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Diffuse Connections: Making Sense of Smell in Canadian Diasporic Women's Writing

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in English

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DIFFUSE CONNECTIONS: MAKING SENSE OF SMELL IN CANADIAN
DIASPORIC WOMEN'S WRITING

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Stephanie Oliver

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the crucial, yet often unacknowledged, role smell plays in Canadian diasporic women's writing. While some critics discuss scent in their work on taste, memory, and diasporic nostalgia, I argue for considering scent in its specificity and suggest that smell shapes diasporic subjectivities differently than taste. Complicating frameworks that focus primarily on notions of memory, homeland, and nostalgia, I consider how diasporic subjectivities are shaped by a range of feelings connected to experiences in past homelands and present places of habitation, including racialized and gendered forms of olfactory discrimination in the ostensibly tolerant nation of Canada. Appropriating the concept of diffusion from scientific theories of smell, I re-conceptualize diffusion as a model of movement and mixing that complicates narratives of linear diasporic migrations from a single point of origin. I use diffusion to theorize "diffuse connections," a framework that emphasizes the blending of diasporic experiences across time and space and the intimate intersubjective encounters that emerge through scent.

Each chapter explores novels by Canadian diasporic women writers that represent diasporic subjectivities in terms of diffuse connections. Chapter One analyzes how Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* represents smell as an alternative way of articulating the unspeakable violence that may mark domestic spaces in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. I examine how diasporic women mobilize smell as a productive tool for queering heteropatriarchal approaches to "home." Chapter Two complicates the relationship between diaspora, settler colonialism, and indigenization by turning to Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*. Situating Goto's work within the historical

context of Japanese settlement in Canada and using Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* as an intertext, I explore how agricultural odours betray the traces of indigenizing practices associated with diasporic settlement and reveal how a range of diasporic communities may be complicit in ongoing structures of colonization. Chapter Three examines the intersections of smell, contamination, and pandemic in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*. I consider how Lai defamiliarizes past and present forms of pathologizing "Asian" subjects through scent and offers posthuman kinship as an alternative model of diasporic community that challenges racist epistemologies of smell.

Keywords: Smell, diaspora, subjectivity, race, gender, sexuality, queerness, Canada, multiculturalism, women's writing, Shani Mootoo, Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai.

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Introduction:

The Olfactory Turn in Canadian Diasporic Women's Writing

Whether it is the stench of salt fish, the musky odour of mushrooms, or the heady scent of cereus flowers, representations of smell permeate the work of Canadian diasporic writers.¹ In Michael Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), the reeking smell of chemicals marks immigrant tannery workers in Toronto as a sign of their labour.² In Dionne Brand's poem "No Language is Neutral" (1990), the "smell of sea water and fresh fish" in Guaya (19) contrasts starkly with the "smell of an office full of hatred" in Toronto (29), demarcating the differences between the Caribbean and Canada. In Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), the fragrance of lavender soap represents the promise of Canada and recalls gendered forms of sexual violence in India. Shyam Selvadurai, André Alexis, Fred Wah, Kerri Sakamoto, Nalo Hopkinson, David Chariandy, and a number of other Canadian diasporic writers also foreground smell in their work.³

Representations of smell are particularly prevalent in the work of Shani Mootoo, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai, three prominent Canadian women writers whose work explores the complexities of Indo-Caribbean, Japanese, and Chinese diasporic subjectivities, respectively. Their provocative descriptions of scent are more than evocative motifs that simply serve to develop mood and atmosphere. As I argue

¹ An earlier version of this Introduction was published as part of my article "Diffuse Connections: Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*" in the journal *Canadian Literature* (2011).

² Ondaatje often foregrounds scent in his work. In his poem "The Cinnamon Peeler" (1982), the scent of cinnamon bears the traces of desire and marks the cinnamon peeler's wife. In Ondaatje's most recent book, *The Cat's Table* (2011), the aroma of burning hemp evokes memories of Ceylon.

³ See, for example, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), Alexis' "The Night Piece" (1994), Wah's *Diamond Grill* (1996), Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field* (1998), Hopkinson's "Fisherman" (2001), and Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007).

throughout this dissertation, these Canadian diasporic women writers represent smell using complex, multi-layered metaphors that organize their narratives, both structurally and thematically. Yet no sustained analysis considers why these authors are turning to smell to represent diasporic subjectivity. As the first extended study to address this critical gap, this dissertation asks: Why are Canadian diasporic women writers turning to smell – arguably the most marginalized sense in the Western tradition – to represent the subjective dimensions of diaspora? While male diasporic writers also explore the intersections of smell and diaspora, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai’s work focuses primarily on the lives of diasporic women. What makes smell a productive framework for representing women’s particular relationships to diaspora? These authors also explore the relationship between diaspora and queerness in their work and may be understood as queer writers. What is it about the dynamics of scent that lends itself to exploring the relationship between diaspora and queerness? Further, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai frame Canada as a primary destination for diasporic migration. How does the particular Canadian context – a context shaped by official multiculturalism, settler colonialism, and a range of other institutional policies and everyday practices – inform this “olfactory turn”? What role does smell play in the encounters that emerge between racialized diasporic subjects and those who already occupy the Canadian landscape, whether they are Indigenous or indigenized? To explore these questions, this dissertation focuses on novels by Mootoo, Goto, and Lai that use smell to explore the complexities of diaspora as it is shaped by gender, sexuality, and race.

The Dynamics of Diaspora

My theorization of diasporic subjectivities builds upon and extends recent critiques that challenge the notion of diaspora as a static object of empirical analysis and instead emphasize diaspora's subjective dimensions. Most critics agree that "diaspora" describes "a scattering of peoples who are nonetheless connected by a sense of homeland, imaginary or otherwise," but as Lily Cho argues, "[b]eyond that, things get murkier" ("Turn" 12). Since the late 1980s, many scholars, including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Rey Chow, and Avtar Brah, have used diaspora as a critical concept to discuss a range of communities formed through varied experiences of dispossession and dislocation.⁴ While critics like Cho and David Chariandy recognize diaspora's historically specific relationship to Judaism, they argue against scholars such as William Safran, Khachig Tölölyan, Robin Cohen, and James Clifford who attempt to define diaspora's major historical and geographical features in order to delimit its conceptual and ontological boundaries. Cho considers this definitional tendency reductive because it "understands diasporas as objects whose major features and characteristics can be catalogued and classified" ("Turn" 14). Further, Chariandy contends that this approach privileges certain diasporas and thus threatens to "make all other conceptualizations of diaspora derivative or secondary, or illegitimate" ("Postcolonial" n. pag). He argues that it is necessary to move beyond a "traditional social scientific preoccupation with ontology (what is a diaspora?) and its concomitant positivistic methodologies and biases" ("Postcolonial" n. pag). For Cho, Chariandy, and others, diaspora is a useful concept for illuminating the dynamics of dislocation and dispossession that shape a range of communities beyond the

⁴ See, for example, Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1989), Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Chow's *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1993), and Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996).

“classical” Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diasporas. They thus argue for a broader usage of the concept while also “reserv[ing] diaspora for the underclass” (Cho, “Turn” 19).

Taking up the call to move beyond debating definitions, Cho theorizes diaspora as “first and foremost a subjective condition” (“Turn” 14). That is to say, the psychic and somatic experiences associated with living in diaspora play a significant role in shaping the identity of diasporic subjects. For Cho, the subjective condition of diaspora is “marked by the contingencies of long histories of displacements and genealogies of dispossession,” which are in turn linked to histories of colonialism and imperialism, processes of racialization, and the dynamics of globalization, transnationalism, and postcolonialism (“Turn” 14). As a form of subjectivity, diaspora encompasses “the subjective conditions of demography and longings connected to geographical displacement,” “the deeply subjective processes of racial memory,” and the feelings connected to “homeland, memory, [and] loss” (“Turn” 14-5). Chariandy similarly argues that diasporic subjectivity is shaped by “irrepressible desires, imagined pasts, [and] projected futures” that result in complex and heterogeneous relationships to notions of home and homeland (“Postcolonial” n. pag). In addition to conceptualizing diaspora as a subjective condition, both critics emphasize the important role that the material conditions of everyday life play in shaping diasporic subjectivities. According to Chariandy, rethinking approaches to diaspora “lead[s] us sharply back to everyday practices of diasporic life” (“Postcolonial” n. pag). Similarly, Cho concludes that approaching diaspora as a subjective condition involves considering “the secret of memories embedded within the intimacies of the everyday” (“Turn” 28). While both critics draw attention to the subjective experiences of diaspora, they only briefly gesture towards the

material conditions of everyday life that inform these experiences.⁵ Building on and extending the work of Cho, Chariandy, and others, this dissertation focuses more closely on the contingent sensory dimensions of daily life that shape diasporic subjectivities.

This dissertation also extends the work of critics like Cho and Chariandy by moving beyond the emphasis on memory, loss, and longing – or more specifically, nostalgia – that tends to dominate diaspora studies. This study does not aim to devalue the powerful role that these affective formulations play in shaping diasporic subjectivities, however. Indeed, a number of provocative theorizations of nostalgia inform my work. In her essay “The Memory of the Senses,” C. Nadia Seremetakis distinguishes the “trivializing romantic sentimentality” of the English term “nostalgia” from the deeply painful experience of the Greek word *nostalghia*. Returning to the etymological roots of the word, Seremetakis suggests that *nostalghia* describes “the desire or longing [associated] with [the] burning pain to journey” and “evokes the sensory dimensions of memory in exile and estrangement” (4). Seremetakis’ work emphasizes how the pain of diasporic memory is inextricably linked to sensory experience. Cho also theorizes nostalgia in her work by drawing on Seremetakis and Anne Anlin Cheng. According to Cheng, “collective communal identity” may be “united not by ethnic homogeneity but by racial grievance” (91). Building on this point, Cho contends that the refusal to “move on” or “get over” the past “functions as a persistent reminder of the hostility of the present location” (“Taste” 95). In other words, “[t]he nostalgic diasporic subject is not just someone who wallows in [...] fantasies about an idealized homeland to which she can never return, but an agential reminder of the unhomeliness of a place in which she will be

⁵ Cho’s other work, which I discuss below, focuses on particular sensory experiences and material practices that inform diasporic experiences.

continually cast as migrant, from away” (96). While this dissertation engages with these provocative approaches to diaspora, memory, and nostalgia, they are not my primary focus. Studies of diasporic subjectivity that focus solely on the psychic and somatic dynamics of longing for home may risk essentializing a “diasporic psyche” preoccupied with loss and nostalgic longing. As this dissertation argues, diasporic subjectivities are not only shaped by feelings and emotions connected to remembering the past or longing for a distant homeland; they are also shaped by the affective dimensions of living in the present, in new places of habitation.

While some critics emphasize the complex affective dimensions of diaspora, most perpetuate the bias towards notions of memory, homeland, and the past. For instance, in their Introduction to *Theorizing Diaspora* (2003), Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur note that diasporic memories of “the homeland” are “marked by ambivalence and contradiction” (8-9). However, when they consider the important question of why diasporic subjects may not want or be able to “look back” on the homeland with nostalgia, they focus primarily on reasons such as the psychological and physical traumas of living in a war-torn country (9). In other words, Braziel and Mannur do not consider how experiences in present places of habitation may affect diasporic subjects’ relationships to the past. My aim here is not to undermine the traumatic experiences that may force diasporic subjects to leave their homeland. Rather, it is to broaden the framework for thinking about diaspora by considering how diasporic subjects’ experiences in their present places of habitation also inform affective relationships to former homelands and memories of the past in crucial – and often unacknowledged – ways.

In this dissertation, I consider how the material conditions of everyday life intersect with diasporic subjects' sensory perception of past and present places of habitation. In doing so, I seek to negotiate a balance between the shared experiences of diasporic communities and the contingent experiences of particular diasporic subjects. Brah's work is instructive on this point, as she resists the framework of nostalgia and avoids essentializing a diasporic psyche precisely by emphasizing the contingencies of sensory experience. As Brah argues, "home" is often figured as "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination"; in other words, "it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (192). But according to Brah, "home" also describes the "lived experience of a locality," including its "sounds and smells, its heat and dust, [its] balmy summer evenings, or [...] shivering winter evenings" (192). These lived experiences are "mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations," including "the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture" (192). Crucially, Brah's nuanced theorization of "home" emphasizes the range of feelings associated with living in diaspora. Moreover, Brah makes the important point that "[i]t is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit proclamations of the place as home" (193). This point is particularly relevant when considering the varying relationships that different generations may have to the concept of "home." Some diasporic subjects may have never lived in or visited their ostensible "homeland," and their "new" country may be the only place they have ever known. Some diasporic subjects may thus "feel at home" in their place of settlement while simultaneously feeling as if they do not belong. As Sneja Gunew puts it,

“the affective economies of generational transmission” become complicated when “even third-generation” diasporic subjects “are still being designated [as] ‘migrant’ or ‘ethnic’” (“Serial” 9). It is important to consider the complex – and potentially contradictory – feelings diasporic subjects may have toward “home” as a multi-layered concept associated with multiple locations.

To this end, this dissertation focuses primarily on the experiences of racialized diasporic subjects who have only lived, or have lived the majority of their life, in one location but experience their everyday lives in relation to a “home” located elsewhere. In doing so, this dissertation does not simply examine the connection between diaspora and movement, which is often the focus of diaspora studies, but also explores the relationship between diaspora and settlement, a topic that is still under-explored. The diasporic authors I examine – Mootoo, Goto, and Lai – write from within Canada and their fiction engages with the notion of Canada as a site of diasporic settlement in a variety of ways.⁶ Mootoo, Goto, and Lai’s work is also animated by debates about Canada’s policy of official multiculturalism and considers how dominant approaches to cultural difference shape the lives of diasporic subjects. It is therefore useful to outline the principles of Canadian multiculturalism, to which I will now turn.

Complicating Multiculturalism and the Management of Difference

In many ways, Canada’s current approach to cultural difference seems quite unlike approaches in the past, when nationalist narratives framed Canada as racially and culturally homogeneous. Up until the Second World War, the Canadian government used

⁶ In Chapter Two, I introduce the concept of “diasporic settlement” by considering the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity, a topic that has only recently begun to garner critical attention.

immigration to serve the country's economic growth and maintain its "British character" (Perin and Troper 703). In its early stages, immigration was considered a necessity, as it provided the labour pool required for nation-building; yet it was also perceived as potentially dangerous, for it threatened Canada's constitution as a white, British nation (Mackey 32). Canada thus "had a strict hierarchy of preferred racial groups for immigration" (Mackey 33).⁷ After the Second World War, however, "public displays of racism [...] became less acceptable" (Mackey 51). In the late 1960s, the Canadian government removed racial and ethnic criteria from immigration regulations and procedures and introduced a point system for evaluating applications (Perin and Troper 710). The Canadian government sought more thoroughly to overhaul its approach to immigration in the 1970s, when it announced a "new vision" for immigration that involved a commitment to serving the needs of both Canadians and new immigrants (712).

The Canadian government's new approach to immigration was part of a broader shift in thinking about cultural difference in the 1960s and 1970s. This shift is embodied by the development of what Eva Mackey calls "official multiculturalism" (xv).⁸ In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau announced a new policy called "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" (Mackey 64). The policy claimed that Canada has two "official" languages – English and French, the languages of the so-called founding

⁷ I will explore the Canadian government's restrictions on Japanese and Chinese immigration in more detail in Chapters Two and Three, respectively.

⁸ As Harold Troper notes, "the term 'multiculturalism' has been used by Canadians to refer to several different, but related, phenomena: the demographic reality of a Canadian population made up of peoples and groups representing a plurality of ethnocultural traditions and racial origins; a social ideal or value that accepts cultural pluralism as a positive and distinctive feature of Canadian society; and government policy initiatives designed to recognize, support, and – some might argue – manage cultural and racist pluralism at federal, provincial, and municipal levels" (997). Mackey's term "official multiculturalism" specifically refers to the state's dominant version of the policy.

nations – but “no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other” (qtd. in Mackey 64). Trudeau’s policy laid the groundwork for the Canadian government’s approach to multiculturalism, which was incorporated into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and became official policy when the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Bill C-93) was tabled in 1988 (Kamboureli 82). The language of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act explicitly frames multiculturalist policies as part of a progressive trajectory towards a more liberal, equal nation. The Act’s preamble begins by evoking legislation such as the Citizenship Act, which “provides that all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, enjoy equal status, are entitled to the same rights, power and privileges and are subject to the same obligations, duties and liabilities,” and the Canadian Human Rights Act, which “provides that every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have” and aims to “redress any proscribed discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin or colour” (Bill C-93 1-2). Using a similar discourse of equal rights and anti-discrimination, the Multiculturalism Act asserts that the Canadian government aims to “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage” (3). The Act emphasizes the “valu[e]” of “diversity,” promotes a “respectful and inclusive” approach to “Canada’s multicultural character,” and aims to “recognize” the “historic contribution” of “communities whose members share a common origin” (3-4).

Numerous scholars have criticized the Canadian government's policy of official multiculturalism. As Mackey argues, nationalist narratives often suggest that Canada has a long history of tolerance towards Indigenous and immigrant peoples (24).⁹ Official multiculturalism constitutes one of the more recent phases in the nation's history of supposed benevolence and tolerance towards immigrant peoples. According to Mackey, "[i]n 1960s Canada, managing and representing forms of difference were central to the creation of national identity, and to the success of the nation-building project" (63). This project continued in the 1970s "and became more institutionalised as the state defined even more clearly the boundaries and hierarchies of difference in the Canadian nation" (63). The Canadian Multiculturalism Act thus serves as a tool to help the Canadian government manage and contain its immigrant populations. As Mackey argues, "the development of a pluralist national identity was a flexible strategy developed to manage diverse populations" – namely Quebec separatists, Aboriginal peoples, and immigrant populations (13).¹⁰ Indeed, Canada has come to define itself through "[t]he state-sanctioned proliferation of cultural *difference* (albeit limited to specific forms of allowable difference)" (Mackey 8, original emphasis). Smaro Kamboureli similarly suggests that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act practices a "sedative politics" that "attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them" (82). As Kamboureli argues, Bill C-93 was part of a strategic political effort to "pay homage to minorities": the Canadian government "bow[ed] to the pressure

⁹ These narratives elide Canada's history of settler colonialism by suggesting that the nation-building project was devoid of racism and colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, and was instead marked by generosity and respect (Mackey 25). I discuss Canada's history of settler colonialism in more detail in Chapter Two.

¹⁰ Mackey notes that this strategy also conveniently allowed the state to establish "a common national culture and identity that would differentiate Canada from other nations, specifically the United States" (13).

to acknowledge them, while maintaining the ‘original’ state made up of two ‘heritage groups’ intact” (98). By constructing “ethnicity” as something that “all Canadians” have in common, the Act normalizes cultural differences (100). According to Kamboureli, “[t]he marginality of the groups the Multiculturalism Act seeks to protect is nullified by its rhetoric of normalization” (102). The Act thus promotes a form of cultural relativism that “dehistoricizes the social and political conditions that have discriminated against many Canadians” (101). Moreover, the Act does not address any specific group of “ethnic” Canadians (102). Collapsing the crucial differences between “ethnic groups” obscures how diasporic communities are racialized differently, and in turn, experience racism and discrimination differently.

The Canadian state manages difference in a variety of ways, including the way it defines and delimits “ethnicity.” By attempting to “preserv[e]” ethnicity, the Act constructs history as a “finished product” and ethnicity as a “permanent condition” (Kamboureli 105). Kamboureli writes: “The ‘preservation’ of ethnicity lodges the ethnic subject within a museum case because of a ‘heritage’ – another touchstone of the Act – that is presumed to be stable and unambiguous, and therefore easily reproducible” (106). Such a construction of difference implies that “ethnic” groups “hold on to unitary lineages of tradition” and “live through homogeneous and neatly shaped histories” (106). Moreover, the Act participates in a normative narrative that constructs folklore as “authentic heritage,” and in doing so, “teach[es] diasporic subjects how to practise and perform their ethnicity” while “remaining willfully ignorant of the diversities inherent in ethnic communities” (108). According to Kamboureli, “the heritage that the

Multiculturalism Act expects ethnic Canadians to celebrate is sanitized” in the sense that it is “deprived of its historical contingencies” (109).

The Multiculturalism Act’s emphasis on performing ethnicity indicates that one of the most obvious ways Canada’s multiculturalist framework manages and contains difference is through the visualist logic of surveillance. As Michel Foucault famously argued in *Discipline and Punish*, the panopticon – an eighteenth-century prison that enabled guards to observe inmates without them knowing whether or not they were being watched – symbolizes how power functions through surveillance in modern societies. According to Foucault, the panopticon “induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (*Discipline* 201). Aware of the possibility that they are under constant surveillance, inmates internalize the disciplinary gaze and regulate themselves (202-3). Such subtle disciplinary mechanisms operate as techniques of power, producing “subjected and practised bodies,” or “docile bodies,” that are defined by their obedience (138). Implicitly drawing on Foucault, Kamboureli contends that the Multiculturalism Act’s emphasis on supporting cultural production by “ethnic groups” encourages the public display of palatable forms of difference that provide “proof of the circulation of ethnicity while securing for minority Canadians a space where they remain visible as Others” (109-110). Moreover, the performance of ethnicity as spectacle “maintains the dominant society’s disciplinary gaze” (110). Canada’s multiculturalist policies thus only legitimate reproducible, reductive images of cultural “heritage” that focus on the past and seem to have little bearing on current political processes (110). In other words, the Canadian state uses official multiculturalism to show that it is “more rights-oriented,” “intent on transforming

the dominant society,” and committed to “combating [...] racism as a response to the demands of the newer ‘visible minority’ immigrants who arrived after the 1960s,” but the Multiculturalism Act “limit[s] [...] diversity to symbolic rather than political forms” (Mackey 67). Mackey claims that this is largely because the Act “mobilis[es] diversity for the project of nation-building,” for within the context of official multiculturalism, “Canada’s ‘multicultural heritage’ is now a ‘resource’” (67-8). The visualist metaphor of the multicultural mosaic, which reduces each “ethnicity” to a decontextualized, but ostensibly equal tile, is used as visual proof of the “circulation of ethnicity,” to use Kamboureli’s phrase.

Further, the Multiculturalism Act’s sanitized language and seemingly innocuous rubrics of ethnicity, heritage, and cultural difference encode a racialized discourse that recalls earlier, more explicit forms of racism based on visual signs of difference. According to Constance Backhouse, Canada has long been invested in a “colour-coded” discourse of race. As Backhouse argues, “the designation of race by colour was ubiquitous in early twentieth-century Canada” (4). For example, the Canadian census of 1901 classified the “races of men” according to the categories of white, red, black, and yellow, and “[e]veryone – from novelists and poets to politicians, public commentators, and historians – commonly portrayed racialized peoples in the luminous hues catalogued by the census officials” (3-4). After the Second World War and the horrors of Nazi social engineering, discourses of race gave way to an emphasis on “origins” and “ethnicity,” concepts that suggested “human differences were better explained by social, political, economic, and geographic factors than biology” (4-6). However, Backhouse contends that “the change was more semantic than substantive,” as “[t]he belief that humanity is

divided into discrete groups, and that such groups can be differentiated by specific characteristics, remained unshaken” (7). Western governments may have created policies declaring their intention to end discrimination after the Second World War, but according to Backhouse, the only real change was that “it became unfashionable to be characterized as racist” (7).

Earlier forms of racism thus continue to resonate in the present, and visual signs of difference like skin colour are still viewed as biological markers of race in the context of Canadian multiculturalism. As Himani Bannerji argues in her essay “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of ‘Canada,’” discourses of colour are central to the organization of social space under Canadian multiculturalism (117-8). Bannerji contends that multiculturalism implicitly privileges “Englishness/whiteness” as “the irreducible core” of what is considered “real Canadian culture” (118). Mackey similarly argues that the term “ordinary Canadians” – a concept often deployed in both popular and official nationalist narratives – refers to people who are “unmarked, non-ethnic, and usually white,” and “have the privilege of being simply ‘Canadian’ [...] with no hyphen attached” (20). According to Bannerji, dominant nationalist discourses reify a racist logic that links whiteness to European civilization and modernity and darkness to otherness, savagery, and inferiority (116-7).

The term “visible minorities” makes explicit the continuing emphasis on visibility and race in contemporary Canadian society. As Bannerji notes, “visible minorities” is a state-sanctioned category that emerged from Canada’s multiculturalist policies (119). The term, which is commonly used to describe “non-white people living in Canada,” underscores how the state constructs, projects, and objectifies racialized forms of

difference (105).¹¹ Bannerji claims that other terms such as “ethnics,” “immigrants,” and “new Canadians” are “no less problematic” than the phrase “visible minorities” because they also encode a binary of “us” versus “them” (120). However, “visible minorities” is unlike these other labels in that it highlights how the Canadian state relies on a logic of vision to manage and contain racialized differences. As Bannerji argues, grouping a broad range of people under the reductive umbrella term “visible minorities” elides the vast historical, linguistic, cultural, and political differences between the people it purportedly describes (119). The term not only classifies certain people according to visual signs of racial difference; it also acts as an identifying device to single out those who ostensibly “hold no legitimate or possessive relationship to ‘Canada’” (119). Just as the whiteness of the Canadian nation remains unnamed in multiculturalist discourse and dominant national narratives, the state’s role in producing and managing categories such as visible minorities goes unnoticed (119). Moreover, Bannerji makes the crucial point that “all white people, no matter when they immigrate to Canada or as carriers of which European ethnicity, become invisible and hold a dual membership in Canada, while others remain immigrants generations later” (120).

While this dissertation builds on critiques by Mackey, Kamboureli, Bannerji, and others, it also extends their work in several crucial ways. First, my study focuses not only on how the state defines difference, but also on how the politics of difference operate at the level of everyday life. Bannerji, for example, discusses how Canadian multiculturalism affects the everyday lives of “visible minorities,” but she makes this

¹¹ As Bannerji notes, First Nations peoples are not included in the category of visible minorities (114). She contends that “[t]he issue of the First Nations – their land claims, languages and cultures – provides another dimension entirely, so violent and deep that the state of Canada dare not even name it in the placid language of multiculturalism” (109).

argument by focusing primarily on the repressive role of the state. As Foucault argues, power is not held by “a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state,” but rather operates “as a multiplicity of force relations” (*History* 92). In other words, power does not simply emanate from a central locus of control or repressive institution like the Canadian government; power is fluid and functions through multiple, decentralized networks that discipline bodies in more subtle ways. So while the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and other national policies, narratives, and myths seek to manage and contain diasporic subjects, it is through everyday encounters that the effects of these policies, narratives, and myths are lived and experienced on an embodied, subjective level.¹² In this dissertation, I focus on official narratives of cultural difference and everyday iterations of racism to consider how they overlap and affect diasporic subjectivities.

Second, this dissertation moves beyond the emphasis on vision – and to a lesser extent, audition – that informs discourses of multiculturalism to examine how smell operates in more subtle ways as a mode of racialization.¹³ It is important to examine how Canadian multiculturalism manages and contains racialized diasporic communities through a visualist logic that inscribes the very modes of racism beyond which the Canadian Multiculturalism Act seeks to move. It is also necessary to consider how multiculturalist policies manage and contain difference at the level of language. A number of scholars, including those cited above, have critiqued the racist dimensions of

¹² Mackey focuses on the politics of everyday life in her work, but she specifically focuses on the impact of multiculturalism in relation to myths about whiteness. This is also important to examine, but as I have already noted, for the purposes of this study I am particularly interested in the experiences of racialized diasporic subjects and the material conditions of everyday life in their new sites of habitation.

¹³ My dissertation does not only focus on racism, however; it also focuses on smell’s enabling possibilities, which I discuss in more detail below.

Canada's bilingual policies and explored how such policies come into tension with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.¹⁴ Indeed, discussions of vision – and to a lesser extent, audition – tend to dominate studies of the politics of difference in Canada and beyond. In studies of race, gender, and sexuality, visual paradigms have been the predominant mode of conceptualizing the politics of representation, the power of the gaze, and the dynamics of visibility and invisibility that inform processes of social marginalization.¹⁵ Many critics have also implicitly adopted auditory approaches to investigate issues of language, questions of who can and cannot speak, and the problem of speaking for others.¹⁶ The emphasis on vision and audition attests to the dominant role that sight, and to a lesser extent, hearing play in Western constructions of otherness. While such critiques have been, and continue to be, invaluable to contemporary criticism, the critical focus on sight and hearing has led to the reinscription of the very sensory hierarchies privileged by Western thought. That is to say, these studies tend to overlook the important ways that

¹⁴ The Canadian Multiculturalism Act states that it seeks to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada” (Bill C-93 4). In her critique of official multiculturalism, Bannerji argues that immigrants are “subjected” to the “binary cultural identity of the country,” particularly through the insistence upon learning Canada’s official languages of English and French (106). According to Bannerji, those deemed “different (from French others)” are “interpellated or bound into the ideological state apparatus through their employment of tongues which must be compulsorily, officially unilingual – namely, under the sign of English” (108). For a more explicitly “auditory” reading of the effects of Canada’s language policies in the context of multiculturalism, see Sneja Gunew’s *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (2004), particularly chapters three and five.

¹⁵ Critics such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon have considered the social and psychic effects of the “colour line” and racial discrimination, while Chandra Mohanty, Homi K. Bhabha, and many other postcolonial scholars have theorized regimes of racialization and colour-based discourses of difference in relation to the power of the colonial gaze. Feminist scholars such as Laura Mulvey and Donna Haraway have examined the gendered and sexualized dimensions of the gaze, while critics like bell hooks and Trinh T. Minh-ha have theorized the intersections of vision, race, gender, and sexuality. See, for example, Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes” (1984), Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man” (1987), Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges” (1988), hooks’ *Black Looks* (1992), and Minh-ha’s *Woman, Native, Other* (1989).

¹⁶ Although Gayatri Spivak, Linda Alcoff, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others do not explicitly frame their work in terms of auditory perception, by focusing on issues of voice, silence, speaking, listening, and language, they underscore the auditory realm as a crucial site of representation. See, for example, Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), Alcoff’s “The Problem of Speaking for Others” (1991-2), and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

alternative sensory modalities, such as touch, taste, and smell, function in relation to the politics of difference.

Some scholars have attempted to think beyond the dominant rubrics of vision and audition by approaching multiculturalism and the politics of difference through other sensory frameworks. Since the late 1990s, considerable critical attention has focused on how multiculturalism promotes the commodification of “ethnic food.”¹⁷ According to Sneja Gunew, “multiculturalism as food” often represents “the most benign version of accommodating cultural difference” in multicultural societies (Introduction 229). Similarly, Anita Mannur argues that “ethnic” cuisine is only “acceptable” in multicultural societies as a “palatable rendering of difference” in which “the excesses of difference are carefully excised to produce a sanitized narrative” easily consumed by the broader public (*Culinary* 224). By promoting the cultural appropriation of “exotic” dishes, multiculturalism disarticulates foods from the particular cultural practices and historical contexts that inform them.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of work that specifically situates food within the context of diaspora. These studies tend to focus on how the sensory dimensions – particularly the tastes and smells – of certain dishes evoke feelings and memories associated with past homelands and link diasporic subjects to a broader sense of community. A number of critics, including C. Nadia Seremetakis, Sneja Gunew, Lily Cho, Anita Mannur, and Parama Roy, provide valuable studies of taste and smell’s role in connecting diasporic subjects to a sense of homeland and community.¹⁸ Yet this work

¹⁷ For a recent discussion of food and ethnicity in the American context, see the special issue *Food in Multi-Ethnic Literatures* in the journal *MELUS* (2007).

¹⁸ See, for example, Seremetakis’ *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (1994), Gunew’s “‘Mouthwork’: Food and Language as the Corporeal Home for the Diasporic

often treats the gustatory and olfactory sense together. In doing so, these studies tend to subordinate smell to taste and elide the crucial differences between the two senses. For example, in her essay “‘How Taste Remembers Life’: Diasporic Memory and Community in Fred Wah’s Poetry,” Cho argues that the transmission of diasporic memories and the formation of diasporic communities occur through a “smell-taste experience” (98).¹⁹ Cho places Wah’s poetry in conversation with scientific theories that emphasize the powerful connection between scent and memory (99).²⁰ Yet Cho focuses predominantly on theorizing taste, arguing that “taste can evoke a memory that is not specific to an individual body but [...] taps into a transpacific archive of experience” and that “[t]aste can carry within it the sense of a particular location” (99).

It is not surprising that critics often invoke smell in their theorizations of taste, particularly when their work focuses on the culinary. The gustatory and olfactory senses are intimately connected and olfaction is considered crucial to the production of taste.²¹ Indeed, no sense operates autonomously; but as Jim Drobnick argues, there is strategic

Body in South Asian Women’s Writing” (2005), Cho’s *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (2010), Mannur’s *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Cultures* (2010), and Roy’s “Reading Communities and Culinary Communities: The Gastropoetics of the South Asian Diaspora” (2002) and *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (2010).

¹⁹ Originally published in the collection *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English* (2005), this essay also appears in Cho’s 2010 book *Eating Chinese* as “‘How Taste Remembers Life’: Diaspora and the Memories That Bind.” All citations in this dissertation refer to the 2005 publication.

²⁰ In her essay, Cho cites scientific studies that emphasize the “connection between the physiological response of memory and that of smell” (“Taste” 98). For example, she cites research suggesting that “olfactory inputs reach the hippocampus through connections with the entorhinal cortex,” and the hippocampus, in turn, “has outputs that influence the primary olfactory complex” (Mair, Harrison, and Flint qtd. in Cho, “Taste” 98-9). Paraphrasing this research, Cho writes: “The hippocampus, the part of our brain that is widely understood as, in laypeople’s terms, ‘the seat of memory,’ is connected to the ways in which we recognize and process the smells we encounter” (“Taste” 99).

²¹ Smell and taste are considered “two of the most linked senses” for a number of reasons: they are both understood as “chemical” senses that “ingest” and engage with sensory phenomena on a molecular level; they are usually perceived as one sensory experience during eating; they have been denigrated as mere survival mechanisms, too animalistic and subjective for reason and knowledge; and they have been aesthetically marginalized (Drobnick, “Eating” 342). Scientific discourse suggests that taste is, at least in part, predicated upon smell. As head colds demonstrate, interrupting nasal airflow eliminates many of the subtleties of food flavour often attributed to taste (Mennella and Beauchamp 201).

value in focusing specifically on the sense of smell (Introduction 3). Examining smell in isolation from the other senses allows for a consideration of scent's particularity. Odours are invisible, intangible, and seemingly immaterial, yet they paradoxically mark bodies in material ways. While aromas are a central part of culinary experiences, scents are not limited to the realm of food. As I discuss in more detail below, odours are associated with a range of other material objects, bodies, environments, and experiences beyond the culinary. Moreover, smells may be deeply linked to memory, but their evocative power and connection to affect is not confined to the realm of nostalgic reminiscences of a distant past or homeland. Crucially, smells mark bodies differently than tastes and thus shape diasporic subjectivities differently. While studies of food and diaspora provide an important background for my work, this dissertation moves beyond these studies by exploring the particular relationship between diaspora and smell. Theorizing smell in its specificity opens up thinking about the range of experiences that shape diasporic subjectivities, and necessitates a movement beyond frameworks that focus primarily on notions of memory, loss, nostalgia, and homeland.

The “Dispensable” Sense: The Historical Denigration of Smell

My dissertation builds on a growing body of interdisciplinary work concerning the sense of smell.²² In recent years, a number of studies in the fields of biology, neurology, chemistry, psychology, and cognitive science have focused their attention on olfaction. In 2004, for example, the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to neuroscientists Richard Axel and Linda B. Buck for their work on how scents are

²² Jim Drobnick provides a useful overview of recent popular and academic studies of smell, particularly in the life and social sciences, in his Introduction to *The Smell Culture Reader* (2006).

perceived and cognitively processed (Drobnick, Introduction 2). A series of academic books have also recently been published on the science of olfaction, including Gary K. Beauchamp and Linda Bartoshuk's *Tasting and Smelling: Handbook of Perception and Cognition* (1997), Catherine Rouby et. al's *Olfaction, Taste, and Cognition* (2002), and Thomas Hummel and Antje Welge-Lüssen's *Taste and Smell: An Update* (2006). It is notable, however, that while these texts include studies that focus exclusively on scent, they have all been organized under the rubric of both taste and smell. Smell has also garnered academic interest in the social sciences. Drobnick attributes the growing interest in scent to the publication of Alain Corbin's influential social history of smell, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, and Patrick Süskind's bestselling historical novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* in the mid-1980s (Introduction 3).²³ Originally published in French in 1982, Corbin's study received much critical attention for its discussion of the major impact odours had on the social and political events in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, particularly in the development of policies and practices around health and hygiene. Building on Corbin's work, a few scholars have produced studies that focus exclusively on scent, including Annick Le Guérier's *Scent* (1992), Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott's *Aroma: A Cultural History of Smell* (1994), and Jim Drobnick's *The Smell Culture Reader* (2006).²⁴ Despite the growing critical interest in scent, however, there is still a relative dearth of in-depth academic studies of smell in comparison to the other

²³ Corbin and Süskind's texts were originally published in French and German, respectively. I will return to a discussion of Süskind's text later when I address smell as an object of study in literary criticism.

²⁴ A number of authors have explored the social, cultural, historical, psychological, and neuro-biological dimensions of smell in popular books written for the mass market. See, for example, Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990), Lyall Watson's *Jacobson's Organ* (1999), and Gabrielle Glaser's *The Nose* (2002).

senses, particularly vision and audition. This may be in part a result of smell's reputation as a highly-subjective sense that is notoriously difficult to classify, which I discuss in more depth later. As Classen, Howes, and Synnott point out, scholarly work on smell has "tended to suffer from the same cultural disadvantages of smell itself" in the sense that critical studies of smell risk being deemed trivial and unimportant (5). Academic scholarship thus reinscribes the dominant Western sensory hierarchy that privileges sight, and to a lesser extent hearing, and devalues the so-called lower order senses of touch, taste, and smell.

The sense of smell has historically been marginalized in Western thought. In the *Timaeus*, Plato suggests that "smells are but half-formed substances" of which there are "only two varieties," the "painful" and the "pleasant" (650). As Le Gu er argues, Western thinkers since Plato have widely disparaged smell for being highly subjective, difficult to describe in language, and therefore impossible to abstract and discuss in the universalizing terms of philosophy ("Olfaction" 4). Smell has thus long been associated with instinct, animality, and the primitive, and has been linked to base, bodily pleasures rather than the attainment of knowledge (4). Sight, in contrast, has historically been valorized within the Western tradition as the sense most closely connected to rational thought. Although major thinkers like Plato and Descartes subtly critique vision in their work, they ultimately privilege sight – or what Descartes called "the most comprehensive and noblest" of the senses – over other sensory modalities (qtd. in Jay 21). While smell tends to be understood as a purely visceral sense deeply connected to memory and emotion, vision is associated with surface, distance, and detachment, and thus supports the fantasy of objective, rational thought upon which Western philosophy was founded.

Drawing on Hans Jonas' influential essay "The Nobility of Sight," Martin Jay explains that in Greek thought, sight is considered to be the pre-eminent sense of simultaneity, "capable of surveying a wide visual field at one moment" (24). Vision is also understood to be "[i]ntrinsically less temporal than other senses such as hearing or touch" and seems to "elevate static Being over dynamic Becoming, fixed essences over ephemeral appearances" (24). Further, "the externality of sight allows the observer to avoid direct engagement with the object of the gaze" (25). Sight thus seems to clearly distinguish between subject and object, and in doing so, fuels the belief that the subject may neutrally observe the object (25). As Jonas contends in his essay, "the gain" made from sight is "the concept of objectivity, of the thing as it is in itself as distinct from the thing as it affects me"; indeed, "from this distinction arises the whole idea of *theoria* and theoretical truth" (qtd. in Jay 25, original emphasis). The core values of Western philosophy are thus deeply connected to the particular logic of vision.

Smell may have been denigrated within early Western philosophy, but in the so-called pre-modern West, it played a central role in everyday life. Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue that up until the eighteenth century, unpleasant odours were generally "accepted as a natural part of the cycle of life" (57). European cities, for example, were often filthy; streets served as dumping grounds for food remains, human and animal waste, and other refuse, and watercourses "were little more than open sewers" (54-5). With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, factories began producing industrial waste and air pollution (56). Plagues, which were common occurrences in Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, were thought to spread through "foul odour[s] caused by putrefaction" (59). To ward off such diseases, people carried "olfactory

prophylactic[s]” such as oranges punctured with cloves, bouquets of fragrant flowers, and handkerchiefs doused in perfume (60). Personal hygiene was also quite different prior to the eighteenth century, when bathing was considered more of a luxury than a necessity (70). Perfumes, toilet waters, and scented powders were used to mask foul odours and for therapeutic purposes (71). Perfumes were also pleasurable and became highly fashionable, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth century “when, among the wealthy, everything from letters to lapdogs was scented” (71). Of course, the rich could afford perfumes and other “olfactory niceties” while the poor could not (33). The working classes were thus marked by the foul odours associated with their trades, such as tanner and fishmonger, and their impoverished living conditions (34). Prior to the eighteenth century, odours were also believed to provide information about a person’s moral standing. Scents were “thought of as intrinsic ‘essences,’ revelatory of truth” (4). The “moral associations of fragrance and foulness were taken quite literally”: “a whiff of fragrance could signify divine grace, while a sulphurous reek hinted at eternal damnation” (54). For centuries, then, people accepted odours as an inevitable part of everyday life. Despite Western philosophy’s denigration of olfaction, many people approached smell as an important form of practical knowledge: scent was thought to provide insight into moral character, and in the context of the plague, the smells one encountered were considered a matter of life and death.²⁵

During the Enlightenment period, however, scientific discourses emerged that challenged widely-held beliefs about smell and ultimately solidified smell’s status as an insignificant sense. In the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century, science rose to

²⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of the significance and symbolism of odours in the classical period, middle ages, and early modern period, see chapters one and two in Classen, Howes, and Synnott’s *Aroma*.

prominence as the dominant mode of truth and knowledge and thinkers used scientific discourse to privilege reason over religious faith and tradition. As Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue, “[t]he devaluation of smell in the contemporary West is directly linked to the revaluation of the senses” that occurred at this time (3). Smell was “increasingly devalued as a means of conveying or acquiring essential truths” and sight became “the pre-eminent means and metaphor for discovery and knowledge, the sense *par excellence* of science” (84, original emphasis). Scientific “discovery” – a term that means to “reveal, show,” or make something visible (“discover, *v.*,” def. 3.a, *OED*) – was considered foundational to progress, and there was an increasing emphasis on technologies that contributed to scientific knowledge by enhancing human vision, such as the microscope. The very term “Enlightenment” underscores how sight took precedence over the other senses.²⁶ Philosophers and scientists thus elevated vision as the sense of reason and civilization, and in turn, denigrated smell as the sense of savagery and madness (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 3-4).

Smell was particularly devalued within Enlightenment theories of aesthetics. Scent’s inconsequentiality was based on the supposition that it contributed little to the acquisition of knowledge or aesthetic enjoyment (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 89).²⁷ One of the most prominent Enlightenment philosophers to deride smell was Immanuel Kant.

²⁶ This is not to say that vision’s hegemony went unchallenged. For a discussion of philosophers who opposed the Enlightenment emphasis on sight, see chapter two of Jay’s *Downcast Eyes*.

²⁷ Le Guérer notes that a few philosophers took issue with the denigration of smell in aesthetics. In the eighteenth century, a number of “Sensualists” challenged the “intellectualizing [p]hilosophies of the seventeenth century” by arguing that “feeling” was an important part of knowledge and that smell had been unjustly denigrated (“Olfaction” 5). Le Guérer suggests that Friedrich Nietzsche is perhaps the most prominent philosopher to challenge the denigration of smell (6). In *Ecce Homo*, for instance, Nietzsche repeatedly makes reference to the sense of smell. Lauding his own ability to “smell out” lies, he declares: “My genius is in my nostrils” (Nietzsche 326). He also claims that through smell, he can “physiologically perceive” the “inmost parts, the ‘entrails’ of every soul” (233). Le Guérer contends that Nietzsche understood smell as “the sense most attuned to truth” as it “draws on the sure sources of the animal instincts that endow the body with such great wisdom” (“Olfaction” 6). Although Nietzsche clearly values smell, he reinscribes, rather than disrupts, mind-body dualisms.

As Hans J. Rindisbacher argues, Kant “explicitly excludes the olfactory from the enlightenment project, or rather, he includes it with a view to its ultimate eradication” (33-4).²⁸ In his influential *Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790, Kant specifically uses scent to illustrate how simple pleasures differ from higher notions of aesthetic taste. According to Kant, judging that a rose “is agreeable (in its smell)” is “a judgment of sense, not of taste” (*Critique* 59).²⁹ He contends that a “judgment of taste carries with it an *aesthetic quantity* of universality, i.e., of validity for everyone, which a judgment about the agreeable does not have” (59, original emphasis). In other words, scents may be pleasurable, but they are fundamentally lacking in aesthetic value. Kant also critiques smell when he distinguishes between the five senses in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, published in 1798. He characterizes sight, hearing, and touch as “empirical” senses central to cognition and describes taste and smell as “subjective” senses that only contribute to pleasure (*Anthropology* 46). Kant understands smell as “taste at a distance” and suggests that since “others are forced to share the pleasure of it, whether they want to or not,” smell “is contrary to freedom and less sociable than taste” (50). While Kant notes that smell is marginally useful as “a negative condition of well-being” in the sense that it warns against breathing “bad air” and eating “rotten things,” he unabashedly criticizes scent when he writes: “Which organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems to be the most dispensable? The sense of *smell*. It does not pay to cultivate

²⁸ For a discussion of other philosophers who excluded scent from the aesthetic realm, including Hegel, see the Introduction to Rindisbacher (1992) and Le Gu er (2002).

²⁹ I use Werner S. Pluhar’s translation of the *Critique* here because it emphasizes scent, but some translations suggest that Kant wrote the term for “use” rather than “smell.” In Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews’ translation of the text, for instance, the line reads: “Now the judgment that the rose is (in its *use*) agreeable is also, to be sure, an aesthetic and singular judgment, but not a judgment of taste, rather a judgment of the senses” (100, emphasis added). Despite the difference in the translation of this particular line, in this section of the text, entitled “First peculiarity of the judgment of taste,” Kant discusses the agreeableness of a flower’s scent in relation to perception.

it or refine it at all in order to enjoy; for there are more disgusting objects than pleasant ones (especially in crowded places), and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell is always fleeting and transient” (50-1, original emphasis). Kant’s theories were extremely influential in constructing smell as a fundamentally insignificant sense.

The advent of microbiology further contributed to the understanding of smell as trivial and unimportant. For centuries, chemists and doctors had been keenly interested in smell, as putrid odours were believed to be a primary source of disease (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 88-9). As I suggested earlier, noxious “airs,” or miasmas, were thought to carry imperceptible viruses (Corbin 14-5). In turn, aromatic perfumes were thought to be capable of destroying miasmatic threats (62-3). With the emergence of rigorous scientific methods in the Enlightenment period, some scientists devised complex frameworks for analyzing scents by refining the language for classifying odours and creating an olfactory scale for determining different levels of putrefaction and fermentation (14). The scientific study of scent became less important, however, with the development of germ theory in the late nineteenth century. Louis Pasteur and others posited that infectious diseases were caused not by putrid odours, but by tiny microorganisms that were invisible to the naked eye; as a result, scientists began to understand odours as mere byproducts of illness rather than agents of disease and abandoned the study of scents in favour of analyzing microbes (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 89). New visual technologies like the microscope thus directly contributed to the devaluation of smell within the influential discourse of science.

Major thinkers like Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud directly linked the devaluation of smell to physical, social, and moral “progress.” Both Darwin and Freud

argued that when humans evolved to be bipedal, sight took priority and scent, like instinct, became obsolete. Smell thus embodied the antithesis of that which was physically – and by extension, intellectually and morally – upright. In his work on human evolution, Darwin theorized a racial hierarchy that positioned the “civilized races” – namely white Europeans – as the pinnacle of civilization, and the “savage races,” or “dark-coloured races,” as its antithesis. Within this racial hierarchy, smell was associated with savagery. According to Darwin, the so-called savage races had a keener sense of smell than the civilized races, which suggested that they were closer to animals and not as highly evolved. In *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, Darwin suggests that smell was once valuable to humans, but no longer holds any significance. For Darwin, “man” did not acquire smell in its present state, but rather “inherits the power in an enfeebled and [...] rudimentary condition, from some early progenitor, to whom it was highly serviceable, and by whom it was continually used” (22).³⁰ According to Darwin’s evolutionary theory, smell became irrelevant because it was no longer necessary for survival as “primitive” humans became more civilized. Darwin states that “[t]he sense of smell is of the highest importance” in most mammals because it warns them of dangers and helps them hunt prey (21). He asserts, however, that “the sense of smell is of extremely slight service, if any, even to the dark coloured races of men, in whom it is much more highly developed than in the white and civilized races” (21-22). In a footnote, Darwin bases this claim on the work of Dr. W. Ogle, who “made some curious observations on the connection between the power of smell and the colouring matter of

³⁰ Although Darwin does not speak at length about smell and memory, he does note that for animals with a keen sense of smell, such as dogs and horses, “the recollection of persons and of places is strongly associated with their odour” (22). He writes: “we can thus perhaps understand how it is, as Dr. Maudsley has truly remarked, that the sense of smell in man ‘is singularly effective in recalling vividly the ideas and images of forgotten scenes and places’” (22).

the mucous membrane of the olfactory region, as well as the skin of the body” (22). By suggesting that the sense of smell is directly linked to skin colour, one of the primary signifiers of race, Darwin enlists olfaction in the project of delineating the difference between the “races of man.”³¹ Darwin also appeals to physiognomy to justify racialized differences in scent, citing research claiming that “the large size of the nasal cavities in the skulls of the American aborigines” explains “their remarkably acute power of smell” (118-119). Darwin’s work solidified the notion that a keen sense of smell was a biological sign of racial inferiority.

Darwin’s approach to smell is underpinned by prevailing notions of disgust. Indeed, William Ian Miller locates Darwin as the starting point for modern psychological theories of disgust (335). Although disgust is etymologically rooted in the notion of taste, it is often associated with other senses, particularly smell (335).³² According to Miller, disgust describes “a strong sense of aversion to something perceived as dangerous because of its powers to contaminate, infect, or pollute by proximity, contact, or ingestion” (336). Although disgust may seem to be a purely visceral sensation, Miller suggests that disgust is shaped by social codes and is deeply connected to moral judgments (335-6). Although Darwin deploys the seemingly neutral language of scientific observation when discussing the heightened sense of smell in the so-called savage races, his thinly-veiled disgust becomes palpable when he discusses their habits. In *The Descent*

³¹ Providing a scientific justification for racial hierarchies is part of the goal of *The Descent on Man*. In the preface, Darwin states that the text’s primary goals are “to consider, firstly, whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; secondly, the manner of his development; and thirdly, the value of the differences between the so-called races of man” (4).

³² Silvan S. Tomkins specifically uses the term “dissmell” to describe “[t]he early warning response via the nose”; he uses disgust to describe “[t]he next level of response, from mouth or stomach” (399). I use the term disgust here because it is widely used and generally accepted as a word that encompasses feelings evoked by smell as well as taste. I also use disgust because I want to emphasize smell’s relationship to processes of ingestion and incorporation, although as I show in the next section, these processes are not necessarily related to consuming food.

of Man, Darwin notes that although the savage races have a sharper sense of smell, “it does not warn them of danger, nor guide them to their food; nor does it prevent the Esquimaux from sleeping in the most fetid atmosphere, nor many savages from eating half-putrid meat” (22).³³ For Darwin, then, the heightened olfactory abilities of the savage races seem to serve no purpose. More importantly, the “fact” that racialized populations have a keen sense of smell but seem to have a high tolerance – if not preference – for putrid odours seems to be indicative of their inferiority as less-evolved races. Darwin thus develops a discourse of disgust around the sense of smell by associating it with racial inferiority. Yet Darwin’s disgust at the savage races’ tolerance for “fetid” air and “putrid” meat is predicated upon their apparent *lack* of disgust when in the presence of foul odours. Although Darwin explicitly devalues scent, he implicitly emphasizes the value of smell as a discriminatory tool that separates the “civilized” from the “savage.”

Like Darwin, Freud constructed smell as the antithesis of civilization. In a notorious footnote in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, published in 1930, Freud discusses the repression of scent as an evolutionary function, connecting it not only with the primitive but also with the female body. In the lengthy footnote, Freud contends that “[t]he diminution of the olfactory stimuli seems [...] to be a consequence of man’s raising himself from the ground, of his assumption of an upright gait; this made his genitals, which were previously concealed, visible and in need of protection, and so provoked feelings of shame in him” (46). Freud posits that “[t]he fateful process of civilization would thus have set in with man’s adoption of an erect posture” (46). Freud’s denigration

³³ Notably, Darwin adds: “In Europeans the power differs greatly in different individuals, as I am assured by an eminent naturalist who possesses this sense highly developed, and who has attended to the subject” (22). While Darwin allows for differences in olfactory abilities amongst white Europeans, he does not for the “dark-coloured races.”

of smell is inextricably linked to his pathologization of female bodies and subordination of women within the patriarchal family unit. Notably, his footnote on scent appears during his discussion of the emergence of the nuclear family and begins by attributing the taboo on menstruation to smell. In the body of the text, Freud claims that the nuclear family unit emerged because “the male acquired a motive for keeping the female, or, [...] his sexual objects, near him,” while “the female, who did not want to be separated from her helpless young, was obliged, in their interests, to remain with the stronger male” (46). In the footnote, Freud argues that modern men are now repulsed by, rather than attracted to, women during menstruation because of the weakening effect of “olfactory stimuli” on the male psyche and the increasing power of “visual excitations” that engage men in a more “permanent” way (46). For Freud, “[t]he taboo on menstruation is derived from this ‘organic repression’” – that is, the repression of the sense of smell (46). In other words, men were once “sexually stimulated by the smells of menstruation – but no longer” (Mavor 281). As David Howes argues, Freud’s conceptualization of the “organic repression” of smell resulted in “antipathy toward menstrual effluvia” and other “excremental smells” (194). According to Miller, Freud suggests that men have been “compensated” for the weakening power of smell by “being given the power to stare” and become sexually excited “all the time, not just once a month” (347). Consequently, “man” now “wants a woman around all the time; hence family organization begins and then civilization built upon the family model” (347). “Woman,” in turn, “had better stay with the man if she wants to protect herself and her children from other men who are now looking for sexual objects to control continuously, rather than sniffing around once in a while for periodic violent contacts” (347). By framing the “organic repression” of smell

as an evolutionary process, Freud not only pathologizes smells associated with women's bodies; he also justifies the existence of heteropatriarchal family structures that subordinate women.

For Freud, the repression of smell is not only key to evolutionary progress; it is also central to human psychosexual development. According to Freud, human development mirrors the evolutionary process: while it is "normal" for humans to revel in taboo odours in the infantile anal stage, these olfactory desires must give way to visual pleasures as individuals mature (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 90). If adults continue to be invested in the sense of smell, it is because their psychological development has been inhibited in some way (90). In the same footnote in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud theorizes the hierarchization of the psychosexual stages in relation to the repression of scent. He claims that while "excreta arouse no disgust in children," a child's "upbringing [...] should make the excreta worthless, disgusting, abhorrent and abominable," noting: "[s]uch a reversal of values would scarcely be possible if the substances that are expelled from the body were not doomed by their strong smells to share the fate which overtook olfactory stimuli after man adopted the erect posture" (47). In other words, anal eroticism "succumbs in the first instance to the 'organic repression' which paved the way to civilization" (47). Freud frames the repression of smell as necessary in light of increasing cultural concerns over hygiene and cleanliness. According to Freud, "a person who is not clean – who does not hide his excreta – is offending other people; he is showing no consideration for them" (47).³⁴ As Miller points out, Freud

³⁴ In yet another footnote in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud claims that "neurotics, and many others besides, take exception to the fact that '*inter urinas et faeces nascimur*' (we are born between urine and feces)" (53). According to Carol Mavor, Freud's comment suggests that "[n]eurotics and hysterics have

clearly denigrates smell and suggests that it weakens over the course of both human evolution and individual psychosexual development; yet in both cases, smell seems to actually gain power as a tool for determining that which is “vile and revolting” and should be repressed (348). Like Darwin, Freud ends up reinforcing, rather than repressing, scent. Indeed, Freud’s attempt to relegate scent to a footnote that ultimately ends up spanning multiple pages represents his own failure to repress smell in his theory of olfactory repression.³⁵

Darwin and Freud’s theories had a significant impact on modern discourses of health and hygiene. As Gale Largey and Rod Watson argue in their discussion of odours and “impression management” in the West, bodies must conform to a particular “olfactory identity” that involves specific processes of “deodorizing and odorizing” (35). Deodorizing practices, including bathing, brushing one’s teeth, and using deodorant, are rationalized through discourses of “health” and “cleanliness” (35). In turn, odorizing practices involve applying socially-acceptable fragrances that indicate a desire to be “fresh and pleasing to others” (35). Failure to adhere to these standards of physical hygiene may result in moral stigmatization, for odours – “whether real or alleged” – serve as “indicants of moral purity” (30). As Largey and Watson put it, “one who smells good is good” (35). The relationship between smell, cleanliness, and morality is inextricably linked to race, gender, sexuality, and class. Women are constructed as smelling either “foul” or “fragrant,” the working classes supposedly “‘reek’ of poverty and coarseness,”

simply failed at repressing the mother and her smell” (282). For further discussion of Freud’s theorization of smell, fetishism, neurosis, and hysteria, see Mavor (2006).

³⁵ For further discussion of Freud’s understanding of the relationship between smell and repression, see Le Guérier (2002) and Mavor (2006). Le Guérier and Mavor also discuss the significance of Freud’s relationship with ear, nose, and throat doctor Wilhelm Fliess, who influenced Freud’s theorization of the links between smell, hysteria, and neurosis.

and “ethnic groups” are thought to carry offensive “foreign” odours (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 161).³⁶ These widespread beliefs essentialize odours by suggesting that smells – particularly offensive ones – are reducible to the biological body and serve as physical manifestations of that body’s fundamental physical, intellectual, and moral inferiority.

