught with Orientalist stereotypes (Eng, 1996; Said, 1978). A colonial world where the power privileges of white males are absolute, are replicated and ensured by the

workings of an ideological system through the inheritance of opportunity and rights according to race (white) and sexuality (straight male) (Eng, 1996). Racialized and gendered stereotypes that are pervasive in heterosexual communities are duplicated to disfigure representations of East Asian LGBT (Fung, 1996). I learned over time that other gay East Asian men, as well as those labeled 'other' in the world of same-sex attraction, also experienced these processes of exclusion (Cho, 2001). Gay East Asians would never be seen as part of dominant culture, but only included on certain terms that were dictated and controlled by segments of the dominant culture (Fung, 1995).

My coming out as a gay man and learning about the LGBTTIQ community reinforced the lessons I had learned through my immigration experience with the immigration officer. The location of immigrants of colour in society is governed by a racial hierarchy (Roy, 1999). Similarly, race dictates how and where I exist within LGBTTIQ spaces. The racialization of gay men of colour and their relegation to specific places and spaces within Toronto's gay community suggests that even within a sexually marginalized community, race is instrumental in the construction of identity and creates and reinforces hierarchies within the sexually marginalized communities. While my coming out opened doors to a new world of sexual identity, this new world was one in which there existed a familiar hierarchy of race, with whites at the top (Li, 1998). I was stamped with an identity not of my choosing (Asian) and stereotyped as a subordinate and a passive object of sexual gratification.

For me, legal guarantees of formal equality, whether in mainstream heterosexual society or in the more marginalized LGBTTIQ communities, were largely irrelevant, as my lived reality was that whites retained and reinforced their positions of privilege and power at the expense of non-whites. Dominant white culture worked against me as an East Asian as well as a gay man. In the next section, I look further into how identity is constructed and generalized for many gay East Asian males, and how gay white males are able to reinforce their privilege within the LGBTTIQ communities.

The Racialized & Sexualized Gay East Asian

A significant feature of white-dominated societies such as Canada is the fact that the superiority of (white) North American culture is taken for granted (Essed, 1991). Edward Said (1978) describes the process of 'Orientalism' as regularizing the dominant thinking processes, vision and ideology based upon assumptions about those who are from the east of Europe (the Orient). All Asian communities, regardless of their race, ethnicity and culture, are assumed to be a homogenous group of people who are weak and feminine (Said, 1978). This stereotype of multiple cultures and national boundaries creates an 'artificial and imagined' reality of peoples, who are then dominated and controlled (Said, 1978).

"I am an Oriental ...", explains a disrobed Song to the investigating judge in David Henry Hwang's (1988) *M. Butterfly*, "... and being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man." Hwang's 1988 Broadway Tony Award-winning play explored one of the greatest concerns for many gay East Asian artists: the pervasive racialized stereotype of the East Asian man as an emasculated male (Aguilar-San Juan, 1994). Fung (1994:45) states that, "...if Asian men have no sexuality, how can we have homosexuality". East Asians are collectively seen as passive and undersexed (Fung, 1996). Fung's (1996:187) review of North American gay male pornography concluded that in the vast majority of images, "Asians are always assigned the role of bottom; Asian and anus are conflated".

The Asian man acts the role of the mythologized geisha or 'the good wife' as fantasized in the mail-order bride business. The 'house-boy' is one of the most persistent white fantasies about Asian men. ... White men who for various reasons, especially age, are deemed unattractive in their own countries, suddenly find themselves elevated and desired. (Fung, 1996:188-9)

The desexualized image of East Asian men has also seriously affected relationships between gay East Asian men. This can lead gay East Asian men to be unable to see each other beyond the terms of platonic friendship, or unable to consider each other as lovers (Fung, 1996). In this way, racism can be seen to become internalized within the gay East Asian male community. By accepting and acting out the stereotypical roles, the gay East Asian male both perpetuates the stereotypes and internally acts out on the ideology that is based upon acceptance of his own racial inferiority.

