

## NON-WHITE SETTLER AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONS: DECOLONIZING POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

JO-ANNE LEE

University of Victoria

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This article appeals for the creation of more spaces for politically informed dialogues among indigenous and non-white, elder-leader-activists. Such spaces may offer possibilities for dislodging white-settler-centered social movement logics and practices by articulating a dialogue across diverse marginalized communities that may reveal alternative language and strategies that social justice organizations desperately need to further decolonization as praxis. Skeptical of contemporary allyship and solidarity discourses that are imbricated in hegemonic European whiteness, this article offers an alternative narrative of indigenous and non-white relations drawn from Asian Canadian literature.

KEY WORDS: decolonization, Asian Canadian literature, non-white settler, white allyship.

### **Relaciones entre indígenas y colonos no-blancos: Posibilidades de decolonización para la justicia social**

Este artículo aboga por la creación de más espacios donde se generen diálogos de carácter político entre activistas-líderes-ancianos indígenas y no-blancos. Tales espacios pueden ofrecer la posibilidad de desbancar las prácticas y la lógica colonizadora blanca que impera en los movimientos sociales por medio de la articulación de un diálogo transversal ente distintas comunidades marginadas, lo cual puede poner de manifiesto estrategias y lenguajes alternativos que las organizaciones de justicia social necesitan desesperadamente con el fin de promover la decolonización como práctica. Desde una posición escéptica de los discursos contemporáneos de alianza y solidaridad que están imbricados en la sociedad blanca europea hegemónica, este artículo ofrece una narrativa alternativa de las relaciones entre indígenas y no-blancos a partir de la literatura asiático-canadiense.

PALABRAS CLAVE: decolonización, literatura asiático-canadiense, colono no-blanco, literatura asiático-canadiense, alianza blanca.

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*It is in our brokenness that we come to know the effects of our violent  
histories as they continue to exert force upon the present.*

Rita Wong, 2008

A remarkable gathering took place in March 2016, on a small island in the Gulf of Georgia in British Columbia, Canada. In a small room, members of Japanese, Chinese, African, and First Nations communities met with a few Euro Canadians and shared intimate, personal memories of violence and injustice at the hands of government in the early part of the twentieth century. All were members of communities that had direct connections to this island. All had suffered past violence, dislocation, and theft of land, imprisonment, and denial of any official government responsibility for the wrongs that had been committed against them. All were experienced elder-leaders-activists who had spent decades mobilizing their communities to seek recognition, redress, apology and reparations. The meeting, organized with care and sensitivity, encouraged the small number of participants to share stories of hardship and resilience —stories usually kept private. Long held barriers of suspicion and mistrust were momentarily lowered, enabling trust and empathy to form. Spirituality and food were central to trust building and storytelling.

Beginning with this story, I want to mark its rarity and to speculate on whether and how social justice mobilizing might be transformed if the foundations of political engagement were grounded within indigenous and non-white settler worldviews and realities instead of those of white settlers. By centering non-white and indigenous activism without the interference of “white noise”, such dialogues might reveal alternative strategies that sustained generations of indigenous and racialized minority communities in their confrontations with settler colonial apparatuses and actors. These conversations may recover strategies of collaboration among diverse minoritized communities —strategies and tactics in danger of being forgotten, buried and dismissed as unimportant.

A turn in this direction offers no guarantee. Any alternative pathway will be fragmented, ambiguous, partial and uncertain given the fraught history of colonial violence and colonial settler nation formation. Yet, at the very least, such unconventional dialogues between indigenous and racialized elder-activist-leaders would decenter more common identity based oppositional dualities that assume whiteness as their pivot point, such as indigenous/non-indigenous, settler/indigenous, white/indigenous, immigrant/citizen, or white/black (Veracini, 2007 & 2010).