Discriminatory approaches to smell obscure the processes that produce particular subjects as “odorous.” Drobnick contends that “[t]here is a tendency to regard smells purely on the level of phenomenological immediacy” (Introduction 1). The common assessment of odours as either “good” or “bad” reinforces this approach to olfaction. Yet embodied responses to scents are not purely visceral and unmediated, nor are they reducible to a simple binary framework. As Drobnick argues, “no act of perception is a pure and unmediated event” and “each society cultivates sensory practices according to its needs and interests” (1-2). While scents may seem purely visceral, olfactory perception is culturally mediated.³⁷ According to Drobnick, “[o]dors are the means by which the boundary between self and other is demarcated, as well as the supposed basis of prejudicial extensions of such demarcation; in other words, olfaction is the means to corporealize dislike and a prominent excuse for expressions of racism, sexism, classism and xenophobia” (Preface 14). Crucially, Drobnick asserts that “[t]he fear of odors, whether they can be actually smelled or not, naturalizes cultural disapproval, where

³⁶ Janice Carlisle contends that due to the emphasis on class distinctions in Victorian England, literature from that period primarily represents smell as a tool for discriminating between classes over other forms of inequalities (12). It is important to note that issues of class are inseparable from other factors that shape embodied experience, such as race, gender, and sexuality. I explore smell and class in relation to race, gender, and sexuality in more detail later in this dissertation, particularly in Chapter One.

³⁷ This is not to say that approaches to scent are completely culturally determined. As Drobnick notes, “[s]ocietal influences [...] are not all-determining; individuals may challenge as much as conform to a reigning sensory regime” (“Introduction” 2). I discuss how the literary texts I study challenge dominant approaches to olfaction near the end of this Introduction.

immoral behavior is believed to produce a foul smell and, conversely, being odorous is tantamount to being odious” (14).

This dissertation argues that odours are not reducible to biological markers of race, gender, sexuality, or class and suggests that how one perceives a particular smell is connected to the issue of transgression. That is to say, the perception of scents as pleasurable or repulsive depends upon whether or not the odours in question adhere to established olfactory conventions or exceed and subvert the boundaries that attempt to contain them. As I suggested in my discussion of smell, memory, and nostalgia, valuable work has already been done on how scents transgress temporal boundaries by evoking memories of the past. While I explore the relationship between smell and memory throughout this dissertation, my primary aim is to foreground other important aspects of smell that have yet to be fully theorized in relation to diaspora – namely, the relationship between smell, space, and subjectivity. Why are certain smells considered subversive or threatening? Why are scents thought to mark some bodies and not others? To explore these questions, I now want to turn to a discussion of the subversive potential of smell’s relationship to space and subjectivity.

The Subversive Potential of Smell

To understand smell’s subversive potential, it is important to first understand how traditional conceptualizations of Western subjectivity are predicated upon the notion of discrete, bounded space. As Sidonie Smith argues, the “universal human subject” is conceptualized as a “singular, unified, and atomic core” surrounded by “well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries” (5). In other words, the “unitary self” is predicated upon

“the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside” (5). From this ideological perspective, the self is “[i]ndependent of forces external to it” and “is neither constituted by, nor coextensive with, its class identifications, social roles, or private attachments” (5). That is to say, “the self escapes all forms of embodiment” (6), a point to which I will return later. Smith historicizes this particular formulation of subjectivity by noting that the Western notion of the universal human subject emerged during the Renaissance and was refined and developed throughout the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century (5). Many scholars have argued that conceptualizations of subjectivity shifted in the twentieth century, particularly after the linguistic turn when poststructuralism and postmodernism questioned the unified humanist subject and theorized postmodern subjectivity as fragmented and fundamentally unstable. Yet the anxiety surrounding odours in the West indicates that the notion of a unitary self with distinct, impermeable boundaries persists alongside postmodern theories of subjectivity.

A number of critics have investigated the stakes of regulating spatial and bodily boundaries. In *Gender Trouble*, for instance, Judith Butler argues that the boundary between “inner” and “outer” worlds is “tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation” and “is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer” (133-4). Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, Butler suggests that excretion is “the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished” in the sense that it “is the mode by which the Other becomes shit” (134).³⁸ According to Butler, the realm of “inside” and “outside” can never

³⁸ Kristeva defines the abject as that which “does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules” and “disturbs identity, system, [and] order” (4). Since the abject disrupts the illusion that something can be a coherent, self-unified whole, it is considered repulsive and is therefore marginalized (4). I discuss Kristeva’s theory of abjection in more detail in Chapter Three.

be completely distinct because “the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability” that “would invariably be exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears” (134). Moreover, the notion of “inner” and “outer” only makes sense by assuming the presence of “a mediating boundary that strives for stability” (134). Butler writes: “this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject. Hence, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject” (134). In other words, the fantasy of the hermetically-sealed self depends upon, and is constituted by, binaristic constructions of inside and outside. According to Butler, dominant discourses construct permeable bodily boundaries as dangerous to the social order (132). Butler develops this point by focusing on the media’s construction of AIDS as a disease spread through the exchange of bodily fluids during transgressive “homosexual” practices. She suggests that because “[t]he construction of stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability,” sexual practices that “open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others,” such as anal and oral sex, “reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines” (132). Butler asserts that “the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities” (33). Consequently, “[t]he deregulation of such exchanges [...] disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all” (133).

Butler’s discussion of the anxieties surrounding the deregulation of bodily boundaries lends itself to thinking through the cultural anxieties attached to smell. As

Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue, smell has been marginalized in the West because it “threaten[s] the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority” and “its boundary-transgressing propensities” (5). While “[c]ontemporary society demands that [...] social structures and divisions be seen to be objective or rational and not emotional, and that personal boundaries be respected,” smell defies this emphasis on surface, distance, and detachment (5). Odours “cannot be readily contained” because “they escape and cross boundaries, blending different entities into olfactory wholes” (4). Smell’s sensory model thus opposes the West’s “modern, linear worldview with its emphasis on privacy, discrete divisions, and superficial interactions” (4-5). Building on these observations, I want to provide a closer analysis of the intersubjective dynamics of smell by bringing Butler’s analysis to bear on the particular materiality of scent.

Anxieties around scent are deeply connected to the fear of permeable bodily boundaries. According to Butler, “[i]f the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (132). The nose constitutes one such site of permeability due to the inability to regulate the odours it comes into contact with. Odours permeate bodily boundaries when air passes through the nose or mouth, which means that smelling is an inherent part of breathing. With every breath, then, the nose opens the body up to the possibility of being permeated by abject odours – odours that have been dissociated from the self and may confound the illusion of the unitary subject – at any given time. Miller suggests that smells are associated with pollution because they are diffuse, pervasive, and invisible (342). Since odours are omnipresent and easily

spread through space, they tend to transgress spatial boundaries and emerge in unexpected contexts, which makes their polluting potential all the more powerful. The invisibility of odours makes them particularly threatening. By thwarting visual detection, scents undermine dominant systems of order, classification, and surveillance. It is also significant that smells often have unlocalizable sources (Miller 342). If scents cannot be easily attributed to an origin point, they cannot be easily contained. As Miller argues, in the West odours are understood to be “especially contaminating” and are considered “much more dangerous than localized substances one may or may not put in the mouth” (342). Indeed, Miller asserts that odours continue to be understood as “vehicles of contagion” within Western culture despite developments in germ theory that suggest otherwise (342). Given the many ways in which the particular materiality of scents challenges the values central to traditional Western models of the unitary subject, it is unsurprising that odours are often understood within the framework of contamination.

Scents do not merely subvert physical and spatial boundaries by permeating the nose and mouth; they also undermine the fantasy of the hermetically-sealed body by emanating from the body itself. Odours are constantly issuing from the all over the body, including highly-regulated orifices like the anus and genitals. Deodorizing and odorizing practices cannot completely contain these bodily odours. Moreover, no matter how invested one is in regulating one’s own bodily odours, people tend to become desensitized to their own smells over time. As James Porteous argues, “[t]he perceived intensity of a smell declines rapidly after one has been exposed to it for some time” (90). The smell does not disappear; rather, the perceiver becomes habituated to it (90). Smell thus challenges the presumption that one can have full self knowledge. In doing so, scent

undermines a core value of the universal human subject: that the (male) subject is a rational being that has the ability to know himself completely (Smith 7). Notably, the complexities of scent's subversive potential are embedded in the very verb "smell." On one level, subjects "smell" in the sense that they have the ability to detect odours with their nose. In other words, subjects are active in that they can sniff out odours. Yet subjects are simultaneously rendered passive by the smells constantly permeating their bodies, over which they have no control. Of course, subjects can plug their noses to avoid smelling odours, but odours still permeate their bodies when they breathe through their mouth. On another level, subjects "smell" in the sense that they constantly emit odours, even as they inhale scents from the world around them.

The diffuse dynamics of scent are gendered in particular ways. Smell is feminized within Western sensory hierarchies because it is associated with the unruly material body. As many critics have argued, the sense of vision and the supposedly neutral, objective, disembodied gaze associated with rational thought "signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White" (Haraway "Situated" 188). In turn, the unruly material body has historically been coded as feminine. Women's bodies in particular have long been constructed as unmanageable and potentially threatening. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, in Western cultures women's bodies are constructed as uncontrollable, formless, and lacking self-containment (203). "The female body" is commonly coded as "a body which leaks, which bleeds, which is at the mercy of hormonal and reproductive functions" associated with menstruation and pregnancy (203-4). Yet according to Grosz, the female body is not only understood as "a cracked or porous vessel"; it is also constructed as "a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order" (203). By extension, women's

bodies are associated with contagion and contamination (203). Western constructions of female corporeality parallel historical representations of scents as formless, uncontainable pollutants that disrupt boundaries and order.

Crucially, the feminized materiality of scents resonates with the subversive potential of queerness. To recall Butler's argument, queer sexual practices deregulate bodily orifices and boundaries, undermining the heterosexual logic that defines "the body" as such. Similarly, scents have the potential to challenge conventions governing the gendered, sexualized body by permeating bodily boundaries. In "Queer Smells: Fragrances of Late Capitalism or Scents of Subversion?" – one of the few essays on smell and queerness – Mark Graham contends that scents share affinities with queerness (305).³⁹ Just as odours are characterized as entities that confuse categories and transgress boundaries by being "difficult to localize" and "hard to contain," queerness is associated with the subversion of neat categories – particularly "the heterosexual-homosexual binary" – and the recognition that gender and sexuality are "inherently unstable" and "are always in a state of actual or potential flux or transition" (305). Graham is quick to note, however, that neither smell nor queerness is inherently subversive. Drawing on the work of Rosemary Hennessy, Graham points out that queer theories that frame gender and sexuality as fluid, flexible, and fundamentally unstable align with the logic of global capitalism, which requires service workers and capital to be extremely mobile and adaptable (314). Citing scholars like Max Hirsch, who critiques queer identity politics for

³⁹ Judith Halberstam hints at the affinities between smell and queerness in "What's That Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives," one of the chapters in her book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005). Although Halberstam's title suggests that smell has a particular relationship to queerness, she does not discuss this relationship – or smell at all – in the chapter. The phrase "What's That Smell?" refers to the name of a CD released in 1999 by the "lesbian punk" band Bitch and Animal (173). Halberstam mentions the CD title in the essay, but does so in passing and does not discuss its significance.

promoting individualism and other liberal values, Graham questions the radical potential of queerness (314). Drawing on Frederick Jameson's work on the intersection of postmodernism and capitalist logic, Graham suggests that the diffuse materiality of scent may be complicit with the capitalist tendency "to dissolve distinctions, to fragment subjectivity, to encourage and even require flux and change" (306). Moreover, Graham notes that the multi-million dollar perfume industry, which was built on marketing scents as the very essence of heterosexual desire to men and women, appropriated queer approaches to gender and sexuality in men's, women's, and unisex fragrance ads in the late 1990s and early 2000s (306). As Graham points out, the logic of smell and queerness may not be as subversive as it seems (306).

I agree with Graham's point that smells are not inherently transgressive. For instance, in the West women have traditionally been expected to live up to their reputation as "the perfumed sex" by applying sweet fragrances to enhance their desirability for men (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 162). These scents are diffuse, pervasive, and invisible, yet when they permeate bodily boundaries, they are generally thought to be socially acceptable.⁴⁰ Indeed, the nose seems to fit the very definition of what Butler calls a "fixed site" of permeability; after all, its primary purpose is for inhaling air, which is necessary for breathing. But not all odours that cross the nasal threshold are considered acceptable for intake. Certain smells have the power to "reinscribe bodily boundaries along new cultural lines," to use Butler's phrase. More specifically, odours identified with that which has been disassociated from the body –

⁴⁰ It is important to note that in North America, fragrances – including those conventionally associated with personal hygiene products like soap, shampoo, and deodorant – are increasingly becoming less acceptable in certain shared public spaces. I discuss the recent rise of scent-free policies in Canada in more detail in my Conclusion.

“shit,” “the Other” – threaten the illusion of the hermetically-sealed, unified Western subject. The sweet scent of a woman is therefore not considered threatening because the smell conforms to established social conventions of smell, gender, and sexuality. Ultimately, it is not necessarily the particular materiality of scents that makes them transgressive. Rather, odours become subversive when they exceed the social conventions that attempt to manage and contain them. It is crucial to note, however, that it is precisely because smells are diffuse, pervasive, and invisible that they often – and easily – transgress conventional methods of regulation and control. If “to queer” means “to disconcert, perturb, [or] unsettle” (“Queer, v.2” def. 3, *OED*), then smell’s particular affinities with queerness lie in its potential to unsettle conventional formulations of the bounded Western subject and challenge the dominant logic of gender and sexuality upon which such formulations depend.

Diffuse Connections: Theorizing Smell and Diaspora

Smell’s association with the unruly body is not only feminized; it is also racialized in particular ways that are significant for thinking about the relationship between smell and diaspora. Smell is a primary mode or medium through which racialized diasporic subjects are constructed as dangerous threats in the West. As Drobnick argues, the fear of odours associated with particular races is fuelled by “anxieties over ‘contamination,’ which often justifies practices of segregation and colonialism” (Preface 14). In his essay “Immigrant Lives and the Politics of Olfaction in the Global City,” Martin F. Manalansan gestures toward the racialized discourses of smell and contamination that often surrounds immigrants. As Manalansan argues, “[d]iscourses around epidemics, natural disasters,

crime and other catastrophes or social ills are constructed around the body of the immigrant” (41). The representation of the immigrant body as a site of disease is directly linked to what Manalansan calls the “smelly immigrant” stereotype (42). According to Manalansan, “the immigrant body is culturally constructed to be the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs” (41). The “smelly immigrant” stereotype demonstrates how xenophobic constructions of smell serve to justify forms of racist discrimination.

Although Malansan’s discussion of the “smelly immigrant” stereotype focuses primarily on Asian-American immigrant neighbourhoods in New York City, the stereotype also informs olfactory discrimination for a range of racialized communities in Canada.⁴¹ However, it is important to note that the notion of the “smelly immigrant” resonates differently in Canada than it does in the United States, where the cultural model of the “melting pot” promotes homogeneity and assimilation. As I suggested earlier, homogeneity and assimilation are also implicitly – if not explicitly – promoted in Canada, but officially, the Canadian state’s multiculturalist policies claim to celebrate cultural difference. Indeed, Euro-Canadians often take pleasure in “exotic” scents associated with commodified forms of difference such as “ethnic foods,” perfumes, and other consumer products.⁴² Multiculturalist policies frame discriminatory discourses that link race and odour, hygiene, and cleanliness as ignorant and ill-informed, and liberal discourses of tolerance and diversity attribute racism to the past. But this progressivist narrative,

⁴¹ For Manalansan, “Asian American” includes East Asian and Southeast Asian immigrants to the United States (42). I discuss the different definitions of the term “Asian Canadian” in more detail in the next section.

⁴² I discuss the dynamics of attraction and repulsion to scents associated with cultural difference in more detail in Chapter Three.

combined with official multiculturalism's emphasis on visual signs of difference, works to obscure how forms of olfactory discrimination persist in the present, both in official narratives of cultural difference and everyday iterations of racism. For example, in November 2011, the city of Gatineau, Quebec introduced a 16-point "values guide" for new immigrants declaring, among other things, that they should not cook smelly foods out of respect for others (Peritz n. pag). The guide "advise[d] newcomers to pay 'special attention' to self hygiene and the cleanliness of public and private spaces, and warn[ed] against 'strong smells emanating from cooking'" (Wallace n. pag). As the guide put it: "In some cases, especially at school, in an apartment setting and at work, it is important to keep this deeply-rooted value in mind as it could result, in some cases, in isolation and exclusion" (qtd. in Wallace n. pag). The controversial guide, which has since been removed from Gatineau's programming, clearly demonstrates how forms of olfactory discrimination persist in the present and are paradoxically justified through a liberal discourse of respect.⁴³

Although official multiculturalist policies declare that Canada is a tolerant nation with liberal immigration policies, anxieties surrounding the "smelly immigrant" stereotype suggest that some Canadians are invested in constructions of the nation as a space that is hermetically-sealed – and by extension, scentless. As I suggested earlier, Western hygienic regimes involve particular practices of deodorization and odorization;

⁴³ Kamal Maghri, a Gatineau resident who emigrated from Morocco in 2001, was one of the most vocal opponents of the guide and filed a complaint with Quebec's Human Rights Commission (Wallace n. pag). Maghri criticized the guide's "offensive, discriminatory and infantilizing stereotypes" and its "dismiss[al] [of] [A]nglophones and [F]irst [N]ations of Gatineau and Quebec" (qtd. in Wallace n. pag). It is important to note, however, that some immigrants also endorsed the guide. For instance, Mireille Apollon, an immigrant from Haiti and the Gatineau city councillor responsible for cultural diversity, defended the city's "values guide," stating: "Behaviours aren't uniform around the globe. There can be irritants" (qtd. in Peritz n. pag). In Chapters Two and Three, I explore how and why some diasporic subjects in Canada internalize and perpetuate the notion that odours associated with their culture are "irritants" – or worse – that must be eradicated.

yet as Classen, Howes, and Synnot point out, the West is often constructed as a space of “olfactory neutrality” (161). Those in power – that is, those seemingly unmarked by race, gender, sexuality, and class – imagine themselves as a pure, scentless centre that must be protected from the contaminating odours of “peripheral” groups constantly threatening to infiltrate the core (161). This particular construction of the West mirrors approaches to the body as a bounded entity that must be protected against unregulated odours that permeate, and potentially re-signify, bodily boundaries. Significantly, the notion that certain bodies are unmarked by odour intersects with the belief that certain bodies are unmarked by race. As Ruth Frankenburg argues, “whiteness” is “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege,” or more specifically, a “‘standpoint’ [...] from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society” (1). The cultural practices associated with whiteness are therefore “usually unmarked and unnamed” (1) – not only by race, but also by scent.

Diffusion – a term that describes how smell moves through space – is a useful concept for thinking through the relationship between smell, racialization, and diaspora. I contend that conventional frameworks of diffusion reflect how Western epistemologies attempt to manage and contain scents. These frameworks may seem innocuous, but they subtly encode a hegemonic logic of fixed origins and essential differences that restricts smell on a discursive level; in doing so, they attempt to manage and contain the anxieties surrounding smell’s transgressive, uncontainable materiality. According to the *OED*, diffuse entities are characterized by their ability to “spread [...] through a space or region” by “pour[ing] or send[ing] forth as from a centre of dispersion” (“Diffuse, *v*,” def. 2). This definition seems to suggest that diffuse entities emanate from a fixed origin point,

although the statement “*as* from a centre of dispersion” hints that this claim is a tenuous one. Significantly, scientific definitions of diffusion, which often use the example of perfume filling a room to demonstrate how diffusion works, undermine scent’s boundary-crossing potential in even more provocative ways.⁴⁴ The *OED* notes that in physics, diffusion describes “[t]he permeation of a gas or liquid between the molecules of another [...] placed in contact with it,” or “the spontaneous molecular mixing or interpenetration” of gases or liquids “without chemical combination” (“Diffusion, *n*,” def. 5). According to this definition, diffusion is a process in which distinct entities come into contact and intermingle, but do not combine. Paradoxically, then, odours are culturally constructed as substances that threaten to contaminate their surroundings through diffusion, but are scientifically defined as entities that ultimately do not mix on a molecular level and thus retain their essential differences from other entities they encounter. Scientific discourses of diffusion thus seem to neutralize the threat of contamination that scents are thought to pose to Western constructions of spatial and bodily purity. By suggesting that diffuse entities can come into contact without combining – that is, without fundamentally changing in any way – these discourses reify the notion of essential differences, and in doing so, reinforce Western fantasies of purity.

The same logic that informs dominant discourses of diffusion also informs common conceptualizations of diaspora. In the field of cultural anthropology, diffusion is a term that implicitly evokes the concept of diaspora, as it refers to “[t]he spread of elements of a culture or language from one region or people to another” (“Diffusion, *n*,”

⁴⁴ The phenomenon of perfume filling a room is a quintessential example of diffusion often cited in science textbooks and encyclopedias. For instance, the entry on “diffusion” in the *Encyclopedia of Physical Science* states: “After the release of perfume, as an example, the odor can soon be detected some distance away [...] due to the diffusion of the perfume molecules through the air molecules” (144).

def. 3.b, *OED*). This definition assumes that cultural and linguistic practices originate in a particular place or population, then spread outward in a uni-directional movement; it thus obscures the complex politics of contact and fails to capture the anxieties surrounding the “spread” of racialized diasporas – and the olfactory “elements” of their culture – in the West. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, diasporic movement and migration is often understood according to a reductive logic of diffusion that inscribes notions of singular origins, linear movement, and essential differences. In Canada, racialized diasporic communities are often constructed as diffuse, malodorous entities that spread out from a foreign origin point, permeate national and bodily boundaries, and threaten to contaminate supposedly pure, scentless Euro-Canadian populations. Smell thus not only serves as a primary means through which dominant populations construct racialized diasporic subjects as contaminating threats; it is also a key metaphor mobilized in the West to describe the migration of racialized diasporic communities. It is important to note, however, that narratives of diasporic diffusion emphasizing linear migrations from a single point of origin are not limited to Western discourses; this reductive logic of diffusion is also embedded in the very concept of diaspora. Etymologically, the term diaspora – which derives from the Greek *dia*, “through,” and *speirein*, “to scatter” – inscribes the notion of “a centre, a locus, a ‘home’ from where the dispersion occurs” (Brah 181). Conventional conceptualizations of diaspora – which, as I demonstrate throughout in this dissertation, are often perpetuated by diasporic communities – are thus predicated upon reductive frameworks of diffusion.

Crucially, diasporas are much more complex than these discourses of diffusion would suggest. As Hall argues, the practice of constructing fixed origins and essential

cultural identities “impos[es] an imaginary coherence” on diasporas (235). It also obscures the multiple journeys, divergent points of departure, and blended origins from which diasporic subjects emerge. As Gilroy famously puts it, thinking about diaspora involves a consideration of both “roots and routes” (190). Accounting for the complexities of diasporic movement thus necessitates an understanding of how diasporas may be marked by “processes of *multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries*”; in other words, it requires a consideration of how diasporic subjects may experience a “multi-placedness of ‘home’” (Brah 194, original emphasis). In failing to account for the complex conditions from which diasporas emerge, narratives that frame diaspora in terms of reductive models of diffusion implicitly attribute the cause of dislocation to problems in a foreign land that is constructed as fundamentally different from, and external to, Western sites of diasporic settlement like Canada. These discourses thus conceal Canada’s own implication in the complex histories and practices of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization that contribute to diasporic displacement and migration.

I want to appropriate diffusion from its conventional genealogies and reconceptualize it to theorize the contingent and uncontainable politics of both smell and diaspora. Contrary to conventional discourses of diffusion, odours do not retain an essential constitution and are therefore difficult to attribute to a fixed source. As I suggested earlier, the very existence of smells depends upon their ability to mix and blend with their surroundings, including other scents. When odours come into contact, they blend together in intimate encounters that fundamentally alter both entities involved. Since these encounters are predicated upon the very act of blending, smells confound the

notion of essential differences and cannot be traced back to a single, specific origin. Like scents, diasporas are diffuse in a way that subverts, rather than reinscribes, notions of pure origins, rigid boundaries, essential differences, and linear movement. My understanding of diffusion thus provides an alternative framework for thinking about diasporic encounters, as it moves beyond constructions of diasporic subjects as malodorous strangers who spread out from a foreign origin point, permeate national and bodily boundaries, and pollute Euro-Canadian spaces and populations. In order to decentre conventional models of diffusion that discursively manage and contain the complex movement and mixing that characterizes scent and diaspora, when I use terms like “diffuse” or “diffusion” in this dissertation, I refer to my alternative formulation of diffusion unless otherwise noted.

I also want to introduce the concept of “diffuse connections” to describe the intersubjective interactions mediated by scent that emerge in relation to diaspora. Thinking about scents, diasporas, and diasporic subjectivities in terms of diffuse connections emphasizes how interactions between subjects and spaces are mutually constitutive. For those invested in essentialist notions of purity and impermeable social and bodily boundaries, the idea of mutual constitution signifies contamination. The notion of blending that is so central to diffuse connections thus produces anxiety for these populations. Indeed, the “smelly immigrant” stereotype may be read as an anxious response to the way in which racialized diasporic communities seem to threaten the supposed purity – and scentlessness – of the Euro-Canadian nation. While smell is often mobilized as a tool of differentiation, smell also constitutes a mode of agential connection that emphasizes intimacy and relationality in provocative ways. The concept of diffuse

connections is therefore productive for rethinking conventional frameworks of diaspora and the intersubjective interactions that constitute diasporic subjectivities.

Sara Ahmed's theory of encounters is useful for understanding the mutually-constitutive interactions associated with diffuse connections. In her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000), Ahmed explores the relationship between strangers, embodiment, and community. She theorizes encounters in relation to "stranger fetishism," an approach to racialized difference that resonates with reductive frameworks of diaspora. As Ahmed argues, stranger fetishism "*invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination*" (5, original emphasis). For Ahmed, it is crucial to understand "how the stranger is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities" (6). Challenging stranger fetishism thus involves interrogating the social relationships obscured by these processes (6).

Ahmed's theory of encounters provides a point of departure for interrogating the social relationships concealed by stranger fetishism. Ahmed suggests that an encounter, at its most basic level, is "*a coming together of at least two elements*" (7, original emphasis). Her conceptualization of encounters thus begins from the position of relationality. Arguing that "the encounter is ontologically prior to the question of ontology," Ahmed asserts that "the designation of an 'I' or 'we' requires an encounter with others" (7). Consequently, "the subject's existence cannot be separated from the others who are encountered" (7). Identity is therefore continuously constituted through daily engagement

with others (7). Crucially, Ahmed's theory emphasizes the complex politics of contact and considers how encounters are shaped by power and knowledge. According to Ahmed, encounters involve "surprise and conflict" (6). Encounters do not involve "two already constituted subjects who know each other"; rather, they are "premised on the absence of a knowledge that would allow one to control the encounter, or to predict its outcome" (8). Encounters thus "shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what we assume that we know," and identities are constituted through this process (7). Ahmed asserts: "[W]hen we face others, we seek to recognise who they are, by reading the signs of their body, or by reading their body *as* a sign. [...] [S]uch acts of reading constitute 'the subject' in relation to 'the stranger,' who is recognised as 'out of place' in a given place" (8, original emphasis). It is important to note that multicultural societies have a particular relationship to the concept of the "stranger." As Ahmed argues, strangers are welcomed and celebrated to a certain degree by multicultural nations; "being out-of-place" thus has "its own place" within multiculturalism (97). Ahmed suggests that "multiculturalism can involve a double and contradictory process of incorporation and expulsion: it may seek to differentiate between those strangers whose appearance of difference can be claimed by the nation, and those stranger strangers who may yet be expelled, whose difference may be dangerous to the well-being of even the most heterogeneous of nations" (97). Only those strangers who demonstrate forms of cultural difference that can be managed and contained are welcomed in the multicultural nation; those who do not are excluded from it. Although Ahmed focuses on Australian multiculturalism in her work, her comments also apply to multiculturalism in Canada.

In multicultural nations, then, epistemological tools for assessing strangers are used to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable strangers. According to Ahmed, “[t]he surprising nature of encounters can be understood in relation to the structural possibility that *we may not be able to read the bodies of others*”; “each time we are faced by an other who we cannot recognise, we seek to find other ways of achieving recognition, not only by re-reading the body of *this* other who is faced, but by telling the difference between this other, and other others” (8, original emphasis). Ahmed suggests that “[t]he encounters we might yet have with other others hence surprise the subject, but they also *reopen the prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference*” (8, original emphasis). Encounters are therefore mediated in that they presuppose “other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times” (7). In other words, each encounter involves a meeting between “the domain of the particular – the face to face of this encounter – and the general – the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism” (8). As Ahmed puts it, “[t]he particular encounter [...] always carries *traces* of those broader relationships” of power and antagonism (8, original emphasis). The particular and the general are therefore mutually constitutive: when a subject meets a stranger, both shape and are shaped by a prior history of encounters. This body of knowledge frames the assumptions and expectations that come to bear upon the encounter, but does not overdetermine the particular meeting.

The element of surprise that informs each encounter opens up the possibility of conflict between those involved in the meeting. As Ahmed argues, “[t]he face-to-face meeting is not between two subjects who are equal and in harmony”; encounters are

shaped by asymmetries of power and may therefore be “antagonistic” (7-8). As I suggested in my discussion of the “smelly immigrant” stereotype, encounters between racialized diasporic subjects and Euro-Canadians may produce feelings of shock, anger, fear, and disgust in the latter, particularly if it is a surprise meeting in an unexpected context. The same encounters may also produce shock, anger, fear, disgust, and a range of other feelings, like shame, for racialized diasporic subjects.

Since Ahmed’s theory of encounters emerges from her critique of stranger fetishism, it is unsurprising that when she briefly mentions smell in her work, she discusses it as a tool of differentiation.⁴⁵ As Ahmed argues, “smelling the difference is [...] a way of knowing that establishes the border between the familiar and the strange: do you smell like a friend or stranger?” (55). In other words, “smelling the difference” is “a practice of differentiation: those we know we treat with kindness, we let [...] in, we allow a relation of proximity or closeness,” and those we do not know, we treat harshly, ostracize, and exclude (56). Ahmed’s brief discussion of “smelling the difference” is useful for understanding how olfaction functions as an epistemological tool of differentiation between self and other during encounters.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ahmed’s theory of encounters is predominantly organized around economies of vision and touch. She defines encounters in terms of “face-to-face,” or “eye-to-eye,” meetings and “skin-to-skin” contact (7).

⁴⁶ Curiously, Ahmed’s emphasis on scent in this moment is based on a misreading of the quotation she cites from Plato’s *Republic*. Drawing on a quotation from Plato’s text, Ahmed compares a dog to a philosopher: just as the dog uses scent to distinguish between those who are familiar and unfamiliar, the philosopher relies on scent as a form of knowing (55). Yet the passage she quotes from Plato’s *Republic* specifically states that the dog in question “distinguishes the *sight* of a friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other”; the quotation does not mention scent (qtd. in Ahmed 55, my emphasis). There are a few other moments in *Strange Encounters* when Ahmed makes suggestive comments about scent’s relationship to stranger fetishism that she does not pursue. For instance, Ahmed’s discussion of “smelling the difference” opens her chapter on “Knowing Strangers,” but after her brief opening comments on scent, she turns away from olfaction to focus on the epistemological problem of speaking for others in ethnographic writing. Ahmed makes a similar move in a later chapter on multiculturalism and stranger fetishism. She suggests that ads for Turkish bath products in the UK promise consumers that they can “smell *like* the stranger” – a provocative comment that bears further exploration – but her analysis focuses on the consumer’s tactile sensation of the product rather than its scent (114, original emphasis).

While Ahmed's discussions of scent emphasize the notion of "smelling the difference," her understanding of the potentially productive dimensions of intersubjective interactions lends itself to theorizing the agential connections that also emerge through scent. Ahmed writes: "The immersion of a self in a locality is not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one could depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses" (89). Building on Brah's work, Ahmed further suggests that "[t]he lived experience of being-at-home [...] involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: [...] the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*" (89, original emphasis). Ahmed's understanding of how subjects and spaces "leak into" and mutually constitute each other aligns with my conceptualization of diffuse connections as an intimate process of blending that fundamentally alters entities that come into contact. In any encounter, both subjects "smell" in the dual sense of the term – that is, they both emit odours while simultaneously breathing them in. Crucially, these subjects do not "remain the same" after an encounter, but are both changed by this intimate intersubjective experience. As I suggested above, for those invested in essentialist notions of purity and impermeable social and bodily boundaries, diffuse connections may create anxiety; as a result, scent becomes a tool of differentiation. Others, however, may open themselves up to – rather than seek to disavow – diffuse connections; that is to say, they approach smell as a form of agential connection that emphasizes relationality in productive ways. Scents may thus form the basis for community, and the intimate intersubjective interactions that emerge through smell may mediate pleasure and desire in provocative ways. For the purposes of this

dissertation, I am interested in how smell functions both as tool of differentiation and a mode of agential connection for diasporic subjects.

I have been focusing on the spatial dynamics of diffuse connections as part of my aim to emphasize the intersubjective encounters that emerge in present places of habitation for diasporic subjects, a topic that requires closer attention in diaspora studies. My concept of diffuse connections also provides a useful framework for considering how scent mediates mutually-constitutive encounters between past and present. Ahmed suggests that each encounter is informed by past encounters, which are in turn reopened by intersubjective interactions in the present. On a fundamental level, then, encounters are shaped by memory. As I have already suggested, smell is deeply connected to memory. Scents have the ability to bring memories of the past into the present; smell thus subverts linear notions of time associated with Western progress. Moreover, the memories evoked by smells “are distinguished from other types of memories by their emotional potency” (Herz 191).⁴⁷ Just as smell’s diffuse materiality has the power to disrupt Western notions of bounded bodies and spaces, scent’s connection to memory and emotion has the potential to challenge conventional Western frameworks of temporality and subjectivity. As Classen, Howes, and Synnott note, “[c]ontemporary society demands that we distance ourselves from the emotions” and “that social structures and divisions be seen to be objective or rational” (5). Smell “threaten[s] the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity [...] by virtue of its emotional potency” (5). Scent’s subversive ability to evoke

⁴⁷ Using the rationalist discourse of science, cognitive neuroscientist Rachel S. Herz argues that the intimate connection between smell, memory, and emotion is attributed to the “uniquely direct neuroanatomical link between olfaction and the part of the brain related to emotion and learning-memory”: “Only two synapses separate the olfactory bulb from the amygdala, which is critical for the expression and experience of emotion. Only three synapses are needed to connect to the hippocampus, which is necessary for associative learning and various forms of memory. The connections between the olfactory area and the amygdala and hippocampus are more direct than the connections between these brain areas and any other sense” (191).

memories and emotions associated with other times and places is inextricably linked to smell's particular materiality. As diffuse, pervasive, and invisible entities, odours – and by extension, the memories and emotions they evoke – can emerge without warning and in unexpected contexts. These factors not only contribute to the surprise and conflict that shapes Euro-Canadians' encounters with the smells of racialized diasporic subjects; they also contribute to the surprise and conflict that may inform diasporic subjects' own encounters with scent. That is to say, smells – and the memories and emotions they evoke – emerge in unpredictable ways for both Euro-Canadians and diasporic subjects. How scents emerge affects how they are perceived, and by extension, how subjects relate to the diffuse connections in question.

Encounters with scents in the present may be informed by olfactory experiences in the past, but as I suggested above, past olfactory encounters are in turn shaped by intersubjective interactions with scents the present. This point is crucial for my project, as I aim to foreground how diasporic subjectivities are shaped by a range of contingent affects and experiences connected to past homelands *and* present sites of habitation; I also aim to emphasize how these affects and experiences blend together, mutually shaping and complicating each other. For example, pleasant memories and emotions evoked by certain scents – including nostalgia for a past homeland – may be complicated by fear, anger, shame, and other feelings arising from diasporic subjects' experiences of olfactory discrimination in new sites of habitation. Indeed, the very same smells that connect diasporic subjects to a sense of memory, homeland, and community may simultaneously mark their bodies as “other” in their current place of habitation. Manalansan briefly gestures toward the complex ways scent signifies for diasporic subjects in his work on the

“smelly immigrant” stereotype. While Manalansan acknowledges that the aroma of foods associated with past homelands may trigger pleasant memories and nostalgic feelings for diasporic subjects, he recognizes that these smells also evoke feelings of ambivalence and anxiety (45). As he notes, food smells do not simply “waft into the air and disappear,” but “adher[e] to clothes, to walls and to bodies,” marking particular homes and bodies as “immigrant” (46). Although this is a brief point in Manalansan’s work, it underscores the complex affective relationships that diasporic subjects may have to smell because of the mutually-constitutive connections between past and present.

My conceptualization of diffuse connections accounts for the complex spatio-temporal dynamics of diasporic subjectivities by emphasizing how notions of “pastness” and “homeland” both affect, and are affected by, encounters that emerge in present places of habitation. As I noted above, diffuse connections may be shaped by a range of affective experiences, including fear, anger, shame, anxiety, ambivalence, pleasure, and desire. While much of this dissertation focuses on how smell functions as a tool for differentiation in present sites of habitation, it also emphasizes smell’s potential as a mode of agential connection for diasporic subjects. By suggesting that scents, diasporas, and diasporic subjectivities may be thought of in terms of diffuse connections, this dissertation suggests that smell not only provides a metaphor for the complex spatial, temporal, and affective dynamics of diaspora, but also constitutes a primary material site where these dynamics play out.

Smell, Language, and Literary Representation: The Olfactory Turn in Canadian Diasporic Women's Writing

Literature plays an important role in the project of theorizing the relationship between smell and diasporic subjectivities. Literature is a primary site of linguistic representation, and rethinking the relationship between smell and linguistic representation is necessary in order to challenge dominant conceptualizations of scent and lay the groundwork for imagining an alternative language of smell. The perceived gap between scent and linguistic representation lies at the core of smell's denigration within Western thought. As I suggested earlier, scents tend to be constructed as purely visceral and unmediated. According to Rindisbacher, olfaction is often perceived as "a surplus sense, not really 'necessary' in cultural patterning within our socio-semiotic systems" (viii). Enlightenment approaches to smell as an insignificant sense thus continue to inform approaches to olfaction in the present. Unlike visual and aural phenomena, olfactory perception lacks refined scientific and linguistic models of classification (Rindisbacher 10).⁴⁸ Sociologists and anthropologists note that European languages are particularly ill-equipped to describe scents (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 3). In English, people often revert to the vague, abstract language of similes to describe odours, as in the phrase "it smells like roses" (Rindisbacher 10). As I suggested earlier, people also describe scents by attributing them to their apparent source, as in the phrase "the smell of coffee." Echoing Plato, people also typically characterize smells as either "good" or "bad" (Rindisbacher 11). Otherwise, people borrow terms from other sensory vocabularies, such as "sweet" from taste or "bright" from vision (Paul Lai 178), or use one of the few

⁴⁸ As Rindisbacher notes, vision is "the dominant metaphoric reference system" that informs language (14). For an example that demonstrates the extent to which the English language is structured by visualist metaphors, see the opening paragraph of Jay's *Downcast Eyes*.

olfactory adjectives that exist in English, like “musty,” the meaning of which may vary greatly among different people (Köster 31). Odours may be represented as ephemeral phenomena that evade linguistic representation, but they are inevitably mediated by language and signify in socially symbolic ways. Describing scent in terms of its source inscribes the restrictive logic of diffusion I discussed above by essentializing smell and attributing it to a fixed origin. Further, the reductive binary approach to smells as either “good” or “bad” emphasizes the moralistic overtones that often determine how odours are perceived. Ultimately, it is precisely the seeming impasse of language marking discussions of smell and representation that makes it important to interrogate the metaphors used to represent smells as visceral, unmediated, insignificant ephemera.

Literature constitutes a rich site for studying smell’s particular – and indeed, paradoxical – relationship to language and representation. Since odours are difficult to record, capture, and store over time, those who study smell must “make do” with descriptions and recollections of scent (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 3). Smell’s relationship to language and representation is thus marked by a profound paradox: scent is defined in opposition to linguistic representation, yet writing is one of the few ways in which odours can be represented. Literary representations of smell thus play an important role in research on the olfactory sense. Even scientists often use literary descriptions of scent as a point of departure for their studies, despite – or perhaps because of – the difficulty of classifying odours in the realm of science. For instance, scientific studies of memory often invoke Marcel Proust’s famous description of the flashbacks triggered by

the taste and smell of petite madeleines in *Swann's Way*.⁴⁹ Indeed, the “Proust Effect” is a term widely used within scientific discourse to describe the mechanics of involuntary memory.⁵⁰

Although literary representations of smell occupy a privileged place in many studies of scent across a range of disciplines, there is a relative dearth of work on smell in literary criticism. The few in-depth literary studies of smell that do exist tend to fall into two groups. The first – and much smaller – group examines texts that foreground scent in unusual ways that are central to its themes, such as Süskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*.⁵¹ The second group focuses on textual representations of smell in major works of the Western canon. Rindisbacher's *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature* (1993), one of the few monographs on smell and literature, focuses primarily on major works by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European writers such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Proust, Wilde, and Huxley. Janice Carlisle's *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (2004) also explores literary representations of scent by examining Victorian writers like Dickens, Eliot, and Meredith. Notably, in the past decade – and the last five years in particular – a number of critical essays have appeared on representations of scent in other literary texts. For instance, a series of articles have been published on smell in

⁴⁹ Originally published in French as *Du côté de chez Swann* in 1913, *Swann's Way* is the first installment of Proust's seven-volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (known in English as *Remembrance of Things Past* or *In Search of Lost Time*).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Shepherd and Shepherd-Barr's entry on the “Proust Effect” in the *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience* (2009). The entry quotes Proust's work and even engages in a brief literary analysis of the text.

⁵¹ See, for example, Bruce S. Fleming's “The Smell of Success: A Reassessment of Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*” (1991), Richard T. Gray's “The Dialectic of Enscentment: Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum* as Critical History of Enlightenment Culture” (1993), and Yanna Popova's “‘The Fool Sees with His Nose’: Metaphoric Mappings in the Sense of Smell in Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*” (2003). Published a year before Süskind's *Das Parfum* in 1984, Tom Robbin's postmodern novel “Jitterbug Perfume” also treats smell in unusual ways and positions olfactory representations at the centre of the text. Although less scholarly work has been written on Robbin's text, it is considered a cult classic.

Shakespeare's plays and a small body of work has emerged that explores scent in the work of James Joyce and William Faulkner.⁵²

My dissertation intervenes in and expands upon this fledgling field of criticism by turning to Canadian diasporic women writers' literary representations of smell. As I suggested in my introductory remarks, writers such as Shani Mootoo, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai represent smell in innovative ways. In most novels, scent is relegated to the background, where it serves a particular purpose – usually to convey a certain mood or atmosphere – and is ultimately subordinated to the protagonist's story.⁵³ I read Mootoo, Goto, and Lai's novels as works of fiction that re-imagine such conventional approaches to scent. As I noted in the Introduction, other diasporic writers have also turned to smell in their writing, but I see certain recurring themes and strategies among Mootoo, Goto, and Lai's particular representations of scent. These writers seize upon smell as a potential site for rethinking fundamental aspects of Western thought, including the conventional frameworks of space, time and subjectivity I have discussed throughout this Introduction. In their work, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai represent odours as if they are fictional characters, investing them with the kind of evocative power and affective depth often ignored in cursory literary discussions of smell. These authors challenge traditional Western constructions of space, time, and subjectivity by creating rich olfactory metaphors that are

⁵² Holly Dugan has published extensively on scent in Shakespeare's work and the early modern period. See, for example, Dugan's "Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Early Modern England" (2008) and "*Coriolanus* and 'the Rank-Scented Meinie': Smelling Rank in Early Modern London" (2010). See also Jonathan Gil Harris' "The Smell of Gunpowder: *Macbeth* and the Palimpsests of Olfaction" (2009). For recent studies of scent in Joyce's work, see, for example, Maud Ellman's "Noses and Monotheism" (2010). A number of critics have also recently explored smell in Faulkner's writing. See, for example, Maryanne M. Gobble's "The Significance of Verbena in William Faulkner's 'An Odor of Verbena'" (2000) and Lorie Watkins Fulton's "William Faulkner's Wistaria: The Tragic Scent of the South" (2004).

⁵³ This is not to say that the odours represented in canonical texts are simplistic and insignificant, of course. Such scents are often deeply symbolic and, I would argue, require a much closer analysis. For examples of such analyses, see the works of literary criticism on scent cited above, particularly Rindisbacher and Carlisle.

central to the novel's thematic content and that structure its narrative form. In doing so, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai re-imagine scent's materiality and offer an alternative language or metaphors of smell. This language complicates the reductive moral binaries that inform descriptions of scents as either "good" or "bad" and problematizes the desire to essentialize odours and trace them to fixed, localizable origins.

Mootoo, Goto, and Lai not only challenge traditional approaches to smell in their work; they also re-imagine conventional approaches to diaspora. Indeed, their experimental representations of smell and reconceptualizations of diaspora are intimately linked. In their fiction, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai complicate frameworks of diasporic movement as a process in which diasporic subjects spread outward from a foreign origin point, permeate the boundaries of other nations, and threaten to contaminate the sites where they settle. These authors also challenge common constructions of diasporic subjectivity as a condition defined by nostalgia, loss, longing, and notions of pastness. Mootoo, Goto, and Lai explore how olfactory memories and relationships to past homelands shape diasporic subjectivities in the present, but they also consider how these memories and relationships are in turn shaped by olfactory-mediated encounters – including experiences of discrimination – that arise in present places of habitation. In doing so, these writers emphasize how diasporic subjectivity itself may be thought of in terms of diffuse connections.

While Mootoo, Goto, and Lai emphasize how smell is mobilized as a tool of differentiation and oppression, they also explore smell as a site of intimate encounters, exchange, and engagement. In other words, their writing also investigates the agential possibilities of what I call diffuse connections. I read Mootoo, Goto, and Lai's work as

fiction that theorizes diffuse connections through narrative form and content. By creatively re-imagining the metaphors and materialities of scent, these authors map the productive potential of diffuse connections in their work. For Mootoo, Goto, and Lai, olfaction has the potential to mediate new modes of connection, and by extension, new approaches to diasporic community. For these writers, diasporic communities are not predicated upon traditional bonds of blood, kinship, or lineage, nor are they predicated upon assumptions about shared nostalgic longings for past homelands; rather, they emerge in relation to diffuse connections that challenge heteronormative frameworks of diaspora and complicate potentially essentialist notions of diasporic community, homeland, and memory.

Moreover, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai emphasize the diffuse connections of smell and diaspora using innovative narrative strategies that undermine the epistemological foundations of the realist novel. As a genre, the novel is associated with “the modern excavation of interiority as subjectivity,” “characters as personality and selfhood,” and “plot as the progressive development of the integral individual” (McKeon xvi). The *bildungsroman* in particular traces the progressive movement of a protagonist – often a young, white male – from innocence to experience (Harmon and Holman, “*Bildungsroman*” 61). The novel is also closely linked to literary realism (McKeon xvii). Refined by nineteenth-century European and American writers, the realist novel espouses a mimetic theory of art that tends to be rooted in the visual and the superficial and emphasizes a “one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject” (Harmon and Holman, “Realism” 432). Realism tends to focus on “the common, the average, the everyday” and centres on the bourgeois individual (432). While Mootoo,

Goto, and Lai focus on the material conditions of everyday life and emphasize subjectivity in their work, they imagine alternative forms of subjectivities – diasporic subjectivities shaped by diffuse connections – that complicate conventional notions of Western selfhood and directly challenge mimetic theories of art and representation. Their fiction is self-consciously anti-realist, even in its engagement with histories of diasporic displacement. The authors I examine use a range of experimental narrative techniques that undermine the progressive telos of the bildungsroman. As Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn argue, Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) and Goto’s *The Kappa Child* (2001) use “speculative fiction, in combination with elements of myth, history, science fiction, dystopia, and even pioneer writing, to present a hybrid literary form” that “disrupts” forms of realism (Introduction 19).⁵⁴ Written earlier, Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) and Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) incorporate elements of postmodernism and magic realism that similarly challenge realist conventions.

Given Mootoo, Goto, and Lai’s shared thematic and formal interests, it is unsurprising that a number of critics examine their work in relation to each other. Indeed, these writers invite comparisons, as they often mention each other in the acknowledgements section of their books.⁵⁵ In recent years, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai have appeared in a number of studies of Asian Canadian literature. For instance, Verduyn and Ty’s 2008 collection *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* features several essays that either examine individual texts or compare works by Lai, Goto, and Mootoo, who, as I noted earlier, are Chinese Canadian, Japanese Canadian, and Indo-Trinidadian

⁵⁴ Ty and Verduyn are particularly interested in how Lai and Goto’s works challenge “‘realist’ ethnographic representations of Asianness,” as their research focuses on alternatives to autoethnography (Introduction 19). I discuss Lai, Goto, and Mootoo’s relationship to “Asianness” further below.

⁵⁵ Mootoo thanks Lai in the acknowledgements section of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Goto thanks Lai in *The Kappa Child*, and Lai thanks both Goto and Mootoo in *Salt Fish Girl*.

Canadian, respectively. Ty and Verduyn use the term “Asian Canadian” to describe Canadians “from East, South, and Southeast Asia” (Introduction 15), but as Donald C. Goellnicht argues, the term “Asian Canadian” is “used primarily to refer to writing by East and Southeast Asian Canadians or immigrants” (16). In his essay “A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature,” Goellnicht examines the emergence of the field of “Asian Canadian Literature.” He contends that the term “Asian Canadian” typically excludes South Asian Canadians or immigrants because “South Asian Canadian literature had a significantly stronger cultural infrastructure by the 1980s than did the literature of other Asian ethnic groups” (14). Goellnicht suggests that this can be attributed to the particular ways in which colonialism shaped the South Asian Canadian diaspora (14).⁵⁶ Since the publication of Goellnicht’s essay in 2000, numerous critics have taken up the term “Asian Canadian” and explored it as a framework that offers enabling possibilities.⁵⁷

While my dissertation builds upon and extends this work, I frame my project in terms of diasporic writing rather than Asian Canadian literature in an effort to resist homogenizing the particular cultural contexts that inform each text. As Goellnicht notes,

⁵⁶ Goellnicht argues that “virtually all the prominent Canadian writers of South Asian origin – and some of the names, such as Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Bharati Mukherjee, and Cyril Dabydeen, are not only easily recognizable now but also central to CanLit – came to Canada as highly educated immigrants from former British colonies” (14). Many came from middle or upper class families and became part of the linguistic and literary elite in Canada (14). For a number of reasons, then, they had an advantage over Chinese and Japanese Canadians, “who had been in Canada longer but had come initially from working-class backgrounds and who, when they started to attend universities in significant numbers in the 1960s, after the repeal of discriminatory laws had isolated them from mainstream life,” did not necessarily pursue literary achievements (14). Goellnicht also points out that by the late 1960s, Canadian publishers and universities had already created a category for literature by, and criticism about, South Asian Canadian writers (15). He writes: “In a manouvre that kept this literature simultaneously inside and outside the field of ‘Canadian literature,’ it was classified as ‘Commonwealth literature,’ a term that gave way in the late 1980s to ‘postcolonial literature’” (15). According to Goellnicht, this designation was generally embraced and promoted by South Asian Canadians (15).

⁵⁷ See, for example, *Canadian Literature*’s special issue *Asian Canadian Studies* (2008), published nearly a decade after their initial exploration of Asian Canadian literature in their special issue *Asian Canadian Writing* (1999).

“the complexities of diasporic identity defy neat taxonomic categories, often exceeding the category of ‘race’” (17). This very concept of exceeding categories – racial and otherwise – is central to my argument that both smell and diaspora may be understood in terms of diffuse connections. Thus while Verduyn and Ty’s collection, published eight years after Gollenicht’s article, indicates that some scholars have begun to include “South Asian Canadian” literature under the rubric of “Asian Canadian,” I do not read Mootoo’s writing as Asian Canadian in this dissertation. Mootoo complicates frameworks of Asian and South Asian Canadian literature in significant ways, and reading her work in terms of diffuse connections foregrounds how the multiple trajectories of diaspora exceed such categories of containment. As I discuss further in Chapter One, Mootoo is the child of Indo-Trinidadian parents whose ancestors migrated to the Caribbean generations ago under the indenture system; she immigrated to Canada as a young adult in the 1980s and has lived primarily on the west coast ever since. Some of her writing explicitly focuses on how, in the context of Canadian multiculturalism’s approach to “visible minorities,” this complex diasporic trajectory is reduced to skin colour, which often leads to misconceptions about her culture and homeland. Goto and Lai are often treated as having a less ambiguous relationship to the field of Asian Canadian literature, yet they also have complex relationships to diaspora. Goto immigrated to Canada with her family when she was a young child and grew up on the Alberta prairies, not the urban centres of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal often associated with immigration. Lai also has a complex – and somewhat unconventional – history of migration: she was born in La Jolla, California to Chinese immigrant parents, was raised in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and has spent most of her adult life on Canada’s west coast. Like Mootoo’s work, Goto and Lai’s

writing is informed by an understanding of diaspora as a subjective condition shaped by multiple journeys, points of departure, and places of settlement.

Since Mootoo, Goto, and Lai's work explores how diaspora is imbricated in questions of gender and sexuality, I specifically understand their fiction within the broader framework of Canadian diasporic women's writing. In 2008, the journal *Canadian Literature* published a special issue called *Diasporic Women's Writing*. This collection, which focuses primarily on Canadian diasporic women's writing, is one of the few dedicated to diasporic women's writing as a field.⁵⁸ Although a growing number of scholars are organizing their work around the rubric of diasporic women's writing, Emma Parker notes that "[d]espite feminist interventions in the field, women's voices often remain unheard and female experience still tends to be un(der)represented" (2).⁵⁹ Further, scholars have yet to explore Canadian diasporic women's writing as a useful framework for examining writers such as Mootoo, Goto, and Lai. By considering how these authors explore the imbrications of gender, sexuality, race, and diaspora in relation to multiculturalist models of difference, settler colonialism, and indigenization in Canada – while recognizing that these systems and processes emerge in relation to broader histories and practices of colonialism, globalization, transnationalism, and postcolonialism – I hope to flesh out some of the particular issues that inform Canadian diasporic women's writing.

⁵⁸ In 2009, the journal *Contemporary Women's Writing* published a special issue on *Diaspora* that also focuses on diasporic women's writing. More recently, the journal *Textual Practice* published a special issue called *Contemporary Women's Writing and Queer Diasporas* (2011) in which scholars specifically explore diasporic women's writing in relation to queer sexualities. I discuss the relationship between queerness and Canadian diasporic women's writing in more detail below.

⁵⁹ For a list of recent books discussing the intersections of gender and diaspora, see Parker's Introduction to the *Diaspora* issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing*.

To this end, this dissertation extends work on diasporic women's writing that productively emphasizes the intersections between gender, sexuality, and diaspora. As Ella Shohat argues, "genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but, rather, as part of a permeable interwoven relationality" (qtd. in Snowden 199). Building on Shohat's point, Kim Snowden asks a series of questions to guide studies of diasporic women's writing: "How are literary histories [...] challenged by the relationship between gender and nation and the construction of gendered literary histories? Are writers diasporic because of their biography or because of their subject matter? Can the two be separated?" (199). Snowden suggests that diasporic women writers like Mootoo – and, I would argue, Goto and Lai – "perform gender in a way that reveals the 'interwoven relationality' of multiple axes of identities when it comes to diaspora" (199). Their representations of diaspora thus "cannot be read without the gendered" – and sexualized – "body at its centre" (199).

My dissertation thus explores how both gender and sexuality are inextricably linked to notions of diaspora. In her contribution to *Canadian Literature's* special issue *Diasporic Women's Writing*, Sneja Gunew contends that "what holds people together in an imagined diaspora" is gendered ("Serial" 9). Women and men are charged with different responsibilities for maintaining cultural connections, and "[w]omen are often constructed as the bearers of tradition, more vehemently so when in transition" ("Serial" 9). Diasporic women thus play a crucial role in reproducing diaspora – not only by upholding cultural traditions of the "homeland," but also by bearing children to raise within those traditions. Significantly, the very concept of diaspora inscribes a logic of heterosexual reproduction that has gendered implications. As Stefan Helmreich points

out, the word “diaspora” is etymologically connected to the notion of sowing or scattering seeds, and “in Judeo-Christian (and Islamic) cosmology, seeds are metaphorical for the male ‘substance’ that is traced in genealogical histories” (245). Helmreich explains that the word “sperm” – which is defined by the *OED* as “the generative substance or seed of male animals” (qtd. in Helmreich 245) – and the word “diaspora” both stem from the same Greek root word, *speirein*, which means “to sow or scatter” (245). Helmreich suggests that “[d]iaspora, in its traditional sense, thus refers [...] to a system of kinship reckoned through men and suggests the questions of legitimacy in paternity that patriarchy generates” (254).

Given the gendered and sexual dimensions of conventional frameworks of diaspora, it is crucial to ask: “how do women writers assert, negotiate, and contest multiple, political ideas of home across time, history, and geography?” (Gunew, “Serial” 7). According to Parker, diasporic women writers often explore “the subversive potential of diasporic women” by representing women who “have the power to disturb or subvert masculinist conceptions of diaspora and dominant ideologies of home and nation as well as the hegemony of a patriarchal, Western literary tradition and history” (5). In other words, diasporic women’s writing often considers how “women unsettled by migration become unsettling women” (5). In this dissertation, I argue that Mootoo, Goto, and Lai specifically mobilize queerness to “unsettle” conventional approaches to diaspora. Mootoo, Goto, and Lai understand themselves as queer writers and take up the issue of queerness in their work in different ways and to different degrees. This dissertation reads the texts I study as works that challenge the gendered and sexualized logic of diaspora. Gayatri Gopinath theorizes queer female diasporic subjectivity as a formulation that

challenges the “heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community” that inform diaspora’s “dependence on a genealogical, implicitly heteronormative reproductive logic” (10-11). Extending Gopinath’s work, I explore how smell becomes the medium through which queer female diasporic subjects undermine the conventions of gender and sexuality that inform conventional heteropatriarchal frameworks of diaspora. While many of the texts I examine theorize different versions of queer female diasporic subjectivity in relation to scent, I specifically focus on the connections between smell, queerness, gender, and diaspora in Chapter One.

