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Artist Statement for *Other(ed) Bodies/Asian Lives*

My collection of short poems, *Other(ed) Bodies/Asian Lives*, captures the continuance of Asian racialization, abstracted as a proximal figure to whiteness, within Asian/American history. Asian-ness is commonly imagined in academic excellence and socioeconomic success, as seen in the model minority myth, which assumes that Asians are innately primed to work (Phung 294). This racial stereotype, however, obscures the imbricated histories of Asian racialization with anti-Blackness and the white-settler project, as well as the continuing histories of racialized violence against Asians and other peoples of color (Kim 226; Day). My poems call attention to these histories, centering the settler state's projection of the Chinese subject, specifically the Chinese woman, as a figure that represents the potential for those racialized to assimilate into white ideals of personhood, family, and freedom (Lowe 30-31). I unearth the recursive continuities of Asian abstraction in the present and critique the notions of anti-Blackness and queerphobia that Chinese American communities uphold to sustain their degree of access to white freedom.

The poem, "Dis/embodied Figures," aims to retell the early history of the Chinese "coolie," being brought to America to replace Black slave labor and act as a "racial barrier" between European whites and enslaved Black peoples (Lowe 31). Through the eyes of the Chinese woman, I intend to illustrate the position of America as a site of freedom and opportunity, with labor being the condition for accessing these white privileges. Freedom, here,

is the ability to have access to the domestic, in terms of marriage, family, and private home, with the Chinese woman being made the figure of “assimilating the colonized” (Lowe 31). She is rendered as neither a free white settler nor an unfree Black slave, this liminal subject of freedom, in order to mitigate the possible revolt of enslaved Black peoples against white settlers (Lowe 27; 31). I visualize this by showing the possibility of family and freedom granted to the Chinese coolie, unlike the Black slave, to illustrate that Asian racialization is built on anti-Blackness (Lowe 31).

At the same time, I display the motif of labor and needing to work in my poems to critique how Asian racialization is defined by our ability to produce labor (Lowe 30-31). I reference this phenomenon to bring light to the model minority myth, which assumes that Asian, specifically East Asian, peoples experience privileges, somewhat like that of a white person, due to their hard work and advanced skills (Phung 294). This myth has obscured the experiences of poverty, discrimination, and social oppression that Asian peoples experience within the Americas (Kim 222). Additionally, I call attention to how this myth has been used to dismiss the experiences of inequality of Black students in American university admissions and used by conservative Chinese communities to reify their entitlement to privileges over the expense of others (Kim 217).

I express this entitlement in the poem, “Racing Yellow,” critiquing the Chinese conservative groups that argue that Asians are “*the new Blacks*” within the American university admission process, which dismisses the deep-rooted differentiation between Asian and Black oppression (Kim 218). Chinese and white conservatives alike argue that Asian Americans are able to achieve such privileges due to their hard work, despite their position as a minority (Kim 220; 222). This logic has been used to dismiss the histories of Black abjection within not only the

university, but also within the nation as a whole. Asian conservatives who proliferate the ideologies of “Asians are the new [B]lacks” use the Asian minority status to disavow the severe inequalities between Asian and Black peoples, with Black peoples not only “displaced as victims,” but “catapulted into the position of world-historical villains” (Kim 233). This recent expression of Asian racialization situated in anti-Blackness demonstrates the continuities of Asian-ness being used as a form of barrier to separate Black protest from the oppressions stemming from the white-settler system.

Lastly, in my poem, “Gay Mulan,” I unravel the abstraction of Asian racialization to be situated in white-settler ideals of heteronormativity, family, and domesticity (Lowe 31). Leung states that Chinese parents in Richmond, B.C. actively protested trans policies in Richmond high schools as they felt that these policies endangered their human rights of a “traditional family” and “parental right” over their children (Leung 488). It appears that the acceptance of queer identities poses a threat to the basis of Chinese citizenship, which is based on Christian and, therefore, white-settler ideologies of domestic life. Asian-ness, specifically, Chinese-ness, continues to be associated with the exclusion of non-normative positionalities in order to reconsolidate their position as a proximate figure to whiteness. As a result, those who hold these ideologies continue the legacies of whiteness that recursively erase identities that fall outside the normative ideals of white humanism.

I created this set of poems to create links among the histories of Asian racialization, anti-Blackness, and the white-settler project. Exclusionary notions of anti-Blackness and queerphobia are an ongoing process within the Asian-American consciousness that continues the colonial agenda of maintaining whiteness at the top of the human hierarchy. From the early histories of the Chinese coolie and the Chinese woman as a racial barrier, the model minority myth, and

protests of queerphobia from Chinese parents, these instances of exclusion from Chinese communities expose their complicity to the very logics that subordinate Asian peoples in the first place. This race for maintaining their position as privileged minorities has led to the continuance of racialized violence and, at times, obscured the severe experiences of oppression Asian *and* non-Asian minorities experience. I hope these poems illustrate the position of Asian-ness in upholding white supremacy and, perhaps, inspire a change in our attitudes that move toward more egalitarian relations.

Works Cited

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