In this essay I appeal for creating more spaces for politically informed dialogues among indigenous and non-white, elder-leader-activists. Such politicized spaces offer possibilities for dislodging white settler centered social movement logics and practices (Snelgrove *et al.*, 2014; Wolfe, 2006). In creating spaces of dialogue across diverse marginalized communities, my hope is that interlocutors will reveal alternative language and strategies that social justice organizations desperately need to further decolonization as praxis. If we listen closely to these conversations and hold them tenderly with honor and respect, I believe we will receive a gift of decolonizing logics not presently imaginable.

Along with other critics, I am skeptical that contemporary allyship and solidarity discourses circulating in today's social movement arenas will achieve transformative change because these discourses are imbricated in hegemonic European whiteness (Snelgrove *et al.*, 2014; Wolfe, 2006). I discuss reasons for this skepticism, drawing on the work of activist scholars and engaged activists. I conclude the essay by offering an alternative narrative of indigenous and non-white relations drawn from Asian Canadian literature.

Lacking deep grounding in alternative worldviews and values and marginalized histories, social justice campaigns, organizations and movements are weakened and vulnerable to misdirection and recuperation. This observation is not new. Social justice activists have long been aware of the effects of counter-hegemonic recuperation of transformative political agendas. Over time, dominant ideologies resurrect to reestablish ascendancy to undermine transformational effectiveness. Alternative possibilities seem ethereal and just out of our grasp.

Even contemporary political alliances formed across broad agendas such as climate change, dismantling global capitalism, environmental justice, appeals for better transportation, housing or health services that acknowledge that indigenous peoples are among the most impacted by inequality rarely include decolonization or address claims of Indigenous sovereignty unless the movements are led by and grounded in the lived realities of indigenous peoples.

Although many organizations promote a centering of indigenous worldviews, practices and values, calls for inclusion are not the same as action. The challenge of fundamentally changing the way things are done is not an easy task. Deliberate erasure of racialized and Indigenous peoples and their histories from narratives about Canadian nation-formation ensures that knowledge about resistance, and tactics of survival among activist elder-leaders from these communities has not been articulated, never mind documented, in any significant way. Much of this history is in danger of being lost in the twilight of fading memories and destruction of evidence. Soon, we will not be able to piece the fragments together as even the fragments of memories will be gone.

What happens if we position indigenous people's struggles instead of normalized whiteness as the reference point through which we come to articulate our subjectivities? How would such a move radically transform our perceptions of the land on which we live? (Wong, 2008: 158)

This penetrating question of imagining how we might stand on this land differently if we could decenter normalized whiteness and center indigenous and racialized minority peoples' struggles inform my opening paragraph. Extending Wong's question, I wonder how positioning indigenous worldviews might transform our understanding of possible models and discourses for anti-racist, transnational, feminist, decolonizing activism? The small workshop that I de-

scribed and similar models of practice that bring indigenous and non-white elder-leaders together in storytelling and sharing are desperately needed initial steps to finding alternatives to Eurocentric, heterosexist, masculinist thought that presently tend to dominate in arenas dedicated to social justice and decolonization.

From my non-white, non-indigenous perspective, I have long felt discomfort at the now almost formulaic call for allyship, solidarity and alliance building in social justice organizations that has recently been extended to a demand for solidarity with indigenous organizations. Certainly, indigenous communities are suffering and require more resources and attention. We can and must act—together. Yet, how do we act? I loathe the possibility that I have experienced elsewhere, of scrambling to survive a race to the bottom.

As a third generation Chinese Canadian woman, I am often sidelined by language that fails to account for my community's history and my particular contexts. I often feel ill at ease in white-dominated spaces and discourse because I am not fully present in my whole self. I am continually negotiating which part of me is included or excluded in the conversation. This isn't because I lack understanding, but what is said and how it is said negates the complex histories of my community's arrival on this land. There is no space to tell different stories of relations with indigenous peoples. When all conversations center on white settlers' experiences, non-white settlers' realities in the colonizing process—equally important for critical unpacking—are pushed to the margins. There is a pressing need for social justice organizations wishing to decolonize through alliances to center the voices of marginalized and indigenous groups who have been pushed aside to advance white centrality and ascendancy.