Each chapter of my dissertation explores different permutations of diasporic subjectivities in terms of diffuse connections. In order to emphasize the multiple journeys, divergent points of departure, blended origins, and contingent experiences that shape diasporic women’s subjectivities, Chapter One examines Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996). Although the text is set on a fictional Caribbean island, it frames Canada as a primary destination for diasporic settlement. *Cereus Blooms at Night* focuses on an elderly Indo-Caribbean “madwoman,” Mala Ramchandin, who has been deeply affected by the abuse she suffers at the hands of her father, a failed colonial mimic man, and by the experience of being abandoned by her mother, her mother’s female lover, and her sister. My reading of Mootoo’s novel focuses on the relationship between smell, queerness, and “diasporic domesticity,” a phrase that I use to describe how domestic spaces – and by extension, women’s bodies – in the diaspora become crucial sites through which the social, political, and cultural politics of the “homeland” are played out. Building on Gopinath’s work, I explore the anxious reassertion of heteropatriarchy in the diaspora as a compensatory mechanism for the way in which diaspora queers identity. I

also read Mala as a queer diasporic female subject who remakes the home from within through scent. I explore how smell becomes an alternative “language” that allows Mala to articulate the unspeakable violence associated with her father’s home. I also examine how scent allows Mala to forge productive relationships with other queer diasporic subjects – relationships based on diffuse connections – that queer conventional heteropatriarchal models of both diaspora.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Hiromi Goto’s representations of Japanese-Canadian farming families to explore the relationship between smell, diaspora, settler colonialism, and indigenization. Complicating the binary of “Europeans” as colonizing and “Aboriginals” as colonized subjects, this chapter conceptualizes what I call “diasporic settlement.” Focusing on diaspora’s etymological connection to the process of scattering seeds, I suggest that diaspora emphasizes techniques of settlement rather than racialized identities and is therefore useful for considering how a range of diasporic communities may be complicit in ongoing structures of colonization. Using Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981) as an intertext, this chapter examines Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) and *The Kappa Child* (2001) as novels that explore the complexities of Japanese-Canadian diasporic settlement through the lens of cultivation. I read smell as a primary mode through which diasporic subjects relate to the Canadian landscape. In my discussion of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, I examine agricultural odours as a byproduct, or residue, of cultivation, which I frame as a key process of indigenization. I also critique Goto’s representation of smell and Japanese-Canadian indigenization in *Chorus of Mushrooms* and approach *The Kappa Child* as a text that is more self-reflexive about how diasporic settlement participates in ongoing colonial processes. In my analysis of *The Kappa Child*,

I read blocked nasal passages as a metaphor for how diasporic nostalgia may perpetuate colonial violence in new sites of settlement and explore how the scents associated with the kappa – a mischievous Japanese trickster figure – seem to allow the text’s narrator to engage with her past homeland and present site of settlement in more productive ways. I also interrogate Goto’s representation of diffuse connections in *The Kappa Child* and consider how the celebration of the kappa and its scents risks obscuring how Japanese Canadians’ presence on the prairies is predicated upon the absence of Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Three explores the intersections of smell, diaspora, contamination, and disease in Larissa Lai’s novel *Salt Fish Girl* (2002). Drawing on Nicole Shukin’s work on pandemic discourse, I read Lai’s novel as an interrogation of the way in which dominant discourses mobilize smell to pathologize “Chineseness.” Set in a post-apocalyptic, near-future Vancouver, *Salt Fish Girl* defamiliarizes past and present forms of olfactory discrimination by re-framing the relationship between smell, racialization, and pathologization through the lens of the future. In Lai’s novel, racialized diasporic subjects – including protagonist Miranda Ching – are diagnosed with a condition called the “dreaming disease” or “Contagion”: their bodies are marked by pungent odours that bear the traces of painful diasporic memories of violence and exploitation. I contend that Lai’s representation of Miranda’s condition constellates a number of key historical moments to emphasize the crucial role smell plays in pathologizing racialized diasporic subjects. I read the novel in relation to dominant narratives of Chinese immigration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century that relied on representations of smell to construct Vancouver’s Chinatown and its inhabitants as sites of contagion. I also situate the text within contemporary pandemic discourses that continue to pathologize “Asian” subjects

and thus draw attention to the limits of multiculturalist policies that claim to celebrate cultural difference. I suggest that Lai's novel aligns with my concept of diffuse connections and emphasizes the complex spatio-temporal dimensions of diasporic subjectivities by exploring how pathologizing discourses in the present affect Miranda on a physical and psychic level and shape her relationship to her diasporic memories in significant ways. Reading Lai's speculative future as a counterpoint to the fear-mongering discourse of pandemic speculation, I also suggest that *Salt Fish Girl* challenges Western fears of human-animal intimacy that inform pandemic discourse through the figure of Evie Xin, a clone manufactured for menial labour whose strong fishy scent and genetically-modified DNA blurs species lines. Bringing Donna Haraway's theory of "companion species," or interspecies mixing, into conversation with my concept of diffuse connections, I read Lai's representation of posthuman kinship as a productive approach to intersubjective interactions that not only challenges racist epistemologies linking smell, animality, and contamination, but also provides a useful framework for re-conceptualizing the notion of diasporic community.

By examining how Mootoo, Goto, and Lai re-imagine the metaphors and materialities of smell in their work, this dissertation aims to draw attention to the crucial role scent plays in shaping diasporic subjectivities. Smell may function as a tool of differentiation for racializing diasporic subjects in the context of Canadian multiculturalism and beyond, but it is also a site of agential connection that offers enabling possibilities for female diasporic subjects. As I hope to show, smell is not a "dispensable" sense, but is rather a complex mode of representation that allows Canadian

diasporic women writers to re-negotiate heteropatriarchal frameworks of diaspora and challenge the management and containment of difference under official multiculturalism.

Chapter One

Home Sweet Home?: Smell, Queerness, and Diasporic Domesticity

in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

Introduction

This chapter examines smell and diaspora through the framework of queerness. While all three of the authors I examine in this dissertation explore the relationship between smell, queerness, and diaspora in their work, I am particularly interested in how Shani Mootoo represents this relationship within the context of the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora. Born in Dublin in 1958 to Indo-Trinidadian parents,¹ Mootoo was raised in San Fernando, Trinidad and moved to Canada in the early 1980s (Wills 708).² Mootoo is acutely aware of the complexities of diaspora and much of her work explores diaspora as a condition of subjectivity marked by race, gender, and sexuality.³ For instance, a number of the short stories in *Out on Main Street* (1993), a collection based on Mootoo's personal journals, explore how queer Indo-Trinidadian women negotiate belonging in Canada. The stories "Out on Main Street" and "The Upside-downness of the World as it Unfolds" in

¹ Although the term "South Asian" has become popular in academic circles, in this chapter I use terms like "Indian," "Indo-Trinidadian," and "Indo-Caribbean" because Mootoo uses them and because I do not want to conflate India and South Asia, as they are two different cultural formations. "South Asia" describes a heterogeneous region that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Burma, and Sri Lanka (Dengel-Janic 133). According to Bina D'Costa, describing a project as "South Asian" when it focuses on India reproduces the hegemonic role India plays in regional politics at the expense of smaller South Asian states (12). Of course, the country of India is also heterogeneous, but since I am interested in "India" as a particular cultural construct in diasporic discourses, I use terms pertaining to India here. I retain the use of the term "East Indian," a phrase used to describe members of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, when invoked by critics.

² Mootoo moved to Canada to pursue a fine arts degree at The University of Western Ontario in London (Wills 708). Since then, she has lived primarily in Vancouver.

³ Mootoo first garnered critical acclaim in 1993 with the publication of her short story collection, *Out on Main Street*. Since then, she has published three novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005), and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008). She has also published a collection of poetry entitled *The Predicament of Or* (2001) and a number of essays. In addition to being a writer, Mootoo is an acclaimed video and multimedia artist (Wills 780).

particular explore Canadian multiculturalism's reductive approach to difference. Smell plays a subtle yet provocative role in these stories and deserves further attention.⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I am interested in Mootoo's most olfacto-centric work, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996).

Cereus Blooms at Night was remarkably successful for a debut novel. It was nominated for numerous awards and gained international recognition, quickly establishing Mootoo as one of Canada's pre-eminent writers.⁵ Set in the town of Paradise on the fictional Caribbean island of Lantanacamara – a space clearly modelled on Trinidad – the novel unravels the mystery surrounding Mala Ramchandin, an elderly Indo-Caribbean “madwoman” suspected of murdering her father, a failed colonial mimic man. Narrated by Tyler, a gay male nurse who cares for Mala at the Paradise Alms House, the multi-generational story spans from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-1990s, the time of the text's publication. Tyler frames the novel as a text written for the purpose of finding Mala's long-lost sister Asha, who ran away from home at a young age and is believed to be living in Canada. Tyler's narrative begins with the story of Mala's father

⁴ In many of the stories in *Out on Main Street*, including “Out on Main Street,” “The Upside-downness of the World as it Unfolds,” “Sushila's Bhakti,” and “A Garden of Her Own,” Mootoo draws on smell to represent how Indo-Trinidadian women struggle to feel at home in Canada. Smell is also central to the story “Lemon Scent,” which focuses on two Indo-Trinidadian women in the Caribbean who attempt to hide their relationship from one of their husbands. Smell also signifies in provocative ways in *He Drown She in the Sea* and *Valmiki's Daughter*. In *He Drown She in the Sea*, scent serves as a memory trigger for Mootoo's wine-tasting Indo-Caribbean protagonist, Henry St. George, while living in Canada. Smell also works in subtle ways to emphasize inter-diaspora tensions between African and Indian diasporas in the Caribbean and class differences between rich and poor Indo-Caribbean families. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, Mootoo uses smell in a more instrumentalized way to highlight the dynamics of race and class that shape Trinidad's creole society. The omniscient Indo-Trinidadian narrator also begins the novel by asking readers to imagine the “cacophony” of scents that would bombard them if they suddenly dropped, blindfolded, onto a busy San Fernando street. Suggesting that the “intersection's odours” would “overwhelm” readers even more than the “aural melee,” the narrator imagines readers' subjective reactions to the smells of transportation, street food, unwashed bodies, failing deodorant, swelling heat, urine and excrement, spilled oil, fishing vessels, foreign ports, hospital waste, and the malodorous samaan tree, the “unofficial tree of the city” (9).

⁵ *Cereus Blooms at Night* was a finalist for major awards such as the Giller Prize and the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award (Steinberg 50).

Chandin, the son of Indian indentured labourers, and traces the traumatic experiences that shape Mala's life, including her abandonment by her mother and her mother's lover and the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of her father.

Although *Cereus Blooms at Night* is set in the Caribbean and focuses primarily on the inter-generational conflict of one Indo-Caribbean family, it raises broader questions about the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, diaspora, and domesticity and thus offers insight into the cultural dynamics that inform diasporic subjectivities in Canada.

Cereus Blooms at Night explores what it means for diasporic women to negotiate what I call "diasporic domesticity." I use the phrase diasporic domesticity to describe how domestic space in the diaspora becomes a key site through which the social, political, and cultural politics of the homeland are played out. Building on the work of Gayatri Gopinath, this chapter explores how diaspora queers nationalist forms of identity, which in turn leads to the assertion of heteropatriarchy in the diaspora as an anxious compensatory mechanism. This emphasis on heteropatriarchy has a particular impact on diasporic women, who are responsible for both embodying and reproducing the homeland in the domestic spaces of the diaspora. *Cereus Blooms at Night* explores how the anxious reassertion of heteropatriarchy in the diaspora may result in a perverse version of diasporic domesticity marked by abuse and incest. Following Gopinath, I read Mala Ramchandin as a queer female diasporic subject – despite her apparent heterosexuality – because she "queers" her father's abusive home; that is to say, she contests the heteropatriarchal logic of kinship and reproduction that structures diasporic domesticity.

My work extends current criticism on *Cereus Blooms at Night* by suggesting that smell is central to the novel's conceptualization of queerness and diaspora. While most

reviews of *Cereus Blooms at Night* praise Mootoo's "sensual" writing, particularly her rich descriptions of scent, scholars have yet to provide an in-depth study of smell's significance in the novel.⁶ I contend that in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo imagines smell as a key mode for queering diasporic domesticity. It is crucial to note, however, that Mootoo does not represent smell as inherently subversive; rather, she represents smell as a site of ambivalence that may be mobilized for particular purposes. In the novel, smell is a site of colonial mimicry and the colonial education of aesthetic taste, a medium for the anxious reproduction of heteropatriarchal forms of Indian nationalism, and a trigger that evokes memories of incestuous violence. Yet the text also represents smell as a site of agential renegotiation and explores how it may be recuperated as a subversive, anti-colonial tool for queering heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity. This chapter tracks the shift from smell as a tool for reinscribing heteropatriarchal colonial power relations to a subversive, anti-colonial queering mechanism. I contend that it is precisely because smell functions as a tool of colonialism and a mode of heteropatriarchal oppression that Mala turns to scent to queer the home from within. By mobilizing smell's ability to permeate the borders between public and private space, Mala subverts attempts to conceal gender and sexual violence within the domestic sphere and silence women's voices. Smell thus embodies an alternative "language" for Mala to articulate the unspeakable trauma associated with her father's perverse version of diasporic domesticity. Crucially, the diffuse materiality of scent allows Mala to forge productive

⁶ For instance, reviewer Lee Reilly claims that *Cereus Blooms at Night* is "told in prose so sensual you can smell the cereus, lime, and cardamom" as well as "the decay of faith, marriage, and human bodies" (1964), while reviewer Sybil Steinberg suggests that Mootoo's representations of smell represent "[t]he fecund and fertile cycles of Caribbean life" (50). While many scholars mention smell in their critical work on *Cereus Blooms at Night*, they usually do so in passing. Donna McCormack's 2011 essay "Multisensory Poetics and Politics in Shani Mootoo's *The Wild Woman in the Woods* and *Valmiki's Daughter*" analyzes representations of smell and other sensory modalities in Mootoo's work, but does not address representations of smell in *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

new relationships with other queer diasporic subjects. These relationships, which I read in terms of diffuse connections, form the basis for an alternative model of queer diasporic community that remakes the home from within. Ultimately, smell's diffuse materiality makes scent a powerful tool for challenging heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity and a productive medium for forging communities that queer diaspora.

Queering Home in the Indo-Trinidadian Diaspora

Before turning to a discussion of smell and queerness in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, it is important to understand the relationship between India and the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora. After the African slave trade was abolished in the early nineteenth century, planters began relying on indentured labourers from India and China to fill the labour gap in the Caribbean colonies (Kale 39).⁷ Between 1837 and 1917, approximately 430,000 indentured men and women migrated from India to Britain's Caribbean colonies, where they worked primarily on sugar plantations (1). Nearly 144,000 of these indentured labourers settled in Trinidad (Munasinghe 67). As Robin Cohen notes, most Indian indentured labourers were Hindu (65), and from a Hindu perspective, crossing the ocean from India to the Caribbean compromised their religious and cultural identity. According to Brinda Mehta, "the traversing of large expanses of water was associated with contamination and cultural defilement as it led to the dispersal of traditional, family, class and caste classifications and to the general loss of a 'purified' Hindu essence" (5). As Aisha Khan argues, the phrase "crossing the kala pani" – meaning dark or black water in Hindi and Urdu – refers to this highly symbolic journey "from [...] cultural purity to

⁷ Like many other Caribbean colonies, Trinidad changed hands a number of times in the eighteenth century (Higman 184). The British captured Trinidad from the Spanish in 1797, but the French and Spanish continued to have a strong cultural influence on the island (184).

cultural hybridity” (123). Khan contends that within the particular context of indentureship, the metaphor of the *kala pani* constitutes “a reflexive commentary on rupture”: it “relates the journey of Indians in diaspora from their forfeited ancestral India, focusing on their transformation from ‘pure’ Indian identity (in the sense of culturally ‘authentic’ or religiously ‘correct’) to their variously defined mixed identity as contemporary Indo-Trinidadians” (123). The relationship between India and the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora has thus long been shaped by discourses of purity and contamination that constructed the diaspora as a tainted, and therefore inferior, version of India.⁸

The relationship between India and the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora may be understood in terms of queerness. In her 2008 essay “On Becoming an Indian Starboy,” Mootoo – a descendant of Indian indentured labourers – provocatively frames the rupture of crossing the *kala pani* in terms of queerness. She writes: “once an Indian from India stepped foot on one of those boats in the nineteenth century, bound for the islands of the British Empire, in leaving behind language, family ties, community, the village, tradition in general, [and] very specific religious rites, he or she was transitioning into a queerness of no return” (83). For Mootoo, this state of queerness continues to affect future generations: “by dint of the original displacement, we seem destined to limp along in a limbo of continuously changing and challenging queerness” (84).⁹ Gayatri Gopinath theorizes the queerness of diaspora in more detail in her book *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005). She asserts: “If within

⁸ I discuss discourses of contamination in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁹ Mootoo suggests that this queerness continues to be inscribed in the relationship between India and the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora. In her essay, she recalls meeting her “First Real Indian” – that is, a person born in India – while attending university in Canada (“Becoming” 88). The “Real Indian” called Mootoo a “bastardized Indian” and declared that “Trinidad’s version of all things Indian – the food, the religion, the people – were inauthentic” (88).

heteronormative logic the queer is seen as the debased and inadequate copy of the heterosexual, so too is diaspora within nationalist logic positioned as the queer Other of the nation, its inauthentic imitation” (11). For this reason, Indian nationalist discourses have historically framed the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora as a corrupt “copy” of the “original” homeland of India. As Gopinath argues, nation and diaspora are “mutually constituted formations” (9). Just as the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora defines itself in relation to the ostensible homeland of India, India relies on the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora to define itself. Crucially, the “bourgeois national subject in India” – a subject gendered as male – is consolidated “through a configuration of its disavowed” – and I would argue, feminized – “Other in the diaspora” (9). The construction of the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora as an inferior version of India thus relies upon a logic of gender and sexuality that frames the diaspora as a queer, feminized other. As Gopinath argues, “discourses of female sexuality are central to the mutual constitution of diaspora and nation” and “dominant nationalism institutes heterosexuality as a key disciplinary regime” (9-10).

The construction of the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora as a queer, feminized version of India had a particular impact on discourses surrounding Indo-Trinidadian women’s sexuality. As Tejaswini Niranjana notes, in the early-twentieth century anti-colonial Indian nationalists mobilized “the figure of the amoral, sexually impure Indian woman abroad as a way of producing the chaste, virtuous Indian woman at ‘home’ as emblematic of a new ‘nationalist morality’” (qtd. in Gopinath 9). Drawing on the work of Niranjana, Rhoda Reddock, Madhavi Kale, and Patricia Mohammed, Gopinath contends that indentureship was marked by discourses that sought to “control and legislate Indian female sexuality” (179). Most Indian women who migrated to Trinidad under

indentureship were single, and both the British colonial state and immigrant Indian men labeled these women as immoral and characterized them as outcasts and prostitutes (179). According to Gopinath, the need to manage and control Indian women's sexuality was informed by a range of intersecting discourses and interests (179). Indian immigrant men attempted to reconstitute a sense of masculinity in the diaspora by constraining "unruly" Indian female sexuality (179-80). The "gendered discourse of anticolonial nationalism in India" also invoked the morality of Indian immigrant women for strategic purposes as "arguments against indentureship were articulated as safeguarding the purity and sanctity of Indian womanhood" (180). Further, colonial discourses promoted Victorian ideals of domesticity and womanhood – ideals organized around the notion of sexual and moral purity – with the goal of "domesticating" Indian women immigrants by "transforming them from wage laborers to dependent housewives" (180). British colonial and Indian nationalist discourses of domesticity thus aligned in the sense that they both sought to define and delimit women's sexuality in the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora.

For the purposes of this project, I am particularly interested in how the reassertion of heteropatriarchy emerges as an anxious response to the way that the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora queers identity. As Gopinath argues, "Indianness is maintained in the diaspora only by predictably positioning diasporic women as the placeholders for communal identity and tradition" (189). Constructing women as the embodiment of cultural and sexual purity thus works to "maintain the boundaries of communal identity in the diaspora" (162). The notion of home as the nation space, domestic space, and female body thus plays a key role in the anxious reassertion of heteropatriarchy. As Gopinath argues, "home and housing were crucial to the production of both a British colonial and

Indian anticolonial nationalist gendered subjectivity in the nineteenth century” (14). Partha Chatterjee contends that in India’s late colonial period, “the battle for the new idea of womanhood in the era of nationalism was waged in the home”; the home “became the principal site of struggle through which the hegemonic construct of the new nationalist patriarchy had to be normalized” (qtd. in Gopinath 14). As Gopinath points out, contemporary diasporic discourses “bear the marks” of these legacies (14). In Trinidad, a “diasporic male elite” still aims to “counter nationalist framings of the diaspora as the inauthentic Other to the nation by positioning women’s bodies as the site of an imagined communal purity and authenticity” (161-2).¹⁰ In the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora, “home” thus continues to be constructed as “a sacrosanct space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, embodied by the figure of the ‘woman’ who is enshrined at its center, and marked by patriarchal gender and sexual arrangements” (14).

I use the term “diasporic domesticity” to account for the particular way in which discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and nation converge in the domestic spaces of the diaspora. In the context of diaspora, domestic space becomes a key site through which the social, political, and cultural politics of the homeland are played out. The notion of home as nation space, domestic space, and female body is certainly not unique to diaspora, but the cultural stakes of diasporic women reproducing and embodying the homeland are different because of the way that diaspora queers identity. In colonial Trinidad, Indo-Trinidadian women had a particular relationship to diasporic domesticity. They were responsible for reproducing Indian cultural and religious traditions in the domestic sphere and bearing children to raise within these traditions, even though the supposed purity of

¹⁰ It is important to note that women may also perpetuate these ideas. In her essay “On Becoming an Indian Starboy,” Mootoo discusses her Hindu grandmother’s desire that she be a “good Indian girl” and learn the cultural and religious traditions of India (86).

these traditions had been compromised by the very act of crossing the kala pani. At the same time, Indo-Trinidadian women had to navigate British models of colonial domesticity. Both Indian nationalist and British colonial discourses may have emphasized women's moral and sexual purity, as Gopinath suggests, but their models of domesticity were rooted in very different cultural and religious traditions. For Indo-Trinidadian women, then, diasporic domesticity not only involved negotiating heteropatriarchal constructions of moral and sexual purity; it also involved reconciling Indian religious and cultural traditions with British colonial domesticity.

This chapter focuses on how women “queer” the heteropatriarchal conventions of diasporic domesticity. Following Gopinath, I use the term “queer” to describe the process of challenging the “heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community” and unsettling diaspora's “dependence on a genealogical, implicitly heteronormative reproductive logic” (10-11). It is important to note that the term “queer” may “refer to a range of dissident and non-heteronormative practices and desires” that are “incommensurate with the identity categories of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’” (11). As Gopinath argues, linking queerness and diaspora “recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries” (11). Focusing on queerness thus “becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential to the notion of diaspora” (11). According to Gopinath, theorizing queerness and diaspora also challenges “the globalization of ‘gay’ identity that replicates colonial

narratives of development and progress and judges all ‘other’ sexual cultures and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity” (11).¹¹

Much of Gopinath’s work focuses specifically on queer female diasporic subjects. As Gopinath argues, queer female diasporic subjectivity “forms a constitutive absence in both dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses” and even tends to be overlooked within “seemingly radical cultural and political diasporic projects” that often “center a gay male or heterosexual feminist diasporic subject” (6). In *Impossible Desires*, Gopinath explores a number of texts in which queer female desire works to challenge the home from within. As Gopinath argues, “many lesbian and gay texts imagine ‘home’ as a place to be left behind, to be escaped in order to emerge into another, more liberatory space” often located in the West (14). But Gopinath contends that “[f]or queer racialized migrant subjects, ‘staying put’ becomes a way of remaining within the oppressive structures of the home – as domestic space, racialized community space, and national space – while imaginatively working to dislodge its heteronormative logic” (14-5). Gopinath reads *Cereus Blooms at Night* as a text in which queer diasporic subjects remake the home space by “staying put.” She argues that in Mootoo’s novel, “home is a vexed location where queer subjects whose very desires and subjectivities are formed by its logic simultaneously labor to transform it” (15). While discussions of queerness in *Cereus Blooms at Night* often focus on the more obviously queer characters in the text – namely Tyler, the gay male nurse and narrator; Otoh, Tyler’s female-to-male transgendered lover; Sarah, Mala’s mother; and Lavinia, Sarah’s lover – I am particularly interested in Mala as

¹¹ Gopinath notes that “[a]n emerging body of queer of color scholarship has taken to task the ‘homonormativity’ of certain strands of Euro-American queer studies that center white gay male subjectivity, while simultaneously fixing the queer, nonwhite racialized, and/or immigrant subject as insufficiently politicized and ‘modern’” (11).

queer female diasporic subject. Although Mala is not identified as a lesbian and has heterosexual relationships with men, she queers diasporic domesticity by challenging the notion of the nation space, domestic space, and female body as home. As Gopinath argues, the novel “imagines queerness as residing not solely in particular bodies that are specifically marked as ‘lesbian,’” but rather “extend[ing] to all those bodies disavowed by colonial and national constructions of home” – including Mala’s body, which is “marked by rape and incest” (184). Gopinath reads Mala as a queer female diasporic subject because “she extricates herself from the terms of heterosexual domesticity”; indeed, the novel explicitly names her as “queer” (184). Mala also queers the notion of home by “remaking” her father’s home – the site of incestuous violence – as “an alternative space of ‘not-home’” that “explodes the gendered and racialized terms of the domestic as set forth under indentureship” (183).

Building on Gopinath’s work, I contend that smell plays a key role in Mala’s queering of home and is central to the novel’s conceptualization of queer female diasporic subjectivity.¹² It is crucial to note, however, that Mootoo does not represent smell as inherently subversive. In the novel, scent is a site of ambivalence that may be recuperated and mobilized for subversive purposes, but may also serve as a mechanism of colonialism and heteropatriarchy. *Cereus Blooms at Night* explores smell as a tool of colonialism by focusing on how, as a young colonial mimic man, Chandin’s sense of smell is conditioned by colonial notions of aesthetic taste. The novel also suggests that smell may function as a mechanism of heteropatriarchal oppression by emphasizing how Chandin’s penetrating

¹² Gopinath mentions scent in her analysis of *Cereus Blooms at Night* and suggests that smell is “crucial to the novel’s framing of home” (182), but smell is not central to her theorization of queer female diasporic subjectivity. She discusses scent in more detail in her reading of Shyam Selvadurai’s novel *Funny Boy*, which precedes her reading of *Cereus Blooms of Night* in chapter six of *Impossible Desires*.

body odour re-enacts his physical assaults on Mala. But as I argued in the Introduction, even though scents may not be inherently subversive, their ability to exceed containment and permeate spatial and bodily boundaries in ways that unsettle heterosexual forms of exchange means that they have the potential to queer their surroundings. Moreover, the fact that smell may serve as a tool of oppression makes it all the more important to renegotiate as a mode of subversion. I argue that in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala renegotiates and recuperates scent as a tool for queering diasporic domesticity precisely because smell functions as a tool of colonialism and mode of heteropatriarchal oppression.

Mala queers diasporic domesticity by mobilizing smell to subvert the borders between public and private space that work to conceal violence against women. According to Meg Wesling, gender and sexual violence tends to be “hidden from view, obscured through the dominant discourse of the family as a site of affection, intimacy, and privacy” and the home as “a sanctuary” (657). The same discourses that conceal gender and sexual violence within the home also silence women’s voices. As Vivian M. May argues, “‘telling’ on ‘the family’ is generally taboo because it threatens to disrupt the cycles of violence hidden under rhetorics of love, care, and benevolent protection” (115). Moreover, the grammar and linearity of language is often “insufficient when it comes to the unspeakable” (108). Smell’s diffuse materiality has the potential to challenge the myths of home as a space of comfort and safety that conceal violence within the home and silence women’s voices. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala’s housekeeping practices produce smells that permeate the physical and discursive boundaries that define the domestic sphere and attempt to contain abuse within the home; she thus renegotiates scent

to queer the home from within. These odours bear the traces of her violent past. Smell thus provides an alternative language for Mala to articulate her unspeakable trauma. Although smell is often constructed as antithetical to language, the characteristics that ostensibly make scent difficult to encode linguistically – particularly its ability to exceed both physical and discursive containment – is precisely what makes smell a productive medium for representing the unspeakable.

Crucially, the scents that bear the traces of Mala's past mediate her relationships with other queer diasporic subjects; these relationships provide a productive alternative to the heteropatriarchal relations that structure Chandin's home. I read these relationships in terms of diffuse connections. As I suggested in the Introduction, I use diffuse connections to describe the intersubjective interactions mediated by scent that emerge in relation to diaspora. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo explores the potential of diffuse connections by framing smell as the basis for alternative diasporic communities. These communities are predicated upon what Tyler, the narrator, calls a "shared queerness" – that is, an affiliation based on mutual estrangement from the norm. In the novel, scent forges diffuse connections between queer diasporic subjects by emphasizing relationality and evoking empathy. The communities that emerge from these diffuse connections re-imagine conventional frameworks of diasporic community based on heteropatriarchal forms of kinship and reproduction.

Educating the Senses: Smell, Aesthetic Taste, and Colonial Mimicry

First, I want to explore how smell reinscribes heteropatriarchal and colonial power relations in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Tyler begins Mala's story by talking about her

father, Chandin Ramchandin, a colonial mimic man. The son of Indian indentured labourers, Chandin is adopted by Reverend Ernest Thoroughly, a colonial missionary from the Shivering Northern Wetlands – a site clearly modelled on Britain – whose name suggests that he is “thoroughly” white, European, and earnest about “civilizing” Indians in the Caribbean colonies. Chandin eagerly adopts the Thoroughlys’ lifestyle and trains to become a colonial missionary; in other words, he is a colonial mimic man. In his influential essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” Homi K. Bhabha theorizes colonial mimicry as a process in which colonized subjects imitate and internalize the colonizer’s cultural values, habits, and institutions. According to Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (266, original emphasis). Crucially, the thin line between mimicry and mockery means that colonial mimicry is always at risk of undermining itself. As Bhabha argues, mimicry “produce[s] its slippage, its excess, its difference”; it “appropriates” the other while also producing “the sign of the inappropriate” (268). In other words, colonial mimicry reveals the limitations of colonial discourse through the very act of imitation. While a number of critics read Chandin in relation to Bhabha’s concept of colonial mimicry, scholars have yet to explore the relationship between scent and colonial mimicry in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Chandin’s colonial training involves an education in aesthetic taste and his internalization of colonial ideology is intimately connected to olfaction. Chandin internalizes dominant Western sensory hierarchies that privilege vision and denigrate scent. He also adopts colonial olfactory codes that serve to reinforce racial hierarchies. By underscoring the crucial role smell plays in Chandin’s colonial education, *Cereus Blooms at Night*

challenges the Enlightenment belief that olfaction is an insignificant sense that has no bearing on aesthetic judgment.

Before turning to a discussion of smell and colonial mimicry in Mootoo's novel, it is important to consider colonial mimicry's particular resonances in the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora. Bhabha specifically theorizes colonial mimicry in relation to V.S. Naipaul's novel about Indo-Trinidadian power relations, *The Mimic Men* (1967).¹³ Indeed, the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora can be understood as a kind of test site for colonial mimicry. Many Indian indentured labourers migrated to Trinidad with the hope of achieving some level of upward mobility outside India's rigid caste system.¹⁴ According to Viranjini Munasinghe, colonial Trinidad "had a highly elaborate system, based on race and color, for structuring the social relations among people of different ancestries" (80). The three-tiered system positioned Africans and their descendants – who constituted the majority of Trinidad's population at the time – at the base, "creoles" of mixed African and European descent in the middle, and a small, elite group of European descendants at the top (80). Since "Indians were essentially latecomers" to a society that was already "thoroughly creolized" by the mid-nineteenth century, they were excluded from this hierarchical

¹³ According to Bhabha, "[t]he line of descent of the mimic man can be traced through the works of Kipling, Forester, Orwell, [and] Naipaul" (267). Bhabha also quotes Ralph Singh, the protagonist of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, to illustrate the parodic elements of colonial mimicry: "We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new" (qtd. in Bhabha 268).

¹⁴ Most Indians indentured themselves to escape the poverty, famine, disease, and poor living conditions in India, which had been exacerbated by the infiltration of the British East India Company and establishment of colonial rule under the British Raj in 1858 (Munasinghe 68-9). Many low-caste Indians indentured themselves in an effort to escape the rigid caste system and create a better life elsewhere (68). The British deemed the system of indentureship to be "mutually beneficial" to both the British Caribbean and India (Kale 54). As one official document put it, the British Government was performing an "act of humanity" by providing Indians with a means of escaping the "dreadful calamities" of their home country; in the Caribbean, the Indians could have access to "profitable employment" and also "have the means of obtaining religious instruction" (qtd. in Kale 54).

system (80).¹⁵ Whereas “West Indians,” or creoles, were defined by racial mixing, a “major ideological axiom” that ostensibly “defined nativeness” in the Caribbean, “East Indians” were constructed as a “pure race” that was “external to Trinidad” (86).¹⁶ Paradoxically, then, dominant discourses in Trinidad excluded the Indo-Trinidadians on the basis of racial purity while nationalist narratives in India distanced the country from the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora on the basis of cultural contamination. The definition of Indians as outsiders may have contributed to a sense of alienation among Indo-Trinidadians, but it also played a crucial role in their ability to benefit from colonial mimicry. In contrast to Africans, who had been brought to the Caribbean as slave labourers and were positioned at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy, Indian indentured labourers had the potential, with the right training, to transcend their skin colour – which was lighter than the Africans’ – and become a compradorial class of colonial mimics. Indians were therefore granted access to the supposed benefits of colonial mimicry that former African slaves, who embodied the epitome of the alterity, were not.

These intersecting issues provide the context for *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

Chandin’s father, Old man Ramchandin, initially comes to Lantanacamara to escape “his inherited karmic destiny as a servant labourer”; “[i]n Lantanacamara it was easier to slip out of caste” and he “planned to work hard, save money and educate Chandin out of the fields” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 26-7). Chandin’s father understands Lantanacamara as a site that

¹⁵ This exclusion is significant given that “East Indians constituted one-third of the total population in 1870” (Munasinghe 83).

¹⁶ As Munasinghe points out, this does not mean that “putatively pure East Indian[s]” did not “mix” with other races, “but rather that this mixing was erased rather than memorialized” (83). It is worth noting that the term “East Indian” was used by British colonialists “to distinguish between the immigrants from the ‘East’” and Indigenous peoples, who were initially misrecognized as “Indians” (Pirhabhi 101). When the term “West Indies” emerged as a name for Britain’s colonies in the Caribbean, the African diasporic population was defined as “West Indian” (101).

offers his son the opportunity for upward mobility through a Christian missionary education. *Cereus Blooms at Night* does not provide an in-depth exploration of the complex relationship between the Afro- and Indo-Caribbean diaspora – as Rajini Srikanth notes, the novel is “curiously silent about the African presence” in the Caribbean (107) – but Tyler does briefly situate Chandin’s education in relation to the treatment of former African slaves. In his discussion of the gossip surrounding Chandin’s adoption and education by Reverend Thoroughly, Tyler cites an Indo-Caribbean woman who, in local dialect, begrudges Africans for ostensibly receiving preferential treatment after the abolition of slavery:

Since the Africans let go from slavery, all eyes on how the government treating them. It have commissions from this place and from that place making sure that the government don’t just neglect them. They have schools, they have regular and free medical inspection. Now, you see any schools set up for our children, besides the Reverend’s school? When we get sick and we have pains, who looking after us? We looking after our own self, because nobody have time for us. Except the Reverend and his mission from the Shivering Northern Wetlands. All he want from us is that we convert to his religion. If I had children, I would convert! Besides, nobody but you really know which god you praying to. (Mootoo, *Cereus* 29)

By giving voice to these thoughts, Tyler – and by extension, Mootoo – hints at the tensions between the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diasporas in the nineteenth century, but

he does not explore why Indians had greater access to upward mobility in the Caribbean than former African slaves.¹⁷

Chandin's colonial training involves an education not only in religion, but also in aesthetic taste. In his discussion of Thomas Babington Macaulay's influential "Minute on Education" (1835), Bhabha writes: "Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' – in other words a mimic man" (267). Given that Macaulay claims that "blood and colour" distinguishes Indians from the "truly" British subjects they mimic, it follows that Bhabha emphasizes "the visibility of mimicry" in his essay (269). He argues, for instance, that "*almost the same, but not quite*" translates into "[a]lmost the same but not white" (269, original emphasis). *Cereus Blooms at Night* acknowledges the relationship between visuality and colonial mimicry by suggesting that Chandin's increasing awareness of his

¹⁷ Mootoo addresses tensions between the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diaspora more directly in her later novels. In *He Drown She in the Sea*, Mootoo investigates the mounting tensions between the island's African, Indian, and European populations during the Second World War and the rise of the Black Power movement, and specifically considers the complex relationships between the Afro- and Indo-Caribbean diaspora. The protagonist, Henry St. George, is the son of an Indo-Caribbean man who was raised by an African couple, and the text highlights the racist views of Africans held by Indo-Caribbean characters, including Henry's mother. Of all Mootoo's novels, her most recent work, *Valmiki's Daughter*, provides the most in-depth exploration of the complex inter-diaspora dynamics of Trinidad's creole society. It is the only one of Mootoo's novels that does not fictionalize its Trinidadian setting – the novel is set in Mootoo's hometown of San Fernando – which suggests that she wants to explicitly explore the politics of the country's creolized culture. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, Mootoo not only interrogates the relationships between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian diaspora; she also self-consciously situates the novel within the trajectory of Indo-Trinidadian literature that has largely ignored the complexities of the Caribbean's inter-diaspora politics. At one point, the protagonist – a young, upper-middle-class Indo-Trinidadian woman named Viveka – critiques V.S. Naipaul's literary representations of Trinidad because they "hadn't ever really paid attention [...] to the presence of blacks in the country" (Mootoo, *Valmiki* 285). Mootoo thus self-reflexively critiques the treatment of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Indo-Trinidadian literature. The novel, which focuses primarily on Viveka's sexual desire for a French woman who has settled in San Fernando with her Indo-Trinidadian husband, also explores the legacy of French colonialism, cocoa production, and Indian indentured labour in Trinidad. Mootoo also acknowledges the Caribbean's Indigenous presence through Elliot, a character with African, European, and Carib ancestry. By framing these issues through Viveka's academic views on "sexism, feminism, paternalism, Marxism, racism, anti-racism, [and] activism" (Mootoo, *Valmiki* 49), Mootoo provides a critical framework for thinking through colonialism, diaspora, and indigeneity in Trinidad.

visual difference from the Thoroughly family – particularly his love interest, the Reverend’s daughter Lavinia – contributes to this self-loathing. Chandin reveres Lavinia for her “fair skin” and “white hair” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 32), and when she “fail[s] to notice” Chandin, he begins to “hate his looks” and “the colour of his skin” (33). Yet the novel provides a much more in-depth – and I would argue, more provocative – exploration of the relationship between colonial mimicry and smell.

Macaulay may claim that immutable visual markers of race prevent Indians from ever becoming “truly” British, but he also suggests that these barriers do not apply when it comes to the internalization of colonial ideology, a process that occurs at the level of aesthetic taste. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, “taste” is socially produced through education and upbringing and serves as a marker of class (1-2). While the notion of aesthetic taste has obvious connections to the gustatory sense, *Cereus Blooms at Night* explores how Chandin’s colonial education manifests in his sense of smell. Gopinath briefly gestures toward the relationship between smell and colonial mimicry when she notes that Chandin is as enthralled by “the image of colonial domesticity and nuclear familial bliss as he is disgusted by the memory of his parents’ mud house, the odor from the latrine mingling with the smells of incense, spices, and coal” (182). Building on Gopinath’s observation, I argue that Chandin internalizes dominant Western sensory hierarchies that privilege vision and denigrate smell. He also internalizes racialized olfactory codes that link vision to civilization, embodied by the Thoroughlys, and smell to primitiveness, embodied by his Indian parents. Chandin revels in the scents associated with the Thoroughly estate and is repulsed by the odours that mark his parents’ mud hut. Indeed, Chandin’s nose becomes a primary tool for making aesthetic judgments and allows him to discriminate –

in the multiple senses of the term – between racialized notions of “good” and “bad” taste as defined by the colonial project.

Chandin’s feelings of disgust for his parents’ hut are based on colonial olfactory codes that mark Indian domestic spaces as dirty and uncivilized. *Cereus Blooms at Night* highlights how these olfactory codes are not only rooted in racist ideologies, but also inextricably linked to colonial frameworks of gender, sexuality, and domesticity. Significantly, the odours that repulse Chandin are specifically associated with his mother, and they lead him to despise his parents’ home, a “two-room ajoupa quarters in the barracks” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 27). After a long day working in the sugar cane fields, Chandin’s father lies in a hammock “daydreaming” about his son’s future and laying plans to work more hours “so that enough funds might be accrued to send Chandin to a college in the capital” (27). In contrast, Chandin’s mother – who also works all day in the fields – does not rest when she returns home, but rather performs the gendered work of domestic labour. It is significant that Chandin’s mother is explicitly named as Janaki in the text.¹⁸ As Smita D. Mehta notes, Janaki is an alternative name for Sita, a central figure in the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* who embodies “wifely devotion and a woman’s total self-surrender to her husband” (192). According to Robin Cohen, the *Ramayana* was a key text for Hindu indentured labourers (65), and those who wanted to ensure the continued practice of Hinduism in the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora used the *Ramayana* to convince women to “return to their conventional roles” and become “pure like Sita” (187, note 16). The fact that Chandin’s mother is named Janaki suggests that she embodies the ideal Indian wife within heteropatriarchal discourses of diasporic domesticity. As a fledgling colonial mimic man intent on rising above his circumstances, Chandin despises

¹⁸ Chandin’s father, in contrast, is never given a first name and is only known as “Old man Ramchandin.”

his mother, and his contempt manifests in his interpretation of her smell. Janaki cooks “at the clay oven at the back of their quarters” and her body is marked by the olfactory traces of her domestic labour (Mootoo, *Cereus* 27). Chandin is particularly self-conscious about these odours when Reverend Thoroughly first visits to inquire about his education.

Janaki’s body “smell[s] of coals and charred eggplant and a sweat that embarrasses [Chandin] with its pungency of heated mustard seed” (27). Chandin is embarrassed by the fact that his home is marked by the smells of his mother’s sweat and Indian cooking. The odours signal Janaki’s attempt to conform to heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity by reproducing India in the domestic space of the diaspora.¹⁹

The novel gestures towards the complexities that women like Janaki must negotiate within the context of diasporic domesticity. While critics such as Anne McClintock point out that Bhabha’s theory of colonial mimicry assumes a male subject (62), the gendered dimensions of colonial mimicry have received little attention. *Cereus Blooms at Night* explores how Janaki performs a kind of colonial mimicry that is gendered feminine. In the novel, Janaki faces a difficult paradox. On the one hand, she is responsible for reproducing India in the diaspora by upholding dominant cultural values and traditions. But on the other hand, she must facilitate her son’s upward mobility – which fuels the family’s migration to Lantanacalara in the first place – by supporting his conversion from Hinduism to Christianity, which in turn contributes to his disavowal of his family’s culture and religion. Indeed, Chandin’s colonial education requires the entire family to convert from Hinduism to Christianity; in other words, they must all become colonial mimics. Janaki must carefully negotiate the gendered division between public

¹⁹ Eggplants were first cultivated in India and are popular in Indian cooking (Renfrew and Sanderson 118). Mustard seeds are also common in Indian cooking (Wickramasinghe and Rajah 290).

and private space to fulfill her competing roles in relation to two different cultures and religions. In public, Janaki attends church on a regular basis and thus takes on the role of performing colonial mimicry on behalf of the family. In private, however, she performs Indian traditions and Hindu rituals. When Chandin visits, the odours marking his parents' home indicate that his mother "had not really converted to Christianity": "sacred camphor and incense used in Hindu prayers coloured the air" and there was "always a faint cloud of pooja smoke" that "permeated his parents' hair and clothes, replacing the odour of coals and spices that used to emanate from his mother's body" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 30).²⁰ The scents reveal Janaki's attempt to maintain Hindu rituals within the home and remind Chandin of his family's cultural and religious background. Janaki's agency is limited, however, as it is rooted in Hindu ideology, the very ideology that defines and delimits her role within diasporic domesticity. Moreover, Janaki's aromatic Hindu rituals ultimately work to reinforce the values of Chandin's aesthetic education: "He was embarrassed by his parents' reluctance to embrace the smarter-looking, smarter-acting Reverend's religion, and there soon came a time when, to his parent's dismay, he no longer visited" (30). The text thus draws attention to the difficulties that women like Janaki face when negotiating the competing demands of multiple cultural influences within the context of diasporic domesticity.

In contrast to the Ramchandins' mud hut, the Thoroughly estate is associated with the visual wonders of colonial Enlightenment. As Gopinath argues, the Reverend's house "is figured as the quintessential English home in the colony" (182). That is to say, it is a space of "public domesticity" where "the empire is replicated on a domestic scale"

²⁰ Pooja, or puja, is a Hindu ritual performed to honour deities and is often done to welcome a "distinguished or adored guest" (Fuller 57).

(George qtd. in Gopinath 182). The estate is “marked by order, thrift, and cleanliness” and an “attention to decorum and neatness that are the hallmarks of colonialism’s ‘civilizing’ project” (Gopinath 182). Chandin is captivated by the Thoroughlys’ home and is particularly “mesmerized” by the beautiful chandelier – a visual metaphor of Enlightenment – hanging in the living room (Mootoo, *Cereus* 31). Chandin longs for his parents and the other field workers “to see the inside of the Reverend’s house so they could embrace not just the Reverend’s faith but his taste” (31). According to Wesling, this scene suggests that “[t]he drama of conversion [...] hinge[s] upon the desirability of commodities,” as “the chandelier stands in for a broad range of objects that Chandin covets” in the Thoroughlys’ home (660). This scene also suggests that Chandin’s conversion depends upon his internalization of the Thoroughlys’ aesthetic taste. In the same moment that he stands transfixed by the chandelier, Chandin recalls the deplorable conditions of his parents’ meager mud hut; “most saddening of all” is the memory of “the latrine with that particular odour that etches itself on one’s brain” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 31). Upon recalling this smell, Chandin immediately feels “an immense distaste for his background and the people in it” (31-2). He internalizes what Bourdieu calls an “ideology of natural taste” – that is, an ideology that “*naturalizes* [...] differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature” (68, original emphasis). Chandin’s internalization of the Thoroughlys’ aesthetic taste is evidenced by his belief that “his people’s lack of these things” in the Thoroughly home “was a result of apathy and a poverty of ambition” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 31). Chandin’s internalization of the ideology of natural taste is inextricably linked to his internalization of Western sensory

hierarchies and olfactory codes that privilege vision as the sense of reason and civilization and denigrate smell as the sense of instinct and primitiveness.

Whereas Chandin's childhood home is characterized by the pungent odours of Indian dishes and his mother's sweat – odours that mark the Indian diasporic home as unsanitary and uncivilized – the Thoroughly estate seems to be marked by an absence of scent. Indeed, Gopinath asserts that the Thoroughlys' home is “marked by economy, order, and sanitization – a distinct lack of smell” (183). As I noted in the Introduction, however, olfactory neutrality is not actually a state of scentlessness; rather, it is a particular olfactory category that presents itself as scentless and is therefore similar to – and indeed, intersects with – whiteness as a racial category. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the visual dimensions of the Thoroughly estate signify olfactory neutrality. As McClintock argues in her work on visibility and colonial domesticity, “[i]n Victorian middle-class households, servants scoured and polished every [...] surface until it shone like a mirror” (218). Mirrors were “the epitome of commodity fetishism,” as they “eras[ed] both the signs of domestic labor and the industrial origins of domestic commodities” (218). Polishing, in turn, “remov[ed] every trace of labour, replacing the disorderly evidence of working women with the exhibition of domesticity as veneer, the commodity spectacle as surface, the house arranged as a theatre of clean surfaces for commodity display” (219). McClintock does not explicitly address the relationship between sight and smell, but Rodolphe el-Khoury contends that visual signs of cleanliness “translate an olfactory condition into a visual experience: to be shiny is to be odorless” (26). In the Thoroughlys' home, then, visual signs of order and cleanliness

work to construct the colonial domestic space as a site that – quite literally – appears to be scentless.

Despite its apparent olfactory neutrality, the Thoroughly household is actually marked by a particular smell: the sweet scent of the sugar cane fields. In the living room – indeed, directly under the chandelier – Chandin spends his “favourite time of day”: the hour of leisure time with the Reverend, the Reverend’s wife, and their daughter Lavinia after the evening meal (Mootoo, *Cereus* 31). The living room “had two large windows through which scented breezes from undulating fields of sugar cane sailed in from the valleys below” (32). It is amidst this “benevolent breeze” that Chandin feels “most thoroughly assured of a place [...] in this new family” (32). Significantly, Chandin’s sense of belonging in the Thoroughly family is solidified by the scent of the fields where his parents work as indentured labourers. From the Thoroughlys’ hilltop estate, the scent of sugar cane – the very resource that motivated the colonization of the Caribbean – exists as a pleasant version of the traces of colonial exploitation. The sense of pleasure Chandin gets from the smell is predicated upon his distance from the fields. Chandin’s colonial education distances him both spatially and ideologically from the stench of food, sweat, latrines, and other odours associated with Indian indentured labour and allows him to romanticize Lantanacamara – and the aptly-named town of Paradise – in the same way that European explorers romanticized sites of colonial “discovery.” As Mary Louise Pratt argues, European explorers construct themselves in their writing as surveyors “whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” the lands they “discover” (7). That is to say, they represent themselves as “a non-interventionist European presence” even though they are “positioned at the center of a discursive field rather than on the periphery” and

are “composed of a whole body rather than a disembodied eye” (78). These explorers assume what Pratt calls “the monarch-of-all-I-survey” position, employing visualist modes of representation to assert mastery over the land and peoples they encounter (204). Mootoo’s representation of Chandin’s “monarch-of-all-I-survey” position in *Cereus Blooms at Night* underscores how surveying the land is not only a visual practice, but an olfactory one as well.²¹ Ultimately, the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” position confers a sense of distance that allows Chandin to separate himself from the land and its people and romanticize Paradise through scent. Chandin’s internalization of colonial olfactory codes thus demonstrates his commitment to colonial mimicry.

Transplanting Queer Desire

As a colonial mimic man, Chandin yearns to create a home that reproduces the Thoroughlys’ model of colonial domesticity. Various critics have explored how Chandin’s desire to marry and start a family with Lavinia Thoroughly oversteps the boundaries of colonial mimicry. As Grace Kyungwon Hong argues, Chandin “[t]oo ‘Thoroughly’ internalize[s] the demand for assimilation” by desiring his “sister” Lavinia, who, as the Reverend’s daughter, “seems to be the most appropriate object of [Chandin’s]

²¹ Christopher Columbus’ journals detail the scents he encountered in the Caribbean and suggest that he surveyed the land with his nose as well as his eyes. On Columbus’ first voyage in 1492, he explored “San Salvador” – the Bahaman island of Guanahani – and described the sweet smells of “Cabo Hermoso,” or Cape Beautiful: “when I arrived here at this cape the smell of the flowers or trees that came from the land was so good and soft that it was the sweetest thing in the world” (101). Columbus’ olfactory description of the land is inextricably connected to his understanding of the economic value of that which smells. Columbus describes the island’s many trees and fruits, noting that they “all smell so that it is a marvel” (105). He then states: “I am the most sorrowful man in the world, not being acquainted with them. Because I am quite certain that all of them are things of value; and I am bringing samples of them [back to Spain]” (105-7). Botanist Carl Linnaeus – a key figure in European colonialism – also enlisted scent in the colonial project by creating a taxonomic system for classifying odours. Linnaeus’ taxonomic system classified odours according to their “hedonic” qualities (Blackledge 229). He developed seven categories of scents: *Fragrantes* (fragrant, sweet), *Ambrosiacos* (ambrosial, musk-like), *Aromaticos* (aromatic, spicy), *Hircinos* (goaty), *Alliaceos* (garlic), *Tetros* (foul), and *Nauseosos* (nauseating) (229).

desire” (91). Invoking Bhabha’s theory of colonial mimicry, Hong notes that “[t]he colonized subject must desire, but cannot attain” (91). Chandin ultimately marries an educated Indo-Caribbean woman named Sarah and creates a hybrid home space that “properly” mimics colonial domesticity. There is much to be said about Chandin’s relationship to Lavinia and the fear of miscegenation that informs Reverend Thoroughly’s rejection of Chandin’s desire,²² but for the purposes of my argument, I am interested in Sarah and Lavinia’s same-sex desire and how it queers the home that Chandin creates. Sarah and Lavinia’s relationship is mediated by the night-blooming cereus, a rare Caribbean succulent that Lavinia transplants into Sarah’s yard.²³ As Isabel Hoving argues, “the cereus marks and mediates [...] transgressive relations” in the novel (162), and its association with transgression begins with Sarah and Lavinia’s relationship. Building on Jill H. Casid’s suggestion that the cereus “transforms” Chandin’s household “through gardening practices of transplantation” – or, as she describes it, “the queer pass-along itinerary of the cereus” (xx) – I read the transplantation of the cereus as a non-germinative model of diaspora that queers heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic kinship and reproduction predicated upon the andro-centric notion of scattering seeds.

After Reverend Thoroughly rejects Chandin’s desire for Lavinia and she leaves Lantacamara to marry her rich cousin in the Shivering Northern Wetlands, Chandin attempts to establish a home that “properly” mimics colonial domesticity without overstepping the boundaries of his assigned place. He marries Sarah, a former schoolmate

²² As Hong notes, Reverend Thoroughly reframes the fear of miscegenation as the incest taboo when he invokes Christian family values to chastize Chandin’s desire for his “sister” (92). Hong points out that the incest taboo “is exactly how Chandin’s later degeneration is manifested” – that is, through the incestuous abuse of his daughters” (92). According to Hong, “[t]he hypocrisy of Thoroughly’s objections to Chandin and Lavinia’s union are further exposed when Lavinia is later betrothed by marriage to a cousin” who is due to inherit a large estate; the cousin, who is adopted, “is at least as much her relative as Chandin is” (92).

²³ I will discuss the significance of the cereus’ smell later in this chapter.

and Lavinia's best friend; as a "woman from his background," she is "the most likely possibility" for a wife (Mootoo, *Cereus* 45). Although Chandin once "dreamed of a stone and mortar house with special rooms [...] like the Thoroughlys," he builds a house with open-air rooms on stilts made from a local mudra tree in an isolated, undeveloped area of Paradise (50). The house, which blends elements of the Thoroughly's colonial estate and his parents' modest hut, embodies the appropriate form of hybridity Chandin is expected to embrace as a colonial mimic man. Indeed, the symbolic structure is built in an "underdeveloped section of Paradise called Hill Side" halfway between the Thoroughlys' hilltop estate and the indentured labourers' barracks in the valley below (50). When Lavinia returns to Lantanacamara after breaking off her engagement, Chandin hopes to win her back. Playing on the conventions of nineteenth-century romance novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* establishes the expectation that Lavinia will confess her true love for Chandin and the two star-crossed lovers will be forced to remain apart due to the social taboos around racial miscegenation. However, these conventions are undercut when it becomes clear that it is Sarah, not Chandin, for whom Lavinia returns.

Sarah and Lavinia's relationship queers Chandin's hybrid model of diasporic domesticity. When Chandin leaves the house to perform his missionary work, the two women spend time alone together in the sewing room and develop a sexual relationship. As Gopinath argues, "female homoerotic desire in Mootoo's novel emerges from within the patriarchal confines of the home, within the cracks and fissures of heterosexuality, and is inextricable from the violences of colonialism and misogyny" (183). Moreover, "[t]he emergence of queer interracial desire between Sarah and her white lover within this home space [...] radically destabilizes the terms of colonial domesticity, unharnessing

Indian women's sexuality from the propagation of the heterosexual, national family unit" (183). Sarah and Lavinia's relationship is mediated by the cereus, which Lavinia transplants into Sarah's garden. One day when Chandin is at work, Lavinia brings his daughters Asha and Mala – then known by her childhood nickname of Pohpoh – two cereus plants she uprooted from her mother's garden. The plants are "ragged and unsightly," but Lavinia explains that they "offer their exquisite elegance for one short, precious night" each year (Mootoo, *Cereus* 54). Lavinia, Pohpoh, and Asha plant the cereus together in the garden's "best planting spot" (54).

A number of scholars have discussed this scene and the symbolism of the cereus plant. According to John Corr, "[t]he planting of the cereus [...] signifies the establishment of a new and special network of relationships between the girls, their mother's lover, and their environment" (84). In this "paradisaal" scene, a family headed by female lovers replaces the conventional structure of the patriarchal nuclear family (84), and in doing so, "queers the archetypal Christian narrative of Eden" (88). Sarah Philips Casteel further argues that the "hybridization" of Mrs. Thoroughly's and Sarah's garden – embodied by the transplantation of the cereus plants – "anticipates the sexual union of Lavinia and Sarah and their own 'transplantation' to the Wetlands" ("Marvelous" 159). Building on these critics, I argue that the transplantation of the cereus embodies a non-germinative model of diaspora that queers heteropatriarchal frameworks of diaspora predicated upon the andro-centric logic of scattering seeds. As I argued in the Introduction, the concept of diaspora is etymologically linked to the process of scattering seeds. This process is inextricably linked to heterosexual reproduction, which is often framed as central to the constitution and maintenance of diasporas in new sites of

settlement. Transplantation, in contrast, is not predicated upon andro-centric processes of heterosexual reproduction. Defined by the *OED* as “[t]ransference or removal from one place to another,” transplantation refers to “[t]he removing of a plant from one place or soil and planting it in another” and “the removal of people from one country and settling of them in another” (“Transplantation, *n.*,” def. I.1 and I.2). In other words, transplantation describes a process of uprooting, transference, and resettlement; it does not involve the scattering of seeds. Transplantation thus embodies an alternative to andro-centric frameworks of diaspora predicated upon the logic of heterosexual reproduction, and by extension, represents a non-heteropatriarchal approach to diasporic kinship.