East Asian LGBTIQ encounter problems of invisibility that arise from unique histories fraught with 'Orientalist stereotypes', as described by Edward Said (1978). In 1996, Gay Asians Toronto (GAT) published a book that included a series of interviews with gay East Asians in Toronto. GAT's (1996) oral histories speak of the impact of racism and homophobia in shaping the experience of gay East Asians in Toronto. According to GAT (1996), mainstream gay communities reflect the dominance of whites in media, advertising and in the selection of their queer role models. GAT (1996:iii) states that the whiteness of the dominant culture is "even more exaggerated and biased" in the gay white communities where "gay culture focuses on the white male, who is usually blonde, blue-eyed, tall, and muscular" and "we come to believe that this is the look we should all be seeking (as an ideal love interest and as an ideal gay man)" (GAT, 1996:iv). This can be contrasted with the idealized but highly ideological physical stereotype of the emasculated East Asian male as discussed above by Richard Fung (1994). Gay white culture in Toronto also includes the racialization of Asians and other minorities in the drag scene, in which Asians are thought to make beautiful drag queens. Overall, gay Asians are expected to be "passive and submissive, to be obedient, docile, effeminate and smooth" (GAT, 1996:iv).

As already noted, this type of Orientalist discourse constructs Asian as hyper-feminine, passive, eroticized objects of white (heterosexual) male desire (Lee,

1996:118). In Western cultures, concepts and gender roles associated with masculinity and femininity promote the domination of males over females and reinforce the identification of maleness with power (Blumenfeld, 1992:24). Ling (1997:314) suggests that passive and subservient images of Asians are tightly associated with the history of (North) American imperialism in Asia, stating that:

The traditional Western concept of masculinity (which) values men as embodiments of civilization, rationality, and aggressiveness and devalues women as embodiments of primitiveness, emotion, and passivity, was extended to account for the West's sense of economic and political superiority over Asia by projecting the latter as a diametrically opposed feminine Other.

The issue of Asian exoticism and eroticism, the so-called 'Rice Queen/King' or 'Curry Queen/King' exoticism of race, sees only colour and culture instead of individuality and personal truth (Lim-Hing, 2000). Exoticism perpetuates racial stereotypes and draws a 'locked box' (Ling, 1997) around the person. Stereotyping is used as a tool for social control, while exoticism reflects and reinforces a hierarchy of power (Lim-Hing, 2000). Exoticism and the resulting stereotypes also result in the construction of the single monolithic identity, that of 'Asian' (Lim-Hing, 2000). Not only is the Asian identity homogenized, but within the hierarchy of race, the corollary of the supremacy of white beauty is the ugliness of all non-whites (Lim-Hing, 2000). In some ways, lesbian and gay Asians often end up challenging societal forces that are meant to control appearances and behaviours, and by doing so challenge their racialized queer place in society (Lee, 1996).

White men with a fascination with Asian 'otherness' and Asian 'mystique', sometimes perceive this as a confirmation of their progressive politics (Wat, 1996). However, that desire, when based on fantasies and stereotypes of otherness, mystique and/or passivity, shares the same source as a bigot's hatred (Wat, 1996). Both reaffirm the racial hegemony that is imposed on all people of colour (Wat, 1996).

Through these various and persistent stereotypical images of Asian men in the popular imagination, the feminization of Asian men becomes naturalized and their masculinity erased (Wat, 2002). Asians have been and continue to be largely absent from the images produced by both the political and the commercial sectors of the mainstream LGBT communities (Fung, 1996). Other people's rejection (or fetishization) of Asian men according to the established hierarchies and the hegemonic image of the white man are experiences of oppression (Fung, 1996).

Gay East Asians are excluded from the white model of masculinity, which "naturalizes the white/masculine and Asian/feminine binary" (Wat, 2002:83). This binary reinforces the dependency of gay Asian men on their white counterparts for affirmation, support and participation (Wat, 2002). In the context of gay immigration, a common stereotype involves the white Canadian gay male sponsoring the gay East Asian immigrant to Canada as his common law spouse or partner. This superimposes additional layers of power imbalances upon the masculine/feminine binary (Cho, 2001). These may include economic dependency

and the implicit understanding that the sponsored gay East Asian immigrant is reliant upon the benevolence of the white sponsor (Cho, 2001). This reinforces colonial stereotypes of the superior white colonialist bringing civilization to the developing or 'third' world immigrant (Ang, 2001).