Yet sharing experiences of surviving and resisting violent oppression among indigenous and non-white people must occur at many levels and on many fronts. Feminist, anti-racist praxis demands continual critical analysis as no single approach will meet the needs of differently positioned subjects and forms of domination are not constant and predictable. The ground constantly shifts under our feet. Furthermore, intersectional feminist analysis emphasizes the co-constitutive relationship between knowledge and multiple identities of difference.

The goal of decolonization requires activists to develop corresponding nuanced practices and knowledge—to go beyond stories of suffering and surviving. It is unlikely that these will originate from social justice movements whose central fulcrum centers on the concerns of white settlers, however well intentioned. Consciously or unconsciously, those who identify as white will tend to maintain unearned rights and entitlements because hegemonic cultural practices, taken as normal and common sense, buttress and sustain the logic of white domination in everyday life.

Critical writers are questioning extant settler and indigenous solidarity discourses in decolonizing social movements by addressing the assumption of

whiteness at the center of settler and indigenous solidarity claims, aspirations, demands, protocols and guidelines (Morgensen, 2014). In particular, the rise of settler colonial studies in the North American academy that appear to reassert white expertise is being challenged (Veracini, 2011). Morgensen (2014) poses the question, if non-natives trace critiques of white settler colonialism only to white scholars (who are its main contributors), how are indigenous and other non-white critiques erased? He argues that white settlers critique of settler colonialism often operates by erasing black and Asian diasporic studies views of colonialism. It also appears that transnational, queer and feminist postcolonial views of colonialism also vaporize in the kinds of concerns raised by many social justice activists and scholars who call for decolonization.

At the same time, the desire to be in solidarity and offer support for indigenous concerns echoes across Canada. Every week another outrage against indigenous peoples hits the news: missing and murdered women, unsafe water, youth suicides, deaths from drugs and alcoholism, intergenerational suffering from residential school trauma, domestic and public violence, and ongoing land claims and self-governance issues. For these reasons and more, I believe white and non-white social justice activists must grapple with some of the troubling ways that the call for decolonization is being enacted on the ground and in the academy in ways that undermine our energies and effectiveness.

To be in respectful conversation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, we must find ways where we can be at one with our words. But, when the meanings of available terms fall short and the structures to voice alternative meanings are denied, it is challenging to do the work of relationship building from a place of shared meaning. Transnational feminist thought understands liminality in the border zone as real and not imagined, an outcome of material practices. Liminality is seen as a resource for producing alternative knowledge. It is not merely a temporary site on the way from or to somewhere else. Yet, liminality is not the same as marginality. There is a danger in romanticizing and idealizing liminal subjectivity in the border zone and overlooking consequences and effects of marginalization. In the context of decolonization, the necessary spaces of contact between diverse indigenous and non-white settlers who are implicated in each other's lives and histories has been and continues to be marginalized. Without time and space to be together on our own terms where we co-create and remember our own knowledge about our relations, activists from these communities will only understand colonization through a dominant white lens that reflects white worldviews and values.

Denying spaces of connection to marginalized groups is also a white settler move stemming from fears that any collaboration outside of their direct surveillance and involvement might be a threat. Canadian history is replete with indigenous and non-white communities' ongoing segregation and dislocations. Yet, scholarship that juxtaposes and sutures indigenous and non-white settler rela-

tions under similar regimes of state oppression is scarce. Consequently, the call for allyship currently presented as the preferred posture for non-indigenous activists requires interrogation (Pinch, 2014; Gehl, n.d.; *Unsettling America*, n.d.).

White experiences of allyship differ from non-white experiences. In colonial encounters in settler societies, non-white arrivals were met with different responses from white settlers and indigenous peoples that resulted in different trajectories of citizenship and different relationships with indigenous nations. These differences must always be brought to the forefront despite demands to simplify and generalize.