While Mootoo’s novel offers transplantation as a queer model of diaspora, it suggests that Sarah and Lavinia’s particular relationship to transplantation is limited in crucial ways. Few critics interrogate the racialized dynamics of power that shape Sarah and Lavinia’s relationship, but a closer analysis of the scene in which Lavinia transplants the cereus into Sarah’s garden reveals that these dynamics shape their relationship in problematic ways. As Tyler puts it: “Lavinia loved the freedom and wildness in Sarah’s garden, so unlike her mother’s well-ordered, colour-coordinated beds. She brought clippings and whole plants ripped from Mrs. Thoroughly’s garden, the fresh, rich dirt still under her fingernails” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 53). Lavinia’s transplantation of the cereus from Mrs. Thoroughly’s flowerbeds to Sarah’s garden symbolizes how she extricates herself from the gender and sexual arrangements of colonial domesticity by ending her engagement, returning to Lantanacalara, and beginning a queer relationship with Sarah. Lavinia’s transplantation of the cereus may be subversive within the context of colonial domesticity and may indeed help “unharness” Sarah’s sexuality, to use Gopinath’s

phrase; but it is crucial to note that this transplantation is primarily enacted by Lavinia and represents her desires. Just as Lavinia asserts her own agency by breaking off her engagement and returning to Lantanacamara to be with Sarah, she acts on her own desires when she uproots the two cereus plants from her mother's flowerbeds and transplants them into Sarah's garden. Lavinia's desires are inextricably linked to her romanticization of the "freedom" of Sarah's "wild" garden as a primitive alternative to the constraints of colonial domesticity, symbolized by Mrs. Thoroughly's cultivated flowerbeds. Even though Lavinia frames the primitiveness of Sarah's garden in seemingly positive terms, her approach to the garden problematically reinscribes racialized colonial hierarchies of power.

While the novel represents Lavinia as a figure who acts on her desires, Sarah seems to have little agency. As Alison Donnell argues, Sarah is a "backgrounded figure" in the text (177). She is generally silent and the narrator Tyler does not provide insight into her thoughts. Significantly, Sarah does not participate when Lavinia, Pohpoh, and Asha transplant the cereus flower into her garden, but merely "smile[s]" and looks on (Mootoo, *Cereus* 54). Moreover, Sarah is hesitant when Lavinia proposes the possibility of beginning a new life together in the Shivering Northern Wetlands, where Lavinia claims "[they] can be a family" and "will never be separated" (59). Sarah seems to have concerns about leaving Lantacamara, but these concerns are "inaudible" to Pohpoh, who eavesdrops on their conversation (59). According to Donnell, the ellipses marking Sarah's unheard protestations in the text seem to be strategic (177). By representing Sarah as a silent, background figure who demonstrates a certain level of passivity – if not reluctance – in relation to Lavinia's plan to relocate to the Shivering Northern Wetlands, the text

raises questions about Lavinia's particular approach to transplantation. Not only is Lavinia's approach to transplantation predicated upon a privileged relationship to both money and mobility – she is the white daughter of colonial missionaries and wants to use her inheritance to move the family to the Shivering Northern Wetlands – but she also understands the Shivering Northern Wetlands as a space of sexual freedom in comparison to Lantanacamara. Lavinia's desire to leave the Caribbean thus seems to “capitulat[e] to the familiar notion of a ‘lesbian’ subject having to leave a Third World home of gender and sexual oppression in order to come out into the more liberated West,” but as Gopinath argues, the text imagines a “far more complicated relation between travel, sexual subjectivity, and the space of home as household, community, and nation” (165-6). The cereus plant is central to the text's complication of these relations.

The cereus – the very symbol of queer desire in the text – plays a key role in confounding Lavinia's plan to transplant the queer family to the Shivering Northern Wetlands. When Chandin discovers the women and girls preparing to leave, Lavinia and Sarah flee in their carriage, leaving Pohpoh and Asha behind. As Johanna X. Garvey notes, the cereus “is the pretext for Pohpoh's accidental abandonment” (104). Pohpoh is “determined [...] to see the spectacular blossoms that Aunt Lavinia had described so rapturously” and plans to bring a clipping of the cereus to the Shivering Northern Wetlands (Mootoo, *Cereus* 60). The text's description of Pohpoh cutting the cereus plant anticipates the rupture to come: “She carefully snapped a leaf off the cereus plant, which was thriving but had not yet blossomed. [...] When the white sap stopped flowing like blood from the snapped-off end, she wrapped the leaf in a handkerchief [...] and placed it in her bag” (60). As the carriage prepares to leave on the day of departure, Pohpoh runs

back to the house to retrieve her bag with the cereus clipping. It is because Pohpoh returns for the clipping that Chandin spots the women attempting to escape, and Pohpoh and Asha are left behind in the chaos. Corr contends that the female lovers are “exiled from their tranquil, paradisaal garden” (89), but such readings not only fail to acknowledge how the cereus complicates their departure; they also do not account for the women’s – or at the very least, Lavinia’s – agency in planning to relocate to the Shivering Northern Wetlands. Gopinath is one of the few critics to emphasize the agential dimensions of Sarah and Lavinia’s escape, yet her suggestion that “[q]ueer desire enables Sarah to quite literally remove herself from the sexual, racial, and gendered logic consolidated under indentureship” (183) does not take into account the deeply complicated nature of Sarah’s departure. Lavinia convinces Sarah to leave Lantanacamara by promising her that they “will *never* be parted from the children” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 59, original emphasis); the fact that the carriage leaves Pohpoh and Asha behind as Sarah “scream[s]” (63) indicates that her departure from the children is not as affirming as Gopinath suggests. According to Corr, the “cultivation” and “violent destruction” of the “queer family” and their subversive garden “become the definitive moments of diasporic rupture and longing” in the text (85). Lavinia’s plan to transplant Sarah, Pohpoh, and Asha to the Shivering Northern Wetlands, where they could supposedly live openly as a queer family, is ruptured in this moment. The novel thus undermines models of transplantation that suggest queer female diasporic subjects must leave the Caribbean to pursue sexual freedom in the ostensibly liberated West.

Pohpoh – later known as Mala – is significantly impacted by this moment of rupture and must deal with the consequences of being abandoned by the only maternal

figures in her life. She must also learn to negotiate the difficult terrain of diasporic domesticity on her own, particularly after Asha runs away. So while Gopinath suggests that “staying put” – that is, remaining within the home to dismantle its oppressive heteropatriarchal structures – is a key strategy deployed by queer female diasporic subjects like Mala, it is crucial to note that she does not choose to “stay put” in Lantanacamara, but rather is left to fend for herself. Mala is deeply marked by the traumatic experience of being left behind and is forced to find ways to cope with her abandonment; queering the home from within is thus a survival strategy for Mala. Her queer agency must therefore be understood in relation to Lavinia’s failed attempt at transplanting the women and girls from Lantanacamara to the Shivering Northern Wetlands and the subsequent rupture of the queer family.

The Foul and the Fragrant: Surviving Diasporic Domesticity

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo mobilizes the metaphors of smell to explore how the violent reassertion of heteropatriarchy emerges as an anxious response to the queering of diasporic domesticity. After Sarah and Lavinia’s escape, Chandin withdraws from society and becomes an alcoholic tyrant who takes out his anger and resentment on his young daughters by raping Mala and Asha on a nightly basis. The stale odours associated with Chandin’s sexual abuse serve as an extension of his violence; smell thus functions as a mechanism of oppression in his incestuous home. Yet smell’s diffuse materiality also makes scent a productive medium for challenging the heteropatriarchal structure of Chandin’s home from within. Eventually, Mala seeks solace in the fragrant scents associated with her childhood friend and lover, Ambrose Mohanty. The

construction of Chandin as foul and Ambrose as fragrant seems to suggest that Ambrose represents a way for Mala to escape her father's domestic prison, but their romantic relationship fails to challenge the heteropatriarchal structure of diasporic domesticity.

Chandin violently asserts his heteropatriarchal authority in the domestic space to compensate for the way in which Sarah and Lavinia queer his home. As Anita Mannur argues, Chandin thrusts Mala into "a system of domestic indentureship" that requires her to "fall in line with his needs and desires – physical, psychic, and sexual" (*Culinary* 76). In doing so, Chandin "maintain[s] the illusion of being the head of a normative household, complete with a wife to ensure the smooth running of the domestic space" (76). According to Gopinath, Chandin's incestuous relationship with his daughters "represents the implosion of the heterosexual nuclear family as legislated under the colonial regime of indentureship"; she thus reads Chandin's home as an "'other' home space" that "shadows" the Thoroughlys' "sanitized missionary home and lays bare all that colonialism both produces and seeks to disavow" (183). To adapt Gopinath, Chandin's home also "shadows" his parents' mud hut and "lays bare" the repressive gender and sexual relations that structure heteropatriarchal frameworks of Indian diasporic domesticity. Drawing on Wesling's claim that *Cereus Blooms at Night* is concerned with "the nuclear family, in its idealized forms and its 'perversions'" (660), I read Chandin's home as a perverse model of diasporic domesticity that reveals the oppressive gender and sexual arrangements of both British colonial domesticity and Indian diasporic domesticity. I describe this model as perverse, but not queer, because it reinforces rather than challenges heteropatriarchal structures of power.

Mala queers Chandin's perverse home by failing to reproduce it on a number of levels. As I have already suggested, conventional models of diasporic domesticity frame home as the nation space, domestic space, and female body. Significantly, Mala never reproduces children despite enduring years of rape, and thus subverts one of the primary purposes women serve within conventional models of diasporic domesticity. Mala's non-reproductive body indicates that Chandin's perverse model of home is not a generative one. Although it is unclear whether Mala takes steps to prevent pregnancy, she actively asserts her own agency in other ways, particularly after Asha runs away and she is left without a support system. Mala queers the domestic roles Chandin expects her to fill, including her role as cook. According to Mannur, cooking Indian meals is central to the gendered labour of "[r]eproducing the nation within the domestic space" and "preserving the structure of home" (*Culinary* 58). Chandin asserts control over Mala's autonomy and personhood by dictating that she prepare specific Indian-inspired meals, yet Mala also finds creative ways to assert her own agency through cooking (76-7). According to Mannur, cooking constitutes a "queer epistemology" in the novel (77). Like Gopinath, Mannur argues that "[q]ueerness by definition resists and refuses to serve the needs of domestic heteropatriarchy" as it "recognizes the implicit privilege and power of heteronormativity but also refuses to engage its effects and expressions without also transforming that logic" (77). For Mannur, Mala's cooking queers conventional domestic models by challenging master narratives of "wifeliness" that "seamlessly suture cooking and heteronormativity within traditional familial and kinship formations" (77). Mala deploys food as "a weapon [...] to repudiate Chandin's claims on her" and as a method "to assert control and to ultimately extricate herself from the shackles of Chandin's

incestuous love” (77). Building upon and extending Mannur’s work, I argue that smell plays a crucial role in how Mala queers Chandin’s home using her culinary abilities.

One of the ways that Mala queers Chandin’s home is by cooking a fragrant creole stew that symbolizes the Caribbean’s model of cultural mixing. Mala is keenly aware of her duties in her father’s home. When Chandin tells her to “[c]urry a brown fowl,” she knows that the meal “must also include rice, split pea dhal, curried channa or aloo and one sadha roti” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 201). As Mala spends more time with Ambrose Mohanty, who courts her in secret, she begins to neglect her domestic duties. One day, Mala arrives late to the market after spending time with Ambrose and discovers that there are no chickens left to buy for the curry Chandin requested. Mala decides to make “the tastiest stewed fish and provision [Chandin] had ever had” so “he would not miss the curry” (203). But as Chandin approaches the house on his way home from work, the smell of the fish stew emanating from the house catches him off guard: “he expected the neighbourhood to be permeated with the bitter aromas of freshly roasted and ground curry paste. He was shocked to be greeted by the quieter aroma of fish tamed in burnt sugar and anise, the smells of a creole stew” (203). Mannur suggests that Chandin is shocked by Mala’s meal because she has disobeyed his command (*Culinary* 76). I contend that Chandin’s anger is also inextricably linked to Mala’s particular choice for an alternative to the Indian curry dish: an aromatic creole stew.²⁴ Mala’s creole stew symbolizes creolization, the pluralist model of cultural mixing used to describe Caribbean society. According to O. Nigel Bolland, creolization is a “version of the old ‘melting pot’

²⁴ Chandin’s anger is also implicitly linked to Mala’s desire for Ambrose. As I have already mentioned, Mala misses the market because she is distracted by Ambrose’s visit that day. When Mala makes the stew, she thinks about Ambrose: “[i]t was indeed for Ambrose that she was cooking” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 203). I will discuss Mala’s relationship to Ambrose in more detail below.

hypothesis, which conceives of a new cultural unity evolving from the blending of diverse original elements” (2). As Khan notes, Caribbean creolization is symbolized by the callaloo, a stew of many ingredients that is Trinidad’s national dish (8). Mala’s creole stew thus replicates the model of cultural mixing from which Chandin is excluded due to Reverend Thoroughly’s fear of racial miscegenation and Lavinia’s queer desire for Chandin’s wife.

Significantly, it is not the creole stew itself, but its pervasive scent that angers Chandin. The stew’s aroma embodies the same kind of cultural mixing as its ingredients, but its diffuse materiality threatens Chandin in a particular way. By permeating the surrounding neighbourhood, the stew’s smell infiltrates Chandin’s senses without warning, confronting him with an olfactory trace of the model of cultural mixing from which he has been excluded. Moreover, by exceeding the boundaries of the pot and the domestic space of the kitchen, the stew’s scent undermines the division between public and private space that works to conceal sexual violence within the home. It is crucial to note that the narrative emphasizes the incestuous insularity of Chandin’s home through olfactory descriptions of enclosure and staleness. After a night of abuse, the air in the “closed-up” drawing room is “thick with the smell of spilled full-proof babash” from Chandin’s drinking (Mootoo, *Cereus* 79). By transgressing the boundaries of Chandin’s insular home, the scent of Mala’s creole stew undermines his perverse model of diasporic domesticity and challenges his attempt to reassert heteropatriarchal authority in the face of Sarah and Lavinia’s betrayal.

Mala relies on her culinary abilities to challenge the power Chandin’s odour has over her. When Chandin arrives home to the creole dish, he violently attacks Mala by

ramming a hot bowl of stew in her face. In this moment, Mala asserts her own agency by concentrating on her culinary strengths rather than the physical suffering caused by her father:

She felt no pain. She tapped her tongue against the roof of her mouth checking the stew for seasoning. She tasted blood. [...] The smell of his alcoholic body and breath agitated her more than the injuries he had just inflicted. She slipped her tongue out of her mouth and licked the stew on her face. The taste of garlic and anise erased his smell. The stew was indeed well seasoned, perhaps the best she had ever cooked. (Mootoo, *Cereus* 205)

Mannur argues that Mala “mobilizes her culinary strengths to block out the pain of [Chandin’s] blows” (*Culinary* 76). It is crucial to note, however, that Mala specifically focuses on her culinary talents in order to counteract the strong reaction she has to the smell of alcohol marking Chandin’s body and breath. As I noted above, Mala associates the smell of alcohol with her father’s nightly rapes. Mala may not be able to prevent Chandin’s odours from assaulting her, but she can refocus her senses to minimize the impact that these scents – and by extension, his attacks – have on her. Mala thus shifts her attention from the stench of Chandin’s alcoholic body to the taste of her creole stew in an effort to draw strength from her culinary abilities. It is precisely because taste is inextricably connected to smell that this shift enables Mala to negate her father’s odour.

After this incident, Mala actively turns to olfaction and re-signifies smell to queer Chandin’s model of diasporic domesticity and undermine his authority over her. When Chandin demands that she find a fowl to curry for him, Mala knows that he will “draw

blood with his beating and berating” if she steals a chicken or comes home empty handed (Mootoo, *Cereus* 206). Arguing that Mala’s “culinary knowledge becomes essential for her survival,” Mannur suggests that Mala “cooks back” to Chandin by serving him a rotting pigeon carcass that is “more foul than fowl” (*Culinary* 76). Mala’s keen sense of smell plays a crucial role in how Mala “cooks back,” as it allows her to find the dead pigeon in the dark backyard. While considering her limited options for procuring a chicken so late at night, Mala “smell[s] a freshness” that tells her something recently died nearby, and she “follow[s] her nose” until she finds the carcass of a dead pigeon (Mootoo, *Cereus* 206). Mala can “tell from its smell that the bird had died that day” and would be fresh enough to use for cooking (206). The smell of aromatic spices is also central to how Mala “cooks back,” as it allows her to trick her drunk father into thinking that she is currying a chicken: he “smelled the aroma of masala, garlic and onions frying in oil” and “was too drunk to notice the foulness of a dish prepared with meat that was almost rotten” (207). The taste of curry spices may “appease” Chandin (Mannur, *Culinary* 76), but the dish’s signature aroma also leads him to believe that he is eating a curried fowl. Crucially, Mala’s rotten curry dish forces Chandin to go to bed early with a stomachache. By using her keen olfactory abilities to find a dead pigeon and deploying spicy scents to delude her father’s senses, Mala escapes Chandin’s sexual violence that night. Mala thus agentially renegotiates smell to queer Chandin’s home and undermine his power over her within the domestic sphere.

Although Mala relies on scent to queer her father’s model of diasporic domesticity, she also conforms to a highly conventional model of heterosexual femininity – and the olfactory codes associated with it – in an attempt to break free from her father.

When Ambrose returns to Paradise, the prospect of a romantic relationship with him seems to represent the most viable option for Mala to leave her domestic prison. Yet the text undercuts Ambrose's potential by suggesting that he and Chandin may be more similar than they seem. Vera M. Kutzinski asserts that "Mala is unaware of the troubling similarities between Ambrose and Chandin" (192). Tyler's narrative draws attention to these similarities "when it parallels their scenes of eating the meals she so diligently, and repeatedly, prepares for these men, both of whom persist in calling her Pohpoh instead of Mala" (192).²⁵ As Kutzinski notes, the descriptions of Chandin's sexual violence "are even more disturbing for being cinematically intercut with scenes of Mala and Ambrose's passionate romance" (190). By strategically placing these scenes side by side, Tyler – and by extension, Mootoo – brings romantic love into uncomfortable proximity with domestic violence and incestuous rape. As Kutzinski argues, "[t]he point is not that Ambrose is *like* Chandin but that the narrative positions them similarly *vis-à-vis* Mala to suggest that Ambrose [...] may only be a slight improvement, and not a structural change" from her father (192, original emphasis). Tyler suggests that this may be the case through his representation of the scents that mediate Mala and Ambrose's relationship.

By constructing Chandin as foul and Ambrose as fragrant, the novel seems to frame Ambrose as a pleasant alternative to Chandin and a potential way for Mala to leave her domestic prison. While Mala is repulsed by Chandin's alcoholic stench, which violently assaults her senses in the same way that he attacks her body, she is attracted to Ambrose's scent and vice versa. Indeed, the narrative predominantly frames Mala and

²⁵ Chandin and Ambrose both cast Mala in conventional gender roles. For instance, Ambrose enjoys proselytizing to Mala because she is an "indulgent audience" and listens quietly when he speaks (Mootoo, *Cereus* 211). He also invites Mala to be part of his tropical tourism business, but only in a domestic capacity that involves her making and serving his clients "tea and hot bread" (200).

Ambrose's desire in olfactory terms. Mala is seduced by the possibility that Ambrose is a potential saviour figure, and the text highlights this seduction through Mala's heteronormative response to Ambrose's scents.²⁶ Mala deeply romanticizes Ambrose "as her black Wetlandish lord" and thinks "of herself as the lady who would one day be rescued by him and revealed to all the world as a princess stolen by commoners at birth" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 208).²⁷ In turn, Mala romanticizes Ambrose's smell. When Ambrose first visits Mala, she observes: "Ambrose E. Mohanty stood like a man, filling the porch with an elegant scent of cloves, cardamom and bay leaves" (196). Mala's attraction to Ambrose, who smells of aromatic spices commonly used in Indian cooking, is inextricably linked to her understanding of him as an alternative to her father: "She gave [Ambrose's] sweat an imagined odour and longed to feel the heat of his underarm against her face. The only man's sweat she knew was her father's which made her nauseous, and so she was delighted that she could invent a smell for Ambrose that melted her with passion and momentarily overpowered her father's awful hold on her" (212). When Mala and Ambrose first embrace, he smells "even more sweet than she imagined": "the natural fragrance of his sweet-and-tangy skin rose from his shirt. She knew now the taste of his skin by its smell. She pressed her face against his chest. He didn't smell like her father, of rum and stale genitals, the shrill severity of soured secretions" (216). Ambrose's scent seems to indicate that he would be much more "sweet" – and ostensibly more "natural" – as a lover for Mala than her own father.

²⁶ The text also frames Mala's relationship to Ambrose in visualist terms, but to a lesser extent. For instance, Mala internalizes Ambrose's gaze. She looks at herself in the mirror "as she imagined Ambrose might, the way he might watch and admire her" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 202).

²⁷ Kutzinski notes that although Ambrose, like Tyler, is described as "black," he is a "dark-complexioned Indo-Caribbean man" (186).

Yet Mala's heteronormative response to Ambrose's scent suggests that their relationship would reinscribe, rather than challenge, heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity. When Mala smells Ambrose's fragrant blend of Indian spices, "[f]or the first time in her life" she "fe[els] like a woman, a feeling both thrilling and frightening" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 196). In response, "she lift[s] her shoulders upright and her small breasts quietly announc[e] themselves" (196). Similarly, when Mala imagines the smell of Ambrose's sweat, "[h]er desire [...] ma[kes] her body arch, reaching out, engulfing, drawing him deep inside her, yet she resist[s] converting these thoughts to actions" (212). Mala clearly feels a strong sense of desire for Ambrose, yet she conforms to conventional codes of femininity by remaining passive instead of acting on her desires. Mala's restrained response to Ambrose as an adult is strikingly different from the confidence she displays during her sexual encounter with him as a young girl. When Ambrose awkwardly pursues Mala in his youth, she quickly takes control of his shy advances. "[N]ot at all caring for any sense of his body but intent on keeping him attuned to what had now become *her* goal" – achieving an orgasm – she guides him through their first sexual encounter (94-5, original emphasis). Knowing "very well" that her underwear "would not come off," Mala "used" Ambrose's body "to arrive at her intended destination before he could even unbuckle his belt" (96). With the naïve young Ambrose, Mala is able to assert control and fulfill her own sexual needs – something she does not do with her father. Given that Mala negatively associates Chandin's abuse with his reeking alcoholic body, it is not surprising that she refuses to be subjugated to Ambrose's odours during sex. She positions her body so that she can avoid "the schoolboy sweat trapped in his thick, oily hair" and focus on her own pleasure (96). The fact that Mala shifts towards

performing feminine passivity and restraining her desires as an adult suggests that she has limited options for escaping her difficult situation. Mala seems to know no other way of escaping her domestic prison than through romantic love.

Ambrose's fetishization of Mala's intimate odours reveals his problematic relationship to gender and sexuality. While living abroad, Ambrose created an elaborate olfactory schema for Mala's vagina. He would masturbate while focusing on "the place of mystery between Mala's legs, a place he imagined would exhale a hot mustiness with two very different scents – balsa wood from the silk cotton tree that he used to make spinners with, and the ripened fruit of the cannonball tree, a fearfully strong but very compelling odour" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 217). Significantly, Ambrose associates Mala's vagina with scents that evoke both fear and desire. Ambrose's fetishization of, and ambivalence toward, Mala's vagina suggests that he does not approach Mala as a whole person but rather as a fantasy he wants to preserve. When Ambrose first tries to kiss Mala and she briefly hesitates, he is "relieved" because he does not want his elaborate fantasy to be shattered: "Ambrose had fallen in love with desire itself and the act of desiring was its own fulfillment. [...] He was, he realized, unwilling to jeopardize his relationship with desire. If he succumbed to Mala's treasures, *desire* could change, would disappear even" (217-8, original emphasis). Ambrose recognizes, but fails to interrogate, his fetishization of Mala. By suggesting that Ambrose is more in love with his fantasy of Mala than Mala herself, the text reveals his limitations as a partner for Mala.

The novel also problematizes Mala and Ambrose's relationship by suggesting that Ambrose and Chandin's scents may not be that different. Mala hesitates when kissing Ambrose because she is momentarily reminded of her father's abuse: "Mala smelled

Ambrose's lips close to hers and felt his breath. She pulled away, a little startled, feeling both the repulsion she knew when her father forced his tongue into her throat and also an unfathomable desire to take Ambrose's deep into her mouth and explore its taste and temperature and texture" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 216-7). It is at this moment that Ambrose draws away from her, realizing that he does not want to compromise his fantasy of Mala. Mala misinterprets Ambrose's action as a "generous hesitation" that demonstrates his respect for her (218). She is so "moved" that she passionately kisses him and they have sex on the floor in Chandin's kitchen (218). By suggesting that the consummation of Mala and Ambrose's relationship is based on fantasies and misunderstandings, the novel undermines Mala's idealization of Ambrose and romantic love.

Chandin ultimately relies on smell's ability to mark bodies to expose Mala's affair with Ambrose. Ever since Ambrose began visiting Mala, she "fear[ed] that her father would discover that her head, heart and body were betraying him, if only because he could smell this new desire on her skin" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 212). Her fears come true when, after Mala and Ambrose consummate their relationship, Chandin returns home, spies Ambrose leaving the house, and sees Mala inside "smiling to herself and smelling her hands" (220). For Chandin, this is proof that Mala has betrayed him. Situating the affair within the context of Sarah and Lavinia's relationship, Chandin insists that he will not let anyone "tief," or steal, his "woman" – whom he also describes as his "baby" and his "property" – "again" (220). When Chandin enters the house, he immediately approaches Mala and "smell[s] her hands," which indicates to Mala that he knows about Ambrose (220).²⁸ As punishment, Chandin attacks Mala with his most brutal sexual

²⁸ This moment recalls an earlier scene in which young Mala removes the betraying olfactory traces of her first sexual encounter with Ambrose. Mala "didn't want to think about the smell of someone else's saliva on

assault yet. When Ambrose visits the next morning, he finds Mala battered and bruised, and “[s]uddenly [he] understood everything” (226). However, Ambrose does not help Mala defend herself against her father because he does not want to “expose the shameful goings-on in the house, to which he had become connected” (228). Mala kills Chandin to prevent him from attacking Ambrose, but Ambrose flees, “think[ing] she had gone crazy and fearing [...] for his life” (228). Abandoned again and completely alone, Mala re-experiences the trauma of her mother leaving with Lavinia and descends into a kind of madness. As Kutzinski notes, Ambrose’s apprehension develops into a “fearful passivity” that not only prevents him from helping Mala in the years to come, but also causes him to shut himself away from the world and sleep for months at a time (192). Ultimately, the novel does not frame Mala’s heterosexual relationship with Ambrose as the most productive way for her to escape her domestic prison. While Mala and Ambrose certainly connect through scent, their relationship is not mediated by diffuse connections that queer heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity.

“[A]n odour of her own design”: Queering Home Through the Stench of Decay

Rather than leaving her domestic prison after killing her father, Mala remakes it from within by mobilizing smell as a tool of queer resistance. Locking Chandin’s corpse in the core of the house, Mala moves into the overgrown yard – the site of Sarah’s former garden – and lets the home fall into ruin. As a result, the structure and its macabre contents produce a putrid odour of decay. Critics like Gopinath have noted that “the

her breast, or that scrubbing off such evidence meant preparing her body for him” – that is, her father, whom she does not name (Mootoo, *Cereus* 97). She “decided it would be best to scrub herself with a concentrated solution of borax and rub her body with an unction of eucalyptus oil, camphorated oil and turpentine, and then to complain of a stomach ache and sore muscles” (97).

alternative, antidomestic home space that Mala creates is marked by an excess of smell” (183), but they have yet to provide an in-depth study of these odours. I contend that the smells emanating from Chandin’s home carry the traces of gender and sexual violence that conventional narratives of domesticity attempt to repress. Since Mala – now an old woman – “could never bring herself to graphically reveal” her abuse to anyone (Mootoo, *Cereus* 196), smell becomes an alternative language for her to articulate this unspeakable trauma. To prevent the stench from dissipating over time and erasing the remaining traces of her story in the process, Mala brews a reeking concoction of her own that somehow prolongs the home’s putrid odour. The stench of Mala’s concoction thus not only subverts the division between public and private space that works to conceal sexual violence within the home and silence women’s voices; it also interrupts conventional frameworks of linear time that would relegate this violence to the past. Mala agentially renegotiates scent to queer the heteropatriarchal frameworks of space and time that structure diasporic domesticity.

Mala queers domesticity by parodying the domestic roles she performed in Chandin’s home. As Hong argues, Mala practices a “strange form of housekeeping, a fun house-mirror version of the separation of sphere and activities, bodily regulations, and attention to order that marked the proper Victorian household” (91). Gopinath specifically describes Mala’s activities as a form of “queer housekeeping” that “revises ideologies of ‘housewifization’ set in place during indentureship, as well as the colonial injunction that urges good housekeeping as the gendered labor of empire” (184). Mala claims that she is performing “a daughter’s duty” by “looking after [her father] all these years” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 182). Yet by locking Chandin’s rotting corpse in the sewing room, a space in the

heart of the house where Sarah and Lavinia once nurtured their queer relationship, Mala parodies – and thus queers – the traditional domestic caretaker’s role she once performed for Chandin. As a result of her actions, the house is marked by an irrepressible odour: “Every few days, a smell of decay permeated the house. It was the smell of time itself passing” (115). Just as the smell of rotting limes is an olfactory trace of the lingering effects of slavery and colonialism in Derek Walcott’s “Ruins of a Great House,” the odour of decay bears the traces of gender and sexual violence that marked Chandin’s home.²⁹ To use Gopinath’s phrase, the rotting smell “lays bare” the gender and sexual violence that diasporic domesticity both produces and attempts to repress.

Cereus Blooms at Night thus represents smell as a primary medium through which the repressed gender and sexual violence of diasporic domesticity returns. As Freud argues, “[w]hat is forgotten is not extinguished but only ‘repressed’; its memory-traces are present in all their freshness” (*Moses* 94). Of course, the return of the repressed is not literally associated with freshness. Freud provocatively suggests that “a memory stinks just as an actual object may stink” if it is not adequately repressed (qtd. in Mavor 282). Building on Casteel’s reading of *Cereus Blooms at Night* as a “postcolonial gothic” text that “uncovers repressed histories expressly in order to unsettle the dominant political and social order” (“Marvelous” 146), I argue that the putrid odour of Chandin’s crumbling

²⁹ Published in 1962 by Afro-Caribbean writer and critic Derek Walcott, the poem “Ruins of a Great House” describes an observer standing before a dilapidated plantation. The stench of rotting limes bears the traces of colonial expansion, which the poem frames as a debilitating disease with long-term effects: “A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose / The leprosy of empire” (9-10). As the poem states in its most famous line: “The world’s green age then was a rotting lime / Whose stench became the charnel galleon’s text. / The rot remains with us, the men are gone” (35-37). In this dense metaphor, Walcott suggests that the stench of rotting limes carries the traces of the violent history of slavery and horrific conditions of the Middle Passage, and these irrepressible traces linger despite the apparent dismantling of the colonial system. Casteel suggests that “[t]he ruined house that is the scene of the crime of incest in *Cereus* is a version of the dilapidated manor house” in Walcott’s poem (“Marvelous” 149). As Casteel notes, Jean Rhys also famously used the trope of the “dilapidated manor house” in her 1966 re-writing of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (“Marvelous” 149).

house emerges to unsettle the heteropatriarchal frameworks that structure diasporic domesticity. It is crucial to note that at this point in the text, the source of the smell is unclear. As the narrator, Tyler does not reveal that Chandin's corpse lies in the bowels of the house until near the end of the novel. By concealing the smell's source for most of the story, Tyler interrogates the notion that gender and sexual violence is attributable to a single, identifiable source. Tyler – and by extension, Mootoo – thus uses smell to illustrate the notion, forwarded by Foucault, that power is diffuse. In other words, Tyler's approach to representing the stench of Chandin's corpse suggests that heteropatriarchal violence in the diaspora is not reducible to a particular source, but rather, is a systemic problem.

Mala mobilizes the transformative power of scent to renegotiate the stench permeating Chandin's house. To avoid being “overcome” by the smell, Mala “brew[s] an odour of her own design” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 115). Years earlier, Lavinia taught Mala that if she protected the snails in Sarah's garden and displayed their old shells when they died, the dead snails' spirits would protect her in turn. Lavinia stressed that it was necessary to “boil all empty shells” first, since “recently emptied snail shells can have the most unpleasant, most nauseating smell” (54). Drawing on this queer subjugated knowledge, Mala makes a reeking concoction of boiled snails to make the house's stench bearable:

She collected and boiled six empty shells at a time. After an hour [...] [t]he house would fill with the aromas of a long-simmering ocean into which worm-rich, root-matted earthiness was constantly being poured and stirred. The aroma obliterated, reclaimed and gave the impression of reversing

decay. [...] The odour hung, rejuvenating the air for days. It wove itself through Mala's hair and penetrated her pores. (115)

By using Lavinia's recipe to create a smelly concoction that counters Chandin's scent, Mala queers her former domestic role as her father's cook. Indeed, the reeking concoction parodies the creole stew she made for Chandin as a young woman. The fetid odour of Mala's strange brew makes the stench of Chandin's corpse bearable for Mala. As Hoving argues, the concoction's smell also "manipulat[es] time": "In resistance to decay, linear time has stopped. By reversing the decay before it reinstalls itself again, the natural cycle of endings and beginnings is interrupted and deferred. In this strange timelessness, processes of growth and rotting are extended infinitely" (156). For Hoving, this explains why Chandin's body – which seems to remain "in a state of incessant decay" – can "rot for decades [...] without turning into a dry skeleton" (156).³⁰

The transformative smell of Mala's concoction produces a form of queer temporality that resists the linear passage of time. Judith Halberstam theorizes "queer time" as a form of temporality that develops "in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1). According to Halberstam, "notions of the normal" are "upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality" that promotes narratives of maturation, idealizes long periods of stability, and constructs longevity as desirable while pathologizing those who show little concern for these values (4). This heteronormative approach to reproductive temporality is "ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples" (5). According to Halberstam, queer time "open[s] up new life narratives and alternative

³⁰ Chandin's corpse still has skin: "Skin [...] stretched across the hairless cranium, clung to the forehead and cheekbones, defined the contour of a mouth cavity and fell off the precipice of a jawbone" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 182-3).

relations to time” (2). In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the putrid smell of Mala’s concoction queers conventional frameworks of linear, progressive time that work to normalize heteronormativity. Within a conventional temporal framework, time would pass unchecked, allowing Chandin’s body to decompose and eventually turn to dust. The passage of time would thus erase the lingering olfactory traces of the violence that once marked his home, and in doing so, silence Mala’s story. In other words, conventional temporal frameworks would further conceal forms of gender and sexual violence that exist within the home, and in doing so, perpetuate the myth of home as a space of comfort and safety. By manipulating time in a way that prevents Chandin’s corpse from decomposing fully and its stench from dissipating completely, the smell of Mala’s strange brew queers temporal frameworks that serve heteropatriarchy.

Mala’s practice of collecting fetid insect and animal carcasses also contributes to her queering of diasporic domesticity. Mala is undeterred by, and even takes pleasure in, the stench of the dead insects, birds, and reptiles she collects:

She paid no attention to the odour rising out of the bucket. The scent of decay was not offensive to her. It was the aroma of life refusing to end. It was the aroma of transformation. Such odour was proof that nothing truly ended, and she revelled in it as much as she did the fragrance of cereus blossoms along the back wall of the house. (Mootoo, *Cereus* 128)³¹

Like the stench of Mala’s snail shell concoction, the smell of her collection of carcasses contributes to her manipulation of linear, progressive time. Mala pins the carcasses on the wall of the sewing room where she keeps Chandin’s lifeless form: “They were fodder for

³¹ I will discuss the smell of cereus flowers and their relationship to Mala’s queering of domesticity in the next section.

a vibrating carpet of moths, centipedes, millipedes, cockroaches and unnamed insects that found refuge in Mala's surroundings. Death feeding life" (130). Mala feeds the fetid carcasses to the living insects, which in turn cover Chandin's dead body, forming a "heavy sheet that was slowly devouring the corpse underneath" (184). The insects seem to eat Chandin's corpse in a way that slows the process of decomposition. Mala's collection of fetid carcasses, combined with her reeking snail shell concoction, queer heteronormative frameworks of temporality by preventing the passage of time from obscuring the olfactory traces of her trauma.

Repulsion and Delight: The Transformative Power of Diffuse Connections

Like the putrid smell of boiled snail shells, the intoxicating scent of cereus flowers plays a crucial role in how Mala queers Chandin's home.³² As Hoving argues, the cereus is an "ambiguous plant": the "invasive cactus" is "ugly in its bareness" and its "blossoms [...] seem to have been soaked in blood," yet the smell of its flowers "evokes sensual bliss" (155). Hoving and others have noted that the "intoxicating scent" of cereus flowers emanating from Mala's yard "intermingle[s] with the stench of the father's corpse" (156); as a result, "the awed visitor is both repulsed and delighted" by this "ambiguous paradise" (154).³³ It is certainly the case that the foul odour of Chandin's corpse intermingles with the fragrant perfume of the cereus flowers in a way that attracts and repulses visitors, but scholars have yet to provide an in-depth analysis of how this process of intermingling

³² A number of scholars have noted that the cereus' scent symbolizes transgressive sexuality in the novel, but few have explored the relationship between the cereus' scent and Mala's queering of Chandin's home.

³³ Other critics have made similar observations. Gopinath notes that "the stench of decomposition and foulness intermingles with the heady, intoxicating aroma of cereus blossoms" (183). Casid suggests that the cereus "transforms" Chandin's "regime of terror," symbolized by his crumbling house, through a process of "intermixing that allows flora and fauna to overrun so that their beauty and their stench potently combine decay and rejuvenation" (xx).

works and why it is significant. I argue that the intermingling of these smells works according to a particular dynamic of attraction and repulsion that serves to undermine the myth of home as a space of comfort and safety. First, it is important to note that this dynamic is not defined by an ongoing oscillation of attraction and repulsion. Rather, the heady scent of cereus flowers – which seems to take on a life of its own in the novel – attracts the local townspeople to Mala’s yard once a year, but those who dare to breach the boundaries of Mala’s fence are soon confronted by the malodorous traces of the violence that marked Chandin’s home. This dynamic of attraction and repulsion thus works to reveal the gendered and sexualized forms of violence that structure the supposedly safe space of the home. I am particularly interested in how Otoh Mohanty, the female-to-male transgendered son of Ambrose and his wife Elsie, engages with and responds to these scents. Otoh feels an affinity with Mala based on what Tyler calls a “shared queerness” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 48), and this affinity is mediated by the complex olfactory landscape of Mala’s property. I read Otoh’s queer affinity with Mala in terms of diffuse connections. Otoh is fundamentally altered by the transformative scents of Mala’s yard: after confronting the reeking traces of Mala’s violent past, he overcomes his indecisiveness and helps Mala when she is in need. Otoh’s relationship with Mala suggests that diffuse connections based on a sense of shared queerness offer the most productive way of remaking the home from within.

The smell of cereus flowers offers Mala a temporary escape from the painful memories associated with being abandoned by Sarah, Lavinia, and Asha. Since being transplanted into Sarah’s garden by Lavinia and the girls, the cereus plants have proliferated and taken over the yard: “The succulents, half a dozen plants in all, had raged

over the side of the house, further concealing the boarded-up window of the room downstairs” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 130). Crucially, the invasive plants have infiltrated the house and taken control of the structure: “The roots of the cereus, like desperate grasping fingers, had bored through the damp wood of the back wall of the house. It was no longer the wall that supported the succulent but rather the other way around” (115). According to Casid, “the cereus begins to make compost of the walls of the father’s house” (xx), and in doing so, participates in Mala’s project of remaking Chandin’s home. The fact that the cereus conceals the room containing Chandin’s corpse suggests that the plant also plays a role in helping Mala live with her violent past. Mala “look[s] forward” to the cereus’ blooming, which occurs only one night a year, with “giddy” anticipation (Mootoo, *Cereus* 130); but first she must negotiate the anniversary of Sarah and Lavinia’s chaotic departure, which falls just before the blooming of the cereus. The intoxicating scent of the cereus flowers makes it possible for Mala to cope with the painful memories of her abandonment. Mala develops a number of strategies to cope with the pain of this traumatic memory, but I am particularly interested in the dissociative fantasies that arise in connection with the smell of cereus flowers.³⁴ When the flowers finally bloom, they send “a dizzying scent high and wide into the air” that offers a “change from the odour of age, filth and rot that normally permeated her yard” (142). The smell offers Mala relief from reliving the trauma of that day, and she “bask[s]” all night in the scent (134). Bolstered by the smell, Mala imagines herself as young Pohpoh again: “Fortified by the night’s display she wove memories. She remembered a little and imagined a great deal”

³⁴ Mala also “strategizes against” the anniversary of Sarah and Lavinia’s departure by consuming a burning concoction of fermented hot peppers (Mootoo, *Cereus* 132). The pain of the peppers numbs the feelings that come when the sun hits the roof on the morning of the anniversary, blinding Mala in the same way it did on the day that Sarah and Lavinia left, and helps her deal with the flood of memories that come rushing back.

(142). The Pohpoh Mala imagines is not fearful or helpless in the face of sexual abuse; rather, she is strong, savvy, and resourceful when it comes to finding ways to escape her father's violence. Mala imagines Pohpoh leaving her room at night to break into neighbouring homes, where she watches "a happy [...] fairy-tale family in which the father was a benevolent king" sleep peacefully in their beds and examines an idyllic family portrait of a mother, father, and two girls – a mirror image of her nuclear family (156). The smell of cereus flowers thus seems to protect Mala from her trauma by evoking dreams of domestic spaces that embody the myth of home as a site of comfort and safety.

However, the particular scent of the cereus flowers in Mala's dream hints that this fantasy is predicated upon repression. While navigating the dark neighbourhood with her sense of smell, Pohpoh encounters "a single cereus plant" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 152). The cereus' blossoms "spewed heavy perfume in the air" with the "force that comes from a broken fire hydrant" (152). Significantly, Pohpoh interprets the smell as having "two edges – one a vanilla-like sweetness, the other a curdling" (152). This is the first time in the novel that the cereus is described as having a double-edged scent. The curdling smell suggests that Mala is implicitly aware that these idyllic images of home repress the violence of her past and only offer a temporary escape from her traumatic memories. Tyler's narrative solidifies this point by framing the flower's curdling smell in a way that evokes Chandin's attack on Mala with the bowl of hot creole stew: "The scent [...] so permeated the air that [Pohpoh] could taste it on her tongue as though she were lapping it from a bowl" (152). By emphasizing the double-edged nature of the cereus' smell in

Mala's dream, Tyler's narrative gestures toward the limits of Mala's cereus-induced fantasy of heteropatriarchal nuclear families and idyllic, peaceful homes.

The cereus flowers in Mala's yard do not seem to have the same double-edged scent that betrays the repressed traces of gender and sexual violence in Mala's dream. In fact, the intoxicating perfume emanating from the flowers in Mala's yard seems to do just the opposite: it stirs desire in the townspeople and signifies romantic love even though it issues from a property associated with sexual abuse. The annual blossoming of the cereus coincides with the "blooming" of the moon, and according to Lantanacamara folklore, "when the moon blossoms, so, traditionally, does love" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 134). The monthly occasion is highly anticipated and "no one [...] wants to be caught without a companion for the evening" (135). As Mala indulges her cereus-fuelled domestic fantasies, the flowers' "dizzying scent [...] compel[s]" couples strolling by "to stop in front of Mala's house to caress and steal probing kisses" (138). While the smell seems to send most couples into a lustful embrace, it has a markedly different effect on Otoh A. Mohanty.

Before discussing the significance of Otoh's response to the smell of cereus flowers, it is important to consider his particular relationship to queerness. Otoh A. Mohanty was born a girl, but after "[h]ours of mind-dulling exercise" that "streamlined" his body "into an angular, hard-bodied creature" and "tampered with the flow of [...] hormonal juices," "she" seamlessly transitioned into "he" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 110). Indeed, the transformation is "so flawless" that the entire town forgets that Otoh was declared a girl at birth (110). Otoh queers heteronormative frameworks of desire and romantic love by attracting both women and men: "Unlike the other men in the village, and much to

their envy, [Otoh] had always been the object of desire of almost every Lantanacamaran woman, regardless of her age. (It is also noteworthy that a number of men were shocked and annoyed by their own naggingly lascivious thoughts of him)” (135). Otoh’s ability to queer heteronormative desire and romantic love is connected to his scent. His “gentle body odour,” which is “highly unusual and so very welcoming from a man” (137), bears the traces of his transgendered identity. Notably, Otoh’s given name is “Ambrosia” (109), a feminized version of Ambrose that describes “[s]omething divinely sweet or exquisitely delightful to taste or smell” (“Ambrosia, *n.*,” def. 5, *OED*).³⁵ Just as the “A” initial in Otoh’s name is a “residually feminizing middle initial” (Kutzinski 183), Otoh’s body odour is a residually feminizing scent. Significantly, the word “ambrosial” is associated with musk-like odours like vanilla, which is historically and etymologically linked to female genitalia (Blackledge 229).³⁶ So while Otoh may pass as a man in Lantanacamara, his scent feminizes him in subtle ways and thus works in tandem with his masculine appearance to queer heteronormative forms of desire and romantic love.

Otoh’s queerness is initially linked to ambivalence. Otoh’s very name – “Otohboto,” a phrase that means “on the one hand [...] but on the other” – signals his “ability to imagine many sides of a dilemma” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 110). Otoh earns this name while transitioning; his name and the ability to which it refers are thus inextricably linked to his transgendered identity. Otoh’s ability to view a problem from multiple perspectives seems like a valuable skill for a subject who queers conventional frameworks of gender and

³⁵ Ambrosia is also the name of the fragrant food of the Greek gods and is associated with immortality (*OED*, “Ambrosia, *n.*,” def. 1a). In Greek mythology, the scent of ambrosia plays a key role in desire and seduction among the gods. For a discussion of ambrosial scent and desire in Greek mythology, see the first chapter of Classen, Howes, and Synnott’s *Aroma*.

³⁶ As Catherine Blackledge notes, “[*v*]ainilla is the Spanish diminutive for vagina or sheath”; thus, “vanilla literally means ‘little vagina’” (229).

sexuality, yet the text hints that Otoh's way of thinking has its limitations. Tyler notes that "if it weren't already a dilemma," Otoh has a habit of "turning it into one"; in other words, he is defined by "the vexing inability to make up his mind" (110). As a result, Otoh "excel[s] in thinking but not doing" (110). Like his father Ambrose, who chooses to distance himself from Mala and go into hibernation rather than grapple with her history of abuse, Otoh is defined by an inability to make complicated decisions and act in complex situations. As Tyler's subtle critique of Otoh suggests, ambivalence – even when inextricably linked to queerness – may be unproductive if it leads to inaction.

Otoh learns to overcome his ambivalence, however, because of the affinity he feels with Mala. Otoh has long been curious about Mala. He grows up hearing his father make vague references to a romantic past with Mala and delivers food to her property every month on his father's behalf, but he never encounters the mysterious old woman. Despite the fact that they have never met, Otoh feels a sense of connection with Mala: "I felt as though she and I had things in common. She had secrets and I had secrets. Somehow I wanted to go there and take all my clothes off and say, 'Look! See? See all this? *I am different!* You can trust me, and I am showing you that you are the one person I will trust. [...] I will be your friend" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 124). I read Otoh's sense of connection with Mala in terms of what Tyler calls a "shared queerness" (48) – that is, a feeling of affinity based on mutual estrangement from the norm.³⁷ Otoh recognizes that he and Mala both have secrets that they long to share with someone who will understand them, someone they can trust. So while Otoh may initially seem to embody the same paralyzing ambivalence as Ambrose, his shared queerness with Mala allows him to

³⁷ I discuss Tyler's "shared queerness" in relation to Mala in more detail below.

overcome it, but only when he encounters the complex olfactory landscape of Mala's property.

I read Otoh's shared queerness with Mala in terms of diffuse connections. For Otoh, it is not romantic love that blossoms on the night of the cereus' blooming; rather, it is a feeling of shared queerness mediated by the cereus' scent. As Otoh walks by Mala's property with his date, a young woman named Mavis, Otoh is seduced by the "heady perfume" permeating the air (Mootoo, *Cereus* 135). The intoxicating smell holds Otoh captive: "[a] scented breeze came gushing through the bushes and whipped itself around Otoh, nabbing him like a lasso" (136). Mavis tries to win back Otoh's attention, but when she tells him that she used to steal fruit from Mala's yard and pelt the house with seeds, Otoh feels "sadness" that quickly turns into "drenching anger" (137). As a result, he feels "distanced" from his date (139). His shared queerness with Mala thus leads him to distance himself from romantic love. Otoh eventually manages to pull himself away from the intoxicating scent of Mala's yard, but he cannot get the smell out of his head. "[S]till full of the night's perfume," Otoh lies awake in bed contemplating the nature of his father's relationship with Mala: "What was it about Mala, he wanted to know, that his father so utterly adored? Had she rejected his father, and if so, why?" (139). The next morning, the smell of Otoh's "sweet lime 3333 after-shave cologne" – which he wears "entirely for its smell" since he has "nothing on his face to shave" – "remind[s] him of the compelling perfume of blossoms that had filled the air around Mala's yard the previous night" (141). He intends to "find out what flower turned the air so sweet and take a clipping of that plant, even if it mean[s] entering her yard" (141). The intoxicating scent of cereus flowers thus compels Otoh to seek out Mala and forge a connection with her.

There are still limits to Otoh's approach to Mala, however. The fact that Otoh wants to take a clipping of the cereus plant from Mala's yard without considering how this might impact her demonstrates his lack of knowledge about her complex relationship to the transplantation of the cereus, a process she associates with the traumatic rupture of her queer family. Otoh also seems to romanticize Mala as an enigmatic figure, but the complex olfactory landscape of Mala's yard challenges this romanticization by playing on the dynamic of attraction and repulsion. When Otoh first crosses the fence into Mala's yard, he observes: "the world seemed quieter, as though time had slowed down" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 150). He "marvel[s] at the sight" of a large, rare mudra tree and the unusual peekoplat birds in its branches: "[i]t was as though he had stumbled unexpectedly on a lost jungle, and except for the odours he would have sworn he was in paradise" (155). As Casteel notes, Otoh is "confronted by oppressive, foul odors and repulsive vegetation" rather than "the sweet-smelling, idyllic landscape that [he] expects to encounter in Mala's garden" ("Marvelous" 148). Otoh "sniff[s]" around the dilapidated house "to ferret out the scent that had captivated him last night," but he only smells a "pungent stagnancy" that rises up "in bursts" (Mootoo, *Cereus* 153). He is "repulsed" by the "perplexing odour," which "appear[s] to be the full-bodied foulness of an overflowed latrine"; yet the smell also piques his curiosity because it "prompt[s] [...] memories of a certain smell – the memory of an outdoor latrine" behind his grandmother's hut "down by the edge of the cane field" (153). As Otoh's observation indicates, Mala's queer housekeeping practices have reduced Chandin's home to the foul odour, and thus the ostensibly more primitive state, of his parents' home – a state the colonial mimic man initially sought to rise above. The putrid smells shatter Otoh's olfactory expectations of Mala: "From the back fence,

far away from the house itself, where he had made deliveries on mornings past, nothing prepared him for such sensory assaults. Certainly his dreams of meeting Mala had been filled with the scent of frilly herbs and potions, potpurri and balms, and nothing so oppressive as what choked him now” (153). Otoh’s sweetly-scented fantasies of meeting Mala recall the elaborate olfactory schema Ambrose developed for Mala’s vagina, which was also predicated upon distance and prevented Ambrose from connecting with Mala as a real person.³⁸ The foul odours that confront Otoh in Mala’s yard undermine his idealized olfactory expectations and reveal how his romanticization of Mala is predicated upon distance – not only physical distance from Mala herself, but also symbolic distance from her traumatic past.

Otoh’s encounter with these unexpected foul odours emphasizes the difficulty of confronting Mala’s violent past. The putrid odours emanating from Chandin’s house are so overwhelming that Otoh briefly “for[gets] his reasons for entering the yard,” but he eventually stumbles upon the cereus plants near the back of the house (Mootoo, *Cereus* 153). The succulents’ limp flowers no longer radiate sweet perfume: “A ghost of scent hovered close to the blossoms, remnants of last night’s fullness now souring in the heat. Replacing the perfume was an even more startling one that seemed to emanate from the wall behind the blossoms” (154). Significantly, Otoh’s encounter with the souring cereus blossoms directly follows the passage describing Pohpoh’s encounter with the cereus’ double-edged scent in Mala’s daydream. By bringing Otoh’s olfactory experience into close proximity with Pohpoh’s, Tyler’s narrative highlights the similarities and differences between the two encounters and reveals that which Mala’s daydream attempts

³⁸ The fact that Otoh goes to Mala’s yard dressed in Ambrose’s clothes and looking like his double further suggests that Otoh’s initial approach to Mala recalls his father’s romanticization of her.

to repress. Mala's dissociative fantasy attempts to protect Pohpoh – and by extension, herself – by repressing the violence of her abusive past, but it emerges in the curdling smell of the cereus Pohpoh encounters. Otoh, in contrast, experiences the souring scent of cereus flowers first-hand as it gives way to the stench of Chandin's crumbling house and rotting corpse. Otoh's encounter with the reeking odours reflects how difficult it is to confront the olfactory traces of violence that Mala's daydream attempts to repress. Upon smelling the "nauseating" stench, Otoh turns to leave, but he encounters Mala, who mistakes him for Ambrose and leads him toward the house (154). Otoh becomes "determined not to give up" on Mala like his father did, so he follows her (154). Inside the house, the stench – which he interprets as "a combination of organic rot" and "stale adult urine" – makes him cough and brings tears to his eyes (162). The smell grows even stronger when Mala leads him into the belly of the house and opens the sewing room door: "[a]n odour far more intense than that under the house burst out like a gaseous belch, knocking him back onto the carpet of dust" (162). Unlike Mala, who has learned to cope with the stench just as she learned to cope with Chandin's attacks, Otoh is overwhelmed by the assault on his senses. He enters the sewing room with Mala, but is "sick to his stomach and terrified" to find what awaits him there (162). Mala invites him to "come and see," but when Otoh moves closer to the "indecipherable mass" on the bed at the back of the room, he faints (163). Tyler does not reveal what exactly Otoh sees and smells at this point in the text, but it is clear that Mala has finally revealed an unspeakable secret to Otoh. Although Otoh's shared queerness is based on the very notion that he and Mala both have secrets, the revelation proves to be too overwhelming for him. When Otoh regains consciousness, he flees from the yard like his father before him. Otoh's

reaction to the repulsive odours underscores the difficulty of confronting that which is concealed by discourses of domesticity, even for those who are deeply committed to confronting them.

By using narrative techniques that mimic the dynamics of smell, Tyler emphasizes the parallels between the violence perpetuated in the past by Chandin and in the present by the local police. After Otoh flees, Mala “sense[s] that trouble [will] follow” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 172).³⁹ In one narrative thread, the police invade Mala’s yard to investigate rumours – spread by the townspeople who misconstrue Otoh’s words – about a potential murder at the Ramchandin house. In another narrative thread, Mala returns to her dream – or rather, nightmare – and imagines Pohpoh narrowly escape being caught by a night watchman and reluctantly return to her father’s house. At other points in the novel, Tyler brings different narrative threads into close proximity in order to highlight their similarities, but line breaks keep the narrative threads relatively distinct. At this particular point in the text, however, Mala’s dream “bleeds into the moment when police are on the verge of discovering Chandin’s body and the secrets risk exposure” (Garvey 102). In other words, Tyler alternates back and forth between the two narrative threads, blending them together in order to underscore how they are inextricably linked. I read this narrative strategy as a diffuse narrative technique as it mimics smell’s diffuse materiality in order to emphasize relationality. As the police invade Mala’s yard, fear begins “breaking” Pohpoh and “unprying her memory” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 174). The police invasion recalls her “father’s invasion” and reminds Pohpoh – and by extension, Mala – “of what she

³⁹ Significantly, Mala’s nose tells her that her visitor was not, in fact, her former lover Ambrose: “She sniffed her hands for a trace of clove oil, cardamon [sic] and bay leaf – scents she associated with Ambrose. There was an unfamiliar smell but not what she remembered” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 172). Mala’s actions recall when she – and later Chandin – smelled her hands after she consummated her relationship with Ambrose, a moment that also signaled trouble for Mala.

usually ignored or commanded herself to forget”: Chandin’s sexual assaults (174-5). By bringing these two narrative threads into close proximity, Tyler emphasizes how Chandin’s invasion of Mala’s body and the police’s invasion of her yard are part of a pattern of systemic violence against her. While Mala was growing up, the police turned a blind eye to the Ramchandin household and thus implicitly condoned the abuse that occurred behind closed doors. Yet when rumours spread that Mala may be a murderer, the police immediately invade her property to investigate without her permission. Mala confronts the police about their neglect before leading them through the house, stating: “You never had any business with my safety before. [...] Why now for?” (179). The home’s rotting stench reinforces Mala’s message by forcing the police to confront the reeking traces of the abuse they disavowed for so long. Imagining Pohpoh by her side, Mala leads the officers into the bowels of Chandin’s dilapidated home. The reeking odours attack the officers even more violently than they did Otoh, and Mala is “quite pleased that they all, including the usually composed chief constable, retched” when “the smell assaulted them” (181).⁴⁰ The smell assaults the police in a way that echoes how Chandin assaulted Mala. The repressed thus returns through the home’s repulsive stench, confronting the police with the olfactory traces of the violence that diasporic domesticity both produces and seeks to disavow.