What then of the public sphere, in which LGBTTIQ seek to assert formal equality rights and to understand and confront discrimination and oppression by dominant groups? Whiteness, including that within the LGBTTIQ communities, pushes non-whites to choose between our identities by keeping the movement predominantly white. June Yee and Gary Dumbrill (2003) found that even in Canadian social work practices which generally promoted a liberal and progressive view of equity and equality, issues around sexual orientation that are supposedly colour-blind (and sex neutral and classless) was in fact a politics of race (and gender and class). The dominant discourse assumes, without ever having to say it, that gay must equal white (and male and economically secure); that is, it assumes white (and male and middle-class) as the default categories that remain once one discounts those who, as gay people, must continually and primarily deal with racism (and sexism and class oppression) (Bérubé, 2001).

In this way, the purported liberal and progressive leaning of Toronto LGBTTIQ politics comes to be dominated by causes that reflect the interest of white middle class LGBTTIQ communities. This has implications in particular for LGBTTIQ immigrants

of colour whose experiences of sexual oppression, racism and powerlessness are likely to be very different from those of white middle class LGBTTIQ. The same causes championed by the dominant group can also divert critical community resources (financial and human) away from focusing on racism within the LGBTTIQ communities.

There is a view of gay East Asians as "Casper the Ghost syndrome: they are seen as either white or as invisible" (Aguilar-San Juan, 1994:2). There is no middle ground. Asians can either choose to be included as part of dominant group and therefore do not have a voice of dissention, or can choose not to be a part of the dominant group but are not seen as part of the discourse of race and racism in which it is predominantly a black-white binary (Bérubé, 2001). In gay culture, rarely is 'race' explicitly discussed as anything other than Black culture in the U.S. (Bérubé, 2001:240)¹³.

Furthermore the LGBTTIQ communities are often referred to as the 'gay community' and the 'gay movement' (McCaskell, 2005). Inherent in this gendered language is an assumption that refers mainly to the dominant white gay able-bodied male communities. Whiteness in the LGBTTIQ communities can be seen in the many whitening practices that structure everyday life and the politics that camouflages the unquestioned assumptions and unearned privileges of gay whiteness (Bérubé, 2001).

¹³ Bérubé's American view of gay culture is transferable to a Canadian experience, where gay Canadian culture views race in singular races and not multiple-racial or multi-cultural.

Gay white males are also marked by other privileges such as being male, economically privileged, able-bodied, having accessibility into most social situations without repercussions and being able to wear the colours of the dominant group (heterosexual white males) (Cho, 2001).

bell hooks (1992) suggests that marginalized groups, marked as other, can be seduced by the emphasis and commodification of otherness, because it offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation. Submitting ourselves to this seduction leaves a problematic racialized sexual ideology unchallenged and reinforces our otherness (Wat, 2002). Further, if otherness incorporates stereotypes of the exotic and emasculated gay East Asian male, then otherness becomes deeply imbued with racist ideology. The attempt by whites to make experiences of homophobic aggression synonymous with racial oppression deflects attention away from the particular dual dilemma that non-white lesbian and gay people face of racism and homophobia (hooks, 2000).

It is not only from within the LGBTTIQ communities that LGBTIQ East Asians must negotiate unequal power relations and experiences of othering. Maurice Poon et al (2005) conducted a survey of gay East Asians in Toronto and found that many believed that the heterosexual East Asian communities do not generally have a clear understanding of LGBTTIQ issues. Many see LGBT (see footnote #9) as a social choice, not a biological one (Kelly, 2001). While members of an East Asian family may accept

an immediate family member who is an 'out' LGBTIQ, they may be less accepting of the LGBTTIQ community or issues (Kelly, 2001). Traditional East Asian approaches to sexuality shaped by patriarchy, hierarchy and religion lead to the assumption that lesbian, gay, trans or bisexuality happens in the other, in the white culture; and is not part of an East Asian construct (Fung, 1996). The impact of this is a manifestation and interpellation of separate and distinct East Asian and gay experiences (Fung 1996).