Recent statements on how to be a good ally need unpacking. Harsha Walia, one of the co-founders of No One Is Illegal (NOIIL), a movement to support migrants, is one voice that has called for centering indigenous worldviews and leadership in social movements. Like many other organizations formed by and for communities of color, NOIIL has developed effective practices and principles to foster allyship, solidarity and alliance building across many different groups. Their website offers useful advice and checklists on how to offer support and how to act in solidarity to bring about effective alliances. But these checklists also dangerously overgeneralize and simplify the complexity of indigenous/settler relations in decolonization, even where statements warn of the complexity of these terms.<sup>1</sup> Many guidelines address the ally as an autonomous, individualized subject who is free to act. The ally is usually not addressed as a member of historical collectivities that have been in violent contact with indigenous peoples or involved in conflicts in non-North American contexts, or who have experienced sectarian violence within their own communities. Nor is the ally addressed through intersecting gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity or sexuality among other intersecting identity categories. The ally is posited as an unmarked, neutral subject, without specificity, that defaults to the normative white, Western, heterosexual, masculine and middle-class subject —the ideal citizen-subject. Whiteness re-insinuates into ally discourses. Some critics have charged that allyship is already co-opted, commodified and made into an identity position that has currency in the “ally industrial complex”:

Where struggle is commodity, allyship is currency.  
 Ally has also become an identity, disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support.  
 The term ally has been rendered ineffective and meaningless.  
 (Indigenous Action Media, 2014)

Morgensen (2014) points out that allyship discourses often assume allies are white. This can be seen in guidelines such as those posted in *Unsettling Ameri-*

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<sup>1</sup> See the websites “*Unsettling America*” and “*Unsettling Minnesota*”.

ca's "Allyship & Solidarity Guidelines" and Pinch's "How to Be a Settler Ally" (2014). Morgensen's (2014) strenuous critique of white allyship discourses exposes its many trickeries. According to Morgensen, allyship discourses give epistemic privilege to the most oppressed as an ontological condition. White allyship discourses sustain myths of the oppressed as natural, given and in need of rescue by the white savior. Morgensen argues that an unconscious desire to return once again to the idealized morally good (white) subject position underlies allyship discourses. Perceiving oppressed subjects as victims, without agency, and in need of help fulfills/justifies the white ally's unconscious desire to be seen as a good person.

Indeed, this desire to be righteous and good informs many guidelines written by indigenous and non-indigenous activists that admonish restraint and self-awareness in their participation in alliances and coalitions with indigenous organizations. Lynn Gehl's (Algonquin Anishinaabe) "Ally Bill of Responsibilities" has sixteen points, including:

Do not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures;

Understand that they are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working with and that they seek to serve. They and their needs must take a back seat;

Do not take up the space and resources, physical and financial, of the oppressed group;

Do not take up time at community meetings and community events. This is not their place. They must listen more than speak. Allies cannot perceive all the larger oppressive power structures as clearly as members of the oppressed group can; (Gehl, n.d.)

Other guideline suggests that (white) allies step back and away from leadership positions. Allies are warned not to "take away or take over" leadership, and to make room for indigenous leaders (Walia, 2012; Keefer, n.d.). Guidelines deal with guilt, shame, privilege, unlearning privilege, salvation, missionary work, self-therapy, etc. Despite their good intentions, I am still troubled by the assumption that allies are white, a representation that erases the complexity of relations among non-white allies and indigenous communities.

When allies are advised that they should step away from taking leadership, it is assumed that the ally holds greater power and that indigenous individuals and groups hold less power and experience more oppression. The ally is advised to withhold, to step back and to offer assistance conditionally, when asked, and not unconditionally, when needed. When (white) allyship discourses require white people to defer action and through deference, act to support decolonization, what becomes important is not dismantling colonial apparatuses, but the proper performance of allyship by displaying correct decolonizing allyship attitudes and



behavior. This is similar to the distinction between anti-racism and non-racism. The latter allows activists to appear anti-racist without doing anything to dismantle racisms. Furthermore, monitoring adherence to ally rubrics saps energy from the main purpose of alliances: to work together to achieve a concrete objective, because allies tend to become embroiled in regulating and policing each other's behavior generating a "crabs in the pot" syndrome, that undermines organizational effectiveness. Allyship turns into an exercise of policing the troops.