Mala also confronts her own past by imagining Pohpoh engaging with the putrid odours of Chandin’s house and the violent memories they evoke. When the police invade her yard, Mala’s “first duty [is] to save and care for Pohpoh” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 172). She returns to her dream and “reconfigure[s]” the police officers’ words “to match her story

⁴⁰ Tyler repeatedly uses the word “assault” to describe how the smell affects the officers’ senses. When Mala lets the police into the sewing room, “[a]n emission of nasty gasses belched out at them” and “[t]hey twisted as though the odour had physically assaulted them” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 182).

of how she saved Pohpoh that day” (175). The smell of cereus flowers in this particular dream reflects Pohpoh’s – and by extension, Mala’s – shifting relationship to trauma. In Mala’s earlier fantasy, she repressed the violent memories of her past; the traces of these memories emerged in the double-edged scent of the cereus Pohpoh encountered, but in an effort to protect Pohpoh – and herself – Mala focused on idyllic images of domesticity that concealed such forms of violence. In this new dream, Pohpoh engages directly with the rotting odours of Chandin’s home. Mala imagines Pohpoh approaching the house and the cereus plants surrounding it. As Pohpoh draws nearer, the blossoms “clos[e] themselves against the onslaught of light,” “[t]heir intrusive perfume wane[s],” and their “sweetness turn[s] bitter and sharply foul” (178-9).⁴¹ When Pohpoh enters the house, the “stiffness and smell” of the sewing room “astonishe[s]” her, but she “quickly adapt[s]” to it (180). Mala may still distance herself from the pain of these memories by mediating her experience through a fantasy, but she at least begins to grapple with the crumbling home’s stale odours, and by extension, her traumatic memories of abuse.

Otoh’s encounter with the repulsive odour of Chandin’s house complicates his diffuse connections with Mala, but in a productive way. The experience transforms him, and he demonstrates his commitment to Mala by overcoming his inhibitions and helping her when she is in need. After recovering from the shock that follows his fainting spell, Otoh returns to Mala’s yard with Ambrose to find the police swarming the property. He feels “an unusual anger and loathing” when his father cannot bring himself to challenge the police and defend Mala (Mootoo, *Cereus* 171). In this moment, Otoh resolves to abandon ambivalence and chooses to take action: “There would be no *on the one hand* ...

⁴¹ This is also the point in the novel when the cereus flowers are described as looking as though they have been stained by blood: “Nearing the house Pohpoh noticed that the white cereus flowers were tinged with colour, as though they had been washed in a laundry that contained red clothes” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 178).

but on the other now” (171, original emphasis). An officer thwarts Otoh’s attempt to break through the police barrier around Mala’s property, but Otoh does not give up; he returns at night and burns down the rotting house along with Chandin’s corpse and any evidence that could be used against her. One of the reasons Otoh stands up for Mala is because he “hold[s] [Ambrose] responsible for all the rumours spread about her” and “blame[s] him for the barred-up house” (124). Otoh later explains that this is why he went to Mala’s yard in the first place: “[I]f anybody could have helped her it was [my father]. That is why I wanted to come face to face with her. I wanted to go up there, to meet her and apologize for him and say that even though he was my father I wasn’t a coward like him and that I would take care of her” (124). According to Ambrose, Otoh is uniquely suited to helping Mala. Ambrose claims that “trouble was lurking like a diseased phantom, waiting to be revealed,” and it was Otoh’s “duty [...] to be the man who unleashed” it (170). Ambrose’s use of the term “duty” is suggestive within the context of shared queerness: just as Mala queers conventional notions of a “daughter’s duty” through her housekeeping practices, Otoh queers the heteropatriarchal “duties” of a romantic suitor by unleashing the reeking traces of Mala’s repressed past. Ambrose could not bring himself to confront the violence of Chandin’s house because, as Mala’s suitor, he was invested in preserving the myth of home as a space of comfort and safety and the heteropatriarchal gender roles that structure diasporic domesticity. Since Otoh’s affinity with Mala is based on a sense of shared queerness, he seeks to challenge these heteronormative notions of romantic love, desire, and domesticity, as they have created the very conditions for the violence she has endured. Ultimately, the novel suggests that

diffuse connections predicated upon a sense of shared queerness work to remake the home from within in ways that heteropatriarchal relationships cannot.

Diffuse Connections and Diasporic Communities

After this turning point in the novel, Tyler, Otoh, and Ambrose form a new community around Mala that queers heteropatriarchal frameworks of diaspora. As a consequence of Otoh burning Chandin's house down, the judge dismisses the trial against Mala and rules that she must spend her remaining days at the Paradise Alms House. The narrator, Tyler, becomes her caretaker when no one else will, and Otoh and Ambrose visit regularly. I read the community that forms around Mala at the Paradise Alms House as an alternative form of "kinship, affiliation, and genealogy that resist[s] the logic of blood, patrilineality, and patriarchal authority" (Gopinath 178). As Hong and others have noted, "the characters' various estrangements" – in other words, their shared queerness – is "the basis for their connection" (95). The cereus becomes the symbol for this new queer diasporic community. Before burning Chandin's house down, Otoh saves a clipping of a cereus plant from the yard. Yet he does not take the clipping for himself as he originally intended; rather, he gives the clipping to Tyler to plant and care for on Mala's behalf. The cereus mediates Tyler and Otoh's queer desire for one another, and eventually, Mala, Tyler, Otoh, and Ambrose plant it together in the Alms House garden. The group re-signifies the transplantation of the cereus as a symbol for an alternative model of queer diasporic community. This model differs from Sarah and Lavinia's, which was predicated upon a model of transplantation that reinscribed racialized power dynamics and involved leaving Lantanacamara for the supposed sexual freedom of the West. In contrast, the

community that forms around Mala at the Paradise Alms House represents a model of transplantation that challenges the heteropatriarchy of diaspora by queering home from within. I am particularly interested in how the shared queerness that bonds this community – particularly Mala, Tyler, and Otoh – is mediated by scent. I read Mala and Tyler’s relationship as the most provocative model of diffuse connections in the novel. These diffuse connections are inscribed on a formal level through free indirect discourse, which I read as a diffuse narrative technique. I contend that Tyler – and by extension, Mootoo – uses this technique to create diffuse connections with Canadian readers by asking them to consider their own relationship to the diasporic trajectories explored in the novel.

Like Otoh, Tyler feels an affinity with Mala that is based on a shared queerness. Tyler is an “outsider” in Paradise: he grew up in a town on the other side of Lantanacamara, he left for a number of years to study abroad in the Shivering Northern Wetlands, and he is the only male nurse on the island (Mootoo, *Cereus* 6). Tyler also struggles to come to terms with his desire for men and his “unusual femininity,” which is the cause of much ridicule among his co-workers (71). Significantly, Tyler has long understood his queerness in relation to Chandin’s perverse version of diasporic domesticity. When Tyler was young, his Nana told him rumours about Chandin’s incestuous relationship with his daughters, which made him “ponde[r] the gender and sex roles that seemed available to people, and the rules that went with them” (47). Tyler explains: “I was preoccupied with trying to understand what was natural and what perverse, and who said so and why. Chandin Ramchandin played a part in confusing me about these roles, for it was a long time before I could differentiate between his

perversion and what others called mine” (48). Tyler’s “shared queerness with Miss Ramchandin” ultimately gives rise to his “proximity to the very Ramchandin Nana herself had known of” (48).

Tyler’s affinity with Mala is mediated by smell. When the police bring Mala to the Alms House, she is feared and resented by the Sisters who run it, but Tyler immediately empathizes with her. Tyler’s affective connection to Mala emerges through a range of senses, including sight and touch, but Mala’s scent affects Tyler in a particular way: it forges diffuse connections that emphasize their affinity as queer subjects and thus evokes empathy in him. When a police officer delivers Mala to the Alms House, she is sedated on a stretcher. After examining Mala’s skeletal frame, Tyler touches her shoulder in an effort to “know the woman who lay hidden by the white sheet” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 11). Mala’s scent, in turn, reaches out to Tyler by permeating his senses. When Tyler feels her cold skin, “an aroma resembling rich vegetable compost escaped from underneath the sheet” (11).⁴² As Tyler notes, it is not the “the sweet yet sour smell” that he “had come to expect whenever close to an old person” (11). Mala’s compost-like odour, which “resembles her own garden” (May 104), recalls her years living in an overgrown yard and remaking her father’s home from within. Mala’s scent thus bears the traces of her experience and marks her as queer. For Tyler, Mala’s “curiously natural smell” indicates that “she had likely not eaten animal flesh in a very long time” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 12). When he feels “the fear trapped in [her] body,” he is “gripped by fury” (11). Recalling the police officer’s statement that she only ate “a biscuit and some hot tea” while in their care, Tyler wonders “if, after she rejected fowl and fish, tea and biscuits

⁴² Tyler also compares Mala’s smell to “the sweet scent of yellow potatoes” and “the delicate perfume of fresh young carrots” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 78).

were all that she was fed or all that she would eat”; “[e]ither way,” Tyler feels that he is “witnessing a case of neglect” (11). Mala’s scent thus articulates details about her background and gives Tyler a sense of how she has been treated. Tyler’s empathy for and affinity with Mala leads him to take over her care when others will not, and this allows him to “gain the full story” of her life (48).⁴³

Tyler’s approach to Mala contrasts sharply with the way that the local townspeople approach her. Even before Tyler met Mala, he “refrain[ed] from taking part in the daily dissections of new gossip and from helping its spore-like dispersal” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 6). Significantly, Tyler frames the spreading of gossip in terms of scattering seeds. As I argued in the Introduction, the process of scattering seeds is associated with frameworks of diaspora that rely on andro-centric, heteropatriarchal logic to ensure the reproduction of home. By linking the malicious act of spreading gossip to heteropatriarchal models of diaspora, Tyler suggests that the townspeople perpetuate the violence Mala endured while living in her father’s house. Tyler’s refusal to participate in this gossip signals his rejection of heteropatriarchal diasporic relations. By positioning the townspeople’s “sowing and tilling and reaping idle rumours about the Ramchandin family” against his first-hand knowledge of the “truth” of Mala’s experience (6-7),⁴⁴ Tyler suggests that challenging such forms of violence involves getting to know Mala by “hearing” her side of the story, even if it is articulated through scent.

The diffuse connections between Tyler and Mala are inscribed on a formal level. As I have already argued, Tyler’s narrative is diffuse in the sense that it brings different narrative threads into close proximity in order to draw out comparisons and contrasts

⁴³ Mala “appear[s] to have a limited vocabulary” and is thought to be mute, but Tyler claims that she is “able to speak and ha[s] volumes of tales and thoughts in her head” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 99).

⁴⁴ I explore the relationship between diaspora and cultivation in more detail in Chapter Two.

between characters and events. Tyler's narrative is also diffuse in the sense that it relies on free indirect discourse to emphasize his affinity with Mala and evoke empathy for her in the novel's readers.⁴⁵ According to Dorrit Cohen, free indirect discourse is a technique for representing consciousness that involves "rendering a character's thought in his [sic] own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration" (494). The relationship between words and thoughts remains latent, "suspending figural consciousness on the threshold of verbalization in a way that direct quotation cannot achieve" (495). Free indirect discourse is therefore a complex and highly flexible technique for representing interiority (497). I contend that free indirect discourse embodies diffuse connections on a formal level. The narrative technique embodies the diffuse dynamics of smell in a number of provocative ways. Significantly, free indirect discourse is defined by a process of blending that makes it difficult to attribute thoughts to a particular source. As Cohen explains, the technique involves a "fusion of narratorial and figurative language" that "charge[s] it with ambiguity" (497). The technique is "apprehended almost unconsciously" because the grammar of free indirect discourse presents characters' thoughts and opinions as "fictional fact[s]" (497). Like smell, free indirect discourse also emphasizes relationality and intersubjectivity by permeating and destabilizing boundaries between self and other, inside and outside. According to Cohen, "the thought-thread of a character is most tightly woven into the texture of third-person narration" during moments of free indirect discourse (501). This narrative technique enhances the narrator's identification with that particular character's mentality (501), while also implicating the narrator – and by extension, readers – in the characters'

⁴⁵ Kutzinski briefly discusses free indirect discourse in her discussion of Tyler's narrative strategies, noting that Tyler "takes us inside [Mala's] mind through free indirect discourse" (192).

subjective experiences more than direct quoting would (507). Tyler's use of free indirect discourse thus not only emphasizes his affinity with Mala; it also works to implicate readers in Mala's story and enhance their identification with an elderly Indo-Caribbean woman who, at the beginning of the text, appears to be an insane murderer. Tyler's diffuse narrative strategy of free indirect discourse thus models his affinity with Mala by creating diffuse connections between Mala and the novel's readers.

Tyler's diffuse connections with Mala allow him to finally embrace his own queerness and forge diffuse connections with others through scent. Tyler only does so, however, once Mala teaches him about the limits of "coming out" as a visualist process. As Gopinath argues, "'gay' narratives of the closet and coming out [...] are organized exclusively around a logic of recognition and visibility" (16). Tyler initially attempts to "come out" to Mala in a way that conforms to this visualist model of queerness. One day, Mala brings Tyler a nurse's dress and stockings to wear. He puts on the uniform – an experience he "savour[s]" – but when he musters up the courage to reveal himself to Mala, he is surprised to find that she pays little attention to him (Mootoo, *Cereus* 77). As Kutzinski argues, "Tyler's 'coming out' is not a public performance, for it is staged in Mala's room" – a dark, enclosed space – and "lack[s] a certain theatricality" (179). Moreover, "Mala refuses to play the role of the audience" (179). According to Kutzinski, "Mala does not need to read Tyler to affirm his existence" because their relationship is not based on "a hierarchical system of gazing and being gazed at (of the self acknowledging its *other* and vice versa)" (179). Kutzinski focuses on how the characters acknowledge each other through their "shared performance" of constructing and deconstructing a tower of furniture each night instead; as she notes, the "precarious,

temporary structure [...] symbolically represents their relationship as one of creative mutuality” (180). Tyler helps Mala remake the home from within by re-arranging the ordering of domestic space, and Mala helps Tyler do the same by encouraging him to express himself in a way that subverts visualist frameworks of “coming out” that attempt to manage and contain queerness.

Mala helps Tyler learn to recuperate scent as a medium for queering the home from within. After “coming out” to Mala in her room, Tyler turns to scent to express his queerness. At the end of the novel, Tyler abandons the caution and restraint he usually shows when policing his self-expression and asserts: “I must, as a matter of life and death, wear scent in the crook of my elbows” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 246). It may seem like an exaggeration to say that wearing perfume is a matter of life or death, but for Tyler, marking his body with scent forces the Alms House Sisters and others who mock him to confront his queerness. Tyler not only wears the scent to challenge the mindset of the people in Paradise, however; he also wears it to express his desire for Otoh. Tyler wants his perfume to signal to Otoh that he is “readier than ever to present [himself] like a peacock in heat” (246). Just before the cereus blooms, Tyler decides to “unabashedly declare [him]self” by “daub[ing] enough scent” on his temples “to make a Puritan cross his legs and swoon” (246-7). Tyler’s olfactory “coming out” parallels the first blooming of Mala’s cereus, which has grown from a clipping into a full-fledged plant. A few days earlier, Mala, Tyler, Otoh, and Ambrose helped transplant the cereus into the Alms House Garden. As Corr argues, the garden – or more specifically, the transplanting of the cereus – “represents the fruition of relational identities that find strength and support across significant differences” (89). The fact that Tyler blossoms, so to speak, at this particular

time underscores the support he feels from the queer diasporic community at the Alms House. Moreover, by coming out through scent, Tyler queers the heteropatriarchal “language of ‘bloom’” that, as Hong notes, is typically used to describe “young women’s sexuality and readiness for marriage” (81).

Although the final scene endorses this queer diasporic community, the fact that the cereus does not bloom before the novel ends suggests that it still has its limitations. In the final scene, Mala, Tyler, Otoh, and Ambrose gather around the cereus in anticipation, waiting for its flowers to bloom. As Corr notes, “[t]his moment, occurring one year after Mala was committed to the Alms House, marks both the starting point of Tyler’s narration and the point to which he brings the reader at the end of the novel” (89). The circular structure of the text seems to indicate closure, but as Hong notes, “the consummation of Tyler and Otoh’s seemingly ideal connection is deferred and is thus linked to Mala’s deferred reunion with Asha, both of which are narrated through reference to the cereus plant of the book’s title” (96). In the novel’s final line, Tyler directly addresses Asha on Mala’s behalf, writing: “You are, to her, the promise of a cereus-scented breeze on a Paradise night” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 249). This promise remains unfulfilled and serves as a potent reminder that this queer diasporic community is far from idyllic. The diasporic ruptures of the past continue to have an impact on those who ‘stay put,’ or are left behind, in diaspora. As Hong argues, the interweaving of these “states of waiting and deferral” and “the narration of this deferral through the imagery of nature” – or more specifically, the transplanted cereus – represent “a different mode of affiliation, one forged through disidentification, alienation, and contradiction, rather than through resolution” (97). In other words, this community may be united by a shared

queerness, but queer affinity does not erase the sense of loss that comes with being left behind in diaspora.

Cereus Blooms at Night provocatively asks Canadian readers to consider the diffuse connections between Lantanacamara and Canada. At the end of the novel, Tyler reveals that Asha had sent Mala many letters over the years begging her to leave home and offering her money to escape. The letters, which the “righteous postman” refused to deliver because he considered “the Ramchandin house to be a place of sin and moral corruption” (Mootoo, *Cereus* 243), were initially sent from the northern part of Lantanacamara, then from the Shivering Northern Wetlands, then finally from Canada, where Asha claimed to be “well and happy” (246). It is significant that the novel specifically mentions Canada, particularly because all other locations in the text are fictionalized versions of real places.⁴⁶ The suggestion that Asha emigrated to, and may still be living in, Canada takes on a particular significance in light of Tyler’s plea to readers at the beginning of the novel: “*If you are not Asha Ramchandin – who could, for all anyone knows, have changed her name – but know her or someone you suspect might be her or even related to her, please present this and ask that she read it*” (3, original emphasis). Tyler – and by extension, Mootoo – interpellates Canadian readers in a particular way by directly implicating them in the story. Canada may seem to be far removed from the fictionalized Caribbean setting of Lantanacamara, but the text suggests that it is not. By specifically invoking Canada, Tyler reminds readers that the country is

⁴⁶ Corr briefly considers the significance of this Canadian reference in his essay on *Cereus Blooms at Night*. He notes that critics are hesitant to make connections between “Mootoo’s Canadianness” and *Cereus Blooms at Night* even though “the novel quite openly signals a distinct connection to Canada: although the colonized Lantanacamara (a very Trinidadian place) and the colonizing Shivering Northern Wetlands (a very British place) in *Cereus Blooms at Night* [are] imaginary, Canada actually appears as itself, albeit briefly” (92-3, note 2).

linked to broader trajectories of diasporic movement that involve multiple journeys, points of departure, and places of settlement. As Mootoo's novel suggests, these trajectories may be shaped by traumatic moments of rupture, gendered and sexualized forms of violence, complex colonial legacies, and models of diasporic domesticity founded on heteropatriarchal frameworks of kinship and reproduction. Some readers, like Mootoo herself, may already be deeply familiar with such diasporic trajectories, but others may not. *Cereus Blooms at Night* confronts those who may be unfamiliar with such trajectories to consider the diffuse connections between Canada and Lantanacalara. In doing so, the novel complicates reductive approaches to diasporic encounters, including those that frame diasporic subjects as malodorous strangers who spread out from a fixed, foreign origin point and permeate national boundaries, polluting the Euro-Canadian nation, and by extension, the bodies of its dominant populations.

As I have argued in this chapter, *Cereus Blooms at Night* represents smell as a key mode through which Mala queers diasporic domesticity. Yet in the novel, smell is not inherently subversive; it is a site of ambivalence that reinforces colonial heteropatriarchy, and Mala must agentially renegotiate smell to queer heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity. I contend that it is precisely because smell serves as a tool of colonialism and a mode of heteropatriarchal oppression that Mala recuperates scent as a means of queering the home from within. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, scents permeate the boundaries between public and private space, drawing attention to the gender and sexual violence concealed by myths of the home as a site of comfort and safety. Smell thus embodies an alternative language for articulating the unspeakable trauma that may structure diasporic domesticity. The odorous traces of Mala's past mediate diffuse

connections with other queer diasporic subjects, who create a community around Mala based on shared queerness. This community not only remakes the home from within through scent; it also re-imagines conventional models of diaspora based on heteropatriarchal forms of kinship and reproduction. Ultimately, *Cereus Blooms at Night* suggests that smell's diffuse materiality makes scent a productive medium and model for challenging heteropatriarchal frameworks of diasporic domesticity and creating alternative communities that queer diaspora from within. Although *Cereus Blooms at Night* is not set in Canada, its interpellation of Canadian readers works to situate Mala's story within a broader context of global diasporic trajectories of which Canada is a part. Indeed, Canada is framed as a destination point where diasporic subjects may ostensibly escape the trauma of home. In the next chapter, I complicate this representation of Canada by turning to the work of Japanese-Canadian author Hiromi Goto, whose novels explore smell as a key mode through which racialized diasporic subjects negotiate their complex relationships to Canada as a new site of settlement.

Chapter Two

The Scents of Diasporic Settlement: Cultivation and Indigenization

in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child*

Introduction

Silence is often figured as a key trope in Japanese-Canadian writing. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) was particularly influential in constructing silence as the defining characteristic of Japanese Canadians' relationships to dislocation, internment, and dispersal during and after the Second World War. Although Hiromi Goto's first novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), does not explicitly engage with histories of internment, it is often interpreted as a text that re-writes *Obasan* and challenges Kogawa's emphasis on silence.¹ Consequently, critical work on *Chorus of Mushrooms* focuses predominantly on topics related to audition, such as language, voice, storytelling, and translation, which – as the title suggests – are central to the novel.² While a number of scholars have explored the role of food and taste in Goto's work, they have largely overlooked the olfactory dimensions of her writing.³ When asked “What does scent mean to you?” in a 2004 interview, Goto outlined her interest in the marginalized sense:

¹ I discuss Guy Beauregard's “Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora” (1995) and other essays that establish this connection later in this chapter.

² See, for example, Mari Sasano's “‘Words Like Buckshot’: Taking Aim at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto's *A Chorus of Mushrooms*” (1998), Mark Libin's “Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*” (1999), Steve McCullough's “‘Trust Me’: Responding to the Threat of Writing in *Chorus of Mushrooms*” (2003), Charlotte Sturgess' “Collective Voice: History as Subject” (2003), Eleanor Ty's “Thrumming Songs of Ecstasy’: Female Voices in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*” (2004), and Anne-Marie Lee-Loy's “Asian American Mothering in the Absence of Talk Story: *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*” (2010).

³ A number of critics provide at least a cursory mention of food's significance in Goto's work. Heather Latimer's “Eating, Abjection, and Transformation in the Work of Hiromi Goto” (2006) and Lisa Harris' “Eating and Reading Hiromi Goto” (2008) are explicitly devoted to examining Goto's representations of food, yet they only mention smell in passing. Mari Sasano also briefly discusses smell in her reading of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, as does Marc Colavincenzo in his essay “‘Fables of the Reconstruction of Fables’:

The sense of smell is rarely expanded upon as a key component in contemporary literature, which is quite remarkable given its association with many sites. (Larissa Lai's novel *Salt Fish Girl* is a delightful exception.) It's a site of culture, identity, familiarity, intimacy, repugnance, seduction, hunger Our senses are the first filters of the physical world and scent is probably a more subconscious awareness in comparison to sight, which is more actively engaged. The nuances of scent can mark a book or story with the visceral and the symbolic. I like to locate the story through the body. Scent is simultaneously corporeal and divine: human essence. (qtd. in Kong 29)

To extend Goto's observation, it is remarkable that critics have yet to expand upon smell as a central component of her own writing, for much of her work invites the same kind of olfacto-centric analysis necessitated by Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*. While the evocative representations of scent in Goto's other works deserve studies of their own, for the purposes of this chapter I focus specifically on representations of smell in Goto's two novels, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* (2001).⁴

Both of Goto's novels centre on Japanese-Canadian families who migrate from Japan to Alberta and set up farms on the prairies. Smell plays a key role in mediating the characters' relationships to the land, yet few studies examine scent's significance in these texts. Moreover, critics have only recently begun to consider the complex relationship

Multiculturalism, Postmodernism, and the Possibilities of Myth in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*" (2005). Mark Libin provides the most in-depth analysis of smell in Goto's writing. His essays "Lost in Translation" and "'Some of My Best Friends...': Befriending the Racialized Fiction of Hiromi Goto" (2001) are not specifically dedicated to smell, but both include a discussion of smell's significance in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. I engage with these critics in more detail later in this chapter.

⁴ Representations of smell are also central to "Stinky Girl" and "Tilting," short stories published in Goto's collection *Hopeful Monsters* (2004). For a reading of smell in "Stinky Girl," see Libin's essay "'Some of My Best Friends...'"

between diaspora and indigeneity in these novels, even though both texts explore how Japanese-Canadian families settle and lay claim to the prairie landscape. This chapter brings together analyses of smell and theories of diaspora and indigeneity by introducing a concept that I call “diasporic settlement.” As I have already noted, diaspora literally means to sow or scatter seeds. As much as diaspora is about displacement from a homeland, its etymological connection to cultivation – a material process historically linked to settlement – suggests that diaspora is also fundamentally about settling in a new land. Drawing on the etymology of diaspora as a term that emphasizes actions rather than identities, I approach diasporic settlement as a framework that draws attention to the processes and practices connected to displacement and settlement, such as the scattering of seeds. This is not to say that diasporic settlement is distinct from processes of racialization; rather, it means that processes associated with diasporic settlement are not reducible to markers of identity. Indeed, the emphasis on identity has in some ways worked to obscure how racialized diasporic subjects participate in ongoing forms of colonialism when they relocate to a new place. My work thus aims to highlight how diasporic subjects may experience displacement from a homeland while also contributing to the displacement of others. In doing so, my work complicates the binary of Europeans as colonizing settlers and Indigenous peoples as colonized subjects. Although racialized diasporic subjects in Canada may have a different relationship to settlement than European settler-colonialists, diasporic settlement nonetheless implicates these subjects in a colonial relationship to the land and its Indigenous inhabitants. A framework that focuses on diasporic settlement thus draws attention to how a range of diasporic communities may be complicit in ongoing structures of colonialism. By emphasizing how

racialized diasporic subjects are implicated in these processes, I do not aim to undermine the ways in which they are also marginalized within the Euro-Canadian nation; rather, I seek to elucidate the range of complex relationships that racialized diasporic subjects must negotiate in Canada. Using *Obasan* as an intertext, I read *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* as novels that explore the complexities of diasporic settlement through the lens of cultivation. As I argue in this chapter, cultivation not only has a historical relationship to settler colonialism as a mode of European indigenization; it also has a particular meaning for Japanese Canadians, given the Canadian government's systematic dispossession, internment, and dispersal of "the Japanese" during the Second World War.

Significantly, Kogawa's and Goto's work suggests that there is a particular relationship between diasporic settlement and smell. *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and *The Kappa Child* each explore cultivation as a technique of diasporic settlement that involves "putting down roots," whether literally or figuratively; in other words, cultivation constitutes a mode of developing material and psychic connections to the landscape. The characters in these novels are "rooted" in Japan and Canada in different ways and to different degrees, and they also have varying relationships to these roots. In each text, smell becomes a key mode through which diasporic subjects relate to the Canadian landscape, and the characters' relationships to scent reflect how they engage with their new site of settlement. In *Obasan*, the smell of wild roses reflects Japanese Canadians' shifting relationships to the Alberta landscape. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the smell of a Japanese-Canadian family's mushroom farm – an odorous byproduct of cultivation – represents the repressed traces of their attempt to indigenize and assimilate on the prairies by concealing their diasporic connections to Japan. In *The Kappa Child*,

blocked nasal passages metaphorize how stagnant forms of diasporic nostalgia can lead to colonial violence in new sites of settlement, while the scents associated with the kappa, a mischievous figure from Japanese mythology, seem to embody a more productive model of negotiating relationships to both Japan and Canada by challenging patriarchal, heteronormative frameworks of diaspora. *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* – published thirteen and twenty years after *Obasan*, respectively – demonstrate a greater awareness of how diasporic subjects are implicated in colonialism than Kogawa’s novel; but as I argue in this chapter, there are still certain limits to Goto’s critique of diasporic settlement.

Cultivating Land, Cultivating Belonging: The Politics of Scattering Seeds

Much work has been done on Canada’s history of settler colonialism and many scholars have explored how this history has shaped the relationship between European settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada. While early theorists of Canada’s relationship to colonialism, such as Northrup Frye and Margaret Atwood, focused on Canada as a colony victimized by Britain, postcolonial scholars such as Gary Boire, Alan Lawson, Stephen Slemon, and Diana Brydon reframed these debates in the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to emphasize the impact of European settler colonialism on Canada’s Indigenous peoples.⁵ Scholars have only recently begun to broaden these debates by exploring the relationship between Canada’s diasporic communities and Indigenous peoples. A number of recent publications such as *Narratives of Citizenship: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples Unsettle the Nation State* (2011), *Countering Displacements: The*

⁵ Cynthia Sugars’ *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (2004) provides a useful overview of this shift and includes selections from Frye, Atwood, Boire, Lawson, Slemon, and Brydon.

Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples (2012), and *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada* (2012) have started to map the complex issues that shape the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity, particularly within the Canadian context.⁶

In many ways, diaspora and indigeneity seem to be antithetical concepts. In contrast to diaspora, which is typically defined in relation to displacement, indigeneity is usually defined in relation to placement. According to the *OED*, the word “Indigenous” describes that which is “native or belonging naturally *to* (the soil, region, etc.)” (“Indigenous, *adj.*,” def. 1.a., original emphasis). Indigenous peoples are also linked to autochthony, a Greek term that suggests they are “of the soil” and have “sprung from [the] land itself” (“Autochthon, *n.*,” def. 1, *OED*).⁷ Autochthony thus implies a natural relationship to the land, while diaspora suggests a process of scattering seeds that involves rooting oneself in new landscapes. In his influential book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford defines diasporic communities in opposition to Indigenous communities. He claims that “[d]iasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by ‘tribal’ peoples” (250). He also suggests that “[t]ribal

⁶ For a discussion of the particular issues surrounding diaspora and indigeneity in relation to postcolonial theory, see Gaurav Desai’s essay “Between Indigeneity and Diaspora: Questions From a Scholar Tourist” (2011).

⁷ This sense of the term was removed from the online version of the *OED* in 2011. Via written personal communication on 17 Sept. 2011, *OED* spokesperson Juliet Evans explained that the definition for “Autochthon” was changed to “[a] person or creature born out of the earth” because this definition “better fits these English uses” (n. pag). The new definition also glosses the etymological meaning of the ancient Greek word as “original inhabitant, native” rather than “sprung from the land itself” because, as Evans put it, “we feel that this better defines the way that the Greek word is actually used” (n. pag). Evans explains: “The definitions found in the previous edition were attempting to do two things at once, to define and also to explain the origin of a use. Although lexicographers have often tried to use definitions in this way, this is something that we generally try to avoid in the new edition of the *OED*, wherever possible keeping definitions and etymologies and other explanations more clearly distinct from one another” (n. pag). Since I aim to draw out the connections between autochthony’s meaning and etymology, I retain the earlier definition of the term, which can still be found in the second edition of the *OED*.

cultures are not diasporas,” as “their sense of rootedness in the land is precisely what diasporic peoples have lost” (254). But as Clifford points out in his essay “Varieties of Indigenous Experience: Diasporas, Homelands, Sovereignties,” published ten years later, diaspora and indigeneity intersect in a number of ways. Arguing that it is necessary to “make space for contradiction and excess across a broad spectrum of indigenous experiences today by loosening the common opposition of ‘indigenous’ and ‘diasporic’ forms of life,” he theorizes “indigenous diasporas” as a concept that emphasizes the diasporic dimensions of Indigenous peoples’ lives (“Varieties” 199-200).⁸

While it is crucial to consider how Indigenous experiences may be understood within the framework of diaspora, it is also important to explore how non-Indigenous racialized subjects negotiate the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity. As Clifford puts it: “If there are diasporic aspects of indigenous life, the reverse is also true. For something like an indigenous desire animates diasporic consciousness: the search for somewhere to belong that is outside the imagined community of the dominant nation-state” (“Varieties” 205). This chapter explores how diasporic subjects may be motivated by what Clifford calls an “indigenous desire,” but it also complicates the notion that their search for belonging necessarily extends beyond their adopted nation-state. Some diasporic subjects may feel – or want to feel – a sense of belonging in their place of habitation, and this longing may exist in tension with, rather than at the exclusion of, a sense of connection to a past homeland. A framework of diasporic settlement attempts to

⁸ Indigenous scholars such as Bonita Lawrence and Neal McLeod have explored the diasporic dimensions of Indigenous life in the Canadian context. See, for example, McLeod’s “Coming Home Through Stories” (2001) and Lawrence’s *“Real” Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood and Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (2004). Drawing on this work, critics like Renate Eigenbrod and Sophie McCall situate literary representations of Indigenous peoples within the context of diaspora. See Eigenbrod’s “Diasporic Longings: (Re)Figurations of Home and Homelessness in Richard Wagamese’s Work” and McCall’s “Diaspora and Nation in Métis Writing” in *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada* (2012).

account for these complex dynamics. According to the *OED*, settlement describes “[a]n assemblage of persons settled in a locality” (“Settlement, *n*,” def. IV.14); it also describes “[t]he act of settling oneself, or [the] state of being settled, in a fixed place or position, in a permanent abode, etc” (“Settlement, *n*,” def. I.4). So while settlement refers to a particular place, it also describes the act of locating oneself in that place. Significantly, settlement also refers to “[t]he act of settling as colonists or new-comers; the act of peopling or colonizing a new country, or of planting a colony” (“Settlement, *n*,” def. I.6). Settlement thus has a particular meaning within the context of colonialism, as the concept of settler colonialism suggests.

To consider the relationship between settlement and diaspora, it is necessary to shift the terms of contemporary diaspora discourse. In his 2005 essay “Restoring the Logic of the Sedentary to Diaspora Studies,” Khachig Tölölyan contends that the emphasis on movement and mobility that tends to dominate diaspora scholarship has “inadvertently contributed to an excessive disassociation of diasporic identity and practices from place” (138). According to Tölölyan, diasporas are shaped as much by “the sedentary” as they are by “migratory mobility,” as sedentariness contributes to the development of diasporic communities in new places (137). By suggesting that “attachments to homeland *and* to one or more diasporic places” are “essential” to diasporic identities (140, emphasis added), Tölölyan underscores the affective connections diasporic subjects may develop in relation to places other than the ostensible homeland. He asserts that “attachments to a barely remembered or imagined or much-visited homeland place can vary tremendously” and do “not prevent [...] the development of an identity which is also intensely local, affixed to a region, village or city in the

hostland” (140). He also claims that “constructing a diaspora usually involves cultivating an attachment to places” both locally and globally (143). This statement is particularly provocative for my study, as it gestures toward a process that I argue is central to diasporic settlement in Canada: cultivation.

Cultivation is a material practice with a complex discursive history. According to the *OED*, cultivation describes “[t]he tilling of land” (“cultivation, *n*,” def. 1a) and “[t]he bestowing of labour and care upon a plant, so as to develop and improve its qualities” (“cultivation, *n*,” def. 2a). Cultivation also refers to “[t]he developing, fostering, or improving (of the mind, faculties, etc.) by education and training”; in this sense, “being cultivated” refers to “culture” and “refinement” (“cultivation, *n*,” def. 4). As Raymond Williams notes, the Latin root word *cultura* initially had a number of meanings, including “inhabit, cultivate, protect, [and] honour with worship,” which eventually separated into different, but related, nouns (87). *Cultura* “took on the main meaning of cultivation or tending” (87). The English word “culture” was therefore initially a “noun of process” that referred to “the tending of natural growth” in the realm of husbandry (87). In the sixteenth century, “the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development,” which eventually became the primary meaning of the word “culture” (87).⁹ Significantly, this secondary level of meaning emerged during the height of colonial

⁹ As Williams notes, the “literal continuity” of the term “culture” continues to exist in agriculture and bacteriology (90). The word also has “three broad active categories of usage”: “(i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”; “(ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general”; “(iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (90).

expansion, when European imperialism manifested the links between culture, cultivation, and colonization, all of which have their etymological roots in *cultura*.¹⁰

Cultivation was central to early forms of settler colonialism, as it allowed Europeans to indigenize on the Canadian landscape. According to Terry Goldie, “indigenization” – or “the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous” – was necessary for European settlers to overcome their position as “alien within Canada” (194). Colonial theories of land ownership promoted cultivation as a primary method through which European settlers could indigenize. For example, John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Civil Government*, published in 1690, is a “seminal” work not only in the sense that it had a significant influence on European settler colonialism, but also in the sense that its theory of land ownership was predicated upon the cultivation of domesticated crops. According to Barbara Arneil, Locke’s influential chapter on property was specifically written “to justify the seventeenth-century dispossession of the aboriginal peoples of their land” (2). By definition, only “the individual” could claim title to property, and by extension, claim the right to exclude others from it (Arneil 141). Since Indigenous peoples seemed to cultivate land collectively, they had no exclusive right to their lands under Locke’s theory (141). As Locke put it:

[E]very man has a ‘property’ in his own ‘person.’ [...] Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, *he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.* [...] As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.

¹⁰ The word “inhabit” – which, as I noted above, was one of the initial meanings of *cultura* – developed through *colonus* to the word “colony” (Williams 87).

He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common. (130-132, emphasis added)

By mixing their labour with the land, European settlers supposedly improved the “untamed” landscape, and by extension, improved the “uncivilized” Indigenous populations already inhabiting the land.¹¹ The dual resonance of cultivation as a process that improved both the land and its inhabitants informed discourses of agricultural development and social progress in Canada. The “four stages theory,” a system based on Lockean approaches to land ownership, suggested that society “naturally” progressed through four consecutive stages – hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce – that corresponded to particular modes of subsistence, approaches to law, property, and government, and ideas about customs, manners, and morals (Meek 2). As D.M.R. Bentley notes, “the great leap forward from rudeness to refinement occurs with the agricultural stage” (34).¹² If cultivation was the main method used by European settlers to appropriate land from Indigenous peoples, seeds were the primary tools settlers used to enact this process. As Bentley puts it: “In a field of grain lies the seed of a civilized world” (40).¹³

Cultivation has particular resonances for racialized diasporic subjects in Canada.

Due to the success of European settlers’ indigenization, Euro-Canadians are not usually

¹¹ The words “culture” and “civilization” intersect insofar as civilization describes “human cultural, social, and intellectual development” that is “advanced and progressive” (“civilization,” *n.*). For a discussion of the differences and similarities between the concepts of culture and civilization, see Williams.

¹² Bentley explores how Oliver Goldsmith’s nineteenth-century poem *The Rising Village* shifts from describing Canada’s “savage” stage to its agricultural one, emphasizing the importance of cultivation as a means of establishing land ownership (39). As Bentley explains, once the landscape was “humanized” through agriculture, settlers could enjoy land that was once wild (44).

¹³ This assumption underlies Catherine Parr Traill’s contrasting descriptions of “Indians” and British settlers in *The Backwoods of Canada*, published in 1836: “*They* reap while *we* sow. While *they* collect, *we* scatter abroad the seed for the future harvest” (qtd. in Chanady 89, original emphasis). As Amaryll Chanady argues, “[a]griculture is considered a prerequisite for establishing a civilized community” in Parr Traill’s work: “the Europeans cultivate the land (they *sow* and *scatter*), whereas the Indians harvest available food sources (they only *reap* and *collect*)” (89, original emphasis). As Chanady argues, Parr Traill associates European settlers with industry and culture, in the dual sense of the term, while aligning Indigenous peoples with nature and thus a lack of culture (87).

forced to grapple with their relationship to settlement and are not typically described as “diasporic.” Racialized diasporic subjects may not have the same relationship to indigenization as Euro-Canadians, but this does not mean that some do not want to indigenize. Although Lockean theories of property construct cultivation as a European task and theories of indigenization tend to focus on Euro-Canadian settler subjects – in Goldie’s formulation, it is specifically “whites” who “need to become ‘native,’ to belong in their land” (194) – racialized diasporic subjects may also feel a “need” to indigenize and may mobilize cultivation, a process at the very core of the concept of diaspora, to do so. It is crucial to note that diasporic subjects may feel the need to indigenize not only because they feel uprooted from a homeland, but also because their marginalization within Canada is predicated upon the success of European indigenization.

My conceptualization of diasporic settlement builds on *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation Through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (2011), a collection published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that explores the intersections of diaspora and indigeneity through the lens of cultivation. In an effort to extend debates on reconciliation in Canada, the collection moves beyond conventional binaries of “White settlers” as colonizing and “Aboriginal peoples” as colonized subjects by considering the perspectives of “immigrant, racialized, ‘new’ Canadians, and other minoritized communities” (Mathur 6-7).¹⁴ Although few critics in the collection invoke the term “diaspora,” their work is useful for highlighting how racialized diasporic subjects are

¹⁴ In his essay “Cultivations, Land, and a Politics of Becoming,” co-editor Ashok Mathur frames *Cultivating Canada* in suggestive agricultural terms. He states that the collection seeks to usher in a “metaphorical and collaborative turning of the soil [that] allows us, through and from a variety of diverse lenses, to perceive with new eyes, perhaps to recreate a vision that will bring us closer to understanding both our collective and disparate pasts and our possible and potential futures” (8). My work problematizes the emphasis on vision that tends to dominate discourses of racialization and landscaping practices.

complicit in colonialism. In their influential essay “Decolonizing Anti-racism,” first published in 2005, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua contend that “people of colour have a complex relationship to Indigeneity”: they may be “marginalized by a white settler nationalist project,” but as citizens of Canada, they also “participate in or are complicit in the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples” (251). Lawrence and Dua explain that “people of colour live on land that is appropriated and contested, and where Aboriginal peoples are denied both nationhood and access to their own lands” (251). As Robinder Kaur Sehdev argues in her essay “People of Colour in Treaty,” it is crucial to critique “[t]he denial of personal accountability on the basis of a lack of direct personal or ancestral action” for “[t]here is no such thing as the innocent subject whose hands are unsullied by power” (266). Sehdev notes that while she personally experiences “racist violence, alienation, glass ceiling, tokenism, and accusations of fundamentalism and terrorism” on a regular basis, she also benefits from settler privileges – including “[t]he right to earn a living from the land, to build a home (physical and metaphorical) anywhere in this country, to be a citizen” – which are predicated upon treaties with Aboriginal peoples (267). Since the Crown theoretically represents the interests of “people of colour” who are Canadian citizens, these “settlers are ‘treaty people’ too” (267).

While it is crucial to emphasize diasporic subjects’ complicity in colonial practices, it is also important to recognize that diasporic settlement is stratified. As Lawrence and Dua point out, “there are broad differences between those who were taken here as slaves, those who are currently migrant workers, those who are refugees without legal documentation, and those who have emigrated and obtained citizenship” (251). Malissa Phung similarly contends that “colonial settlerhood” is stratified and that “people

of colour” are not settlers in the same way that the British and French were when they colonized Canada (292). For Phung, class plays a crucial role in stratifying settlerhood. As she notes, racialized communities evoke indigenizing processes when they strive for upward class mobility and promote labour narratives of hard work and enterprise “in the face of Indigenous claims to autochthony” (294). Narratives about the struggles of immigrant life tend to “construct people of colour as exemplary settlers who have been able to work hard to rise above their racialized immigrant origins and succeed despite all of the odds stacked against them” (294). These discourses recall those evoked by European settlers who “constructed a labour narrative of hard work and enterprise to self-indigenize,” and in doing so, sought to differentiate themselves from Indigenous people “who had been constructed as lazy and lacking in industry and civility” (293). According to Phung, “settlers of colour” may mobilize narratives similar to those constructed by “white settlers,” but they cannot simply be equated because “settlers benefit from the ongoing colonization of Indigenous people to differing degrees” (292-3). For example, early Chinese immigrants were, on the one hand, constructed as a “model minority” group of “hyper-industrious labour machines willing to work for next to nothing” and, on the other hand, decried as unfair competition for white Canadian workers (294). As Phung notes, this “yellow peril” discourse continues today in various forms, including news articles critiquing a “perceived Asian hyper-enrolment and unfair Asian-white competition in Canadian universities” (295).¹⁵ Ultimately, Phung asserts that “there are multiple ways of being configured as an invasive settler”: “Although they may occupy Indigenous lands and benefit from the displacement of Indigenous people, Chinese

¹⁵ Phung discusses the racism of CTV’s 1979 W-Five program “Campus Giveaway” and, more recently, *Maclean’s* 2010 article “Too Asian?” (295). I discuss yellow peril discourse in more detail in Chapter Three.

settlers have also been figured as perpetually *foreign* or *alien*, unsettled settlers posing an invasive threat to the livelihoods of *Indigenized* white settlers” (295, original emphasis). Indeed, racialized diasporic subjects may turn to settler-colonial narratives to counter the marginalization and exclusion they experience in Canada.¹⁶

Like Phung and other critics in *Cultivating Canada*, my work explores the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity, but it shifts from visualist, identity-based discourses of “people of colour” to a framework of diasporic settlement. By organizing my work around diasporic settlement, I aim to foreground material practices connected to displacement and settlement – particularly cultivation, a process inextricably linked to the concept of diaspora. By emphasizing diasporic settlement, I do not mean to suggest that these material practices are somehow separate from processes of racialization; rather, I want to consider how racialized diasporic subjects engage with new sites of settlement in ways that may require us to think beyond discourses of vision and identity.

Rootings and Uprootings: Japanese Internment, *Obasan*, and the Scent of Wild

Roses

Due to the historical injustices associated with internment, Japanese Canadians have a particular relationship to diasporic settlement. By re-reading histories of Japanese internment through the lens of diasporic settlement, I want to draw attention to how the government’s internment policies were inextricably linked to racial panic surrounding the settlement and cultivation of British Columbia by Japanese immigrants. By making farming central to internment, the government re-signified cultivation as a means of

¹⁶ Lawrence and Dua note that in the early-twentieth century, South Asian immigrant men constructed themselves as colonists to challenge nationalist discourses that privileged “whiteness,” while Jewish and Japanese Canadians used colonial discourses strategically to align themselves with Euro-Canadians (253).

oppression rather than a mode of indigenization for Japanese Canadians. Kogawa gestures toward the limits of cultivation as a strategy for Japanese-Canadian indigenization in *Obasan*. *Obasan* may not emphasize smell in the same way that Goto's texts do, but it gestures toward smell's significance as a mode of engagement with the landscape. Notably, the novel opens and closes with suggestive descriptions of the scent of wild roses. I contend that Kogawa's representation of the "native" flowers' smell reflects the narrator's shifting relationship to indigenization in the novel.

Early racism toward Japanese immigrants was deeply connected to their purchase, settlement, and cultivation of land in Canada. As Peter Ward argues, most Euro-Canadians did not differentiate between Chinese and Japanese immigrants prior to the Russo-Japanese war, but Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 led to the representation of Japan as an aggressive competitor set on conquering the West (99).¹⁷ Since Japanese people were portrayed as fiercely nationalistic, Japanese immigrants in Canada were thought to be unassimilable and thus represented a threat to military security (104-5). Fear of Japanese spies fuelled racism against Japanese immigrants on Canada's west coast, contributing to the belief that many Japanese immigrants had entered the country illegally and sparking rumors that Japan's military was infiltrating the country and threatening the "whiteness" of British Columbia and Canada as a whole (105). According to Ward, the notion of "peaceful penetration" – a phrase used to describe "the quiet, relentless, and insidious infiltration of Japanese immigrants into west coast society" – was at the core of Euro-Canadian stereotypes about "the Japanese" (107). Early immigrants were mostly male sojourners who crossed the Pacific each year for seasonal work, but according to

¹⁷ During the 1890s and early 1900s, representations of "the Japanese" "drew heavily upon older Chinese stereotypes and generalized assumptions about the nature of Asian society" (Ward 102).

Ward, they “put down roots” on the west coast “far more quickly than other Asian immigrants” (109-10).¹⁸ Although laws forbade Japanese immigrants from acquiring crown lands, they could buy property privately (111), and in the early 1900s many began purchasing land in Canada (106). Most Japanese immigrants who migrated to Canada between 1910 and 1930 became farmers, with many specializing in fruit farming (111). Popular discourses reflected a deep suspicion of Japanese immigrant farmers. For example, one newspaper piece published in 1914 decried the presence of Japanese fruit farmers in New Westminster: “Where a short time ago the small fruit industry was in the hands of white people, furnishing them with a comfortable living, now the Japanese are in possession of many tracts of valuable land and it will not be long before the caucasian will be swept away by the invading yellow horde” (qtd. in Ward 106). The use of the words “possession” and “invading” signal the militarized discourses Euro-Canadians used to suggest that “the Japanese” were literally gaining ground in Canada by buying and cultivating land.

War-time policies of dispossession and internment and post-war policies of dispersal shaped Japanese Canadians’ relationship to the land in significant ways. Following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Mackenzie King’s government approved provisions under the War Measures Act that allowed for the “total evacuation” of anyone with Japanese ancestry from the west coast (Ward 155).¹⁹ As Roy

¹⁸ I discuss Chinese immigration in more detail in Chapter Three.

¹⁹ On January 14 1942, Ottawa announced a “partial” evacuation of “all Japanese male nationals, aged 18 to 45 years,” who were to be removed from the west coast by April 1 (Adachi 208). These measures ignored the fact that three-quarters of the “Japanese” expelled from the west coast were Canadian-born or naturalized citizens (Adachi 210). In doing so, the measures “restored the legitimacy of ‘race’ as the basis of disenfranchisement” (Miki 186). In these documents, the government used the term “evacuation” as a euphemism to mask the mass expulsion that was actually occurring (Miki 195). The orders-in-council “were to completely regulate the lives of all persons of Japanese origin, regardless of citizenship, and set

Miki argues, the measure classified 23,000 “persons of the Japanese race” as “enemy aliens” who needed to be removed from their homes on the west coast (185). The government also confiscated any property belonging to these “enemy aliens,” purportedly for their own protection.²⁰ According to Miki, the government’s homogenizing discourse reduced “persons of the Japanese race” to “an undifferentiated pool of labour – grist for the Canadian economy” (193). While some “persons of the Japanese race” were sent to live in barracks in Japan, most were sent to interior ghost towns, isolated road camps, and sugar beet farms to work (Adachi 216). As the war was ending in 1945, the Canadian government used the War Measures Act to pass another set of policies that aimed to prevent anyone with Japanese ancestry from returning to the west coast, thereby eliminating the Japanese presence altogether (Miki 191). The government gave Japanese Canadians two options. The first option, “repatriation,” involved sending even the Canadian-born people with Japanese ancestry to “return” to Japan even though, as Miki points out, the Canadian-born “could not, at least according to linguistic and legal conventions, be ‘repatriated’” (191-2). The second option, “dispersal,” required people of Japanese ancestry to move “east of the Rockies” (191-2).

After the war, the Department of Labour instituted the “Japanese Resettlement Program” to make use of the labour pool of former internees (Miki 193). The program included the 1945 “Farm Placement Plan” for “Japanese Canadian Families,” which removed 23,500 “people of Japanese ancestry” from the west coast for “reasons of

into motion the mechanics of forced evacuation and detention on the basis that they were ‘necessary for the security and defence of Canada’” (Adachi 216).

²⁰ A 1942 order-in-council invested “Custodians” with “the power and responsibility of controlling and managing any property of persons of the Japanese race evacuated from the protected areas,” including the power “to liquidate, sell or otherwise dispose of such property” (qtd. in Adachi 427-8).

military necessity” (193).²¹ Japanese Canadians describe this dispersal as “the second uprooting” (191), a name that underscores the violence that accompanied the government’s seemingly benign policy of “dispersal” following internment. As the word “uprooting” suggests, official governmental policies of dispossession, internment, and dispersal produced a Japanese diaspora *within* Canada. Despite endemic racism that framed “the Japanese” as foreign enemies rather than Canadians, many had put down roots, both literally and figuratively, on Canada’s west coast. For some Japanese Canadians, then, the government’s systematic process of “uprooting” produced a sense of loss and longing for a home located not in Japan, but in Canada.

Kogawa explores Japanese Canadians’ relationships to diaspora and indigeneity in *Obasan*. The novel explores how Naomi Nakane, a third-generation Japanese Canadian, is uprooted from her family home in Vancouver, interned at a Slocan camp, and relocated to rural Alberta as part of the second uprooting. Sarah Phillips Casteel’s essay “Joy Kogawa’s Native Envy” is one of the few studies to explore the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity in Kogawa’s writing. Arguing that Kogawa “attempts to indigenize” Japanese Canadians in her work (104), Casteel focuses on landscape imagery and botanical metaphors in *Obasan*. According to Casteel, Kogawa’s metaphors of “rootedness” suggest that “Japanese Canadians, like the plants to which they are compared, are seeking out soil willing to house and nourish them” (87). For Casteel, Kogawa’s representations of “unanchored roots and resistant soil” thematize “the deracination of Japanese Canadians and the unyielding character of the Canadian nation,”

²¹ Miki notes that at this point, the term “race” was no longer used in official discourses (193). The government was gradually re-defining “persons of Japanese race” as “Japanese Canadian,” which signified their loyalty to Canada and suggested that they were not only more benign subjects, but also “outsiders” who wanted to enter the nation’s “Canadian” family (193-4).

respectively, while Naomi's attempt to "indigenize herself by 'planting' her Japanese Canadian body in the Canadian soil" aims to defy the hostility of the landscape, and by extension, the nation that has dispossessed and displaced her family (87). For the purposes of this chapter, I am particularly interested in how Naomi uses rooting metaphors to frame her resettlement in Alberta. I read Naomi's transplantation to Alberta as a particular form of diasporic settlement that reflects how internment re-signified cultivation for many Japanese Canadians.

Japanese immigrants historically relied on cultivation to indigenize in Canada, but as *Obasan* suggests, internment significantly altered Japanese Canadians' relationships to farming. Initially, Naomi frames Japanese Canadians as pioneer heroes who participated in the exploration and settlement of Canada (Casteel 99-100). She declares: "We are the pioneers who cleared the bush and the forest with our hands, the gardeners tending and attending the soil with our tenderness, the fishermen who are flung from the sea to flounder in the dust of the prairies" (Kogawa, *Obasan* 119-20).²² Although early Japanese immigrants faced racial discrimination for settling in British Columbia and cultivating the land, Naomi strategically frames Japanese Canadians as pioneer heroes in an effort to naturalize their presence on the west coast. In doing so, Naomi underscores how internment and dispersal not only forced Japanese Canadians to adapt to unfamiliar landscapes, but also re-signified their relationships to cultivation. As Casteel argues, Naomi idealizes Vancouver as an Edenic paradise from which she was expelled (88) and even represents Slocan as a "second Eden" with lush forests that seem to offer a

²² Naomi's aunt Emily also describes Japanese-Canadian strawberry farmers as "pioneers" who "cleared the Fraser Valley with horses and their bare hands" and laments how "[t]he burgeoning berry industry, lands, equipment – all were taken by the government and turned over to returning war veterans," even though some of the farmers were Canadian war veterans themselves (Kogawa, *Obasan* 206).

connection with the landscape and counteract her expulsion from the west coast (89-90). In contrast, Naomi loathes the dry Alberta prairies where she and her brother, aunt, and uncle are relocated after the war. All four are put to work on a sugar beet farm owned by a Euro-Canadian family in the small town of Granton. Naomi describes Alberta as an “exile from [her] place of exile” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 217) and feels completely uprooted: “We are planted here in Alberta, our roots clawing the sudden prairie air” (208). As Casteel argues, Alberta’s “dry, resistant soil denies [Naomi and her family] the possibility of rootedness” (92). Not only that, but Naomi must also perform the back-breaking task of harvesting sugar beets, a process that recalls her own violent uprooting from British Columbia. Since sugar beets have tap roots that grow deep underground to “tap” reserves of water (Forbes and Watson 133), they are extremely difficult to uproot; to harvest the crops, Naomi must drive a hook into each beet and “yank from the shoulder til it’s out of the ground dragging the surrounding mud with it” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 216). By drawing parallels between Naomi’s sugar beet harvesting, her uprooting from the west coast, and her transplantation to Alberta, *Obasan* underscores the limits of cultivation as a means through which Japanese Canadians could indigenize after internment. As Thy Phu argues, within the context of internment, cultivation was figured as “a privileged mode of productive labour whereby the internees could prove they belonged to the nation that had rejected them” (57).²³ Resettlement programs like the Farm Placement Plan thus re-signified cultivation for Japanese Canadians. Farming no longer held the potential for

²³ In *Obasan*, Naomi describes a newspaper story entitled “Facts about evacuees in Alberta” that portrays Japanese Canadians as “efficient beet workers” and features a photo of a Japanese-Canadian family “Grinning and Happy” among a pile of beets (Kogawa, *Obasan* 213). Phu discusses the relationship between cultivation and Japanese internment photography in the American context in “Cultivating Citizenship: Internment Landscapes and Still-Life Photography,” the second chapter in her book *Picturing Model Citizens: Civility in Asian American Visual Culture*.

Japanese Canadians to indigenize on the Canadian landscape by becoming property owners who tended their own land; instead, farming became a reminder of Japanese Canadians' tenuous place within the Euro-Canadian nation.

For this reason, Naomi moves beyond cultivation to seek out other ways to indigenize on the prairies. After settling in Alberta, Naomi identifies less with farming as a form of pioneer heroism and instead begins to align herself with uncultivated prairie landscapes and Indigenous peoples.²⁴ As Casteel notes, *Obasan* “opens and closes with visits to the coulee, Naomi’s uncle’s favorite retreat, underlining its privileged status in the novel” (92). In contrast to the harsh, desert-like conditions of the sugar beet farm, the coulee “represents a redemptive, sustaining nature” that offers Naomi a place for “reflection and rest” (Casteel 92). But Naomi’s idyllic representation of the coulee is not without its problems. As Casteel argues, Kogawa’s novel “attempts to indigenize Japanese Canadians by linking them to the natural Indian and to a Canadian landscape that lies out of time” (104).²⁵ To do so, the novel invokes visual tropes and practices historically associated with colonialism. This is particularly noticeable in the opening scene as Naomi and her uncle Isamu sit by a coulee gazing at the vast prairie landscape. Naomi gazes at the “virgin land,” noting that the long prairie grass looks as though it has “not been cut” since “the beginning of time” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 2). By constructing the

²⁴ Casteel contends that there is a “slippage between the indigenous and the diasporic in Kogawa’s writing” but does not provide a clear explanation for why *Obasan* represents Japanese Canadians as both “settlers” and “natives” (99). As I argue here, Kogawa’s representation of Japanese Canadians as both “settlers” and “natives” is less of a slippage than a shift that reflects Naomi’s changing attitude toward cultivation.