Finally, as a gay East Asian male, I continue to struggle with separateness and the experience of being othered. My experiences of being racialized, sexually racialized and gendered create a complex and shifting web of identities, including gay, gay East Asian, East Asian male, immigrant, person of colour, Malaysian-Chinese, and Chinese immigrant. As such, when I speak of a gay East Asian identity, I am also speaking of multiple layers that can both connect me with and disconnect me from other communities. At the same time, I operate within a North American context of identity politics that does not account for the complexities of sexual and ethnic identities (Eng and Fujikane, 1998). I am forced to choose a single one-dimensional identity that is based on race or sexuality, but not both. Forced to choose, either way I am excluded from full participation. The result is marginalization, oppression and internalized self-hatred (Poon, Ho, Wong, Wong and Lee, 2005).

Conclusion

Traces of Asian-ness and Chinese-ness cannot be erased completely from the westernized Asian. As Homi Bhabha (1994:89) points out, “we will always be almost the same but not quite,” because we are not white. The immigrant of colour who is a citizen becomes a part of the diversity of the country in a way that a white citizen or immigrant does not (Bhabha, 1994).

In discussing power dynamics, Carl James (1996) notes that there is an unequal distribution of power, access to power and opportunities based on race, class, gender, dis/ability, and sexual orientation. James (1996) further notes that racism is rooted in the socio-economic and political histories of colonialism and oppression, and woven into the fabric of society in which oppression and racism remain and create generalizations and assumptions about whole groupings of people.

The title of this paper, “Finding Space: The Marginalization of a Gay East Asian Immigrant in Toronto’s LGBTTIQ Communities”, hints at the journey I have to undertake in order to assist me understand my place and my identity in a society where both place and identity are not always what they appear to be. Further, if place and identity are in part constructs of dominant groups, the journey and the destination become less certain. The risk of finding a place or locating an identity may reinforce rather than challenge the dominant discourse of racism and homophobia. It is therefore necessary to temper my desire to undertake that journey

with an understanding that is one in which I must be mindful of the extent to which knowledge can be the product of a dominant and oppressive discourse.

This does not mean that the process of seeking for and analyzing my own experience of searching for place and identity cannot contribute to a broader literature relating to the oppression of gay East Asian men. In this paper I have set out to add another voice in the complex area of marginalization of individuals from the gay, the East Asian and the immigrant communities, which is an under-represented voice in existing academic literature. I set out to show the links between homophobia and racism and how identity is constructed and to consider how identity is constructed by dominant groups. In doing so, I made use of storytelling and autoethnography, methodologies to explore an area of academic writing that remains underdeveloped.

I referred to the works of Razak (1998) and Scott (1992) and their discussions methodology of storytelling, which has the potential to create the conditions for political change: that is, that storytelling as a methodology should not only declare the existence and experience of racism but create the conditions where racism can be better recognized and challenged.

I also referred to the works of Magnet (2006), Humphries (2005) and Tedlock (2005) in support of the use of autoethnography, to reveal my experiences of racism, marginalization and homophobia. Humphries (2005) used autoethnographic

vignettes in order show how research was enhanced by autoethnographic detail. Magnet (2006) used autoethnographic methodology for a more introspective and critical purpose in which, a dialogue made up of multiple and 'layered' voices. Finally, Tedlock (2005) used autoethnography to reconcile the autobiographical impulse with the ethnographic impulse that transcended self-referentiality by engaging with cultural forms involved in the creation of culture.

By using personal stories, I was able to convey my experiences of 'othering' that make visible complex identities from my standpoint as a gay East Asian immigrant. In doing so, I was able weave storytelling with an autoethnographic methodology and to draw others into a collective experience in which a version of truth was demonstrated (Butler, 1997). Importantly I discussed autoethnography as being more substantive than a confessional tale.

Writing about racism and homophobia based on my own personal experiences has been challenging on multiple levels. On one hand, it allowed me to contextualize my experiences within theoretical and academic frameworks. On the other hand, the use of autoethnography has afforded me an opportunity to share personal and private memories that have long been personal demons in the form of racist and homophobic experiences.