A logic of perverse reversal stems from the ontological privileging of the oppressed subject. Because the ally is not positioned, ontologically, on the same level as the indigenous person but as superior and apart, proper enactment of allyship requires the ally to give precedence to indigenous subjects. By advising allies to adopt of a posture of deferral and deference, of separation and non-interference, ally discourses position the (white) ally as an outsider. She is not co-implicated in and accountable for antecedent conditions that caused violence, injustice and inequality. She remains innocent. This perverted trickery reinserts oppositional dualistic thinking into spaces of resistance and is one mechanism through which colonial thought processes constrain new praxis.

Allyship discourses are dangerous to non-white settlers if not unpacked because these discourses implicate them in white settler genocide by offering no other subject position outside of the white ally. White ally discourses do not and cannot capture the complicated subject positions of peoples who hold different historic relationships to indigenous peoples and different historic relations with other minoritized populations (Amahady & Lawrence, 2009). As settlers, people of color are also complicit in taking and occupying land as property, yet non-whites share with indigenous peoples a violent history of displacement, segregation, dislocation, and internment enacted through racialized and gendered violence. They also share in relations of kinship and friendship. Complexity, messiness, paradox and conflict mark these relations, as they do all intergroup relations constituted in colonizing conditions.

When non-white social justice actors uncritically adopt white allyship as a subject position through which they comprehend their actions in decolonizing social movements, it is more difficult to identify and name their own histories of violence, oppression and privilege in relation to diverse indigenous peoples. "We are here, because you were there", one of the memes of transnational feminisms, clarifies and brackets different historically grounded relations with indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. The erasure and silence around non-white settler and indigenous relations robs social justice organizations in their decolonizing work because what is missing in decolonization are alternative imaginaries of possible democratic, non-colonized futures. All social justice actors must take responsibility for decentering white allyship by acting with critical self-awareness about necessary distinctions in relational contexts for white and non-white peoples in practices of decolonization.



The non-white ally cannot do the hard work of building solidarity unless she is fully aware of the levels of complicity that enfold her subjectivity as ally in social justice and decolonization movements. But this is a challenge when our histories are not taught in schooling curriculum, when we do not have access to elder-activist-leaders from our communities. Where exactly would alternative, oppositional knowledge come from?

Hayes, in a recent blog published online in *Truthout*, cautions:

In my own experience, I have found that dialogues about Native and Black relations often lack a shared historical understanding. This is unsurprising, given that both Black and Native people are constantly at odds with the erasure of their respective histories in the United States. The work of telling our own stories, and forcing honest dialogues about the harms perpetrated against our peoples, is at times exhausting. The history of our experiences is softened, sanitized and whitewashed in classrooms and popular entertainment. But living on the front lines of our own struggles sometimes means missing the opportunity to share in the pursuit of social and political transformation. (Hayes, 2015)

The Canadian settler state has created categories of identity that are strenuously and vigorously policed: citizenship laws for one and the Indian Act for the other. Increasingly, racialized and indigenous activists are joining together to break apart these divisions. Indigenous activists are joining “Black Lives Matter” and the migrant action movement “No One Is Illegal” and racialized Canadians are joining “Idle No More” movements (Todd, 2015). Activists from these communities recognize the interconnectedness of these struggles. On both sides, there is much to reconcile —this is not a story of happy solidarity, but one where the legacy of colonialism compelled both groups to enact and narrate particular kinds of stories of relations to serve different purposes. Historical colonial encounters between Black, African Canadian, Asian Canadians, and Latino/a Canadians and indigenous peoples took various forms and emerged out of distinct contexts; often they were mutually violent and exploitative (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009).