²⁵ As Casteel explains, the term “natural Indian” was initially theorized by Philip Deloria and describes how Indigenous peoples “have been strongly identified with nature, with which they are assumed to have a privileged and harmonious relationship because, in their cosmologies, land and self are co-extensive and interdependent” (93). This natural intimacy is often framed in positive terms, but it “derives from a colonizing vision that did not differentiate between the landscape of the New World and its inhabitants and understood Indigenous peoples as figures that existed outside culture and history” (93). Casteel notes that while many critics have analyzed Euro-American – and I would add, Euro-Canadian – representations of the “natural Indian,” less work has been done on representations of the “natural Indian” in diasporic writing (93).

landscape as virgin territory, Naomi evokes “one of the most pervasive tropes of New World discourse” (Casteel 95). She also occupies what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” position. As I noted in Chapter One, European colonial explorers adopted the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” position by using visualist modes of representation to assert mastery over the landscape and its peoples (Pratt 204). Naomi provocatively compares her uncle to Chief Sitting Bull, the Lakota leader famous for defeating Colonel Custer and his troops at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. She observes: “Uncle could be Chief Sitting Bull squatting here. He has the same prairie-baked skin, the deep brown furrows like dry river beds creasing his cheeks. All he needs is a feather headdress, and he would be perfect for a picture postcard – ‘Indian Chief from Canadian Prairie’ – souvenir of Alberta, made in Japan” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 2). According to Casteel, this comparison is part of Kogawa’s broader attempt to show how “both Uncle Isamu and Chief Sitting Bull are victims of Euro-Canadian oppression” (95-6), but as Casteel points out, the comparison collapses distinct forms of oppression and perpetuates nativism (106). Naomi’s relationship to the landscape seems to shift at the end of the novel, however. Comparing the opening and closing coulee scenes reveals how this shift is reflected in the novel’s representation of the scent of wild roses.²⁶

For Naomi, the wild rose embodies an autochthonic relationship to the Alberta landscape that cultivation cannot offer. One of the most recognizable symbols of Alberta, the wild rose is native to the prairies and was chosen as Alberta’s official floral emblem

²⁶ There are a number of notable representations of smell in *Obasan*. For instance, Naomi describes an anti-Japanese newspaper headline stating that Japanese Canadians are “a stench in the nostrils of the people of Canada” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 126). Emily’s letters also provide an extended description of the “nauseating” smells of the Livestock Building in Hastings Park where women and children were initially interned. As Emily puts it: “The whole place is impregnated with the smell of ancient manure. Every other day it’s swept with chloride or lime or something but you can’t disguise horse smells, cow, sheep, pig, rabbit, and goat smells” (105). While I cannot pursue an analysis of these olfactory descriptions here, they deserve further exploration.

in 1930 (Wilkinson 116-7), around the same time when Japanese immigrants were settling in Canada in record numbers and anti-Japanese sentiment was growing on the west coast. Wild roses are highly symbolic in Kogawa's text. In the opening scene, Naomi climbs down the coulee's banks to pick a wild rose before leaving:

I always pick at least one flower before we go home. I inch my way down the steep path and along the stretch where the side of the slope oozes wet from the surface seepage of the underground stream. Wild rose bushes, prickly and profuse with green, cluster along the edges of the trickle. I can smell them as I descend. At the bottom of the coulee I can hear the gurgling of the slowly moving water. I stand for a long time watching as the contours of the coulee erode slowly into the night. (Kogawa, *Obasan* 4)

Naomi mentions the flowers' scent in this scene, but only acknowledges it in passing; she focuses more so on the bush's prickly thorns, which symbolize the barriers that prevent Naomi from indigenizing on the prairie landscape. She also focuses intently on the land upon which she stands. As Christina Tourino argues, Naomi's reference to "[e]rosion refers to both the outlines of the land disappearing in the darkening night and the land itself, which slips beneath her feet" (149). Naomi's visual attention to the eroding land reflects her insecurity about her position as an uprooted Japanese Canadian in Alberta.

Naomi has a very different relationship to the scent of wild roses in the novel's final scene when she returns to the coulee after her uncle has died.²⁷ According to Tourino, "Naomi's revisit to the coulee at the end of the novel creates the effect of a cyclical return" (150). But it is a return with a difference. As Tourino notes, the closing

²⁷ Within the timeline of the novel, this occurs "just a month" after Naomi's last visit, which is described in the opening scene (*Obasan* 270).

passage almost repeats the final paragraph of the opening scene verbatim, yet there are a number of subtle, but significant, differences (149). For instance, the scene “does not conclude with the image of erosion” (150).²⁸ For Tourino, Naomi’s new approach to the coulee is a sign that she has experienced a rebirth (150).²⁹ At this point in the text, Naomi has “learned about her mother’s death and can finally tell that story”; in other words, what has been “hazy and opaque has become, if not perfectly lucid, certainly better understood” (150). Naomi’s newfound clarity and understanding extends beyond her relationship with her mother. She also experiences a rebirth in the sense that she recognizes her positionality in relation to the prairie landscape. Significantly, the text represents this rebirth in olfactory terms. Rather than concluding with an image of erosion, the novel ends with a description of the scent of wild roses: “Between the river and Uncle’s spot are the wild roses and the tiny wildflowers that grow along the trickling stream. The perfume in the air is sweet and faint. If I hold my head a certain way, I can smell them from where I am” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 271).³⁰ The fact that the novel’s final lines focus on the scent of wild roses is significant.³¹ In contrast to the opening scene, this passage represents smell as a marker of Naomi’s engagement with the landscape. Rather

²⁸ Tourino points out a number of other differences between the opening and closing scene of the novel. For example, in the concluding passage “Naomi makes this visit alone on her own initiative, in the morning instead of at night” (150). She also “takes her Aunt Emily’s coat,” which suggests “that she is ready to embrace instead of resist her politically vocal aunt” (150).

²⁹ Tourino’s discussion of Naomi’s rebirth focuses specifically on her shifting relationship to the coulee’s water source. Tourino writes: “The amniotic sac of the coulee is no longer a place of silence and darkness; it is again a living and subtle sensory world of water. The aborted stillbirth of traumatic memory has given way to a kind of second birth for Naomi in which she brings the story of her family and the Japanese Canadian community to light” (150).

³⁰ Julie Tharp is one of the few critics to provide an analysis of smell in this passage. Arguing that the scene emphasizes how “the mind’s desire is for rootedness in the body” while “the body’s desire is to endure in the flesh,” Tharp reads the scent of roses as “[Naomi’s] uncle’s flesh made to live again in the rose” (221). For Tharp, this scene suggests that “Naomi affirms the living, the sensual in the midst of loss” (221).

³¹ These are the final lines of the novel proper. After this section, Kogawa includes an excerpt from a Memorandum, written by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians and sent to the House and the Senate of Canada in April 1946, arguing against the deportation – or “exile” – of Japanese Canadians (272, original emphasis).

than trying to pick a wild rose, Naomi focuses on smelling the flowers from where she stands, an action that suggests she may no longer feel the need to displace that which is “native” to the prairies to affirm her own positionality in relation to the land.³² It is also significant that the text ends on a conditional “if”: Naomi can only detect the flowers’ scent if she tilts her head at a particular angle. Ultimately, Naomi’s re-orientation to the flowers and their scent suggests a re-evaluation of her positionality. As Kogawa’s novel demonstrates, scent serves as a provocative metaphor for how diasporic subjects relate to the land upon which they settle. Goto explores smell as a mode of engagement with the landscape in even more detail in her work, which examines the dynamics of diasporic settlement for Japanese Canadians living in post-internment prairie landscapes.

Sanitizing Scents: Odour and Repression in *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Goto’s representation of smell and diasporic settlement is informed by her particular relationship to settlement in Canada. Born in Japan in 1966, Goto immigrated to Canada with her family at three years old as part of the post-1965 wave of immigration (Ty, “Scripting” 201). After living in British Columbia for a short time (Harris n. pag), Goto’s family moved to Nanton, Alberta (Sasano 52), where she grew up on a mushroom farm (Harris n. pag). Although Goto emigrated from Japan to Canada in the 1960s and did not experience internment directly as Kogawa did (Ty, “Scripting” 201), a number of

³² In Kogawa’s novel *Itsuka* (1992), the sequel to *Obasan*, it is clear that Naomi recognizes that her relationship to the prairie landscape is not the same as that of a wild rose. Near the beginning of the novel, Naomi remarks: “I’m a transplant. Not a genuine prairie rose. [...] Even if I stood still for a hundred years on Main Street, there’d be no Granton roots under my feet” (Kogawa, *Itsuka* 43). As Naomi puts it: “I’ve managed to be potted in the sticky prairie soil” (43-4). Although Naomi still feels “rootless” in Granton (43), she recognizes that she cannot make autochthonic claims to the landscape.

critics read Goto's celebrated novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* in relation to *Obasan*.³³ For instance, Guy Beauregard argues that *Chorus of Mushrooms* "writes back" to *Obasan* by establishing similar fictional elements but deploying different representational strategies (52).³⁴ As Beauregard notes, both texts are narrated by Japanese-Canadian women, focus on relationships between different generations, and deal with the issue of absent mothers (52). Both novels are also set in rural Alberta: *Chorus of Mushrooms* is set on a mushroom farm in the small town of Nanton, a place that echoes the fictionalized town of Granton in *Obasan* (52). Yet Goto's Japanese-Canadian characters also differ from Kogawa's in a number of significant ways. Unlike Naomi and her brother, aunt, and uncle, the Tonkatsu family in *Chorus of Mushrooms* emigrates from Japan to Alberta under Canada's ostensibly more liberal immigration policies in the latter half of the twentieth century. Not only do they voluntarily settle on the prairies, but they also live a relatively comfortable middle-class lifestyle by running a mushroom farm that they own. As Mari Sasano argues, "[t]he internment experiences in *Obasan* [...] forcibly exclude Japanese Canadians from their 'homeland,' and cannot be interchanged with the chosen migration in *Chorus of Mushrooms*" (50). Yet the Tonkatsus continue to deal with both subtle and obvious forms of racism while also engaging in techniques of diasporic settlement.

While much of the scholarship on *Chorus of Mushrooms* implicitly explores issues of diasporic subjectivity by focusing on how the characters' relationships to Japan are mediated by the pressure to assimilate in Canada, critics have yet to explicitly explore

³³ *Chorus of Mushrooms* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in the Caribbean and Canada region in 1995 and was co-winner of the Canada-Japan Book Award in 1996.

³⁴ Mari Sasano, Mark Libin, and Eleanor Ty also examine *Chorus of Mushrooms* in relation to *Obasan*.

the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity in the novel.³⁵ Keiko and Shinji – or Kay and Sam – Tonkatsu attempt to cut ties with Japan and assimilate into Euro-Canadian culture; to this end, they mobilize cultivation as a material practice to indigenize on the prairies while also attempting to conceal the labour involved in indigenization. In an effort to raise their daughter, Muriel, as a “Canadian,” they attempt to repress any traces of the family’s connection to Japan.³⁶ But they cannot silence Kay’s octogenarian mother Naoe – also known as Obachan – who refuses to stop speaking in Japanese, eating Japanese foods, and telling Japanese stories. While the “chorus of mushrooms” described in the novel’s title obviously resonates on an auditory level, I argue that it also has a particular relationship to the realm of olfaction. I read the smell of the mushroom farm in *Chorus of Mushrooms* as an unstable byproduct or residue of cultivation that reveals the traces of Kay and Sam’s indigenizing practices, including their repressed diasporic connections to Japan.³⁷

Before turning to a discussion of smell in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, it is important to outline the link between mushrooms and indigenization. Mushrooms have a particular

³⁵ Beauregard is one of the few critics who explicitly invokes the concept of diaspora in his work on *Chorus of Mushrooms*, arguing that the novel “participates in the politics of what Rey Chow calls ‘writing diaspora’” by “resisting pre-packaged models of cultural homogeneity in order to articulate the complexities of living in diaspora” (47). Libin also suggests that *Chorus of Mushrooms* “deal[s] with the complexities of a diasporic identity on the Prairies” (“Some” 93), but the concept is not central to his discussion.

³⁶ Muriel’s name echoes Muriel Kitagawa, the model for Naomi’s Aunt Emily in *Obasan* (Melnyk 32). Muriel’s grandmother calls her Murasaki, a Japanese word for purple that also references Murasaki Shikibu, a tenth-century Japanese writer who was “the first person to write a novel” and “create the antihero” (Goto, *Chorus* 165). As Beauregard notes, Sam’s adopted name echoes Naomi’s Uncle Isamu in *Obasan* (59).

³⁷ For the purposes of my argument, I focus specifically on the odours associated with the Tonkatsus’ mushroom farm, but *Chorus of Mushrooms* features other representations of smell that deserve further investigation. For instance, the winner of a “Herald Funny True Stories Contest” describes the disaster that ensues when a Japanese immigrant boy brings a skunk to school (Goto, *Chorus* 103). According to the boy’s Calgary school teacher, he “must have been sprayed so badly that he couldn’t smell anymore” (103). Naoe also “smells her way to Chinatown” in the novel (Latimer n. pag). Libin provides an in-depth exploration of the “smell-taste” of Chinatown in Goto’s text. I discuss his conceptualization of “smell-taste” in more detail below.

relationship to the notion of autochthony. To illustrate the concept of the autochthon, a person who is “of the soil” and seems to have “sprung from the land itself,” the *OED* cites a line from a seventeenth century text describing “men” as “Autochthones, Intelligent Mushromes” (“Autochthon, *n*,” def. 1).³⁸ As the definition suggests, mushrooms seem to spring from the land itself. This appears to be the case because a mushroom’s vegetative structure is concealed underground. Biologists Shu-Ting Chang and Philip G. Miles explain: “The structure that we call a mushroom is in reality only the fruiting body of the fungus. The vegetative part of the fungus, called the mycelium, comprises a system of branching threads and cordlike strands that branch out through the soil, compost, wood log, or other lignocellulosic material on which the fungus is growing” (3). Although mushrooms seem autochthonic in the sense that they appear to spring from the land, which hides their vegetative structure, scientific discourses have historically undermined mushrooms’ relationship to the soil – and by extension, autochthony – by suggesting that mushrooms are not actually rooted in the ground. Linnaeus classified mushrooms as so-called lower-order plants because they have “relatively simple, anatomically uncomplicated structural attributes” and “lack [...] true roots, true stems, true leaves, true flowers, and true seeds” (Chang and Miles 1). Mushrooms have also been categorized as “lower” forms of plant life because they feed on organic material. As Chang and Miles point out, mushrooms “cannot manufacture their food from simple inorganic material, such as water, carbon dioxide, and nitrates, using energy from the sun, as is the case with the green plants” (6); rather, they “derive their food from complex organic materials

³⁸ The line is taken from Nathaniel Ingelo’s 1664 religious allegory *Bentivolio & Urania*.

found in dead or living tissues of plants and animals” (6).³⁹ Depending on the species, mushrooms either thrive on decomposing organic materials, like rotting wood and manure, or feed parasitically on living things (7). Mushrooms and other fungi are thus associated with rot, death, and decay. According to the *OED*, the word “fungus” is synonymous with both “mould” and “mushroom,” and within medical discourses, a “fungus” describes a “spongy morbid growth or excrescence” that grows in wounds and qualifies as a pathological condition (“Fungus, *n.*,” def. 2a).

The etymological, historical, and scientific relationship between mushrooms and autochthony resonates with racist histories of marginalization. The *OED* notes that in figurative terms, the word “mushroom” describes “[s]omething which has sprung up or grown rapidly, or has suddenly (and often ephemerally) sprung to notice; an upstart” (“Mushroom, *n.* and *adj.*,” def. 2.a). As I suggested in my discussion of early Japanese immigrants in Canada, fear often surrounds the sudden, rapid growth of racialized communities, particularly when they seem to threaten an indigenized populations’ autochthonic claims to the landscape. Indeed, the pathological connection between Asian immigration and sudden, rapid growth is embedded in the *OED*’s very definition of “fungus,” which illustrates the concept with the quotation: “That significant fungus, the Chinaman” (“Fungus, *n.*,” def. 2b). Taken from George W. Cable’s 1881 novella *Madame Delphine*, the quotation throws into sharp relief the kind of anti-Asian sentiment that informed Euro-Canadian attitudes toward both Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the nineteenth century and persists in “Asian invasion” discourses today.⁴⁰

³⁹ As Chang and Miles explain, mushrooms and other fungi “have features of their own” which are “sufficiently and significantly distinct to place in a separate fungal kingdom, the Kingdom Myceteae” (1).

⁴⁰ This line is part of a description of the city of New Orleans that opens Cable’s text. The novella opens with a description of the bustling arcades of Canal Street, where women selling flowers “make the air sweet

The mushroom farm in Goto's novel may be read as an extended metaphor for the Tonkatsu family's relationship to indigenization. Like most commercial mushroom operations in Canada, the Tonkatsus' farm is a climate-controlled facility that grows mushrooms indoors by providing dark, humid conditions year-round (Canada Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food, "Canadian Mushrooms" n. pag). Not only do they grow mushrooms in highly-controlled, artificial conditions, but they also grow their mushrooms on peat moss imported from "west of Edmonton" (Goto, *Chorus* 106). Roger Bromley, one of the few critics to explore the metaphoric resonances of the mushroom farm in Goto's text, argues that the facility is "an obvious metaphor" for the "hyphenated identities and hybrid realities" of the family's "Japanese-Canadian existence" (118). He contends that "[t]he mushrooms, fungi of rapid growth, are grown in artificially produced humid conditions, transplanted from their originating soil and produced in isolation, on the margins" (118). In other words, the Tonkatsus' mushroom farm symbolizes the large-scale effort and intensive labour required for Japanese Canadians to indigenize. In turn, the mushrooms they grow – which not only lack "true roots," but also grow indoors on imported moss rather than directly in the prairie soil – symbolize how the Tonkatsus are not truly rooted in the Alberta landscape.

The smells associated with the mushroom farm bear the repressed traces of Sam and Kay's diasporic connections to Japan. The farm is marked by the "fungus hum of mushrooms growing behind closed doors" (Goto, *Chorus* 84). According to the *OED*, the

with their fragrant merchandise" (Cable 1). The narrative soon shifts to descriptions of "decrepitude" and "decay" as the narrator walks down the side streets, where "ancient and foreign-seeming domestic life" now "overhangs the ruins of a former commercial prosperity" (2). The narrator states: "you see here and there, like a patch of bright mould, the stall of that significant fungus, the Chinaman" (2). Cable's novella uses fungus as a central metaphor to construct "the Chinaman" as a threat to New Orleans' Euro-American population and capitalist progress. The text's representation of the United States' Chinese immigrant population as a fungus parallels turn-of-the-century discourses that framed Vancouver's Chinatown as a malodorous site of contagion, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

word “hum” commonly refers to an “indistinct sound produced by the blending of distant voices or noises; a murmur” (“Hum, *n.1*,” def. I.1.b). Humming sounds are often associated with “machinery in motion” (“Hum, *n.1*,” def. I.1.a) and suggest a “condition of busy activity” (“Hum, *v.1*,” def. 3). Although the word “hum” is most commonly linked to the auditory realm, it may also be used to describe a “disagreeable smell” (“Hum, *n.3*”). Just as humming sounds signify moving machines and busy activity, the farm’s humming odours are markers of labour; more specifically, the smells are an irrepressible olfactory byproduct of the physical and psychic labour of indigenization. Despite attempts at sanitization, these odours permeate the farm and the Tonkatsus’ home, which is marked by the “ammonia acrid” smell of compost (Goto, *Chorus* 37).⁴¹ If, as Pavlina Radia suggests, mushrooms “evoke the rapid yet hidden growth of unresolved mourning by symbolically pointing to the missing pieces of the Tonkatsu immigrant story” (193), then the smell of the mushroom farm carries the traces of this silenced story. As the text suggests, the chorus of mushrooms – and by extension, the Tonkatsus’ story – can only be “heard” by attending to their fungal smell.

More than any other family member, Kay tries to assimilate into Euro-Canadian culture by disavowing her diasporic connections to Japan. Kay dislikes the idea of living in Vancouver because “[t]here are too many Japanese there who wish they were in Japan” (Goto, *Chorus* 189). She does not understand why people leave their homeland “if they always pine for the past” (189). For Kay, “decid[ing] to immigrate” and “be at home in

⁴¹ According to the Queensland, Australia Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website – a primary source on mushroom farming provided on the Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development website – commercial mushroom crops are grown on a pasteurized substrate containing layers of compost mixed with soil or peat, and composting is often done on site (“Mushroom Production Methods” n. pag). The decomposition of organic matter that occurs during the process produces strong odours: “If composting is [...] done on site, [...] various odours will occur and possible objections from the neighbours may result” (n. pag).

[her] new country” is a “common sense” issue: assimilation is necessary for children to live a “normal and accepted lifestyle” so they will not feel confused by having to “juggle two cultures” (189). By suggesting that moving on from the past is simply a matter of choice and common sense, Kay precludes the possibility that some people may be forced to move to a new place and may yearn for a past homeland because of racial discrimination in their new place of settlement. Moreover, her comments negate how historical injustices like Japanese internment shape diasporic subjectivities. Not only does Kay occupy a position of relative privilege in comparison to other immigrants, such as the Vietnamese refugees employed on the farm, but she also fails to recognize that her beliefs are shaped by her experience as an upwardly-mobile immigrant who has benefited from Canada’s multiculturalist policies and post-1965 immigration laws.

Kay’s obsessive cleaning symbolizes her desire to sanitize the traces of her Japanese background. As I suggested in the Introduction, a number of critics have argued that Canadian multiculturalism “sanitizes” cultural differences to make them palatable for Euro-Canadians. Since Kay wants to assimilate, she attempts to sanitize any signs of cultural difference that would mark her family as “other.” The prairie dust that fills the Tonkatsus’ house represents the traces of Japanese culture that Kay wants to eliminate. She constantly vacuums the house to get rid of the dirt, but by “trying to suck up everything in her path,” she “swirls the dust even more” (Goto, *Chorus* 13). Naoe wishes Kay would “let the piles of dust grow and mound” so she could “plant *daikon* and eggplant seeds” and “[l]et something grow from this daily curse” (3). Naoe wants to cultivate her diasporic connections to Japan, rather than conceal them like her “convert” daughter. Naoe circumvents Kay’s sanitizing practices by sharing Japanese stories with

Muriel. Eager to find out more about her background, Muriel loves her grandmother's revisionist Japanese folktales even though they are told in a language that she does not understand. Muriel describes listening to her grandmother's stories as "inhal[ing] dust and poetry" (20) and compares her words to motes of dust that "swirled, swelled, and eddied" in the "prairie-shaping wind" (21). Significantly, Muriel compares Naoe's storytelling to the process of scattering seeds: "Like a chain of seeds they lifted, then scattered [...] and stretched across the land with streamers of silken thread" (21). Naoe may not be able to grow Japanese vegetables on the prairies because of Kay's obsessive cleaning, but she sows the seeds of diaspora in a figurative sense by telling Muriel Japanese folktales and piquing her granddaughter's curiosity about the family's past.⁴²

In contrast to Naoe, who cultivates connections with Japan through storytelling, Kay represses her stories in an effort to cultivate a connection to Canada. Muriel solidifies the link between Kay's repression and the mushroom farm – the site of this cultivation – when she states: "Mom's voice only rattled like a tiny mushroom in an otherwise empty bucket. Her stories must be ugly things filled with bitterness and pain. The pain of never having told" (Goto, *Chorus* 32). The odours that mark Kay's body gesture toward the potentially damaging effects of sanitization and repression. When Kay returns from working on the farm each day, her body carries "the stink of formaldehyde she used to sterilize her buckets" (Goto, *Chorus* 37).⁴³ Formaldehyde, a colourless gas

⁴² I will discuss Naoe's relationship to seeding metaphors and heteronormative frameworks of diaspora later in this chapter.

⁴³ According to Canada's Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food, rigorous sanitization methods are a crucial part of commercial mushroom farming ("Canadian Mushrooms" n. pag). To meet stringent national and international safety standards, Canadian mushroom farmers steam-sterilize growing rooms between crops and pasteurize the growth medium before the mushroom spawn to ensure a healthy crop ("Canadian Mushrooms" n. pag). Yet because mushrooms are themselves a form of fungus, it is difficult to manage pests and diseases (Queensland Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, "Hygiene Procedures" n. pag). Eliminating odours is also a key part of mushroom farming. In a section of their website devoted to

with a “pungent, irritating odor,” is often used as an industrial cleaner (Caraccio and McGuigan 1246). Formaldehyde is also a common embalming agent (1246), which is significant given that Kay’s sterilization techniques, like the sanitization of her cultural background, may be considered a form of self-preservation. The “stink of formaldehyde” that points to Kay’s repression contrasts with the stench associated with the members of her Baptist church. Pastor Lysol – a man whose name signals his commitment to cleansing his congregation – compels churchgoers to confess their sins publicly, and in doing so, purge their souls. Muriel describes these moments as “Spill Yer Guts” sessions, noting that “[t]he gods would never linger in pews stinking with selfish guilt” (Goto, *Chorus* 99). She also meditates on the “nervous sour anticipatory stink of people waiting to hear of a sin” (100). The smell underscores the eagerness of churchgoers seeking the “vicarious thrill” that accompanies the “[d]egradation” of public confession (100). Notably, Kay “never join[s] that spectacle” (102). In contrast to Pastor Lysol’s process of spiritual cleansing, which is achieved through public confession, Kay’s sanitizing practices involve silence and repression; as a Japanese Canadian trying to assimilate into Euro-Canadian culture, she must conceal, rather than reveal, details about herself. The text’s representation of stench thus draws attention to the different stakes of repression for Euro-Canadians and Japanese Canadians. While Pastor Lysol’s congregation stinks, the stench is not associated with toxicity and death. The fact that formaldehyde is carcinogenic, and therefore toxic for humans (Caraccio and McGuigan 1246), suggests that the repression necessitated by cultural sanitization may have harmful long-term effects. The text explores what Sneja Gunew calls “the affective economies of

“deal[ing] with” the “odours associated with mushrooms farms,” Mushrooms Canada asserts that by remodeling substrate wharfs, installing forced-aeration systems, and treating the air with scrubbers and biofilters, it is possible to reduce the odours associated with mushroom farming (“Produced” n. pag).

generational transmission” (“Serial” 9) by suggesting that Kay’s sanitization and repression have a significant impact on Muriel.

“Betrayed by what we grew”: The Limits of Mushroom Management

Muriel has a complicated relationship to indigenization that manifests in her attitude toward the mushroom farm and its odours. Forced to participate in her parents’ assimilationist approach to indigenization, Muriel must work on the farm to “learn about responsibility and patience and forbearance and how money must be earned and not taken for granted and other basically fundamental Baptist attitudes” (Goto, *Chorus* 33). Muriel’s disdain for her parents’ Protestant work ethic is reflected by her contempt for the farm’s odour: “I hated it. The sour stink of compost and the armpit smell of mushroom soil” (33). The farm’s “armpit smell” suggests that the Tonkatus’ assimilationist approach to indigenization involves not only the erasure of racialized markers of bodily difference, but also the erasure of the body itself. Although Muriel expresses her disdain for these processes of repression, she also internalizes and perpetuates these processes. Muriel is like the mushrooms grown on the farm in the sense that she is the product of her parents’ attempt to indigenize and assimilate in Alberta, yet she completely dissociates herself from them. When told to pick a room full of “diseased number twos,” Muriel complains: “Fuckin’ stinks in here. Ah, god! There’s nothing in here but stinkin’ number twos and green mold! [...] They should just steam this sorry mess and be done with it” (35). To get out of her work, Muriel “[b]urie[s] hundreds and thousands of mushrooms” so she can “leave [her] silent tomb” (36). Affected by her mother’s repression of her cultural background, Muriel responds with her own form of repression.

Muriel's resentment towards both her parents and the farm arises from the feeling that she has been subjected to "mushroom management." According to the *OED*, mushroom management describes "a system of management in which employees are poorly treated and have information concealed from them"; this management philosophy is summed up by the phrase: "keep them in the dark and feed them bullshit" ("Mushroom, *n.* and *adj.*," def. C2). Within this framework, a mushroom is "[a] person within an organization from whom information is deliberately concealed" ("Mushroom, *n.* and *adj.*," def. 2.d). Muriel may be understood as a mushroom in the sense that she has been denied knowledge of her cultural "roots" in Japan and has been fed stories about the value of assimilation by her parents. Narrating as an adult, Muriel explains that she was "bitter" as a child because she "wasn't given the chance to choose" to learn Japanese and "had a lot of questions about [her] heritage" that "were never answered" (Goto, *Chorus* 189). Muriel not only blames her parents for preventing her from learning about her culture; she also criticizes Nanton for failing to "foster cultural difference" and instead promoting "cultural integration" (189). According to Sasano, the fact that Muriel's t-shirts lack logos suggests that she "tries not to allow identity to be inscribed onto her" (43). Yet one of Muriel's shirts has a logo and it clearly indicates that her Euro-Canadian peers also view her within the context of mushroom management. In junior high school, Muriel receives a t-shirt from Hank, her "cowboy" boyfriend, that reads: "I must be a mushroom / Everyone keeps me in the dark / And feeds me horseshit" (Goto, *Chorus* 103). The t-shirt's logo directly echoes the mushroom management philosophy and suggests that members of the broader Nanton community are also treating her poorly and concealing information from her.

Smell confronts Muriel with the both the limits of her self-knowledge and the limits of her parents' attempt at sanitizing the traces of cultural difference that mark the family as "other." One day, Muriel invites her classmate Patricia over after school. Patricia is "the most popular girl in class" and Muriel "desperately want[s] to be her best friend" (Goto, *Chorus* 93). Muriel's relationship to Patricia recalls Naomi's relationship to Penny Barker, the daughter of the farmers who own the sugar beet farm in *Obasan*. While Penny's racism toward Naomi and her brother is much more explicit in Kogawa's novel, Patricia's treatment of Muriel demonstrates how racism operates in more subtle ways under multiculturalism.⁴⁴ While visiting Muriel's home, Patricia claims that the house has a "funny smell" (60). Muriel "anxiously" asks: "What house smell?" (61). She knows that the smell cannot be attributed to "foreign food" because the family eats "[o]nly meat and carrots and potatoes like everyone else," and Naoe, who sometimes eats Japanese food in secret, "hadn't sneaked any squid for months" (61). When Patricia compares the Tonkatsus' house smell to "warm toes," Muriel asks if it is "gross" and wonders if her friend is thinking of "[c]lean toes or dirty ones" (61). Patricia responds: "No, not gross. [...] Just funny" (61). Patricia's olfactory observation defamiliarizes the family home for Muriel; for the first time, she is confronted with the notion that she may

⁴⁴ Naomi often feels inferior around Penny Barker. Penny wears "pretty dresses [...] bought from the stores" that contrast with Naomi's clothes, which are made from Obasan's old dresses (Kogawa, *Obasan* 221). Penny also "never talks with [Naomi] in school – only when [they] wait for the bus" (221). Penny's racism reflects common attitudes towards Japanese Canadians at the time. At one point, Penny says to Naomi's younger brother Stephen: "Come here blackhead and let me squeeze you" (221). As a child raised in an era of multiculturalism, Patricia's racism is more subtle than Penny's. For instance, she gives Muriel back-handed compliments such as: "You're Japanese, but I still think you're pretty" (Goto, *Chorus* 96). Although Penny and Patricia's comments reflect different forms of racism, they produce the same kind of confusion in their targets. In *Obasan*, Stephen does not know whether to "scowl or laugh" at Penny's "blackhead" comment, but he forces himself to chuckle with a sour "Hyuck Hyuck" (221). Similarly, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Muriel feels "[c]onfused" by Patricia's back-handed compliment about her attractiveness, but she says thank you anyway (96). Notably, when Muriel receives the mushroom t-shirt from her boyfriend Hank, she responds with "Hyuck hyuck" (103), a comment that echoes Stephen's awkward laughter in *Obasan* and also mocks the Western dialect of her cowboy boyfriend.

not have full self-knowledge of how she is perceived by her Euro-Canadian peers. Muriel knows that she looks different from her Euro-Canadian classmates, who call her “a slanty-eye[d] Chinaman” and a “Chink” even though she repeatedly insists that she is not Chinese (52-3); but until Patricia mentions her house smell, she is not aware that her difference also registers on the level of scent. Muriel subjects her home to intense self-examination: “I nervously glanced around my house with new eyes. Strange to me for the first time” (Goto, *Chorus* 61).

Muriel’s reaction to Patricia’s comments recalls Frantz Fanon’s famous discussion of the internalization of racism in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the chapter “The Fact of Blackness,” Fanon recalls how a child once pointed at him and cried out “Look, a Negro!”; in that moment, his “corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema” (112). He suddenly saw himself as a fragmented subject occupying “not one but two, three places”: “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics” (112). While Fanon’s splitting of the self is provoked by a visual observation about his racial difference, Goto’s novel suggests that olfactory observations can have similar effects. Indeed, because people become habituated to scents and thus may not be aware of the odours marking their bodies, statements like Patricia’s are potentially even more shocking – particularly for someone like Muriel, who is familiar with her mother’s obsessive efforts to sanitize any and all traces of cultural difference that might mark the family as “other.” When Muriel says that she does not smell anything, Patricia points out: “you smell something all the time and it’s like not smelling anything at all” (Goto, *Chorus* 61). To prove her point, Patricia

notes that she does not know what her house smells like, but Muriel immediately replies that it smells like “potato steam” (61). Like Muriel, Patricia asks if it is “gross” (61). As Libin points out, Patricia “seems to be content in the knowledge that her house smells like potato steam and unaware of the racist connotations of identifying the smell of ‘toes’ in Muriel’s house” (“Some” 112). This is because the politics of scent are different for Patricia than they are for Muriel. Patricia’s inquiry about her own house smell is merely “[c]urious” (Goto, *Chorus* 61) because there is nothing at stake; she is an indigenized Euro-Canadian subject. Muriel, in contrast, is made anxious by Patricia’s claims because they undermine her family’s attempt to assimilate in Canada. Muriel “didn’t want to believe that [her] house had a smell” and finds it difficult to fathom considering that “Mom was so clean all the time” (61). When Patricia leaves, Muriel wanders around her house “[a]nd really smelled for the first time” (61).

As Libin notes, the “house smell” scene in *Chorus of Mushrooms* responds to a scene in *Obasan* when the Barkers visit Naomi and her aunt to pay their respect after Uncle Isamu’s death (“Some” 120). In the *Obasan* scene – one of the few in which Naomi interacts with Euro-Canadians – Naomi senses Mrs. Barker’s discomfort in Obasan’s home. Noticing that Mrs. Barker is breathing unevenly, Naomi wonders:

What is it she smells? What foreign odour sends its message down into her body altering her limbs? If only I could banish all that offends her delicate sensibilities. Especially the strong smell of miso and daicon and shoyu. Especially all that dust that Obasan and I are too short to see. Mrs. Barker’s glance at Obasan is one of condescension. Or is it solicitude? We

are dogs, she and I, sniffing for clues, our throats quivering with
subliminal growls. (Kogawa, *Obasan* 245)

Drawing on Fanon's argument that "the fact of cultural difference is immediately affirmed and converted into physical discomfort in the presence of whiteness," Libin contends that "Mrs. Barker's perceived discomfort forces Naomi to feel 'foreign' in her own house, transforming her into a dog trying to sniff out her scent" ("Some" 120). Yet unlike Muriel, who is made anxious by the thought that her house smells, Naomi is angered by the idea of offending Mrs. Barker's senses.

It is crucial to note, however, that the passage describes Naomi's interior thoughts; she is projecting onto Mrs. Barker's body language. In contrast, Patricia explicitly states that Muriel's house smells in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Although Patricia's remarks seem benign, their power to destabilize Muriel's sense of familiarity in her home reveals that they are more insidious than they seem. While Naomi sarcastically proposes to banish whatever offends Mrs. Barker's senses, Muriel takes Patricia's comments very seriously. When Patricia leaves, Muriel "scurrie[s] about, hands on [her] knees and all hunched over," her "nose a finger pointing" as she searches for the smell (Goto, *Chorus* 61). When she "[s]niff[s] cautiously around [her grandmother's] ankles," Naoe laughs and compares Muriel to a dog (61).⁴⁵ Although Naoe's response suggests that Muriel's attempt to locate the scent is ridiculous, Muriel's thoughts and actions show how easy it is to internalize dominant olfactory perspectives.

Muriel soon realizes that her family is marked by the smell of the mushroom farm. She eventually discovers a "lingering odour from the laundry room": "I poked in the

⁴⁵ Naoe declares: "Mattaku inu to sokkuri" (Goto, *Chorus* 61). According to the *Random House Japanese-English English-Japanese Dictionary*, in Japanese, "mattaku" means "indeed; really; utterly" ("Mattaku"), "inu" refers to a dog or a spy ("Inu"), and "sokkuri," as an adjective, means identical ("Sokkuri").

laundry hamper, filled with Dad's work clothes. And the waft that rose around me. The clamour of mushrooms growing" (Goto, *Chorus* 62). The use of the word "clamour" is suggestive. According to the *OED*, the auditory term describes an "excited outcry of vehement appeal, complaint, or opposition" that often implies "a mingling of voices" ("Clamour, *n*," def. 1a). Sam's work clothes are thus saturated with a "noisy" mushroom smell that bears the traces of indigenizing labour and cannot be eliminated by sanitizing techniques. Unbeknownst to the Tonktasus, their attempt to conceal the traces of their indigenizing labour and cultural difference registers at the level of scent. Muriel is "horrified":

Something so insidious tattooed into the walls of our home, the upholstery in our car, the very pores in our skin. We had been contaminated without ever knowing. For all that Mom had done to cover up our Oriental tracks, she'd overlooked the one thing that people always unconsciously register in any encounter. We had been betrayed by what we smelled like. We had been betrayed by what we grew. (Goto, *Chorus* 62)

Muriel's shame is inextricably linked to the particular dynamics of scent as a marker of difference that cannot be easily managed or contained. As Libin argues, "smell becomes the inevitable reminder of cultural difference for Muriel, an unconscious but ever-present betrayal of the family's desire to be accepted by the homogeneously white community" ("Some" 112-3). He suggests that "[t]he scent of mushrooms remains the family's racialized signature, abiding and irreducible": "[t]he smell of difference, the smell of 'race,' exceeds any attempt to mask its trace" and "draws attention to the racialized body

as excessive” (“Some” 113-4). Ultimately, the odour of mushrooms undermines the Tonkatus’ attempt at mushroom management.

By the end of the novel, Muriel begins to understand her parents’ reasons for taking the particular approach to indigenization and assimilation that they did. As an adult, Muriel returns to Nanton to visit her parents on the farm and connects with her father for the first time. While growing up, Muriel did not have a close relationship with her father. As she puts it: “He lived on his skin surface and I can’t even remember what he smelled like” (Goto, *Chorus* 59). Although Muriel could not smell it, Sam came home from the farm each day “with mushrooms seeping from the pores in his clothes” (48). Naoe’s description of the scent as “*fushigi*,” or “mysterious” (48, original emphasis), suggests that the smell hints at something that has been concealed. Naoe also observes that the harder Sam works, the sharper the smell: “He’s tired after loading compost all day. The smell was especially acrid this afternoon” (40). The sour smell is a material trace of what Sam has repressed in order to assimilate in Alberta. Muriel realizes this when she returns during adulthood to visit her father on the farm. When she first enters the barn, she has a strong reaction to the pungent smell of sterilizing chemicals: “The Green Machine was clean and had been sprayed with formaldehyde to kill any diseases, molds, or mites. I covered my nose and mouth with my forearm and squinted my eyes into slits. Tears made it impossible to see, I hadn’t been there for quite a while and I wasn’t acclimatized” (205). Inside her father’s office, however, the smell is “not so bad” (205-6). The office, which is “filled with books [...] all in Japanese” (206), has not been subjected to the same degree of cultural sanitization. Having never been in her father’s office before, Muriel is shocked and admonishes him for not teaching her Japanese when

she wanted to learn growing up. Sam insists, however, that when he and Kay immigrated to Canada and decided to assimilate as best they could, they lost their ability to speak Japanese. Ashamed by the loss of his “home words,” Sam claims that he “didn’t have the heart to talk so much”: “I just put my energies into the farm, grew mushrooms in the quiet of the dark” (207). To distract himself from the profound sense of loss, Sam focuses on cultivating mushrooms; in other words, he puts all his energy into the project of indigenizing and assimilating. The farm’s odours thus bear the traces of Sam’s repressed cultural and linguistic connections to Japan. Muriel forgives her father when she learns about his difficulty negotiating the relationship between his past homeland and new site of settlement. When she leaves his office, “[t]he formaldehyde had lifted or evaporated [...] and [her] eyes didn’t water any longer” (210). The dissipation of the odours of sanitization suggests that Muriel has reached a new level of understanding with her parents.

“Everything filled with sound and story”: Smell and the Unheard Chorus of Mushrooms

Naoe has a very different approach to diasporic settlement than Kay and Sam. While she shows interest in cultivation, she has no desire to assimilate. She wants to celebrate, rather than disavow, her cultural “roots” in Japan. A number of scholars have explored how Goto’s representation of Naoe – also known as Obachan – re-imagines Kogawa’s quiet, passive Obasan. Libin argues, for instance, that Goto’s “Obachan is a whirlwind of words, as opposed to the hauntingly silent Obasan of Kogawa’s novel” (“Lost” 137). While Ty suggests that “the silence is broken” in *Chorus of Mushrooms*

when Naoe and Muriel express their desire and creativity through food, eating, and story-telling (“Thrumming” 154), I am interested in how Naoe engages with smell to break the silence of Japanese culture in the Tonkatsu household. Unlike the other family members, Naoe approaches the farm as a site of diffuse connections in the sense that she attends to, rather than ignores, its odours and understands them as productive modes of connection rather than as betraying traces of repression.

Naoe counteracts Kay and Sam’s attempt at sanitization and repression by engaging directly with the mushroom farm’s odours. According to Libin, the text’s syntax of “smell-taste” experience “represents the adoption of Japanese conventions of grammar in order to translate the pleasures of taste and aroma into the textual discourse of the novel” (“Lost” 131).⁴⁶ Although Libin’s argument links smell and taste together – just as the text does in some scenes – his points are also useful for understanding Naoe’s specific relationship to olfaction, particularly in key moments when smell takes precedence. For Libin, the language of “smell-taste” represents “the desire for individual fulfillment and communal unity” and allows Goto’s characters to “know” a community “in an essential (but not essentializing) way” (“Lost” 132). This is particularly the case for Naoe, who does not work on the farm and thus has not been habituated to the scent that Kay, Sam, and Muriel unknowingly carry on their bodies. Through scent, Naoe connects with the farm and her family members:

⁴⁶ While Libin’s article focuses on smell and taste, it is primarily concerned with issues of language and translation. Libin contends that “Goto’s syntax seems designed specifically to acknowledge and honour the untranslatable loss while still allowing itself to be seduced by a desire to translate this loss. The language of ‘smell-taste’ is a monument to these encoded desires” (“Lost” 131). As I argued in my discussion of Cho’s theory of “smell-taste experience” in the Introduction, I understand taste as a sense that is, in many ways, predicated upon smell. Moreover, Goto represents smell in particular ways that depart from taste, as I discuss below.

Keiko used to come back from the barn smelling like soil and moist. Like birth. I used to press her clothes to my face and breathe deeply, smell-taste her day. Warm semen smell of the first crop of mushrooms, wet wet peat moss, the tepid coffee she drank at 10:00, the stink of formaldehyde she used to sterilize her buckets. I can see these things with a scent in my nostrils, a passing taste on my tongue. (Goto, *Chorus* 37)

Libin suggests that the “generative potential of this grammar of ‘smell-taste’ is apparent in the comparison of the aroma of the farm to ‘birth’ and ‘semen’” (“Lost” 131). Unlike Kay, Sam, and Muriel, whose relationships to the farm and its odours are complicated by their varying desires to assimilate, Naoe takes pleasure in the farm’s scents. Her approach to the farm’s odours embodies an alternative model of engagement that acknowledges scent as a form of relationality. Naoe’s approach to the farm and its odours may be subversive in the sense that it seeks to recognize, rather than conceal, her particular relationship to both Japan and Canada, but it is also limited in its conceptualization of fertility and growth. By associating the farm’s smell with birth and semen, Naoe evokes metaphors of heterosexual reproduction that structure conventional models of diaspora. Her reliance on these metaphors reveals the difficulty of constructing a feminist framework that re-imagines diasporic settlement and relationships to cultivation while also challenging the heteronormative gender and sexual politics of dominant diasporic frameworks.⁴⁷

Despite the limitations of Naoe’s relationship to the smell of mushrooms, she re-signifies the farm as a site of pleasure and desire by engaging with its scents. After twenty

⁴⁷ I discuss these politics in detail in the Introduction and Chapter One. For an example of how seed metaphors reify conventional models of heterosexual reproduction, see Robert Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue: Poems* (1977).

years of uttering Japanese words that register as background noise and telling stories that fall on deaf ears, Naoe changes her tactics: rather than emphasizing audition, she engages directly with smell, the realm of repression. She decides to leave Nanton, in part because she thinks that Kay and Muriel “need to grow without [her] noisy presence” (Goto, *Chorus* 76). As she puts it: “Everything filled with sound and story. Why a body could get lost with all this noise, but the nose never lies” (83). Naoe has never visited the farm, but from her chair by the front door of the house, she can smell its odours. From a distance, Naoe revels in the farm’s “scent of rich moistness”; she can tell that the farm’s air “hangs heavy with wetness,” which suggests that “[t]he dust does not fly where the mushrooms are growing” (48). The farm’s scent indicates to Naoe that the dust Kay tries so desperately to eliminate from the family home actually has the chance to settle on the mushroom farm. As I suggested earlier, dust is one of the metaphors Goto uses to represent the traces of Japanese culture in the novel. For Naoe, then, the farm is a site where she may finally be able to cultivate a meaningful relationship to the place where she lives by engaging with the repressed traces of her cultural background – something she has not been able to do in Kay’s presence.

Naoe’s diffuse connections with the farm’s mushroom crop registers on the level of bodily pleasure. As Libin argues, Naoe runs away from the Tonktasu household because she yearns for “sensory gratification” (“Lost” 130). Naoe wants to experience “[m]oments of joy” that she has not yet “allowed [her]self to live,” particularly the experience of “fall[ing] into the flesh” (Goto, *Chorus* 76). She seeks out this experience among the scents of the mushroom farm.⁴⁸ Before leaving Nanton, Naoe visits the farm in

⁴⁸ Curiously, Libin discusses Naoe’s sensory gratification primarily in relation to her experience eating Chinese food in Calgary’s Chinatown and does not mention her orgasmic encounter on the mushroom farm.

the middle of the night. Drawn by “[t]he *fushigi* smell where the mushrooms are growing,” she relies solely on her sense of smell to find her way to the barn through a blinding snowstorm (82).⁴⁹ According to Libin, the syntax of Goto’s synesthetic language “reflects an immediate and unmediated writing style” that “becomes a partial translation of the vocabulary of alternative experience” (“Lost” 131-2). This syntax attempts to capture the visceral dimensions of Naoe’s pleasure on the farm. As Libin notes, the “synesthesia of olfactory language” is “more evocative than the discourse of visual classification” and overthrows a Cartesian discourse that privileges the scopic and the logocentric” (“Lost” 132). Indeed, once she reaches the farm, Naoe must rely completely on her sense of smell to navigate, for it is “[s]o black, so dark, she could only see with her nose, with the surface of her senses” (Goto, *Chorus* 83). Paradoxically, focusing her attention on smell, the so-called “surface of her senses,” allows Naoe to delve beneath the surface of repression.

By turning her full attention to her olfactory sense, Naoe connects with the mushrooms in an embodied way. Seduced by the fungal odours, Naoe undresses in the warm, moist barn and takes on the characteristics of the thriving fungi around her: “Her skin, so dry, slowly filled, cell by cell, like a starving plant, the mushroom moisture filling her hollow body” (Goto, *Chorus* 84). In contrast to Muriel, Naoe is a mushroom in the sense that she cultivates diffuse connections with the repressed traces of the family’s Japanese culture by engaging directly with the mushrooms’ fungal odours. In the

⁴⁹ Radia notes that in Japanese creation myths, mushrooms have “regenerative and medicinal powers” and are linked to the “Goddess of Mirth,” who “coaxed the self-exiled Sun Goddess Amaterasu from the cave, where she had hidden, and thus saved the world from darkness” (193). Radia reads Muriel as the Goddess of Mirth, arguing that she “figuratively coaxes her grandmother’s ‘dead’ spirit out of the crypt through her storytelling and culinary antics” (193). I would argue that the smell of mushrooms more closely represents a manifestation of the Goddess of Mirth in the sense that the scent coaxes Naoe from the “cave” of the Tonkatsu home, where she has been “hidden” for the past twenty years, and allows her to experience a kind of rebirth.

darkness, Naoe finds the room of mushroom beds by “follow[ing] the scent ripe with fungal ecstasy” (85). When she enters, “the timeless murmur of mushrooms hush”; the “fungal silence” is as “thick as the moisture around her” (85). The mutual silence of Naoe and the mushrooms suggests that both no longer need to “clamour for attention.” As the auditory hum goes silent, the olfactory hum grows stronger, increasing Naoe’s pleasure. She begins to masturbate among the mushrooms and “the rich scent” becomes “headier than any musk, any perfume” (86). Naoe finally “falls into the flesh” when she experiences an orgasm, which the text describes as a “SLAM of breath knocked from lungs, beyond the painful register of human sound, the unheard chorus of mushrooms” (86). Few critics provide an in-depth analysis of the sensory dimensions of this sentence, which is also the final line of the scene and the chapter.⁵⁰ Heather Latimer argues, for instance, that the “chorus of mushrooms” signifies an “echo” that is “[u]nheard yet heard” (n. pag).⁵¹ Latimer and others fail to note, however, that the grammar of the sentence suggests that the unheard chorus of mushrooms resonates *beyond* the level of sound. As I have already argued, the novel repeatedly draws attention to the limits of sound as a register of diasporic connection; characters fail to listen, cannot understand the language, or lose the ability to speak. This scene suggests that “hearing” the chorus of mushrooms – and thus attending to the repressed traces of Japanese culture – requires a shift in sensory

⁵⁰ In Beauregard’s reading of this scene, he contends that the “sensual healing potential” of the mushroom farm provides a stark contrast to the hardship Naomi endures on the sugar beet farm in *Obasan* (57). He also notes that the title *Chorus of Mushrooms*, evoked in this scene, can be read as “an attempt to politicize female sexuality by taking the mushroom cloud of the atomic destruction that haunts Kogawa’s narrative and reconfiguring it as an orgasm” (52).

⁵¹ Arguing that Naoe’s “*jouissance* breaks through the text when she masturbates” among the mushrooms, Latimer argues that the chorus of mushrooms “signifies a type of excessive fleshiness both the mushrooms and Naoe represent” (n. pag, original emphasis). She explains: “Literally growing in ‘shit’ in a moist darkness, the mushrooms are an abject symbol of the border between life and death, feces and food, yet they also symbolize Naoe’s erotic and earthly pleasure” (n. pag).

registers. In other words, one can only “hear” the chorus of mushrooms, and thus engage with that which has been silenced, by attending to the realm of scent.

While Naoe’s relationship to the mushroom farm is productive in the sense that it emphasizes an elderly Japanese-Canadian woman’s pleasure and gestures toward the need to engage rather than repress diasporic connections, the novel fails to interrogate this relationship within the context of diasporic settlement. Like the text itself, scholarship on *Chorus of Mushrooms* tends to represent Naoe’s journey away from the Tonkatsu household in celebratory terms. For instance, Ty argues that Naoe rejects the traditional caregiver role and insists upon her needs being met (“Thrumming” 163-4), while Libin contends that Naoe re-imagines Kogawa’s *Obasan* by “re-figur[ing] dispersal as liberating” (“Lost” 137).⁵² These arguments tend to focus on a specific scene when Naoe strikes out on her own after her orgasmic experience on the farm, declaring: “I’ll walk and walk and the wind will serenade me. I’ll walk and sing and laugh and shout. I’ll scrape my heel into the black ice on the highway and inscribe my name across this country” (Goto, *Chorus* 108).⁵³ Bromley contends that Naoe challenges racist constructions of first-generation immigrants as sojourners longing to return to an idealized homeland (116). For Bromley, Naoe is subversive because she “has no desire to return to Japan” but rather “wishes to travel in Canada,” where she wants to ““inscribe her name across the country’ [...] rather than being inscribed/racialised by the country” (116). Anne-Marie Lee-Loy similarly praises how Naoe “define[s] and claim[s] space for

⁵² Libin further suggests that this liberatory approach to “dispersal” contrasts with Kogawa’s construction of dispersal as “metaphor for absence, loss, [and] death” (“Lost” 137). Radia also describes the novel’s “‘moving,’ mobile ending” as “free[ing]” (197).

⁵³ The text’s image of Naoe inscribing her name across the landscape recalls the scene in *Obasan* when the Barkers visit Obasan’s home after Uncle Isamu’s death. After musing about what Mrs. Barker smells, Naomi describes Mrs. Barker and Obasan in colonial terms: “[Mrs. Barker] sits straight as a flagpole. Her flag represents the Barker kingdom, a tiny but confident country. But momentarily she is planted here on this soil beside Obasan’s own dark flag” (Kogawa, *Obasan* 246).

herself as a Japanese Canadian” (321). Sasano is perhaps the most celebratory of Naoe, particularly in her reading of the novel’s final scene when, in a moment marked by magic realism, Naoe performs as a bullrider called the “Purple Mask” at the Calgary Stampede. Sasano writes: “By becoming the Purple Mask, she is not only a rodeo star, but also a successful inhabitant of her environment, no problem. She has infiltrated the ranks. While furiously not white Canadian, she fully embraces and occupies aspects of that culture that please her” (51).⁵⁴ As a feminist, postmodernist re-imagining of Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Naoe is subversive in the sense that her actions and attitude are predicated upon a logic of reckless abandonment and promote an aging Japanese woman’s personal desires and pleasures.

Yet by celebrating how Naoe “occupies” the land and “defines and claims space” without questioning what it means for a diasporic subject to “inscribe her name across the country,” scholars fail to consider the violent colonial histories invoked by these terms, and by extension, Naoe’s journey. While a few critics note that “[t]he violent effacement of cultural difference is not the exclusive property of the white Canadian in Goto’s novel” (Libin, “Lost” 129), they tend to support this point by exploring how Naoe is implicated in Japan’s history of imperialism in China.⁵⁵ While it is important to discuss Naoe’s

⁵⁴ Beauregard also reads this scene in positive terms, arguing that “Naoe is momentarily outside the ideological constraints imposed by hegemonic groups” (60). Similarly, Charlotte Sturgess suggests that Naoe is “liberated from the constraints of old age and tradition” just as the “text is liberated from the constraints of realistic form” (25).

⁵⁵ Beauregard contends that “Goto’s fiction refuses to conform to a self-evident split between the colonizers and the colonized: her Japanese Canadian characters are in varying degrees implicated as *both*” (59, original emphasis). Like Libin, Beauregard makes this point by focusing on how Naoe is implicated in Japanese imperialism: she lived for years in the Japanese colony of Manshu, or Manchuria, and was married to a man who built bridges that the Japanese army used to slaughter the Chinese people (58). Beauregard also draws attention to how Kay and Muriel participate in colonial processes by renaming the Vietnamese refugees employed on the farm, noting: “Goto complicates the process of renaming by addressing not only how Japanese Canadians have had their identities/names split, but also how they have participated in the process of splitting the identities of migrants less economically privileged than themselves” (58). This is a crucial point to make, but it does not implicate Naoe.

complicity in Japanese imperialism, it is also crucial to consider how Naoe is implicated in ongoing processes of colonization in Canada. Naoe claims that age has provided her with “distance so [her] eyes have room to focus” on how, during Japan’s war with China, her privilege rested upon the suffering of others (Goto, *Chorus* 45-6). Naoe may be aware of her complicity in the past, but she does not reflect on how she is implicated in similar structures of oppression while living in Canada.

For scholars interested in the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity, it is crucial to interrogate how Naoe’s desire to inscribe the landscape participates in the colonial project of renaming Indigenous land. Notably, Naoe embarks on her cross-country journey by travelling from Nanton to Calgary on a road that becomes the Colonel James Macleod Trail, a highway named after a man who oversaw the signing of Treaty Six and Treaty Seven with the Plains Cree and Blackfoot Confederacy, respectively (Waiser 456).⁵⁶ Naoe and Macleod may have very different relationships to colonialism, but Naoe’s desire to “inscribe her name across the country” echoes how the MacLeod Trail literally etches Macleod’s name across former Blackfoot territory. Charlotte Sturgess argues that the novel’s interweaving of folk tale, Japanese myth, and realism “serves to remap epistemological and social territory” (23). For Sturgess, this is a subversive act that resonates in postmodern feminist terms: Naoe re-signifies a domain conventionally constructed as masculine, and in doing so, “reappropriates strategic spaces of cultural mythology for other imaginary ends” (23). But how do Naoe’s actions resonate

⁵⁶ MacLeod was superintendent, and later commissioner, of the North West Mounted Police in the late-nineteenth century (Waiser 456). He participated in – and in some ways, precipitated – the signing of Treaty Six with the Plains Cree in August 1876 and Treaty Seven with the Blackfoot Confederacy in September 1877, two of the last major treaties in western Canada (456). Supposedly Chief Crowfoot and Chief Red Crow – the head of the Blackfoot and Blood tribes, respectively – “attributed their willingness to enter into treaties with the queen’s representatives to their friendship with Macleod” (456).

within the context of the colonization and displacement of Indigenous peoples, whose territory has long been remapped and reappropriated through violent colonial practices? What does it mean that scholars like Sturgess describe Naoe's subversive "transformations" as "trickster-like" (24) without considering what it means to apply that term, which has particular resonances for Indigenous communities, to an elderly Japanese woman intent on inscribing her name across the landscape?⁵⁷ And what does it mean that critics like Beauregard claim that "Goto 're-places' Japanese folk tales and myths onto the windswept prairies" (47) without considering that this may involve displacing Indigenous folktales and myths? *Chorus of Mushrooms* may re-write *Obasan* by representing Naoe as a Japanese grandmother figure who mobilizes postmodern feminist tactics to challenge Euro-Canadian claims of belonging, but the novel fails to question – and at times, even celebrates – Naoe's participation in ongoing colonial practices.