The complex ways in which my identity has been constructed and conferred, through experience and power relationships of domination and subordination, is

multi-leveled. Identity is not usefully conceived of as being freely chosen or independent of existing power structures and societal norms. Rather, to understand how racism and homophobia have acted to shape and construct identity into simplistic binaries (gay/straight, white/Asian), it is necessary to critically look at both experience and identity. Through storytelling, my experiences become more than a record of my life; they become a reflection of how racism underpins the stories of immigrants of colour in Canada - not only from a personal perspective, but also from a historical one in which I claim space in order for my voice to be heard.

EPILOGUE:

An Evening to Remember

Analyzing stories of a new immigrant coming to Canada and then coming out in Toronto's LGBTTIQ communities as a gay East Asian male, has helped me to understand how identity and dominant constructs of race and sexuality can reproduce existing power imbalances and reinforce oppression. As a way of demonstrating the on-going struggles of being othered based on a complex history of racialized immigration and white dominance, I would like to end this paper with another personal story. Drawing on the tradition of feminist autoethnographic storytelling once more, I demonstrate how unequal social relations continue to shape and maintain white privilege, how the experience of being othered is current and alive, and that being a gay East Asian male in Toronto has been and continues to be seen as outside the established and accepted face of gay or East Asian.

On June 15, 2006, nearly three decades after my immigration to Canada, my partner and I attended a friend's dinner party in Toronto. The guests crossed a spectrum of racial identities, sexual diversity, economic background, ability and disability. On its face, the gathering might be perceived as evidencing the success of the ideology of multiculturalism and state sanctioned representations of Canada as a 'mosaic', a place where people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, experiences and perspectives share and appreciate each other's differences (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2000).

During the dinner, one conversation turned to the fact that my partner, who is white, had emigrated from Australia to Canada some four years previously. This puzzled one of the guests, who also happened to be a gay white judge. He asked me where I was from and what my status was in Canada. As the subject of the conversation had been about my partner and his immigration experience and not mine, I was initially confused by the question. I asked the judge what he meant by referring to my 'status'. Did he mean my marital status or my status of being HIV positive or negative? He replied that while he understood that my partner had immigrated to Canada, he wanted to know what my status in Canada was.

It seemed that the judge had assumed on the basis of my colour that I was not originally from Canada and/or was not Canadian. Further, my relationship with my partner failed to conform to stereotypes of mixed-race immigrant relationships, in which the white Canadian sponsors the coloured immigrant, providing economic support and cultivating a relationship of dependence. That a mixed-race relationship might be built on a different basis had proved to be either inconceivable or deeply confronting to the judge. Having identified me as 'other', his questioning was directed towards establishing a category within which I could be placed. Race had not been mentioned, but I was profoundly aware that race had become the central element of the discussion.

I was unwilling to provide an answer to the judge's question until he was willing or able to frame the question in a way that more transparently referred to the motive and the assumptions underlying the question. As stated earlier, racial stereotyping is used as a tool for social control, power hierarchy and reinforcing the dominant culture as neutral (Lim-Hing, 2000).

At play in the judge's questioning of my status were a number of complex, unspoken assumptions. Answering his question seemed to lead to entrapment. The issue of my 'status' had been raised by a white person, who by virtue of his professional occupation, already had a secure sense of his status and position in Canadian society. For the white judge, the question of status, in the context of immigration law, was possibly a morally neutral one. Conversely, for many immigrants of colour, the question is ideologically loaded and cannot be divorced from long held fear of immigration law, policy and practice as being a system of control in which race plays an integral part. How could I receive a question about my status without being reminded, as if by the immigration officer, that I am resident in Canada only if I comply with the normative standards of a post-colonial society?

A further difficulty with the line of questioning was the stereotyping of my partner and I. There seemed to be an assumption that my partner, a gay white man, had exercised his political authority as a Canadian citizen in sponsoring a non-white

dependent partner as a landed immigrant. That this act of benevolence might be bestowed by a white Canadian upon a non-white partner fits neatly into the colonial assumptions that many white men have, particularly if the sponsored partner comes from a country perceived to be a 'developing country' (Cho, 2001). My partner and I did not fit neatly into that stereotype and in this sense our story is disconcerting to those who have a fixed sense of the direction in which power should flow between different races.