Chinese Canadians and indigenous peoples, for example, first encountered each other in desperate circumstances; at times helping, at other times exploiting the other (Barman, 2013). Reconciliation among non-whites and indigenous peoples will necessarily look different than reconciliation among white settlers. Organizing within their own communities to bring critical awareness of decolonization will look different from white people organizing in the dominant culture.

Many barriers exist in realizing the possibilities that racialized subjects might co-create with indigenous leaders. Shared experiences of violence, dispossession and incarceration does not mean that trust and respect will automatically flow.

Non-white, non-indigenous activists face many challenges gaining access to the wisdom, experiences and narratives of elder-activists from their communities, especially since relations with indigenous peoples were stigmatized and hidden. Informally, connections may be forged. But decolonizing the nation will require formal channels for transferring subaltern knowledge of co-reliance, and co-operation or conflict and oppression. These do not exist. The work of sharing and reconciling or perhaps transcending irreconcilable differences remains unfulfilled. This year, 2016, marks the first anniversary of Canada's "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" that sought reconciliation with Canada's First Nations. Yet, what is being reconciled? Non-white settlers have much to reconcile with indigenous peoples, but the stories and histories, positive and negative, have yet to be told.

To be one with our word requires us to act with integrity from a place that honors our word as where one stands. When actions are not congruent with words and the meanings of words are distorted, we cannot act with integrity. Standing on uneven and shifting ground, it is more difficult to be resilient and resistant and easier to be drawn into tangential or divisive issues. Easily confused, we lose trust and fall into internal disputes. To ground and guide our activism, we might draw on the non-competitive worldview that grounds all indigenous relations —that all beings are related and interdependent; the spirit and material world coexist, and all beings have an obligation and responsibility to past and future generations (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009).

Intentionally turning away from whiteness as normative constitutes a deliberate act of decolonization (Simpson, 2011). But turning away is not easy as white identified and non-white identified activists, lacking knowledge of their historical co-implication in each other's and in indigenous peoples' oppression, continue to frame their activism in the colonizers' schema. Indigenous and racialized activists must claim spaces of connection inside social movements so that critical dialogue, as yet only known through yearning, can be generated. From these conversations will emerge powerful words from which we can build alternative futures and platforms for mobilization.

I want to conclude this essay by drawing on Rita Wong's reading of Asian Canadian and First Nations literature that addresses "the complicated relationships between those who have been racialized as 'Asian' and those who have been racialized as 'Indigenous'" (Wong, 2008: 160). Among the authors she analyzes are SKY Lee's, *Disappearing Moon Café*, Tamai Kobayashi's *Exile and the Heart*, Marie Clement's play *Burning Vision* and Lee Maracle's story *Yin Chin*.

As a Chinese Canadian woman, the ability to draw on critical scholars and cultural workers who are closest to my communities' historical trajectory of arriving and settling on this land, and who examine fraught relations between indigenous and Chinese Canadians offers me rare access to my community's history using tools especially crafted for this work. Although empirically-based

scholarship is lacking, these critical cultural workers offer stories and language on which we can build.

I will here focus on Wong's (2008) reading of SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, a story about the relationship between Wong Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, and Kelora, a half-native, half-Chinese woman of the Shi'atko clan. Gwei Chang receives Kelora's support in his quest to return the bones of dead Chinese laborers who died while laying tracks through the perilous Fraser Canyon of British Columbia. Chang, a laborer working for the Canadian Pacific Railway is created by SKY Lee to tell the story of the forgotten history of Chinese indentured workers who helped in nation building. Close to starvation and death, he is rescued by Kelora, who makes possible Chang's intimate relationship to the land, outside of law and economy, giving him access to her community, and the worldviews and teachings of her people. To contextualize this relationship, Wong observes that relationships between First Nations people and Chinese people dated back to at least 1788, but are "often marginalized in official historical narratives that privilege nation building premised on white dominance" (Wong, 2008). In this comment, Wong immediately provides a politicized reading of Lee's story which, Wong argues, reflects Lee's intention as well. Wong also refuses the celebratory settler pioneer narrative of nation building, by emphasizing the harsh, exploitative conditions that Chinese laborers endured. Kelora and Gwei Chang's relationship cannot be understood through discourses of allyship or solidarity, for this relationship requires a different register that includes words that express emotion, kin relations, movement through time and space, and shared and co-created intergenerational futures and pasts. I wonder if I can use this story to imagine other forms of mutual assistance and support?