Diasporic Violence and the Dynamics of Scent in *The Kappa Child*

Like *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *The Kappa Child* focuses on a Japanese-Canadian family living in rural Alberta, but Goto's award-winning second novel – published seven years after her first – is much more self-reflexive about how diasporic settlement is complicit in colonialism.⁵⁸ Narrated by an unnamed Japanese-Canadian woman, *The Kappa Child* moves back and forth through time between the narrator's adult life in Calgary, where she works as a shopping cart collector, and her childhood in rural Alberta, where she, her three sisters, and her mother endure physical and emotional abuse

⁵⁷ I discuss the notion of the trickster in more detail in my discussion of *The Kappa Child*.

⁵⁸ *The Kappa Child* won the 2001 James Tiptree, Jr. award, a literary prize awarded annually to a work of science fiction or fantasy that "expands or explores" understandings of gender ("James Tiptree, Jr. Award," n. pag).

at the hands of a tyrannical father obsessed with growing Japanese rice on the prairies.⁵⁹

While recent work on *The Kappa Child* has implicitly explored the complexities of diasporic settlement by examining how the father's approach to the prairie landscape is complicit in colonial violence, scholars have yet to examine the crucial role that smell plays in mediating the characters' relationships to diasporic settlement in the novel.

Although scent is not as prominent in *The Kappa Child* as it is in the other primary texts I examine in this dissertation, its representations of scent are provocative for my study.⁶⁰

Like *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *The Kappa Child* represents smell as a key mode through which diasporic subjects engage with the landscape. Yet the novel also refracts the olfactory themes of *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* with a difference.

Unlike these earlier works, *The Kappa Child* explores how diasporic settlement is not only mediated by diffuse connections to Canada, the site of settlement, but is also mediated by diffuse connections to the homeland of Japan. In doing so, the text elucidates how olfactory relationships to a range of different places intersect and inform how and why diasporic subjects settle in particular ways.

Before turning to a discussion of smell in *The Kappa Child*, I want to situate the novel in relation to *Obasan*. While critics have been quick to read *Chorus of Mushrooms* as a text that re-writes and responds to *Obasan*, they have yet to provide an extended reading of *The Kappa Child* in relation to Kogawa's influential novel. Those who do compare *The Kappa Child* to *Obasan* tend to suggest that Goto's novel moves beyond the

⁵⁹ These two narrative threads are generally kept separate in the text through chapter divisions. Periodically, these chapters end or begin with short sections featuring stories of the kappa from Japanese mythology or poetic fragments that seem to give voice to the kappa child; these sections are differentiated from the rest of the text by italics. I will discuss the kappa and the kappa child in more detail below.

⁶⁰ *The Kappa Child* may be less olfacto-centric than *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, and *Salt Fish Girl*, but it still features a number of provocative representations of smell that warrant further study. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus primarily on representations of scent that relate to diasporic settlement.

issues addressed in Kogawa's text. For instance, Ty argues that *The Kappa Child* and other recent works of Japanese-Canadian literature have "mov[ed] away" from representing the trauma of internment and "attempted to go beyond an ethnographic account of the way the issei, nisei, and sansei cope with the internment and dispersal" ("Scripting" 108). Internment may not be the primary subject of *The Kappa Child*, but Goto situates the family's experience within the context of this history and engages directly with Kogawa's influential representation of internment. Ty also differentiates *The Kappa Child* from *Obasan* by suggesting that Goto's novel does not follow a trajectory "from the west coast to the camps," but rather explores "a great deal of displacement across North America" ("Scripting" 108). In actuality, the family in *The Kappa Child* follows a migratory pattern from west to east that clearly recalls the dispersal and relocation of internment: after emigrating from Japan to British Columbia, where they live for a brief period of time, the father moves the family to rural Alberta and purchases a farm. As Christine Kim notes, the family's movement from British Columbia to Alberta recalls "the forced migrations of Japanese internment" even though it is "not made as part of the Japanese-Canadian internment" (291). Kim explores how *The Kappa Child* references internment – even noting that the narrator is forced to work the land "much like an indentured labourer" (292) – but she does not situate the novel's representation of migration and labour in relation to *Obasan*. Marilyn Iwama is one of the few critics to make connections between *The Kappa Child* and *Obasan*. In her review of Goto's novel, Iwama suggests that the harsh conditions endured by *The Kappa Child*'s narrator, who is forced to perform hard labour on her father's land, recall the hardships faced by Naomi on the sugar beet farm in *Obasan* (138). Iwama argues that because Goto is "a writer without

familial roots in prewar Canadian society,” she is “‘free’ to engage with a more sophisticated racialization” than writers like Kogawa did in the 1970s and 1980s (139). I argue, however, that Goto’s “more sophisticated racialization” in *The Kappa Child* does not simply move beyond texts like *Obasan* by using a “deliberately playful tone” and featuring a protagonist who refutes common stereotypes of Japanese Canadians as “silent, acquiescent subjects or model minorities,” as Ty suggests (“Scripting” 108). Rather, by exploring how Japanese Canadians may perpetuate colonial violence, *The Kappa Child* engages with the complex issues surrounding cultivation, indigenization, and diasporic settlement in Kogawa’s novel of internment rather than moving beyond them.

The narrator’s father, Hideo, has a very different relationship to indigenization than the characters in *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Hideo does not aim to indigenize by assimilating like the Tonkatsus, yet he also refuses to be read as anything other than “Canadian.” When the narrator’s family first arrives in Lethbridge, a “white” hotel manager assumes that they are Japanese and expresses his disapproval of internment, lamenting: “I always thought it was terrible what was done to you people” (Goto, *Kappa* 70). Infuriated by the manager’s comments, Hideo insists: “We are CANADIAN!” (70).⁶¹ Kim reads Hideo’s “violent response” to the manager’s “liberal sympathies” as “a rejection of a narrative of Canadian identity that excludes racialized bodies” (292). As Kim explains, Hideo “refuses to be read through the historical lens of Japanese-Canadian struggles”; he “shuts down discussions about the legacies of institutionalized practices of discrimination aimed at Japanese Canadians” and “refuses to acknowledge the troubling terrain the contemporary moment is perched upon” (292). I

⁶¹ In Japanese, the name “Hideo” means “fire coming out of man” (Harvey, Smid and Pirard 2). Nancy Kang argues that Hideo’s name evokes the English word “hideous,” a term that encompasses his monstrosity as the violent family patriarch (“Water” 39).

would argue that Hideo also challenges the manager's statement in order to define himself rather than being defined by – or even in relation to – others. Hideo not only resists being compared to past Japanese Canadians; he also refuses to be aligned with Indigenous peoples. In a scene that clearly echoes the opening of *Obasan* when Naomi compares her uncle to Chief Sitting Bull, the narrator observes her father looking out over the prairie land he just purchased and thinks: "He could pass for an Indian" (44).⁶² Karin Beeler contends that "Goto establishes links between Japanese-Canadians and First Nations cultures" in this scene (61), but I argue that this passage specifically aims to *critique* the alignment of Japanese Canadians and Indigenous peoples in texts like *Obasan*. Hideo seems to read his daughter's mind, immediately undermining her thought by demanding "[w]hat are you staring at?" (Goto, *Kappa* 44). Eager to avoid a physical confrontation, she "gulp[s]" fearfully and lies to her father, telling him: "I like it here" (44).⁶³ By representing this encounter as a moment marked by fear, apprehension, and the threat of physical violence, Goto's novel re-writes the scene from *Obasan*, which represents a moment of bonding between Naomi, her uncle, and the prairie landscape. In doing so, the text undermines how Naomi approaches the prairies and its Indigenous inhabitants as figures to help indigenize Japanese Canadians.

Hideo's investment in the individualist values of pioneer heroism, combined with his particular relationship to Japan, results in an approach to cultivation that reifies violent

⁶² Surprisingly, critics have yet to note the connection between these two scenes. Karin Beeler suggests that Kogawa draws a similar "parallel between minority cultures" in *Obasan* (61), but she does not discuss how the scene from Goto's novel recalls the moment in which Naomi compares her uncle to Chief Sitting Bull; rather, Beeler supports her point by observing that Naomi "identifies with one of the aboriginal children in her classroom" (61). In Kang's reading of *The Kappa Child*, she notes in passing that the narrator's comparison of her father to "an Indian" is "loaded," but does not explain why ("Water" 32).

⁶³ This scene echoes an earlier moment in the novel when Hideo returns from town with fried chicken for his wife and daughters after they have been waiting in the hot sun for hours. Although "[f]ried chicken was the last thing [the narrator] wanted to eat," she lies and says it "smells great!" to avoid upsetting him (*Kappa* 35).

colonial relationships to the landscape. As Beeler notes, the text repeatedly compares Hideo to Pa Ingalls, the heroic father figure in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, the narrator's favourite book (Goto, *Kappa* 60).⁶⁴ According to Philip Heldrich, Pa Ingalls embodies the "'stalwart and rugged,' 'anti-social' frontiersman" who champions "radical individualism" and believes in "manifest destiny as a divine right for westward expansion" (101). Goto's representation of Hideo inverts this formulation of the frontiersman in a number of ways, and in doing so, raises questions about the innocence of Japanese Canadians' relationships to diasporic settlement. As the narrator notes, the family travels from the "west" to the "east" to "get to the same place" as the Ingalls, who "were from the east" and "went west" (Goto, *Kappa* 42). The Japanese-Canadian family's migration pattern inverts the Euro-centric east-to-west movement of early North American settlers, yet the family arrives in the same place in the sense that they also participate in the colonial occupation of Indigenous lands. Unlike the Tonkatus, who mobilize cultivation to disavow diasporic connections to Japan, Hideo relies on cultivation to establish a material connection to his homeland in his new place of settlement. Hideo wants to be "the first to grow Japanese rice in Alberta!" (113), but as the narrator explains: "Dad didn't know how to grow Japanese rice. Forget about the fact that you couldn't grow it in Alberta anyway. No water. The too-short growing season" (126). Kim contends that "[b]y refusing to acknowledge the arid reality of the Albertan landscape, the father constructs it as both inhospitable and a space to be conquered" (292). In other words, Hideo's approach to the landscape rests upon the very same myths

⁶⁴ As a child, the narrator uses *Little House on the Prairie* to interpret her experiences on the prairies. She often carries the book around with her and, as Beeler notes, she sometimes becomes "so involved in her experience of the little house world that she becomes one with Laura" (64). Beeler points out that these moments of "union or fusion" in the text do not last, as Goto makes it clear that the Japanese-Canadian family's harsh settler experience is far different from "the more positive image of the Ingalls family" (64).

that fuelled European settler colonialism. When Hideo attempts to dig a well – an act Pa performs successfully in *Little House on the Prairie* – he frames himself as a heroic pioneer, declaring: “This is a land for pioneers! [...] We struggle and fight. For water. For success. For life!” (133). The text undermines Hideo’s pioneer narrative by emphasizing his ridiculous appearance: “His hair stood on end and his teeth were rimmed with dust” (133). This scene not only constructs Hideo as a failed version of Pa Ingalls, but also critiques pioneer heroism as a model for Japanese Canadians to adopt in relation to the land. Notably, Hideo’s words echo the passage in *Obasan* when Naomi describes Japanese Canadians as “the pioneers” who cleared the land and tended to the soil on the west coast, but were then sent to “flounder” on the dry, dusty prairies. The text thus challenges narratives of pioneer heroism used to indigenize Japanese Canadians in *Obasan*.

Hideo’s blocked nasal passages metaphorize his uninterrogated positionality in relation to the prairies. When Hideo moves to Alberta, he develops severe allergies and becomes dependent on nasal spray to breathe. It is significant that Hideo’s addiction to nasal spray “didn’t happen until the dry, dry prairies filled [his] head so mucus-full he couldn’t breathe without it” (Goto, *Kappa* 126). Hideo’s allergies suggest that his new place of settlement is alien to him. According to scientific discourses, allergies occur when a “foreign” substance like dust enters the body, registers as a potential threat, and triggers the immune system to release histamine, a natural chemical, into the bloodstream; nasal sprays and other antihistamines aim to counteract this effect (“Antihistamines” 76). For Hideo, Alberta is a “foreign” and inhospitable landscape, much like it is for Naomi in *Obasan*. But while Naomi turns to the scent of wild roses as a way of engaging with the

landscape and acknowledging her position in it, Hideo rejects the very act of smelling as a form of exchange. In other words, his blocked nasal passages suggest that he is threatened not only by the prairie landscape, but also by the very notion of permeability, and in turn, relationality. Since smelling opens up the body – and by extension, the subject – to intimate encounters with the surrounding environment, smelling undermines the fantasy of radical individualism that forms of the basis of Hideo’s beloved narrative of pioneer heroism. Hideo’s blocked nasal passages thus not only symbolize his desire to shut down the possibility of relationality, but also sustain this condition in a material way. Moreover, Hideo’s addiction to nasal spray suggests that he plays an active role in creating his condition. Nasal spray addictions are symptomatic of a condition called “congestion rebound” (Hanson, Venturelli, and Fleckenstein 437). If nasal sprays are used for an extended period of time, nasal membranes become dependent upon antihistamines: “One can become hooked and use the spray more and more with less and less relief until one’s tissues no longer respond and the sinus passages become almost completely obstructed” (437). In other words, the ostensible antidote for allergies can actually exacerbate the problem. By emphasizing how Hideo is addicted to nasal spray, the novel suggests that his condition – which the narrator repeatedly describes as “pathetic” (Goto, *Kappa* 256) – is part of an unproductive self-perpetuating, self-damaging cycle.

Hideo’s condition is inextricably linked to diasporic nostalgia. In a provocative statement regarding her father’s nasal spray addiction, the narrator claims that Hideo’s “cavities” are “filled with memories lost, or maybe the unattainable future”: “All he knew was that we needed water to make the flooded soft mud of his childhood thought-place, years disremembered and half a world away” (Goto, *Kappa* 126-7). Kim views Hideo’s

rice-growing obsession as a “nostalgic effort” that “speak[s] to a sense of urban dislocation as an adult in Japan as well as to displacement in rural Alberta” (304). As I noted in the Introduction, nostalgia may be productive for diasporic subjects; Lily Cho argues, for example, that nostalgia involves a refusal to “get over” the past that “functions as a persistent reminder of the hostility of the present location” and thus serves as “an agential reminder of the unhomeliness of a place in which [a diasporic subject] will be continually cast as migrant, from away” (“Taste” 95-6). *The Kappa Child* explores how nostalgia may also motivate diasporic subjects to engage in a violent relationship with their new sites of settlement. As Kim notes, Hideo is “not exempt” from experiencing “historical pain” and his situation necessitates both “self-criticality and compassion,” but this “does not justify his actions” (304). His “desire to create a past long gone without being conscious of the price extorted by it from those in the present moment [...] translates into material and symbolic violence” (300).⁶⁵ By suggesting that Hideo’s nasal blockage is inextricably linked to his desire to re-create Japan in Alberta, Goto’s text re-imagines the relationship between scent and diasporic nostalgia: it is not smell, but the *inability* to smell, that makes Hideo’s memories and desires stagnate. The novel thus suggests that smell plays a crucial role in allowing diasporic subjects to engage in meaningful ways with their new sites of diasporic settlement. Hideo’s blocked nasal passages obscure his positionality in relation to the prairies, and as a result, he engages with the landscape in material ways that participate in ongoing colonial processes.

⁶⁵ Beeler suggests that Hideo’s agricultural goals display a “desire to put a cross-cultural stamp on what has often been perceived as an essentially ‘white’ landscape” (61). Unlike Kim, she does not explore the potentially problematic dimensions of this desire.

Troubled Alliances: Gerald Nakamura Coming Singer and the Kappa

Critical discussions of diaspora, indigeneity, and colonialism in *The Kappa Child* tend to focus on the narrator's complicated relationship to Gerald Nakamura Coming Singer, a half-Japanese Canadian, half-Blood Indian boy living on a nearby farm. Gerald is the son of Janice Nakamura, an outspoken Nisei chicken farmer, and Stan Coming Singer, a member of the Blood tribe who moved back to the reserve after he and Janice split up.⁶⁶ A number of scholars read Gerald as a figure who provides the narrator with an opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship to the landscape, but few explore how the text positions him in relation to the kappa, a mischievous figure from Japanese mythology who seems to have emigrated from Japan to Canada along with the narrator's family. Before turning to a discussion of the role smell plays in the narrator's relationship to the kappa, it is necessary to trace how the novel represents Gerald and the kappa as two different but related figures who offer access to water, a key resource the family needs to survive on the prairies.

The text positions Gerald as a crucial ally for the narrator in the text. When the narrator meets Gerald, she "had to meet someone [she had] never imagined" (Goto, *Kappa* 189).⁶⁷ Gerald is "incomprehensible" to her because of his mixed heritage: "In Laura Ingalls' book-world, Indians meant tepees on the prairies and that was that. Indians

⁶⁶ Gerald's father, Stan Coming Singer, is an absent figure in the text and is only mentioned once.

⁶⁷ For the purposes of this argument I focus on Gerald, but Janice also undercuts common Japanese-Canadian stereotypes. Janice has "no shame" about the fact that she "[c]an't speak a word [of Japanese]" and "never set foot anywhere else" (Goto, *Kappa* 163). Pilar Cuder-Dominiquez reads Janice as an alternative to conventional Japanese mother figures, for she is too "manly, outspoken, and self-sufficient to fit into the Japanese construction of femininity" (119). Like Gerald, Janice offers access to water, as she shows the family the location of their pumphouse. By "laugh[ing] loudly" at Hideo, who is out attempting to build a well (Goto, *Kappa* 164), Janice undermines his patriarchal authority and heroic pioneer narrative. Indeed, when Hideo finds out that it was a woman, not a man, who helped them "discover" water on the property, he "stomp[s] out the house, snorting at phlegm to the depths of his nose"; he is angry because Janice "wasn't a man" (166).

didn't equal someone who was both Blood and Japanese Canadian. Indians certainly never meant someone who lived next door on a chicken farm" (188). As Beeler argues, the text portrays Gerald as a figure of "cultural hybridity" who "counters simplistic or stereotypical representation[s] of either aboriginal culture or Japanese Canadians" (62). Gerald's complexity leads the narrator to realize that "First Nations peoples were unproblematically construed as enemies" in *Little House on the Prairie* (Kang, "Water" 32).⁶⁸ One of the primary reasons that Gerald represents an important ally for the narrator is because he has knowledge of, and access to, water. For the narrator's family, it is a case of "Japanese rice or die" (Goto, *Kappa* 192): they need water to support Hideo's dream of growing rice on the prairies, but there is no major source of water close to the farm. Water also has symbolic significance in the text. According to Kang, "the self-esteem and sanity of [Hideo's] family [...] require the living water that he will not – rather than cannot – give" ("Water" 31). By suggesting that Hideo does not give his family what they need to survive, either physically or emotionally, the text critiques the notion of the father as the "provider" in patriarchal family structures. Gerald, in contrast, seems to offer access to water and a more meaningful relationship to the land. When Gerald meets the narrator he brings her to a hidden creek, a natural source of water that contrasts starkly with Hideo's dry well. The creek, which the narrator describes as a "gift" (Goto, *Kappa* 169), is a restorative space like the coulee in *Obasan*. But while Naomi's approach to the

⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Goto's representation of Gerald revises Wilder's olfactory stereotypes about "Indians." Smell is central to Wilder's construction of Indians as enemies in *Little House on the Prairie*, particularly in the chapter "Indians in the House." As Heldrich notes, this chapter – which details Laura's first encounter with Indians – "provokes much of the outrage surrounding the text today" (100). The chapter tells the story of how two Indians enter the house one day when Pa is away and provides numerous descriptions of the "awful" smell emanating from the skunk skins they wear (Wilder 142). *The Kappa Child* references the "Indians in the House" chapter when Janice and Gerald first visit the narrator's house. As their truck approaches, the narrator states: "all I could think about was how the Indians came to the Ingalls' house and took all the coffee and tobacco" (Goto, *Kappa* 162). As I suggest above, the narrator soon realizes that Gerald and Janice bear little resemblance to the "Indians" in Wilder's book.

coulee initially reinforces stereotypes about the prairie as an empty landscape, the narrator's relationship to the creek helps her overcome such stereotypes. While visiting the creek with Gerald, the narrator realizes that the land is "[n]ot empty" but "full of noise and presence" (167); she also begins to see the land as "beautiful," noting that it "[h]ad been beautiful before Laura Ingalls ever noticed, before her Pa plowed it under" (168). As Beeler argues, the text represents Gerald as a "cultural mediator" who "translat[es] the landscape for the narrator" and helps her move beyond her negative image of the prairies (63). It is not surprising, then, that Gerald becomes the narrator's "best and only friend" (Goto, *Kappa* 197).

Although Gerald is the narrator's only real ally at this point in her life, she rejects his friendship in favour of her family. Late one night, Hideo enlists his daughters to help him re-route water from a neighbouring farm to use on his land.⁶⁹ Feeling trapped and helpless, the narrator reviews her options but concludes that "[t]here were none," for if she "ditched the family, there was absolutely nothing left" (Goto, *Kappa* 199). As Kim argues, the narrator realizes that she is caught in a double bind: she recognizes "the futility of her father's efforts to recreate Japan in Alberta and feels immense shame at being forced to undertake this theft of resources," but "she is also bound to her despotic father by love, kinship, and a recognition of their shared similarities" (303). In this moment, the novel also recalls how the government "forc[ed] Japanese Canadians to participate in a colonial myth of unoccupied territory" by relocating internees to land that was ostensibly empty; but as Kim notes, the text is "more complicated than previous settlement narratives that deliberately neglected Indigenous presences" (296-7). Indeed,

⁶⁹ In an ironic reversal, the narrator engages in the act of stealing that Laura accuses the "Indians" of doing when they enter the Ingalls' house in *Little House on the Prairie*.

“Gerald appears on the scene just as the narrator is feeling despondent over her lack of escape routes” (292-3). Gerald’s appearance suggests that he may be the narrator’s best option for navigating her difficult position as an unwilling, but nonetheless complicit, participant in her father’s scheme. Gerald does not reprimand the narrator or impede her work, but rather tries to help by recommending that they keep quiet to avoid waking the neighbours. In response, the narrator leans on her shovel “like [she had] seen done on TV” and flexes her forearms, “[w]anting, for some strange reason, to impress [her] quiet friend” (Goto, *Kappa* 200). When Gerald “pat[s] [her] muscles encouragingly” and tells her that she is “strong,” tears come to her eyes (200). Gerald’s unwavering support – which also makes him complicit in Hideo’s project – undermines the heroic fantasy of self-reliance and radical individualism that the narrator tries to embody in this scene. In a moment that recalls Hideo’s angry encounter with the motel manager (Kim 293), the narrator lashes out at Gerald when he attempts to comfort her. She yells at him to “get his baby butt home” and hurls a steady stream of insults as he leaves (Goto, *Kappa* 200). The narrator feels “the words stinging something inside [her],” but she is “unable to stop” (200). According to Kim, the narrator’s “callous treatment of Gerald” is part of her realization that she has “very limited options” (303). In this moment, the narrator also realizes that “her father’s impossible dreams” have not only “distorted his humanity,” but also “caused similar effects in herself” (293). The scene thus explores the “transmission of violence and despair between generations” (293). After this incident, Gerald not only leaves the narrator’s farm; he also leaves the prairies altogether by moving to Vancouver to live with an aunt.

The narrator's speech and actions in this scene have colonial implications. As Kim notes, even though the narrator's participation in colonial violence "is clearly coerced, this factor does not make her speech or actions any less damaging" (297). Kim explains: "when the ten-year-old narrator takes her shovel to the land in order to try to produce the rice paddies her father demands, she engages in a violent relationship with the land" (297); therefore "any resolution that seeks to place the entire burden upon the father without implicating the narrator is perhaps as impossible a fantasy as Albertan rice fields" (293). The narrator not only engages in a violent relationship with the land; she also engages in a violent relationship with Gerald. While Kim acknowledges that the narrator's speech and actions cause damage, she does not specifically consider how the narrator's verbal assault on Gerald contributes to his displacement from the prairies.⁷⁰ I contend that the narrator pushes Gerald off the land, and in doing so, participates in the ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples.

In some ways, the narrator's role in driving Gerald away from the prairies may be considered subversive in the sense that it challenges heteronormativity. According to Jenna Hunnef, the narrator is "intensely aware" that Gerald "represents the possibility for Japanese-Canadians to claim 'Blood' ties to the land" (86). The spectre of heterosexual kinship thus haunts the narrator's alliance with Gerald. To comfort the narrator when she first begins to cry, Gerald "[a]wkwardly pull[s] [her] close and lick[s] [her] lip" (Goto, *Kappa* 200). The narrator feels "shocked, embarrassed, elated, I don't know what" (200).

⁷⁰ Kim briefly mentions Gerald's "relocation" to Vancouver, but she focuses on the government's, rather than the narrator's, role in neo-colonial policies that shape the migration and settlement of Indigenous peoples. Kim contends that "Gerald's eventual relocation to Vancouver to live with his aunt reverses the migration pattern of the narrator while remaining shaped by the paternalistic authority of the Canadian government" (296). As Kim points out, the novel's timeline suggests that Gerald probably does not have "Native" status and therefore would be unable to live with his father on the reserve even if he wanted to (296). Kim also mentions Gerald in relation to the concept of displacement, but only in the sense that he experiences it when "his parents part ways" (296).

Growing “furious” because she is unable to make sense of her feelings, the narrator not only yells at Gerald to go home; she also calls him a “sissy” and a “pansy” and his mother a “slut” (200-1). According to Hunnef, the narrator’s “anger and frustration over the realization that cultural syncretism is only possible through kinship and heteronormativity result[s] in the projection of her racial grief onto Gerald” (86-7). By rejecting the possibility of a heterosexual relationship with Gerald, the narrator refuses to participate in forms of indigenization predicated upon heteronormative bonds of kinship. But, problematically, the same actions that challenge the conventional gender and sexual politics of kinship reinscribe colonial practices.

In addition to exploring how the narrator participates in ongoing colonial practices by displacing Gerald, it is crucial to interrogate how the kappa’s presence on the prairies is predicated upon Gerald’s absence. Various descriptions of the kappa include “water sprite,” “river monster,” and “trickster,” the kappa is an “[a]quatic, frog-like creature with webbed hands and feet, a small turtle-like shell, beaked mouth, and a bowl-shaped head” that must be filled with water, the source of its supernatural powers, for it to survive (Goto, *Kappa* 277). Japanese folklore suggests that the kappa has only been seen in Japan, with “[s]ome sightings on mainland Asia” (277); yet in Goto’s novel, a kappa appears on the Alberta prairies after Gerald moves away. Critics have yet to note the correlation between the kappa’s emergence and Gerald’s disappearance in the text. Additionally, scholarship on *The Kappa Child* overwhelmingly celebrates the kappa as a subversive figure who embodies a productive model of relating to the landscape. Kang frames the kappa as “a trope of transnational possibility” without problematizing the fact that it is “neither indigenous to Canada nor to North America” (“Water” 29). Beeler similarly celebrates

the kappa without recognizing the colonial implications of the kappa as an “image of the East [...] superimposed onto a western Canadian geography” (67). Kim also does not interrogate the kappa’s complicity in colonial processes, even though her essay is part of a broader examination of how representations of trickster figures may “conceal the colonial violence that has been enacted upon First Nations cultures, even in claiming to draw attention to these cultures” (290). Like Kang and Beeler, Kim reads the kappa as a productive figure, asserting that “[t]he migration of the Japanese kappa [...] gives us a way of imagining harmonious coexistences that do not resort to strategies of colonial violence” (297). Departing from these critics, I read the kappa as a figure that replaces Gerald on the prairies and that provides an alternative mode of accessing the water the narrator needs, physically and emotionally, to survive. In doing so, the kappa implicitly participates in colonial violence against the landscape and its Indigenous inhabitants.

By positioning Gerald and the kappa in relation to each other, the novel suggests that both figures embody the possibility of Japanese-Canadian indigenization on the prairies. The first time the narrator visits the creek with Gerald, she feels a “webbed hand” tap her cheek, hears a “[w]et, trickly sound” like laughter, and smells a “[w]aft of algae” (Goto, *Kappa* 168) – all signs that suggest the kappa is nearby. But when the narrator turns over, she realizes that she is facing Gerald, who says that she had fallen asleep. Early in the novel, then, the text juxtaposes Gerald, a figure with Indigenous ties to the land and access to natural sources of water, with the kappa, a Japanese figure that, like the narrator’s family, seeks to indigenize on the prairies. Significantly, it is only after the narrator rejects Gerald that the kappa comes to the family’s aid by providing the water they need to grow Japanese rice. After the narrator recalls the water-stealing incident that

led to Gerald's departure, her next memory focuses on an unusually rainy summer that allows Hideo's rice to finally grow. She recalls how raindrops "as full as muscat grapes" fell and her father's "tambo flourished" while the potatoes, wheat, and barley on neighbouring farms "drown[ed]" and "rott[ed]" (226-7). Hideo "didn't need his nasal spray to help him breathe" that summer (227), for his nostalgic desire to transform Alberta into Japan comes true. As Kang argues, "[t]he kappa steps in [...] as an embodiment of hope, healing, and an expanded worldview" to provide the "living water" that Hideo cannot give ("Water" 31).

The kappa may embody a more productive alternative to the landscape than Hideo, but it still participates in colonialism by transforming the prairie landscape. Curiously, Kim claims that "[t]he transplantation of the rice, *with the exception of the one year when it flourishes*, represents an impossible set of cultural relations that operate through imposition and ahistoricism, and that radically differ from those embodied by the kappa" (297, emphasis added). In contrast to Kim, I argue that the rainy summer that allows Hideo's rice to flourish represents the *apotheosis* of an impossible set of ahistorical cultural relations imposed on the dry prairie landscape. Moreover, these cultural relations do not differ from, but rather epitomize, those embodied by the kappa. It is telling that the narrator discovers footprints in the tambo that suggest "a gleeful creature had ran jubilantly over every inch of the amazing wetness, jumping, leaping, dancing, stepping exquisite toes, perfectly webbed" (Goto, *Kappa* 228). Declaring that they are kappa footprints, Hideo wonders: "But how? [...] [I]n this country, this climate? Where would it have come from? Emigrated like us?" (229). The text never confirms whether or not the kappa is responsible for the unusually wet weather, but it seems likely

given that the creature needs water to survive and is notorious for using its magical powers to cause mischief. The kappa thus achieves what Hideo cannot: it transforms the dry prairie landscape into lush rice paddies. Although the kappa is a kind of savior for the narrator and her family, its playful rain dance problematically recalls Indigenous ceremonies performed to bring rain and yield crops. Kim claims that the kappa is able to “live alongside Blackfoot tricksters without claiming the social imagination in absolute terms” (297), but in this scene, the Japanese creature seems to replace Indigenous mythological figures associated with rain and crops. Indeed, the narrator suggests that the “sluggish brown” Old Man River – which, as Kim points out, is named after a Blackfoot trickster also known as Naapi (296) – is too far north to provide water for the farm (Goto, *Kappa* 126). The kappa thus provides the narrator’s family with water that the land – and by extension, its Indigenous tricksters – cannot.

Constant Craving: Cucumbers, Queer Desire, and Diasporic Longing

The kappa is often read as subversive because the text represents the mythological creature as a figure of queer female desire. While a number of critics have explored the narrator’s adult relationship with the kappa in terms of queer desire, scholars have yet to provide an in-depth discussion of smell’s role in this relationship. I argue that the scents associated with the kappa – particularly those linked to water – mediate queer desire in the novel. These scents also form the basis for an embodied sense of diasporic longing that contrasts with the stagnant form of nostalgia sustained and symbolized by Hideo’s blocked nasal passages. In other words, the kappa’s scents provide a model for how Japanese Canadians may connect with distant homelands and new sites of settlement in

meaningful ways in which they ostensibly acknowledge, rather than disavow, their positionality in relation to the landscapes they inhabit, both physically and psychically.

Through scent, the kappa provides the narrator with diffuse connections to a broader sense of diaspora that Gerald, as a hybrid figure three generations removed from Japan, cannot. Years after the summer of unprecedented rainfall, the kappa re-emerges in the narrator's life when she is, yet again, at a low point. Cynical and alone, the narrator has distanced herself from her dysfunctional family and difficult childhood. While collecting shopping carts one night in Calgary's urban core, the narrator stumbles upon a wedding banquet in a Chinatown restaurant and joins the lively feast. Afterwards, the narrator is confronted by the kappa disguised as a bride. The ambiguously-gendered "Stranger" tells the narrator to "[c]onsider the wedding banquet a gift" (Goto, *Kappa* 89). Like Gerald's "gift" of the creek, the kappa's "gift" of the wedding banquet finally provides the narrator with a sense of meaningful connection that has been lacking in her life. But while Gerald's gift of the creek symbolizes a natural connection to the prairie landscape, the kappa's gift of the banquet symbolizes a connection to a sense of diasporic community. The narrator's feasting is an obvious metaphor for how this community helps "nourish" the narrator, but the scents in this scene also provide the narrator with something that the eating itself does not offer: the *desire* to connect with a broader community. The smell of rotting food in an outside dumpster, and not the taste of the wedding feast, produces a sense of longing in the narrator that drives her to join the festivities in the first place; indeed, the smell literally produces the feast. Before discovering the banquet, the narrator encounters a dumpster in an empty alley and is immediately overtaken by its odours: "the sweetness of rotting fruit, souring mustard

greens filling the Dumpster. A waft of hot oil. The smell brought back a body-memory so sudden and intense my stomach fistled with longing. I stood on the sidewalk, incapable of movement” (Goto, *Kappa* 85). As the narrator closes her eyes and inhales the air around her, the city falls silent then grows loud again; when she opens her eyes, she realizes that the building in front of her has transformed into a lively restaurant filled with wedding guests. The narrator’s “body-memory” recalls Cho’s theorization of memory and “smell-taste experience” in the sense that her memory does not seem to be particular to the narrator’s life, but rather, taps into what Cho calls a “transpacific archive of experience” (“Taste” 99). This embodied experience of memory – which opens up, rather than shuts down, the possibility of relationality – is also a “gift” from the kappa to the narrator.

These diffuse connections are intimately linked to queer female sexual desire. After the banquet, the disguised kappa compels the narrator to visit Calgary International Airport and experience “the last total lunar eclipse of the twentieth century” (Goto, *Kappa* 89). In a scene that echoes Naoe’s sexual encounter on the farm in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the kappa seduces the narrator through smell. At the airport, the narrator detects “a particular scent” on the kappa’s breath and becomes “almost dizzy” with the “sudden odor of algae” (121-2). Although she is initially hesitant about following the Stranger’s orders to disrobe, the narrator is compelled to undress after smelling its intoxicating scent: “Smell of rich, green moistness slow-drowning my senses. I took off my clothes” (122). As Kang notes, the kappa engages the narrator in naked sumo wrestling that is “mutually pleasurable” (“Water” 31). When the narrator realizes that “something cool-wet” has “covered [her] in liquid sweetness,” she thinks that the Stranger “came,” not realizing that she has won the match by spilling the water in the kappa’s bowl-shaped head (Goto,

Kappa 124). The kappa rewards the narrator by blowing between her legs in what Kang describes as “a variation of oral sex” (“Ecstasies” 22). The narrator experiences an orgasm that is literally earth-shaking: the stars “glittered and spun,” “[t]ime spiralled and inflated,” and the narrator “wanted to laugh, to weep, to keep this moment forever” (Goto, *Kappa* 124). Afterwards, the “[s]cent of algae” hangs in “a rich cloud among [them]” (124). Although “it wasn’t exactly sexual intercourse” (104), the narrator becomes pregnant with a kappa child. As Kang argues, the kappa child “partakes in a semiotic of queerness that cannot be adequately explained”: it “is implanted through air” in “a strange sort of post-penetrative, quasi-immaculate conception with no males required” and thus destabilizes familiar “social scripts about how babies are made” (“Ecstasies” 21-22). The text thus re-imagines implantation as an alternative model of reproduction that queers heteronormative frameworks of diaspora predicated upon the andro-centric logic of scattering seeds. In Goto’s novel, implantation does not involve insemination, but rather involves a mutually pleasurable form of exchange that is mediated by scent. The narrator’s “alien” pregnancy results from these diffuse connections and represents the intersection of diasporic longing and queer sexual desire.

After her transformative experience at the airport, the narrator develops an insatiable craving for Japanese cucumbers. Kappas are known for having “a fondness for cucumbers” (Goto, *Kappa* 277), and this craving becomes one of the few signs that the narrator is pregnant with the kappa child.⁷¹ Like the wedding feast, Japanese cucumbers symbolize the kappa’s ability to “nourish” the narrator in ways that her family – and

⁷¹ The narrator has “[n]o visible symptoms” of pregnancy (Goto, *Kappa* 99). The narrator’s doctor has “scientific reason to believe that [she] wasn’t pregnant” and suggests that she is experiencing a psychosomatic condition called *pseudocyesis*, or hysterical pregnancy (151). Significantly, the narrator’s sister, Mice, claims that she knows the narrator is pregnant because she “smell[s] [...] like water” (91).

particularly her father – cannot. But again, it is important to point out that it is the scent, not the taste, of Japanese cucumbers that fuels the narrator’s cravings. After the narrator’s orgasmic experience with the kappa at the airport, the creature disappears, leaving behind a “green-wet-smelling leather jacket” (144). Realizing that she “wanted that jacket [...] more than anything [she had] ever wanted before,” the narrator “clutche[s] the scarred jacket to [her] nose as [she] ma[kes] [her] getaway” from airport security (145). Her nose is drawn to something “long, thin, and strangely bumpy” in the pocket (146). Based on the shape, she assumes it is a dildo, but when she pulls it out she realizes that it is a Japanese cucumber. Her immediate reaction is to sniff it: “Brought the fruit to my nose, the rising green of fresh water. My head spun dizzy with a flash of memories not mine. An unknown ache twisted my heart. Tears filled my eyes and longing rose, not from my stomach, but from the belly of my soul” (146-7). Kang, one of the only critics to provide a reading of this passage, briefly mentions this scene to suggest that “[t]ransnationalism [...] makes room for personal readings of nationhood” (“Water” 29-30). In other words, the watery scent of Japanese cucumber, like the smell of the Chinatown dumpster, taps into the “transpacific archive of experience” Cho describes. Immediately, and “[w]ithout a conscious thought, the cucumber was crisp-bit between [the narrator’s] colossal teeth” (Goto, *Kappa* 147). She admits: “I was addicted” (147). The narrator’s cucumber addiction contrasts with her father’s nasal spray addiction because it does not disavow, but rather opens up the possibility of, meaningful exchange with the past and a more productive approach to diasporic longing. Indeed, “the longer [the narrator is] pregnant, the more [her] thoughts are pulled to [her] childhood” (223). These memories, which she has tried to repress, seem to “drown” her at first (125), but she embraces them as the

novel progresses. Through scent, then, the kappa helps the narrator develop diffuse connections with both a diasporic and personal archive of memory that contrasts with the stagnancy of Hideo's nostalgia. The narrator's addiction also contrasts with Hideo's in the sense that it helps her connect with, rather than define herself against, other diasporic subjects, particularly lesbian women. Her desire for Japanese cucumbers leads her to Bernie, a Korean-Canadian grocer who eventually becomes her lover. The same scents that prompt the narrator to engage with memory in a meaningful way thus provide the basis for an alternative diasporic community predicated upon queer female desire and mutual pleasure rather than patriarchal kinship structures that function through fear and abuse. The kappa thus seems to offer "an alternative to violence and self-diminution through the formation of alternative, ostensibly 'post-familial' bonds" (Kang, "Water" 31) that, I argue, are inextricably connected to smell.

Given the kappa's role in the narrator's personal growth, it is no surprise that critics tend to frame the narrator's pregnancy with the kappa child in positive terms. Kang provides the most extensive reading of the kappa pregnancy as productive. In her essay "Water Birth: Domestic Violence and Monstrosity in Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*," Kang contends that the kappa pregnancy "catalyzes [the narrator's] adult process of growing up" (34). Reading the embryonic kappa child as "a synecdoche for the nascent self," Kang suggests that the narrator gains self-confidence with the "emotional midwifery" of her friends and the kappa (41). She further suggests that "[t]his pregnancy is truly 'pro-creation,' advocating the construction of a positive, productive, and rehabilitated sense of self in the wake of abuse by intimates" (41). In her essay "Ecstasies of the (Un)loved: The Lesbian Utopianism of Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*," Kang

frames her analysis in terms of queerness, arguing that the kappa pregnancy dramatizes how “the alien *is* the queer self, is *inside* the self, and slides from being uncomfortable and even grotesque to the acceptable and entirely plausible” (24, original emphasis). As Kang argues, “[g]estation gives rise to [the narrator’s] new self-concept rather than any literal offspring” (24). While the kappa child, like the kappa that implants it, clearly precipitates positive changes in the narrator, these changes are problematically linked to Gerald’s displacement. The text itself hints that the narrator’s addiction to Japanese cucumbers is connected to colonial violence when it is revealed that Hideo is considering planting Japanese cucumbers on his farm. In a climactic scene in which the narrator finally confronts her father about his abusive past, the narrator finds a pamphlet entitled “Hydroponics and You! Farming For The Future” on his table (Goto, *Kappa* 258). As she flips through the pamphlet, the phrase “‘Grow succulent cucumbers’ leaps out from the page and [her] mouth waters” (258). The kappa provides the narrator with the “living water” she needs to survive in the sense that the smell of Japanese cucumber connects her with a sense of diasporic longing, her childhood memories, and an alternative diasporic community based on queer female desire; but as this scene suggests, Japanese cucumbers – like Japanese rice – have the potential to mediate a violent relationship to the landscape. Ultimately, the celebration of the kappa and the kappa child in Goto scholarship risks obscuring the fact that the creature’s presence on the prairies – and by extension, the narrator’s personal growth – is predicated upon Gerald’s absence. Indeed, it is almost as if questions of queer desire and diasporic longing trump other issues relating to indigeneity. So while it is important to acknowledge that the kappa is in many ways a productive

figure that has much to offer the narrator, it is also crucial to situate the text's representation of the kappa within the context of diasporic settlement.

To this end, I want to examine the narrator's attempt at reconciliation with Gerald. As an adult, the narrator is told by Janice that she "really messed up" her son (Goto, *Kappa* 205). The narrator admits that she "tr[ies] not to think of him," as she feels a "lingering vestigial organ of guilt in [her] body cavity" (208). It is significant that, unlike Hideo's blocked cavities, the narrator's cavities are filled with guilt rather than nostalgia. As Kim argues, the narrator wants to "handle" her relationship with Gerald "with care" (301), for she is "deeply entangled with various complicated narratives that refuse easy solutions" (303). Yet the text seems to present an easy solution when, near the end of the novel, the narrator apologizes to Gerald over the phone while he is visiting his mother's farm. Gerald not only accepts her apology, but goes to great lengths to reassure her: "We were children. And our lives were a mess. I forgave you a long time ago. [...] Actually, the move was good for me. Going to my auntie's in Vancouver gave me options I never had in a small town. There were more people I could relate to. I made friends. Grew up. Had lovers. I'm happy, now, so don't worry" (Goto, *Kappa* 240). The text seems to suggest that Gerald, unlike the narrator, has easily moved on from the past. Scholars have yet to interrogate the apparent ease with which Gerald forgives the narrator. Kang goes so far as to suggest that Gerald might be gay and therefore may have benefited from moving to metropolitan Vancouver where he would have had "choices he never had in a small town, including autonomy, an accepting community, and access to lovers" ("Ecstasies" 26). While it is certainly possible that Gerald's relocation has positive outcomes, his departure is inextricably connected to the narrator's participation in colonial practices.

The text's representation of Gerald's acceptance and forgiveness thus risks obscuring the harmful effects that diasporic settlement may have on people with Indigenous ties to the land.

The novel seems to draw attention to this issue when the narrator shifts from wallowing in guilt to taking responsibility for her actions toward Gerald. After her phone conversation with Gerald, the narrator seems committed to reconciling with her childhood friend, yet she misses the opportunity to meet up with him before he returns to Vancouver. When Gerald leaves the narrator his phone number with a message encouraging her to call him, she realizes that he has given her "another chance" (Goto, *Kappa* 262).⁷² Moreover, she realizes: "I have choices. I do" (262). The narrator seems to recognize that she is not a passive subject who lacks agency in her relationship with Gerald, but rather, is an active participant in diasporic settlement who has the ability to make choices about the way in which she relates to the landscape and its inhabitants. Yet the choice the narrator makes after recognizing her agency and renewing her commitment to Gerald requires interrogation: rather than phoning her childhood friend, she participates in an idyllic fantasy of Japanese-Canadian indigenization. In a scene that echoes the narrator's encounter with the kappa at the Calgary airport during the lunar eclipse, the narrator gathers with her best friends, lesbian couple Genevieve and Midori, and her new lover, Bernie, to watch the last conjunction of the century. When raindrops "as big as [...] Muscat grape[s]" begin to fall, the narrator looks to the cloudless sky and wonders where the rain is coming from (Goto, *Kappa* 275). She receives no verbal answer, but the appearance of a group of kappas, which emerge from the ground beneath her feet,

⁷² The deferral of the narrator's reunion with Gerald recalls the deferral of Mala's reunion with Asha at the end of *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

suggests that the creatures are responsible for the rainfall. The droplets fall “soft as kisses” and the women “drink from the skies” as they run barefoot through the grass:

Moon to sea, sea to moon, earth to sky, earth to water. We leap, bound, in the sweetness, our laughter. Soaring, we leap skyward, leave perfect footprints in the rich mud. New green shoots of life twine at our feet, rising leafy in the warm night air. And in the collage of green, the movements of our bodies, I can see kappa rising from the soil. Like creatures waking from enforced hibernation, they stretch their long, green limbs with gleeful abandon. Skin moist, wet, slick and salamander-soft, kappa and humans dance together, our lives unfurling before us. And the water breaks free with the rain. (275).

The novel’s final passage frames this utopic scene as a gleeful celebration of rebirth for both the narrator and the kappas.

Without exception, critics read the novel’s final scene in positive terms. Pilar Cuder-Dominiquez contends that in this passage, “[n]ature and nurture are finally in harmony”: the friends represent a sisterhood that does not depend on biological ties and the kappa gives its symbolic blessing to the two lesbian couples (121). Kang similarly claims that the image of kappas “emerg[ing] after the rain, banishing drought” suggests that “a lesbian utopia requires the irrigation of self-love” which, in turn, produces “mental landscapes ‘wet with possibilities’” and “a community of empowered women who love each other without fear from within and without” (“Ecstasies” 16). For Kang, the scene also celebrates multicultural difference, as “[t]he kappa’s presence acts (not unlike water) as a solvent, bringing together disparate ethnicities” (“Water” 32). Kim also seems to

justify the celebratory nature of the text's final scene. She contends that the narrator's friendship with Gerald cannot be "fully actualized [...] until [she] can be sure that she is capable of true friendship"; for this reason, the narrator "strives towards a more hopeful future" at the end of the novel (303). Kim thus reads the novel's "unarguably [...] optimistic" ending as "a clear moment of hope and a sign of the kappa's effectiveness" (301).

By failing to interrogate the conclusion's unequivocal celebration of Japanese-Canadian indigenization, these scholars overlook how the novel's final scene reifies colonial violence in ways that trouble its hopeful message. The concluding scene problematically suggests that the kappa's "effectiveness" essentially lies in its ability to indigenize Japanese Canadians on the prairies. The image recalls the rainy summer when Hideo's Japanese rice grows, but in this scene, multiple kappas dance in the rain and emerge from the ground. The kappas thus seem to have indigenized by implanting themselves directly in the soil. By engaging in another rain dance, the kappas also continue to transform the Alberta landscape in the image of Japan and ostensibly replace Indigenous mythological figures on the prairies.⁷³ The final rain dance also differs from the earlier one in the sense that the kappas dance alongside humans, indigenizing them in the process. As the narrator and her friends dance with the kappas, "green shoots of life

⁷³ The novel's final scene echoes an earlier moment in the text when the narrator imagines a future world ruled by myths rather than humans. She states that when "humans are gone, our myths will come alive, wander over the remnants of our uncivilization": "Kappa, water dragons, yama-uba, oni. Selkie, golem, lorelei, xuan wu. The creatures we carry will be born from our demise and the world will dream a new existence" (Goto, *Kappa* 223). Kang celebrates this "multicultural vision," arguing that it "implies that an older, homogeneous, and rigidly patriarchal order should be supplanted by a less hierarchical, more fluid, democratized perspective" ("Water" 41). According to Kim, the novel's vision of a future "in which global mythologies are able to coexist [...] suggests that cultural stories may be able to teach us how to construct more hospitable futures" and "asks us to consider how such stories and those who tell these tales are located within landscapes" (294-5). This may be the case, but it is significant that Indigenous tricksters are conspicuously absent from the narrator's list, and by extension, her imagined future.

twine” around their feet, literally rooting them in the landscape in ways that Naomi could only dream about in *Obasan*. It is difficult to read this scene in relation to Gerald without suggesting that his act of forgiveness somehow condones the indigenization of the narrator and the kappas. Problematically, *The Kappa Child* seems to mobilize reconciliation to sustain the fantasy of Japanese-Canadian indigenization and is therefore limited in its ability to envision a model of meaningful exchange with the prairie landscape and its Indigenous inhabitants.

As I have argued in this chapter, *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and *The Kappa Child* represent smell as a key mode through which diasporic subjects relate to the Canadian landscape; the characters’ relationships to scent thus reflect how they engage with their new site of settlement. In many ways, Goto’s representations of smell complicate Kogawa’s approach to diasporic settlement. While the brief descriptions of the scent of wild flowers hint at Naomi’s transforming relationship to the Alberta landscape in *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* foregrounds the metaphors of smell to explore what cultivation signifies for Japanese Canadians living in post-internment prairie landscapes. *Chorus of Mushrooms* suggests that engaging directly with the odorous byproducts of indigenization and repressed traces of cultural difference is much more productive than attempting to sanitize them in an effort to assimilate. But as I have argued, the text’s representation of Naoe as an agent of freedom and mobility reinscribes colonial violence and reveals the need to reconcile postmodern feminist frameworks with the complex issues surrounding diaspora and indigeneity. *The Kappa Child* demonstrates a greater awareness of these complicated issues and mobilizes smell to draw attention to the many factors that mediate diasporic settlement for Japanese Canadians. Unlike *Obasan* and

Chorus of Mushrooms, *The Kappa Child* suggests that diasporic settlement is shaped by diffuse connections to the homeland of Japan as much as it is by diffuse connections to sites of settlement in Canada, and it re-imagines the metaphors of smell and diasporic nostalgia to underscore the importance of opening oneself up to relationality. In an attempt to provide an alternative model of diasporic settlement, the novel suggests that engaging with the kappa and its evocative scents leads to productive forms of diasporic longing and the development of alternative diasporic communities predicated upon queer female desire, pleasure, and reproduction. Although *The Kappa Child* attempts to reconcile this alternative approach to diasporic settlement with the text's Indigenous presence, it is limited by its endorsement of Japanese-Canadian indigenization. So while *The Kappa Child*'s complex representation of diasporic settlement complicates *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Obasan* in many ways, it demonstrates the limits of reconciling queer feminist diasporic frameworks with critical approaches that interrogate the relationship between diaspora and indigeneity. But if, as I have argued, smell offers a productive metaphor for imagining relationality and meaningful forms of exchange, then it may provide a valuable framework for re-imagining the complex relationship between diaspora and indigeneity in the future.

Chapter Three

Pungent Pathologies: Smell, Disease, and Diasporic Subjectivity

in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*

Introduction

In her 2001 essay “Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gaps of History,” Chinese-Canadian writer Larissa Lai investigates how “the racialized and diasporized subject” experiences the “disposal of history” in the “assimilationist/multiculturalist era” (45).¹ Although Lai rarely invokes the term “diaspora” in her work, much of her writing explores the complexities of diasporic subjectivities.² In this chapter, I read Lai’s 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl* as a literary text that theorizes the links between smell and diasporic subjectivity. Of all the novels I study in this dissertation, *Salt Fish Girl* is perhaps the most experimental in how it uses smell to represent the diffuse connections that shape diasporic subjectivities. As I argued in the Introduction, I use diffuse connections to describe intersubjective interactions mediated by scent that emerge in relation to diaspora. Reading diasporic subjectivities in terms of diffuse connections emphasizes how a range

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published as part of my article “Diffuse Connections: Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*” in the journal *Canadian Literature* (2011).

² In addition to being a novelist, Lai is a poet, essayist, political activist, and academic scholar. Her work, which spans across many different genres, often critiques the ongoing historical injustices faced by marginalized communities. Her first novel, *When Fox Is A Thousand*, was first published in 1995. She won an Astraea Foundation Emerging Writers Award in 1995 and her first novel was shortlisted for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award. *Salt Fish Girl* was nominated for the James T. Tiptree Jr. Award for “gender-bending sf” in 2002 and the Sunburst Award for a Canadian novel in 2003. She has also published a number of chapbooks and poetry collections, including *Sybil Unrest* (co-authored with Rita Wong), *Eggs in the Basement*, and *Automaton Biographies*, all published in 2009. In addition to publishing numerous works of poetry and short fiction, she has written cultural criticism, literary essays, and academic journal articles engaging with current social and political issues. Lai has a B.A. in Sociology from the University of British Columbia, an M.A. in Creative Writing from The University of East Anglia, and a PhD in English from the University of Calgary, which she completed in 2006. She is currently an Assistant Professor in Canadian Literature in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia.

of affects and experiences connected to different times and spaces blend together and mutually constitute each other in ways that shape diasporic subjectivities.

Lai also represents diasporic movement in terms of diffuse connections. As I noted in the Introduction, dominant discourses often rely on reductive frameworks of diffusion to frame racialized diasporic communities in Canada as entities that spread out from a foreign origin point, permeate national and personal boundaries, and contaminate the supposedly pure Euro-Canadian population. Lai complicates such frameworks by suggesting that diasporas emerge through complex migratory processes that reflect smell's complication of linear movement from a single point of origin. In her 2004 essay "Future Asians: Migrant Speculations, Repressed History & Cyborg Hope," Lai describes *Salt Fish Girl* as a "fictive history of the present for people like [her] to make sense of the world" (171). By "people like her," Lai means "people who come from histories of travel and migration, people who are caught in various, often contradictory, positions with regards to the politics of race, class, gender, sexuality, the body etc., people who are somehow marked as 'other,' as different" (171). Lai is acutely aware of how her own relationship to diaspora informs her work. Born in La Jolla, California in 1967 to parents who emigrated from Hong Kong, Lai grew up in St. John's, Newfoundland and has lived primarily on Canada's west coast since the 1990s.³ Indeed, she often holds up her own history as an example of how diasporic trajectories subvert clear origins and linear migrations. In "Future Asians," she asks: "What would a place of origin mean for me? What would I consider home?" (171). Lai understands these places as "pitstops on a journey [her] family has been on for a number of generations [...] that has sent it all over

³ Lai's father, Tyrone Lai, is a university professor at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. Her mother, Yuen-Ting Tsui, is an independent scholar and writer. In essays such as "Future Asians," Lai acknowledges that she enjoys a certain level of privilege that some immigrants do not.

the world” (171). With *Salt Fish Girl*, Lai aimed to “create a myth of origins for girls that travel, girls who come from many places at once”; in other words, she wanted to create a myth that was “liberating” in its denial of “racial purity and the primacy of the citizen tied to the land” (173).

A number of Lai’s creative and critical works contain provocative descriptions of scent, but more than any other text, *Salt Fish Girl* represents odour as a central dimension of diasporic subjectivity.⁴ Not only are the novel’s two primary narratives organized around smell, but their interweaving structure also reflects the diffuse blending of time and space that shapes diasporic subjectivities. One storyline follows Nu Wa, a half-fish, half-woman from Chinese mythology who creates humans out of the reeking mud of the Yellow River and later lives as a human in nineteenth-century South China, where she falls in love with a girl who smells of salt fish. Another storyline follows Miranda Ching, a young “Asian” girl living in Serendipity, a post-national, consumer-capitalist city that resembles a near-future Vancouver.⁵ Haunted by memories of a distant past and marked by the pungent smell of durian fruit, Miranda is diagnosed with a condition known as the “dreaming disease.”⁶ In the novel, scent links Nu Wa and Miranda’s storylines together. The smell of durian, which marks Miranda’s body as a sign of her so-called disease, is a physical trace of her connection to Nu Wa, whom she dreams about at night. According to Lai, scents “tap in to a visceral, bodily sense of memory, that kind of immediate connection one gets to a moment in the past when one is confronted by scent” (“Future”

⁴ *When Fox is a Thousand* also features a number of significant olfactory moments, but is not explicitly organized around smell like *Salt Fish Girl*. Lai’s creative essay “The Sixth Sensory Organ” (1996) is in many ways a precursor to *Salt Fish Girl* as it explores the links between smell, memory, and embodiment.

⁵ The text describes Miranda as “Asian” (Lai, *Salt* 23) but specifically racializes her as Chinese.

⁶ Grown primarily in Southeast Asia and consumed widely in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, durian is a hard, spiky, football-sized fruit with a creamy texture and subtle flavour but notoriously pungent odour (Paul Lai 177).

173). For Lai, this connection reaches “beyond the moment of birth to those moments in the past experienced by those who have gone before us”; in other words, smell provides access to a sense of history that is not factual, but is “experienced in and written on the body” (“Future” 173). Miranda’s durian odour mediates her embodied relationship to Nu Wa and thus connects her to a broader sense of Chinese diasporic history that is not part of her daily life in Serendipity. In this chapter, I read Miranda and Nu Wa’s interconnected lives in terms of diffuse connections.