Further, why had the conversation turned from my immigrant partner's immigration status to my status? I felt deeply conflicted, as refusing to answer the judge's questions was construed by the judge as evasion on my part. Why, the judge asked, was I so afraid to answer a simple question? The implication was that I, as an immigrant of colour, might be hiding something. Also implicit, was his presumption of being entitled to an answer.

There followed an excruciatingly frustrating and difficult exchange in which the judge repeatedly asked me, and I pointedly refused to answer the question, "what is your status?" The judge, in a paternalistic and irritated tone, said he was simply trying to have a 'civilized conversation'. Our hosts and other guests showed discomfort and embarrassment at the escalating tension. Several attempts were made to diffuse the situation with humour. Finally, another guest, a Thai woman¹⁴,

¹⁴ It is important to note that the only person to speak up to the judge was a woman from a racialized country. It is significant that a woman, and not a man, felt compelled to speak. Her 'voice' in attempting to mediate and also

intervened and argued that immigrants' stories are not always linear and that what may appear to the questioner to be a simple question may not lend itself to an easy answer. The judge contradicted her reasoning but eventually chose not to pursue his line of questioning further.

As Ien Ang (2001) stated in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, there is an assumption made by those who are privileged, not immigrants and never 'other-ed', that it is a right to ask an immigrant (especially an immigrant of colour) about their immigration experience and expect to be answered with honest and private details about the process, including the immigrant's current status.

The context in which this exchange took place is important. I had assumed that conversations at this dinner party, amongst a group of multiracial and sexually diverse Torontonians, would likely occur in a place where power differences would be understood, acknowledged and respected, and where there would not be attempts by one person to subordinate another on grounds of race or sex (Ang, 2001). The white judge's assertion that the line of questioning was reasonable and that my refusal to answer was irrational placed me in a space where I was reminded of the colonial ideology of civilizing the coloured races (Ang, 2001). The judge's questions zeroed in on several core aspects of assumed identity (race, sexuality, immigrant, partner in a mixed-race relationship, colonial subject, among others) and

defend could stem from the fact that she was also an immigrant, that she experienced the attack on my identity as attack on her identity. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that while this paper does not pick up on other voices, it is important to acknowledge that it was a Thai woman who came to my 'defense'.

sought to make me complicit in identifying myself as being an outsider on each count.

Implicit in the judge's questioning of my status were assumptions and presumptions about my racial identity, sexual identity and status on citizenship. The judge had assumed that I was not born in Canada, and that being the non-white with a partner who is white, I would be the one being sponsored to emigrate to Canada. At no time did the judge assume that my partner was the one being sponsored into Canada. Like the white Immigration officer who acted as 'gatekeeper of the nation' and sought to mark me with a particular identity or formal status at the time of my landing, the judge assumed this role of 'gatekeeper of the nation' and spoke from a position of authority and power. By racializing me in this way, it was made clear that I remained in a space that was separate from and subordinate to that occupied by gay white men.

The immigration officer's warning that my family and I not live in cramped quarters, and the judge's questioning of my status, are each examples of deeply rooted practices of racism. In each case, the message was that I, as an immigrant of colour, might never be able to escape the watchful eyes of official gatekeepers. Both the statements of the immigration officer and the judge lack transparency and demonstrate that while I have been a legal Canadian citizen for almost thirty years, I can always be reminded of my racialized and marginalized queer place in the nation.

Even more poignant for me in a mixed-raced immigrant partnership, I am always more suspect than my white partner, who is now a Canadian citizen of only six weeks.

For me, this encounter reinforced my experience as a racialized subject in Canada. Whether invisible as a visible minority, or invisible as a gay East Asian man, or marked by both those identities, I am rendered vulnerable to racism, marginalization and differentiation in Toronto. As a gay East Asian male immigrant in Toronto, my experiences of marginalization because of race and sexuality only emphasize that my difference is based not only on my colour and my race, but also that my multiple layers and complex identities can be reduced to a singular defining factor – my race. As such, I am immediately reminded that I continue to be an outsider, regardless of how long I live in Canada.

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