The characters in Lee's novel are multiply constituted, and Wong points out that Lee's novel constantly troubles and unravels social categories. SKY Lee reads class inequality not only through ethnic and race categories but also in relation to immigrants' relations to indigenous land and people. What language do we have to comprehend these complicated and evolving relations? Gwei Chang experiences upward mobility throughout the novel and his relations to indigenous lands and to Kelora change. Kelora does not appear as a character in the story, her absence can be read analogously to indigenous "disappearance" and, without her, there is no story.

The novel transgresses and transcends fixed hierarchies and borders of race, ethnicity and class, as the central characters are mixed-raced. Again, what language do we have to address Chinese settlers' relations to indigenous people at the level of intimate family relations, especially when identity for both groups was stigmatized and they were targeted for extinguishment by the settler state?

Dorothy Christian, mixed Chinese and Secwepemec First Nations, also writes of the search for her ancestry and living with a lifelong and profound sense of shame for being native, and not having access to her Chinese family (2012). In

recovering her roots, she tells of her mother, a knowledge keeper in her community, being encouraged by Elders to marry outside their community to protect her people's bloodline. In today's climate of indigenous resurgence and self-determination against elimination, such a suggestion seems farfetched, yet in earlier times, desperate to survive as a people, such unions were not frowned upon and even encouraged. Nonetheless, many Chinese/Native children speak of living with silences from both sides of their family lineage. Here on the West coast of Canada, brutal discrimination against Chinese arrivals and indigenous peoples are still living memories. What language do we have to assist with inter-generational healing and reconciliation for Chinese and indigenous mixed families separated by white societal prejudices and the violence and pain of miscegenation laws? What can we learn from stories of racially mixed families about how to live and work together?

Ting An, a product of Gwei Chang and Kelora's union, is invited to join a native community upriver, but refuses the offer due to his attachment to Gwei Chang. Wong asks about the untaken alternative that Ting An has access to and what a "shift in priorities would achieve?" She links this alternative to "undeveloped alliances [that] constitute the silences and empty centres upon which national formations continue to depend" (Wong, 2008: 164). In *Disappearing Moon Café*, it is Kae, speaking from the future, who narrates the story of Gwei Chang and Kelora, the absent indigenous wife. Kae reveals the family secrets kept hidden; family secrets that Dorothy Christian, in real life, has worked to uncover (Christian, 2004). Christian was finally restored to her full sense of self after being politicized as an activist during the Oka crisis, and making connections—though unproductive—with her Chinese family. Absence brought into presence might be a strategy of alliance building, a language for articulating something known but only felt as a ghostly haunting.

In closing, I hold out hope for the promise that is gestured to in *Disappearing Moon Café* by its writer, SKY Lee, and thoughtfully extended into contemporary political frames by Rita Wong. As Wong reflects, unfulfilled promises are not empty, they still exist and it is the work of cultural workers to imagine strong affective bonds, to offer to activists an alternative way to imagine possibilities for alliances between Chinese Canadians and First Nations: "Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness" (Wong, 2008: 166). I turn to cultural works of fiction and poetry as a way of skirting the policing of activist identities and the limits of regulatory, categorical language that constantly fail us because this language, the language of colonization, insistently, persistently and relentlessly return us to the chains of the past.

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