Lai has written extensively about her representation of smell in *Salt Fish Girl*, and her comments are useful for understanding diaspora as a condition of subjectivity.⁷ She specifically uses smell in *Salt Fish Girl* to explore “the things we repress in order to enter mainstream culture” (“Future” 172-3). For Lai, history “relies on” subjective memories of the past, and smell – “the most evocative of the senses” – is “linked to memory in a very emotional, intimate kind of way” (“Future” 172). Lai thus turns to smell in *Salt Fish Girl* “to mine a history that has been largely unwritten and is in the process of being forgotten” (“Future” 172). Lai also believes that smell “is a powerful means by which the mainstream denigrates its others, particularly racialized and sexualized others,” as “foreign” foods and women’s genitalia are both “supposed to stink” (“Future” 172). Exploring what she considers the two primary ways of relating to smell – a “hegemonic, oppressive one that wants to deny and obliterate and a progressive, liberatory one that wants to acknowledge and reclaim” – Lai uses smell as a trope in the novel “to question the disgust we feel for those who are afflicted by history, those who carry the memories

⁷ Lai has addressed her writing strategies in a number of essays, including “Political Animals and the Body of History” (1999) and “Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gaps of History” (2001). I focus primarily on her essay “Future Asians” here not only because it was published more recently, but also because it explicitly addresses her approach to writing *Salt Fish Girl* and contains her most extended reflections on smell.

we were meant to forget at the moment of assimilation” (“Future” 172-3).⁸ Lai’s comments not only provide useful groundwork for theorizing the relationship between scent and diasporic subjectivity; they also provide valuable insight into why she and other Canadian diasporic women writers may be turning to smell to explore this relationship in literature.

Most scholars cannot avoid grappling with Lai’s innovative representation of scent when writing about *Salt Fish Girl*, yet few make smell the primary focus of their work. Most sustained analyses of smell in Lai’s novel explore the connections between scent, memory, and the dreaming disease. However, critics have yet to situate Miranda’s so-called disease within the long history of pathologizing discourses that frame “the Chinese” as the carriers of infectious diseases. In this chapter, I read Miranda’s illness – also known as “the Contagion” – in terms of these discourses. This chapter thus moves beyond colour-based discourses of the “yellow peril” by focusing on how dominant discourses in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century mobilized representations of smell to construct Vancouver’s Chinatown as a site of contagion. Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection, I suggest that these narratives relied on olfactory discourses to pathologize “Chineseness” and construct “the Chinese” as essentially external to Canada despite their crucial role in building the nation. Exploring contemporary discourses of what Nicole Shukin calls “pandemic speculation” (207), I argue that this logic continues today in the ostensibly tolerant era of official multiculturalism. By emphasizing the olfactory dimensions of pandemic discourse and its particular

⁸ Lai suggests that “we repress these moments because they frighten us” and because “we have to repress them to be able to function as subjects in contemporary society” (“Future” 173). As a result, “we can only know the past in glimpses and glimmers” that are frightening and disgusting, but also comforting – albeit tenuously comforting because “something uncontrollable and disconcerting” lies just beneath the surface (“Future” 173).

relationship to essentialist notions of “Chineseness,” *Salt Fish Girl* underscores the anxieties surrounding permeable boundaries and diasporic movement. I also read Lai’s representation of diasporic subjectivities in terms of diffuse connections. Lai emphasizes the complex spatio-temporal dimensions of diasporic subjectivities by emphasizing how pathologizing discourses affect Miranda on a physical and psychic level and shape her relationship to her diasporic memories in significant ways. Ultimately, I contend that Lai defamiliarizes past and present forms of racialized pathologization and exploitation by reframing these issues through the lens of the future. Further, I read Lai’s speculative future as a counterpoint to the fear-mongering discourse of pandemic speculation. Through the figure of Evie Xin, a fishy-smelling clone whose genetically-modified DNA blurs species lines, Lai challenges Western fears of human-animal intimacy that inform pandemic discourse and imagines alternative modes of forging connections through scent.

Beyond the Yellow Peril: Smell and Disease in Vancouver’s Chinatown

Before turning to a discussion of *Salt Fish Girl*, it is useful to consider how essentialist constructions of “Chineseness” and pathologizing discourses of contagion shaped racism towards early Chinese immigrants in Canada.⁹ According to Peter Ward, “a strong note of contempt for the Chinese began to creep into western thought” in the early-nineteenth century (4). Ward explains that “[w]hen viewed charitably, China seemed a curious, exotic, irrational place,” but popular accounts repeatedly suggested that

⁹ It is worth noting that Euro-Canadians also have a particular relationship to disease. In order to construct themselves as “native” to the land they settled, European colonizers mobilized diseases such as smallpox in an attempt to wipe out Indigenous populations. Yellow peril discourse implies that Euro-Canadians are indigenous to Canada and that “the Chinese” are colonizing their land. The pathologization of racialized populations who claim space on Euro-Canadians’ “native” land refigures the colonial project of bringing hygiene to racialized others in distant lands. I discuss the politics of colonialism, settlement, and indigenization in more detail in Chapter Two.

China had grown decadent and was characterized by “ignorance and perversity, cruelty and poverty” (4). Chinese immigrants were a significant presence in British Columbia from 1858 and onward, when men came to Canada seeking work in the gold rush, and later, in the mining, service, railroad, and canning industries (14-16).¹⁰ Racism towards Chinese immigrants in Canada was in many ways socio-economically motivated. Chinese workers were actively recruited as a cheap and abundant labour source for building the railroad, but many Euro-Canadians resented their presence and did not want them to permanently settle in Canada. Chinese labourers were considered a threat to “the west coast workingman” because, as Ward argues, many assumed that “the Chinese” had certain racial characteristics that made them well suited for menial work and it was widely believed that they were willing to accept lower wages than their Euro-Canadian counterparts (10).

Racist conceptions of Chinese immigrants in Canada were informed by yellow peril discourse.¹¹ According to Ward, yellow peril discourse framed “the Chinese” as an impending threat to the Euro-Canadian nation, for “[e]ver since Napoleon had warned of

¹⁰ Andrew Onderdonk, the American contractor for British Columbia’s section of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, hired Chinese railroad workers from the United States in 1880 and 1881 and requested that other labourers come over from China to work on the project (Con et al 20-1). In the four years of railroad construction alone, over 17,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in Canada; 10,000 of these immigrants came directly from China (22). An 1880 report from British Columbia’s government requested the restriction of Chinese immigration, the implementation of a provincial head tax, and the prevention of naturalization for Chinese immigrants, but Prime Minister John A. MacDonald denied the requests (49). According to MacDonald, Chinese workers were necessary for building the railroad (49). Although Ward mentions the presence of Chinese women in Canada – he addresses the stereotype that “most Chinese women were prostitutes and concubines” (8) – social histories written by critics like Ward tend to focus on “the Chinese” as a population of male sojourners in Canada. Lai’s novel provides an alternative version of this history by representing women’s diasporic subjectivities.

¹¹ It is important to note that yellow peril discourse is not exclusively associated with “the Chinese.” As Ward notes, “[d]uring the first half of the nineteenth century western thought tended to blur the many distinctions between China and Japan”; both countries were “considered part of the larger Asian whole, a mysterious, over-crowded, and backward society” (98). The yellow peril, which “seemed [to be] a single Oriental threat to the West,” thus applied to the Japanese as well as the Chinese (98). Yellow peril discourse particularly targeted the Japanese during the Second World War. For a discussion of racism towards early Japanese immigrants in Canada, particularly in relation to the Second World War, see Chapter Two.

the sleeping giant of the East, the twin themes of race war and Asian inundation had recurred in European thought” (6). Dominant discourses in British Columbia framed “the Chinese” as a backward, inferior, and unassimilable “alien” presence in Canada and “repeatedly emphasized that widespread poverty, loathsome disease, cruel vanities, and low regard for life were all characteristic of Chinese society” (5). Chinese immigrants were thus thought to pose an imminent threat to the physical – and by extension, moral – health of Euro-Canadians.

Yellow peril discourse perpetuated the notion that whiteness was connected to health and cleanliness and darkness was linked to dirt and disease.¹² In her study of Canada’s “social hygiene” movement, Mariana Valverde contends that Chinese immigrants were thought to pose a threat to Euro-Canadians’ “clean souls and bodies,” bodies that were both “symbolically and literally white” (104). Maria Noëlle Ng also explores the connections between Chinese immigrants, darkness, and disease in her reading of literary representations of Chinatown. Arguing that the area of East Pender and Main Street in Vancouver was linked to the “saffron coloured sons of the East,” Ng explains that “[t]he colour saffron, an evocation of the yellow peril, became a short-hand description of the Chinese, whose qualities include immortality, the ‘herd instinct,’ and a propensity to contract and spread infectious diseases” (160).¹³

While visualist discourses clearly informed racist characterizations of Vancouver’s Chinatown and its inhabitants as dirty and diseased, concerns over

¹² I discuss Anne McClintock’s influential work on this topic later in this chapter and in Chapter One. For more on the visualist dimensions of “Asianness” within a North American framework, see Eleanor Ty’s *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (2004).

¹³ As Ng notes, Sax Rohmer’s popular Fu-Manchu stories, published in the early-twentieth century, contributed to the image of Chinatown as a “dark, dangerous, and dingy area inhabited by aliens such as the Chinese” (161).

contamination by “the Chinese” were also framed in olfactory terms.¹⁴ Moving beyond the visualist framework of the yellow peril reveals that anxieties over the spread of infectious diseases from the uncontainable East were inextricably linked to the fear of odours associated with Vancouver’s Chinatown. More than symbols of contagion, these scents were thought to be potent miasmas that carried the infectious diseases of the East. Smell was therefore framed as a primary mode through which contagion would spread from “the Chinese” to Euro-Canadians; in other words, smell was both the medium and the model of infection.

Early representations of Vancouver’s Chinatown as a site of contagion reflect Euro-Canadian anxieties about the permeability of national and bodily boundaries. As Kay J. Anderson argues, “[f]rom the late 1880s, the enclave of Chinese settlement at Vancouver’s Pender Street was an important site through which white society’s concepts about the Chinese were constituted and reproduced” (4).¹⁵ One of the most persistent

¹⁴ Interestingly, Ng’s critique of contemporary representations of Chinatowns includes a number of olfactory descriptions. Although she comments on them in passing, she does not make any larger arguments about smell’s role in the novels or its broader significance in representations of Chinatown. For instance, in her discussion of how Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* reifies Rohmer’s orientalist depictions of Chinatown, Ng focuses on a particular scene that abounds in olfactory metaphors. In a darkened room, the cruel head of a Chinese-Canadian criminal organization accuses a young man of “sniffing after white women’s asses,” and his potential sexual relationship with a white woman is described as “a rotten fish matched with a stinky shrimp” (Lee qtd. in Ng 165). Ng reads the latter description as “a vulgar reference to the male and female private parts” (165). Ng also describes how, when the leader in Lee’s novel tries to assert order over the room full of rowdy men, he calls them “mangy dogs sniffing after the stink of a dirty she-bag” (Lee qtd. in Ng 165-6). Ng focuses on how Lee portrays the Chinese men as hyper-sexualized beings “obsessed with fornication who need to verbalize this obsession abusively” (166). In her reading of Lin-Chandler’s *The Healing of Holly-Jean*, Ng cites a description of a London Chinatown gang that also echoes Rohmer’s work: “Criminal: drugs, prostitution, gambling, bonded labour, illegal migration, and extortion from the miasma of Chinese commerce” (Lin-Chandler qtd. in Ng 171). The olfactory metaphor in this quotation is particularly telling. According to the *OED*, a miasma is a “[n]oxious odour rising from putrescent organic matter, marshland, etc which pollutes the atmosphere” and was once “believed to be the carrier of various infections” (“Miasma,” *n*, def. 1). Lin-Chandler’s description of Chinatown’s illegal activities as a kind of miasma thus suggests that the inherently immoral activities of “the Chinese” threaten to corrupt the presumably honest and trustworthy activities of European business.

¹⁵ In the 1860s, people from various “races,” including Chinese immigrants and Euro-Canadians, lived together in the small town of Granville on the Burrard Inlet: “Some of the Chinese settlers in Granville lived in wooden shacks around the shore of False Creek near Hastings Street, some lived to the west in the vicinity of Dupont (later Pender) and Carrall streets, and others were sparsely scattered throughout the Old

stereotypes connected to Vancouver's Chinatown was that it was a site of squalor and disease (Ward 7). Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, China was commonly thought to be "ravaged by virulent, disgusting diseases," and in Canada, "the public mind linked Chinese immigrants with the possibility of epidemics" such as smallpox, cholera, leprosy, and syphilis (7-8). According to Monica Chiu, "[t]he attribution of 'dirty' and 'diseased' to the Chinese speaks more clearly to the nation's own preoccupation with moral and medical self-hygiene than to that of the Chinese or other immigrants," as it reveals "its perpetrators' own (self-) loathing of a potentially dark and dirty self" (7). Chiu's statement may refer to the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the United States, but it also resonates in the Canadian context and draws attention to the logic of abjection that shaped Euro-Canadian approaches to Vancouver's Chinatown.

Kristeva's theory of abjection is useful for thinking through Euro-Canadian constructions of Chinatown as a site of disease. In her essay "Approaching Abjection," Kristeva defines the abject as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). The abject "does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules" and thus "disturbs identity, system, [and] order" (4). Since the abject confounds boundaries and disrupts the illusion of

Granville Townsite and environs" (Anderson 63-4). In 1884, when the federal government decided to extend the western part of the railway from Port Moody to Coal Harbour on the inlet, Granville "transformed [...] from a small, rough village of transients into the prosperous new town of Vancouver," which included many discharged Chinese railway workers (64). According to Anderson, what were once relatively peaceful and paternalistic group relations gave way to an increasingly competitive atmosphere (64). Anderson argues that "[m]any saw the primary challenge facing the new town to be the prevention of permanent Chinese settlement" (64). In January 1887, a meeting of Vancouver's citizens at City Hall resulted in the appointment of a committee to create a fund for offsetting the expenses of sending Chinese immigrants "to the place from whence they came" (qtd. in Anderson 66). The group's intimidation strategies resulted in a number of Chinese immigrants leaving Vancouver for other areas of British Columbia (66). An anti-Chinese league was created in February 1887 to prevent Chinese immigrants from relocating within Vancouver's city limits (67). After a public meeting on February 24, a riot erupted which involved destroying the shanties and burning the possessions of Chinese immigrants (67). The government immediately reacted and set to reforming the "mob rule" (68). As Anderson points out, the protection of the reluctant provincial government ironically allowed Chinese immigrants to resettle in Vancouver (68). Many returned to the Carrall and Dupont area, and by 1889, most Chinese immigrants and businesses were located in this area (68). The shacks of labourers were situated just south of this area on the tidal flat on False Creek's western shore (68).

coherent wholeness, it is considered repulsive and is therefore marginalized (4). In a famous passage, Kristeva describes the process of abjecting milk cream, or “that skin on the surface of milk,” writing: “‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since the food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me,’ who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3, original emphasis). Kristeva’s expulsion of the reviled milk cream exemplifies how the abject, which is always-already part of the self, is constructed as a foreign substance and expelled from the body; indeed, it is established as the abject through the very act of expulsion. Within Kristeva’s framework, this process of abjection works to constitute the subject. As Judith Butler explains in her reading of Kristeva, “[t]he construction of the ‘not-me’ as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject” (133). As I noted in the Introduction, these boundaries are central to conventional approaches to Western subjectivity that construct the self as a coherent, unified, hermetically-sealed entity.

Through a process of abjection, Euro-Canadian discourses disavowed the Chinese presence in Canada. Chinese immigrants were already part of the nation – indeed, they had been actively recruited to come to Canada as a key labour source for nation-building projects – but Euro-Canadians refused to accept this and attempted to expel “the Chinese” by constructing them as external to the nation. Dominant discourses repeatedly framed Vancouver’s Chinatown as an “ulcer [...] lodged like a piece of wood in the tissues of the human body, which unless treated must cause disease in the places around it and ultimately to the whole body” (qtd. in Anderson 81).¹⁶ According to the *OED*, an ulcer is

¹⁶ Notably, “the Chinese ulcer” is a common term for syphilis (Rothschild 1458), which, as I noted above, was often associated with early Chinese immigrants in Canada. Even more significant is the condition’s

an “open sore attended with secretion of pus or other morbid matter” and may refer to “[a]ny corroding or corrupting influence; a morally diseased or unsound element; a plague-spot” (“ulcer, *n.*,” def. 1.a. and 2.a). Notably, Kristeva suggests that ulcerous sores exemplify the abject. As she puts it: “A wound with blood and pus [...] *show[s] me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3, original emphasis). Representations of Vancouver’s Chinatown as an ulcer thus underscore the site’s abject status as a threat to the physical and moral health of the nation.

The smells of the so-called ulcer of Chinatown were considered particularly dangerous to the Euro-Canadian nation. Significantly, Kristeva briefly notes in her work that “the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay,” also exemplifies the abject (3). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, smell’s diffuse materiality emphasizes blending and complicates notions of purity and singular origins. Scents associated with the abject may be particularly offensive because they cannot be expelled from the body in the same way that one can, for example, spit out milk cream. Plugging the nasal passages constitutes an attempt to block out abjected odours, but as I noted in the Introduction, this does not remove odours that have already permeated – and indeed, are always permeating – the body with each breath of air. Odours thus constantly threaten to undermine fantasies of the body as a pure, bounded entity. As an abject space, Vancouver’s Chinatown was repeatedly constructed as a foul-smelling site of disease. Moreover, Euro-Canadians invoked conventional discourses of diffusion – which, as I argued in the Introduction,

connection with offensive odours. In his influential 1882 treatise on the science of surgery, physician Edward C. Franklin described “China” ulcers as “[i]chorous, sensitive ulcers, with putrid smell; flat, shallow base with copious discharge” (25). Bruce M. Rothschild suggests that because “early on syphilis became a cultural embarrassment,” the condition was attributed to various nations; in addition to the Japanese naming it the “Chinese ulcer” or “Canton rash,” for instance, the Germans and English called it “the French pox” while the Russians called it “the Polish sickness” (1457-8). The description of syphilis as “the Chinese ulcer” gestures toward the West’s particular history of pathologizing “the Chinese” as a race riddled with diseases.

discursively manage and contain both scent and diasporas – to suggest that “the Chinese” were emanating from a foreign origin point, permeating national and bodily boundaries, and contaminating the supposedly pure Euro-Canadian population. Discourses that constructed Chinatown as an abject space thus framed smell as both the medium and the model of infection.

Significantly, one of the first proposals for a head tax on Chinese immigrants mobilized olfactory discourses to construct Vancouver’s Chinese population as a threat to Euro-Canadians. At the British Columbia Legislative Council in 1871, MP Arthur Bunster proposed “a poll tax of \$50 per head per annum on all Chinese engaged in any occupation in this colony” (qtd. in Con et al 45). To justify the head tax, Bunster argued: “I want to see Chinamen kept to himself [sic] and foul diseases kept away from white people. ... Why when I drive ... past the hovels, the stench is enough to knock me off my seat” (qtd. in Con et al 45, ellipses in original).¹⁷ Bunster also claimed that Chinese immigrants did not pay taxes and that “their smelly baskets” pushed white people off the sidewalk (qtd. in Con et al 45). The desire to segregate “the Chinese” and their diseases is explicitly framed in terms of scent’s ability to assault “white people” and potentially displace them from their position of power.

The threat of infection through smell resonated on both a moral and physical level. Dominant discourses suggested that “the Chinese” had particular modes of living that proved their status as an uncivilized race closer to animals than humans. Newspapers framed Chinese immigrants as mindless cattle whose cohabitation in close quarters reflected a natural “herding instinct” that “directly opposed” Euro-Canadian notions of

¹⁷ The grammatical slippage between the plural “Chinamen” and singular “himself” reflects the ease with which Euro-Canadian discourses reduced Chinese immigrants to singular stereotypes.

“civilized progress, morality and hygiene” (qtd. in Anderson 81). As one letter to the editor put it: “[t]he degraded humanity from the Orient, more beastly than human, live in places that a hog would die in stench of” (qtd. in Anderson 84). By “defy[ing] any writer to pen-picture that awful place” (qtd. in Anderson 84), the letter suggests that both written and visual description are rendered useless when representing the uncontainable habits of Chinatown’s inhabitants. It is crucial to note, however, that although the letter suggests that the area’s repulsive odours exceed modes of representation linked to Western rationalism, this is itself a mode of representing Chinatown as a potentially uncontainable, and therefore threatening, space.

Similar olfactory discourses served to justify the explicit management and containment of Chinatown by judiciary and medical officers. In his report to the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, Commissioner Chapleau claimed that “[t]he Chinese custom of living in quarters of their own – in China towns – is attended with evils, such as the depreciation of property and, owing to their habits of lodging [in] crowded quarters and accumulating filth, is offensive if not likely to breed disease” (qtd. in Anderson 80). Chapleau further claimed that “the air [in Chinatown] is polluted by disgusting offal with which [the Chinese immigrants] are surrounded, and vile accumulations are apt to spread fever and sickness in the neighbourhood which in the end may affect extensive districts” (qtd. in Anderson 81). By connecting Chinatown’s odour to moral depravity, Chapleau echoes earlier narratives that linked miasmas, disease, and morality during the plague in Europe. The positioning of Chinatown’s odours within a moralistic medical framework underscores how dominant discourses used representations of smell to cultivate a sense of moral panic in Vancouver’s Euro-Canadian population. Moral panic describes a large group’s consolidated response to a threat to the “social

body” and the “moral order”; the group imagines the threat to be so dangerous that regulatory processes must be instituted to reaffirm the dominant group’s sense of moral and physical superiority (Hier and Greenberg 140). Moral panic over Vancouver’s Chinatown extended beyond physical and moral corruption to include economic concerns such as the depreciation of property. In 1896, Medical Health Officer Thomas described Vancouver’s Chinatown as a “cesspool,” arguing: “there is abundant evidence of the continued deposition of refuse and filth of all kinds with the result that the atmosphere of the neighbourhood is saturated with evil odours” (qtd. in Anderson 84). Inspectors thus argued for “constant vigilance” in enforcing by-laws regarding Chinatown’s population density and sanitation (qtd. in Anderson 85). As Anderson writes, “the Chinese” threatened to “eventually subvert or contaminate the superior white race if not carefully monitored” (81).

By deflecting from the socio-economic factors and structures of racism that contributed to Chinatown’s material conditions, pathologizing discourses obscured the role that Euro-Canadians played in producing these conditions. As one description of Vancouver’s Chinatown put it: “Let not sympathy of the tender-hearted be aroused by these poor Chinks. They do not live like rats from force of circumstance. They prefer the stench and filth of their vile surroundings” (qtd. in Anderson 81-2). But as Ng notes, “Chinese immigrants were confined, through social and economic measures, to a few streets of undesirable real estate” in order to “prevent any kind of racial contagion” (160). David Chuenyan Lai similarly argues that white landlords refused to sell or lease properties to Chinese immigrants unless the land was on the outskirts of town in areas that did not appeal to Euro-Canadians (34). Consequently, the growing Chinese community was confined to the area at Dupont Street, which was “a depressed, swampy

district” covered by the waters of False Creek at high tide (Anderson 68). Notably, medical health officers did not explain that Dupont Street had not been connected with public sewers when they decried Chinatown’s unsanitary conditions and resulting odours (Anderson 84). As Anderson points out, health inspectors maligned Chinatown’s high population density and poor sanitation without considering “the constraints on Chinese family settlement, jobs and pay discrimination, or the physical condition of the tidal flats” (85). It is also crucial to note that Chinese immigrants may have banded together to form the supportive community structures necessary “in order to survive in a hostile society” (Ng 160). Pathologizing discourses thus concealed the socio-economic factors that shaped Chinatown’s material conditions and obscured the central role that Chinese immigrants played in building the Canadian nation.

Over the course of the twentieth century, attitudes toward Chinatown and Chinese Canadians gradually shifted. After the Second World War, the federal government and B.C. provincial government seemed to embrace more liberal policies towards Chinese citizenship and immigration, but despite this apparent shift in attitudes, policies, and practices, institutional and everyday forms of racism continued to operate in both subtle and obvious ways (Anderson 173-4).¹⁸ For the purposes of this project, I am particularly interested in how the pathologization of “the Chinese” and the spaces they inhabit has been reinvented in the context of official multiculturalism in Canada. In the 1960s and 70s, Chinatown began to be exploited for commercial and political reasons. Anderson argues that in the early days of official multiculturalism, Vancouver’s Chinatown was re-

¹⁸ In the late 1940s, the B.C. government enfranchised Chinese Canadians and repealed the notoriously racist Chinese Immigration Act – or Chinese Exclusion Act – of 1923, but as Anderson notes, the policies that followed continued to restrict Chinese immigration and demonstrated that “concern[s] about the racial purity of Canada still covertly guided political action” (173-4).

signified as a crucial site of “difference” that was supposedly “respected and valued for its contribution to the uniquely Canadian ideal of unity through diversity” (212). As “a powerful symbol of the new Canada” – a multicultural nation where “ethnic groups” are “separate but equal” – Chinatown became a “valuable asset” for the Canadian government, which promoted the neighbourhood as proof of multiculturalism’s success (212). Vancouver’s Chinatown was developed as a key tourist site that, as Anderson notes, was “self-consciously styled” by urban planners to emphasize a palatable version of its “ethnic” character (229). But even in an era that seemed to celebrate tolerance and diversity, Chinatown was subjected to regulation, particularly “when expressions of the ‘peculiar’ Chinese” are “considered less as contributions than as threats to white Canadians” (237).¹⁹ In other words, the appropriation of Vancouver’s Chinatown under official multiculturalism depended upon – and continues to depend upon – the management and containment of difference.

By pathologizing Chinese immigrants who threaten the boundaries of ostensibly Euro-Canadian spaces, contemporary discourses of cultural difference echo racist narratives of the past and gesture toward the limits of multiculturalism’s celebration of “Chineseness.” According to Glenn Deer, “vestigial elements” of yellow peril discourse “continue to haunt us in the symbolic economy” (“New” 31). For instance, the growing

¹⁹ Anderson notes, for example, that in the early 1970s, there was a crackdown on barbecued meats sold in Vancouver’s Chinatown (237). Expressing concern over salmonella poisoning, health officials called for new rules requiring meats to be kept at a certain temperature and stored in special glass ovens; however, merchants declared that there had never been any problems, microbiologists denied the possibility of bacteria in the meats, and other health officials outside Vancouver proclaimed that there had been no documented cases of food poisoning (237-8). According to Anderson, the restrictive rules were changed when barbecued meats were brought to Parliament Hill and “circulated under the noses” of legislators, including then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (238-9). Anderson’s example demonstrates how certain exoticized scents seem to constitute an acceptable sign of difference under Canadian multiculturalism, particularly when they are removed from the specific racialized context – in this case, Chinatown – that otherwise seems to pose a threat to the health of the Euro-Canadian nation.

population of Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants in Vancouver and Richmond, a suburban city within the Greater Vancouver area, has given rise to what Deer calls the “‘new’ yellow peril” (“New” 22).²⁰ Deer contends that “[t]he management of racialized space has shifted from [...] earlier direct tactics for controlling the movements of Asian Canadians,” such as the head tax on Chinese immigrants and the denial of franchise rights, “to discursive and symbolic” strategies (“New” 31). Public controversies suggest that Asian immigrants have unnatural habits and a disregard for their environment and blame the growing Asian population for the “white flight” from certain neighbourhoods and resulting “cultural ghettoization” (“New” 22-3). These controversies recall the narratives of racial panic surrounding early Chinese settlement in Vancouver. So although most Chinese Canadians live in cities and suburbs rather than Chinatowns (Ng 168), “the Chinese” continue to be constructed as a racialized group with unnatural predilections that result in the creation of new cultural enclaves in the suburbs, and these enclaves continue to engender anxieties for Vancouver’s Euro-Canadian population.²¹

Multiculturalist discourses of tolerance and diversity may seem to celebrate cultural difference, but the traces of yellow peril discourse emerge in narratives that construct “the Chinese” as perpetual foreigners who permeate, and thus contaminate, Euro-Canadian spaces. Moreover, as Lai notes in her essay “Corrupted Lineage,” certain aromas – such

²⁰ According to Deer, the press frames migrants from Hong Kong as the new “colonizers” of British Columbia without noting the irony that Hong Kong’s status as a British colony ended in 1997 (“New” 22). The framing of Chinese immigrants as colonizers elides the complex history of European colonization in Canada and the complicated relationship that non-European immigrants have to ongoing colonial processes, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two.

²¹ Malissa Phung similarly argues in her discussion of “Too Asian?”, a 2010 *Maclean’s* article covering “a perceived Asian hyper-enrolment and unfair Asian-white competition in Canadian universities,” that yellow peril discourse continues in the present day (295). Phung notes that the *Maclean’s* article echoes CTV’s 1979 W-5 special “Campus Giveaway,” which reported on “the supposed mass displacement of hardworking white Canadians from highly competitive and lucrative programs such as pharmacy, computer science, engineering, and medicine by foreign international students, who were represented in the segment with images of Chinese Canadian university students” (294-5). For further discussion of the program, see Anderson’s chapter “Chinatown Re-oriented, 1970-1980” in *Vancouver’s Chinatown* (1991).

as the smell of “salt fish, durian, fermented tofu, garlic, [and] anchovies” – are interpreted as “foul odours” and “make it difficult still” for Chinese Canadians “to rent an apartment or buy a condo or otherwise enter any kind of shared living space” (48). Odours associated with “Chineseness” thus continue to be constructed as the abject because they infiltrate ostensibly Euro-Canadian spaces and thus exceed the management and containment of difference.

Processes of abjection not only inform contemporary approaches to “Chineseness” in Canada; they also shape contemporary discourses of global disease. According to Nicole Shukin, the current era of globalization is characterized by “biomobility,” a term that describes how infectious diseases have the potential to “travel rapidly through the social flesh of a globally connected world” (182). Although pandemic discourses assert that impending diseases will “pos[e] an indiscriminate threat to human species life on a global scale,” pandemic frameworks construct particular human and animal populations as the source of those threats that compromise the survival of “humanity” (183). Shukin calls this “pandemic speculation” and suggests that it “works [...] to reinscribe racial difference in the global village” (207). Valorized in multicultural discourse as a symbol of an “ideal multicultural mingling in the world marketplace,” the global village is refigured in pandemic discourse as “a breeding ground of disease that must be quarantined from the space of liberal cosmopolitanism to which it had been intimately articulated but that it now threatens to infect” (185). The global village thus becomes a site of “recalcitrant cultures incarcerated in traditional or ‘backwards’ lifeways,” particularly because these cultures seem to lack clear boundaries between humans and animals (185). According to Shukin, since “future pandemic will by all accounts be zoonotic (animal) in origin,” this lack of human-animal boundaries poses an

ominous threat (184). Echoing the civilizing projects of colonialism, contemporary pandemic discourse pathologizes members of the global village “who live in ‘unhygienic’ intimacy with other species and with one another, positioning them as needing to be enlightened about the new sanitary standards of global citizenship that alone hold hope of averting the leap of disease across species lines” (187). By relying on speculation to mobilize fear, contemporary pandemic discourse inscribes liberal racism (186-7). Like the moral panic produced by earlier discourses surrounding Vancouver’s Chinatown, pandemic speculation “infect[s] [...] well-intentioned, white, liberal-minded, middle-class subjects living in relative security in affluent pockets of the globe” (207). As Shukin argues, “the horror of breached species barriers” is “closely bound up with intolerance for the pathological substance of ethnic alterity” that critics like Slavoj Žižek see “lurking in the ideal of multiculturalist tolerance” (204).²²

Narratives of global pandemic thus reveal the limits of multiculturalist ideologies promoted by countries like Canada. According to Shukin, in contemporary pandemic discourse “[r]acist intolerance reemerges as a visceral, seemingly ‘preideological,’ and thus permissible, response to the excessive alterity of culture and nature” (205). As Shukin notes, “[t]he ugly limits of multiculturalism” are revealed by pandemic origin stories that obscure the West’s role in producing global diseases (205). Significantly, the very networks “valorized in neoliberal discourses of telecommunication and global finance” provide the conditions that allow disease to spread quickly across the globe (184). Although Western biomedicine has yet to clearly determine the causes of SARS and avian flu or create reliable cures for them, pandemic discourse “displaces the

²² See Slavoj Žižek’s “Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism” in *New Left Review* (1997).

pathological nature of global capitalism onto the figure of the ignorant ‘villager’” (212). As Shukin points out in her discussion of mad cow disease, pandemic origin stories place the blame of infection on “ethnic others” in order to deflect from the West’s complicity in spreading disease (204-5).²³ Pandemic origin stories thus serve “as a metaphor for Europe’s infection by ethnic others” (205). In this sense, contemporary pandemic discourses abject “ethnic others,” and in doing so, perpetuate reductive frameworks of diffusion by attributing the source of disease to an external, non-Western origin point that threatens to infect supposedly uncontaminated populations in the Western world.

Western pandemic discourses often construct China as the source of impending global health crises; in doing so, they participate in the ongoing pathologization of “the Chinese.” Noting that China is often constructed as “the ostensible epicenter of disease” (206), Shukin contends that pandemic discourse “repeatedly represents China’s Guangdong province as the breeding ground of zoonosis by virtue, significantly, of the region’s imagined excess of interspecies intimacy and, in the eyes of the West, its ‘sick’ intermingling of human and animal flesh” (209).²⁴ Significantly, most of Canada’s early Chinese immigrants came from China’s Guangdong province (Con et al 7). In Canada, then, contemporary constructions of China as the source of global pandemics resonate with the long history of understanding China – and by extension, Vancouver’s Chinatown – as a site of infectious disease. Shukin notes that in Western pandemic discourse, “Asian ‘wet markets’ – markets selling live poultry and sometimes wild animals – are racially

²³ A 2005 article in the respected medical journal *The Lancet* attributed the spread of mad cow disease to the pathological “ethnic” practice of bone collecting in India (Shukin 204). Shukin notes, however, that this was only one segment in the chain of industrial livestock production, and focusing on it deflects from the suggestion that “animal cannibalism,” or “the agroindustrial practice of feeding rendered remains of ruminants back to livestock,” may have also contributed to mad cow disease (204-5).

²⁴ Shukin notes, for example, that media coverage of the potential avian flu pandemic in 2005-2006 framed the disease as “emanating from the East,” and more specifically, China’s Guangdong province, even though outbreaks occurred – and many poultry populations were culled – in Canada and the Netherlands (206).

pathologized as zoonotic hotbeds” that “deeply offend Western sensibilities by virtue of the seemingly superstitious and callous consumption of the exotic and even endangered animal life they supply” (209). The pathologization of Asian wet markets echoes historical discourses that frame Vancouver’s Chinatown as a cesspool of infectious diseases and continue to haunt approaches to Chinese Canadians today.

Ultimately, contemporary pandemic discourse reinscribes the long-held notion that “the Chinese” are uncivilized “ethnic others” with unnatural, unhygienic habits that produce diseases and thus threaten the health of supposedly uncontaminated populations in the West. On the surface, pandemic discourse may not seem to promote overt racism in the same way that turn-of-the-century descriptions of Vancouver’s Chinatown did, but it perpetuates similar beliefs by justifying racial pathologization through the supposedly neutral and irrefutable discourse of modern Western biomedicine. Similarly, contemporary multiculturalist discourses in Canada seem to promote inclusion, tolerance, and diversity, but anxieties surrounding Chinese-Canadian settlement in the suburbs and other supposedly Euro-Canadian spaces reveals that subtle forms of racism persist in the present. As I noted in my Introduction, Sara Ahmed argues that “multiculturalism can involve a double and contradictory process of incorporation and expulsion: it may seek to differentiate between those strangers whose appearance of difference can be claimed by the nation, and those stranger strangers who may yet be expelled, whose difference may be dangerous to the well-being of even the most heterogeneous of nations” (97). A stranger’s acceptance in the multicultural nation thus depends on whether they can be managed and contained. Smell complicates attempts to manage and contain difference in the multicultural era and provokes anxieties about contamination in a way that echoes earlier fears about Chinatown as a malodorous site of contagion. As I suggested in the

Introduction, some scents are accepted as exoticized, commodifiable forms of difference in the multicultural era, but others – particularly those that infiltrate ostensibly Euro-Canadian spaces – are not. I now want to turn to Lai’s novel *Salt Fish Girl*, a text that explores the relationship between overtly racist turn-of-the-century discourses of racial contamination and contemporary frameworks of pandemic speculation that exist alongside multiculturalist narratives of tolerance and diversity. Lai constellates these historical moments and investigates how their pathologizations of “Chineseness” are inextricably linked.

Regulating Olfactory Boundaries: Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone

While a number of studies discuss Lai’s representation of smell in *Salt Fish Girl*, scholars have yet to consider how the novel’s representation of Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone recalls representations of Vancouver’s ostensibly Euro-Canadian spaces and racialized “Chinese” enclaves, respectively.²⁵ In her critical work, Lai suggests that *Salt Fish Girl* is “a lot more about the present” than the future (“Future” 171).²⁶ “By extrapolating from things that are happening now and projecting into the

²⁵ Although various critics explore representations of scent in *Salt Fish Girl*, Paul Lai’s 2008 article “Mythological Futures and the Olfactory Sense in Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*” is one of the few studies specifically devoted to examining the novel’s representation of scent. His wide-ranging analysis explores how smell “offers a productive analytic for unraveling the novel’s playfulness with genre as well as its critiques of modernity, temporality, capital, biotechnology, the millennial moment, embodied subjectivities, and species boundaries” (167). This chapter builds on Paul Lai’s work, but also differs from his essay in that it aims to situate Lai’s representation of smell and disease within particular histories that frame “the Chinese” as the supposed carriers of infectious disease.

²⁶ When Lai wrote *Salt Fish Girl*, she was “trying to think and narrate through a contemporary moment” that involved a number of major world events, including “the cloning of Dolly the sheep, the arrival of three rusty ships from China on the West Coast of British Columbia carrying around 600 Chinese migrant labourers, Monsanto’s suing of a farmer whose canola crop, probably through natural pollination, had picked up some of Monstano’s altered DNA, the patenting of slightly modified basmati rice by a large Texas corporation, [and] the construction of Celebration, a fully planned ur-American town, by Disney” (“Future” 171-2). Lai’s essay “Asian Invasion vs. the Pristine Nation,” published by *Fuse* magazine in

future,” Lai argues, “we get a vantage point of sorts” (“Future” 172). A number of critics, including Rita Wong, Tara Lee, and Joanna Mansbridge, read the novel’s futuristic setting as a commentary on the capitalist exploitation of racialized, feminized labour. For instance, Wong reads the Unregulated Zone as a “rational extension” of contemporary Free Trade Zones, which feature policies that “exploit and discard labour for the sake of momentary profit” (119). While my analysis of *Salt Fish Girl* builds on these arguments, I read the novel’s juxtaposition of the supposedly scentless Serendipity and odorous Unregulated Zone as a futuristic version of the relationship between Vancouver’s Euro-Canadian spaces and the city’s Chinatown. I thus argue that Lai’s futuristic novel engages with issues surrounding the “historically racialized enclaves” of Vancouver’s Chinatown, rather than “moving beyond” them as Deer suggests (“Remapping” 119). Lai’s representation of Serendipity as an assimilationist space of olfactory neutrality and the Unregulated Zone as an “Asian” space marked by Chinese odours constellates multiple historical moments, and in doing so, underscores how discourses of smell have been, and continue to be, mobilized to pathologize “Chineseness,” and indeed, “Asianness” more broadly.²⁷

Before turning to a discussion of how smell operates in Lai’s future world, it is important to consider Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone’s different relationships to regulation. Run by Saturna, one of the “Big Six” corporations that wield “absolute power” in the novel’s near-future world, Serendipity is a walled city segregated from the Unregulated Zone, a space where “law-abiding corporate citizens [...] are not supposed to

2000, is specifically devoted to critiquing the racist underpinnings of Canada’s approach to the boats of Chinese migrant labourers off the coast of British Columbia in 1999.

²⁷ As I noted in Chapter Two, racist generalizations about “Asians” are often based on stereotypes about “the Chinese.” Lai explores this elision in *Salt Fish Girl*.

go” (Lai, *Salt* 14).²⁸ In the Unregulated Zone, the Big Six run factories where Serendipity’s consumer products are mass-produced by hordes of cloned labourers that have been created using the DNA of “so-called Third World, Aboriginal peoples, and peoples in danger of extinction” (160). A number of critics explore how Lai’s representation of Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone comment on present conditions under global capitalism. As Lee argues, by exploiting racialized, feminized labourers – many of them Asian – in the Unregulated Zone, Saturna relies on a system that mirrors contemporary forms of exploitation (101). Rita Wong further suggests that *Salt Fish Girl* reflects the situation of Canada’s “so-called ‘illegal migrants’” who are systemically prohibited from entering through Canada’s “front door” and then blamed for not fitting the restrictive criteria of the country’s immigration policies (109). In contrast to the Unregulated Zone, Serendipity seems like an idyllic site of comfort and safety, yet it is a highly-regulated space that reflects how difference is managed and contained through contemporary multiculturalist policies. As Deer notes, “[t]he illusory nature of the world of Serendipity is ironically signaled by its very name: this is not a city that encourages improvisation, or leaves the discovery process to happy accidents,” but is a “brutally regulated world” (“Remapping” 139). In Lai’s future world, the management and containment of difference occurs through the regulation of odours.

Serendipity is represented as a space of olfactory neutrality and thus recalls constructions of Vancouver as a clean, pure, and supposedly scentless Euro-Canadian space. According to Lee, Serendipity’s “surface of sanitized efficiency” attempts to “remove evidence of [capitalism’s] workings”; as long as its residents “focus on the

²⁸ Saturna and the other Big Six companies, including Soni, Monsanto, and Nextcorp, recall the names of multicultural corporations like Sony and Monsanto that currently dominate global capitalism.

‘pretty’ exterior of their lives, the machinations of power will remain invisible and by extension, unchallenged” (96). It is unsurprising that Lee emphasizes how the visual operates in Saturna’s attempt to manage and contain difference in Serendipity, for the few textual descriptions of the city emphasize its idyllic appearance.²⁹ For example, the “storefront windows gleamed with cleanliness, behind which beautiful things were displayed,” and the genetically-modified food was “always vibrant bright and regular in shape and colour” (Lai, *Salt* 30-1). As I noted in Chapter One, visual signs of cleanliness and health “translate an olfactory condition into a visual experience: to be shiny is to be odorless” (el-Khoury 26). These visualist descriptions thus construct Serendipity as a space of olfactory neutrality. As I suggested in the Introduction, olfactory neutrality is like whiteness in the sense that it is not unmarked, but rather, is a category that presents itself as unmarked. Serendipity may therefore seem to be unmarked by scent, but this an olfactory identity predicated upon the management and containment of odours that threaten to disrupt its appearance as a sanitized consumer-capitalist space. Notably, the name of the Big Six’s domain of control – the “PEU,” short for Pacific Economic Union (160) – is a homonym for “pee-yew,” a colloquial phrase that expresses disgust at offensive odours. The homonym suggests that despite Serendipity’s sanitized surface, something about the space “stinks” on a figurative level.

The smells of the Unregulated Zone bear the traces of exploitation that Saturna and the Big Six seek to disavow. In the “dirty” and “foul-smelling” Unregulated Zone, the air is “thick with the smell of old petrol, sulphur, urine and rotten food” (Lai, *Salt* 37),

²⁹ Deer takes an even more visualist approach to the novel, arguing that Lai’s dystopic Vancouver interrogates how Vancouver – the “city of glass” – promotes the “illusion” of “transparency, freedom, fusion, and mobility” (“Remapping” 138).

odours associated with urban decay.³⁰ Significantly, the Unregulated Zone’s scents racialize it as an Asian space. Black market shops sell Chinese herbal concoctions that “stink” (40), pungent-smelling durians grow even though it “is not their climate” (14), and cloned factory workers reek of salt fish.³¹ The smells of Chinese herbs, fruit, and fish that mark the streets of the Unregulated Zone recall the odours associated with the pathologized spaces of Vancouver’s Chinatown and Asian wet markets. Saturna prohibits Serendipity’s “corporate-citizens” from entering the Unregulated Zone not only because its odours may offend their sanitized senses, but also because the corporation wants to disavow the relationship between the two spaces; in other words, those in power want to prevent diffuse connections from emerging between Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone’s inhabitants. By abjecting the Unregulated Zone and shielding Serendipity’s residents from its smells, Saturna obscures how Serendipity’s idyllic consumer-capitalist world relies on the exploitation of the Unregulated Zone’s racialized inhabitants.

The Unregulated Zone’s racialized inhabitants are marked by a condition – later known as the Contagion or dreaming disease – that re-imagines olfactory conventions in a number of crucial ways. In the Unregulated Zone:

[T]he barefoot terminally unemployed [...] roamed the streets with glazed eyes and scaly skin, or sat on street corners spewing memories of genocide and smallpox, smart bombs and slow starvation. The odours that accompanied these memories – of steel and blood and shit and old potatoes

³⁰ The “vast city” is also described as “mushrooming up into the pinkish purple sky” (Lai, *Salt* 36). In addition to linking the Unregulated Zone’s post-apocalyptic dimensions to the atomic bombs dropped on Japan during the Second World War, this description highlights the connections between mushrooms and constructions of “Asian,” and particularly Chinese, immigrants as a form of rapidly-growing fungus that threatens the health of Euro-Canadian society. For more on the relationship between representations of mushrooms, fungus, and Chinese and other Asian immigrants, see my discussion of Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* in Chapter Two.

³¹ I discuss the smell of salt fish and its significance in more detail later in this chapter.

– mingled with the smell of uncollected garbage and open sewers. The destitute wandered shoeless and hungry and dreaming with an intensity that only the destitute can dream. (Lai, *Salt* 230-1)

Lai's description of the malodorous Unregulated Zone and its inhabitants recalls early medical officers' reports on the unsanitary conditions of Vancouver's Chinatown; it also evokes representations of racialized homeless populations and people living with mental illness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area that borders on Chinatown.³² As Mansbridge argues, the pathologized scents that mark the Unregulated Zone's inhabitants signal how "traumatic memories of the past [...] leak into the present" (124). Yet these traumatic memories do not simply emerge in the present through scent; the scents associated with these memories also mark the Unregulated Zone's inhabitants' racially-pathologized bodies as a sign of their ability to remember the violence of the past. As Lee puts it, those who suffer from the so-called dreaming disease "are plagued [...] by the stench of capitalism's ghosts" and "the memories of its violence" (97). The odours associated with this condition are deemed threatening because they draw attention to the histories that the Big Six corporations want to repress. As I discuss in more detail below, the corporations construct this condition as a contagious disease, and in doing so, obscure how their exploitative capitalist system contributes to the impoverishment of Unregulated Zone's inhabitants. Lai's novel thus emphasizes how, in the past and the present, those in power mobilize olfactory discourses to pathologize racialized bodies as the carriers of

³² Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is known for its high rates of poverty, mental illness, homelessness, drug use, sex work, and violence. For an in-depth discussion of the problems facing those who live in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, see, for example, Leslie A. Robertson and Dara Culhane's *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (2005).

infectious disease, and in doing so, conceal their role in producing socio-economic disparities.

The Chings, one of the only Asian families living within Serendipity's walls, have assimilated into Serendipity and have a much different relationship to smell than the Unregulated Zone's racialized inhabitants. The Chings were "fortunately installed" in Serendipity before the Big Six imposed strict regulations on immigration (Lai, *Salt* 14). Parents Aimee and Stewart Ching seem to have no connection to the people living outside Serendipity's walls in the Unregulated Zone. The Chings embody the model minority stereotype: they invest themselves in narratives of upward mobility and feel indebted to Saturna for allowing them to live in Serendipity when the world fell into ruin. Aside from suggesting that Aimee's grandmother was originally from Hong Kong (14), the text does not provide specific details about the Chings' diasporic histories. On a formal level, then, the narrative represses the diasporic memories that the Chings themselves had to repress in order to stay in Serendipity. The novel thus draws attention to the act of forgetting that, as Lai has argued, occurs when diasporic subjects assimilate in a new place. Like Lai, Lily Cho suggests that "good" diasporic subjects must "let go" of their connections to past homelands when they settle in a new place ("Taste" 93). The text's suggestion that the Chings live in "a house full of secrets" (Lai, *Salt* 15) hints at the repression involved in assimilation. In Lai's novel, repressing these diasporic histories involves the repression of scent. The Chings are careful not to engage with scents that would evoke memories of their diasporic histories. They also avoid producing scents that offend their neighbours' senses and do not engage in "foreign" activities that would lead their neighbours to associate them with offending odours as a form of differentiation. In Serendipity, as in Canada, the "successful" assimilation of diasporic subjects includes the repression of both

“foreign” scents that may offend the dominant population and olfactory memories that may disrupt the forward movement of capitalist progress.

As a young woman, Aimee performed acceptable forms of cultural difference as a cabaret dancer at a Serendipity nightclub. Lai’s representation of Aimee’s cabaret career reflects how dominant multiculturalist approaches frame cultural difference – and Asian femininity in particular – as an exotic commodity for Euro-Canadian consumption. As Anne Anlin Cheng argues, Asian women’s bodies may be made “palatable” to white people by either being made over in the image of whiteness or being made “so exotic and other that it can be admired as such” (46). Aimee’s history as a cabaret performer at the New Kubla Khan nightclub draws attention to how racialized Asian women perform palatable versions of hyper-sexualized exotic otherness and reveals how contained forms of difference produce an ambivalent sense of attraction and repulsion for Euro-Canadians. At the New Kubla Khan, Aimee performed Nancy Kwan covers like “Fan Tan Fanny” alongside “long-legged, cheongsammed Asian women fluttering fans” (Lai, *Salt* 19-20).³³ Significantly, the New Kubla Khan, located at “the East Neighbourhood at the very borders of Serendipity,” recalls the Kublai Khan, a Chinatown nightclub located in Vancouver’s East End in the 1970s.³⁴ As Becki L. Ross argues, East End nightclubs like the Kublai Khan played a key role in transforming Vancouver’s Chinatown into a tourist

³³ Marketed as “the essence of the Orient” and “Pure Asian Beauty itself” to American audiences, the half-Chinese, half-European actress Nancy Kwan was best known for playing a “hooker with a heart of hold” in the 1960 film *The World of Suzie Wong* and a similar character in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1961 musical *Flower Drum Song* (Cheng 50-1).

³⁴ While West End night clubs were owned by white men, featured white striptease headliners, and catered to white male professionals, East End clubs like the Kublai Khan were smaller, more “run-down,” leased by “men of colour,” and featured “B- and C-grade” striptease acts in comparison to the West End’s “A-List” (Ross 58). As Ross notes, the Kublai Khan was owned by Jimmy Yuen (58). In his poem “Kublai Khan Ten,” Sean Gunn, the Chinese-Canadian electric bass player at the Kublai Khan, describes the club as “Vancouver’s one and only [...] totally debauched, vilely despicable, fiendishly nefarious, scum-sucking beyond redemption / Chinatown strip joint” (qtd. in Ross 62). Formerly known as the Shanghai Junk, the Kublai Khan was located at 442 Main Street (Ross 32).

site – or more specifically, “the city’s premiere ‘exotic’ destination” – in the postwar era (59). The clubs “marketed consumer taste in the extraordinary and the unusual” and became a “popular destination for thrill-seeking white Vancouverites and tourists” by offering them “entrée to somewhere exotic, foreign, and supposedly inferior” (59-61).³⁵ As Ross notes, the few local Asian Canadian women who worked at the clubs “highlighted their exotic ethnicity in order to capitalize on their ‘novel,’ albeit limited, marketability” (128). The New Kubla Khan evokes a specific Vancouver institution, yet the timeline of Aimee’s performances – which occurred when the sixty-three-year-old was “much younger” (Lai, *Salt* 19) – suggests that she worked at the New Kubla Khan in 2002, the year of *Salt Fish Girl*’s publication.³⁶ By having Aimee reflect on her performances in what is her past and the reader’s present, Lai makes a commentary about representations of cultural difference in the present under official multiculturalism. The novel constellates multiple historical moments: Nancy Kwan performances in the 1960s, the East End Vancouver nightclub scene in the 1970s, the text’s publication in 2002, and Aimee’s present, which is actually mid-twenty-first-century western North America. By mapping these cultural moments onto one another, Lai suggests that they are linked by the exoticization and commodification of palatable forms of Asian femininity.³⁷

³⁵ Ross contends that “[t]he area’s nightclubs were renowned for informal drug dealing, recreational pot use, an active sex trade, and a visible police presence far removed from the upper-crust” (60). According to Ross, visiting East End clubs “was considered slumming it” for white Vancouverites (61).

³⁶ Since Aimee is sixty-three in 2044 (11), she would have been twenty-one in 2002.

³⁷ The broadcaster of Running Dog TV, a channel that aired Aimee’s performances in the early-twenty-first century, romanticizes the East Neighbourhood because of its proximity to the Unregulated Zone: “I could throw a stone into the Unregulated Zone. Very dangerous, ladies and gentlemen, very very dangerous. But you’re always safe when you’re watching Running Dog” (Lai, *Salt* 20). As the *OED* notes, the phrase “running dog” is the translation of a Chinese term used to describe “a person who is subservient to a foreign power [...] that threatens revolutionary interests”; it also means “a servile follower” or “lackey” (“running, *adj.*,” def. S3.b). The name “Running Dog TV” thus suggests that the media outlet is a mouthpiece for the Big Six. By extension, Lai’s novel suggests that contemporary media representations of hyper-sexualized Asian femininity play a role in supporting corporate interests and the Canadian government’s official multiculturalist policies.

At this point in the novel, Aimee is not nostalgic for her diasporic past, but she is nostalgic for the memories – and scents – associated with her cabaret career. Aimee often recalls her time as a cabaret performer as she sits at her vanity, which is “unadorned” except for a glittering “array of elegantly cut perfume bottles” (Lai, *Salt* 11). Kate Chiwen Liu focuses on the trope of reflection in this scene and reads Aimee’s vanity as a space of “self-display” like the New Kubla Khan (327). Aimee’s perfume bottles may also be read as a symbol of how difference is contained through the hyper-sexualized performance of Asian femininity.³⁸ As I suggested in the Introduction, heteronormative frameworks of desire have long associated sweet-smelling perfumes with femininity. Significantly, Aimee engages with the nostalgic memories of her cabaret past while “[s]eated at her vanity, fingering the trappings of long-forgotten glory, the bottles and tubes [...] out of which beauty refused any longer to leak” (Lai, *Salt* 13). The perfumes not only symbolize her hyper-sexualized performance of Asian femininity at the New Kubla Khan; they also contributed to her performance in a material way by helping her smell the part of the

³⁸ This scene echoes Nancy Kwan’s performance of her famous *Flower Drum Song* number, “I Enjoy Being a Girl.” In her analysis of the film’s visual representation of Asian femininity, Cheng explains that Nancy Kwan’s character Linda Lowe is “in front of a three-way mirror entranced by her own visuality” as she sings “I Enjoy Being a Girl,” a “tribute to her own beauty and femininity” (46). Cheng argues that “[t]he plot tells us that Linda’s kind of overexposed beauty will pass into unseemliness, literally the obscene body in a strip act at the climax of the movie (a repeat performance of “Fan Tan Fanny”)” (50). Provocatively, Cheng writes:

(Suppose we were to revisit that dressing room twenty years later to find the same woman executing the same device. One may very well imagine another classic Hollywood plot where that lissomeness over time, still slender and now hardily maintained, may have acquired a harsher edge in the service of ‘landing a guy,’ whereby the joy of being a girl must now be considered in light of a last chance, shadowed by shades of nostalgia and taking on the more injunctive, burdensome flavor of a feminine weapon.)” (55)

Lai’s novel explores the sentiment expressed in Cheng’s extended parenthetical comment by imagining the kind of future that awaits women like Kwan/Lowe. Indeed, Lai’s portrayal of the sixty-three-year-old Aimee represents a version of Asian femininity that is even further removed than the one Cheng describes. Cheng suggests that “beauty as the fulfillment of a promise – a promise of fullness itself – is always most pronounced when its nominee proves to be less than sufficient to the nomination” (55). Lai explicitly frames her representation of Aimee within the terms of unfulfilled promises, yet she does so not by emphasizing vision, but by emphasizing scent.

desirable, palatable female Asian other.³⁹ The description of Aimee’s empty perfume bottles frames her commodified performance of exotic difference – as well as her nostalgic longing for those performances – as “trappings.”

The smell of durian provides a pungent counterpoint to the scented beauty products of Aimee’s cabaret days. Significantly, at the precise moment that Aimee reflects on her empty perfume bottles, she catches “her first whiff” of durian (Lai, *Salt* 13). The unusual smell floating through Aimee’s window frees her from the trappings of her cabaret past. Rather than organizing her self-worth around the idealized forms of beauty supposedly contained in her consumer products, the smell of durian causes Aimee to recall elements of her diasporic past, and thus engage with forms of “Asianness” that exceed the contained forms of cultural difference considered acceptable in Serendipity. Lai re-writes olfactory conventions by framing the smell of durian as an agential entity. Smell’s ability to evoke memories is often framed in passive terms, but in *Salt Fish Girl*, the scent of durian actively – and even aggressively – transgresses Serendipity’s imagined boundaries and confronts Aimee with the memories she repressed when she settled in Serendipity. At first, the smell wafting through Aimee’s window is faint, unfamiliar, and “unpleasant, like the reek of cat pee tinged with the smell of hot peppers that have not been dried and are on the verge of going off” (Lai, *Salt* 13). However, as the breeze grows stronger the scent becomes less unpleasant. When a strong cross-draft “pushe[s] through the barely open window,” it brings “another dimension” of the smell that is “intriguing,” “familiar,” and “also illicit – the smell of something forbidden smuggled on board in a battered suitcase, mingled with the smell of unwashed underwear” (13). The description

³⁹ My reading of this scene demonstrates how certain scents, such as those associated with heteronormative definitions of women’s sexuality, may be diffuse but not necessarily subversive.

of durian odour as an illicit smell linked to smuggled suitcases recalls Wong's suggestion that illegal migrants are forced to enter through the "back door" of Canada (109). Her curiosity piqued, Aimee abandons the tortoise-shell compact she received at her cabaret debut and gives herself over to the smell: "She laid both hands flat on the vanity top and breathed the odour in. Durian, such as she hadn't tasted since she was a small child and her grandmother smuggled one in from Hong Kong" before the Big Six took over and the family settled in Serendipity (Lai, *Salt* 14). By giving her full attention to the durian, Aimee allows herself to engage with the traces of her repressed diasporic past. The narrative never provides a full account of Aimee's diasporic history and thus confounds any desire to trace a clear diasporic trajectory for her, but this scene suggests that she may be implicated in histories of illegal migration that extend beyond smuggling fruit. By actively engaging with the scent of durian that wafts over Serendipity's walls, Aimee forges diffuse connections with the Unregulated Zone and participates in the durian smell's illicit contamination of Serendipity's space of olfactory neutrality.

In the novel, smuggling durian fruit becomes a metaphor for Chinese immigration and the pathologization of "Chineseness." According to Paul Lai, the pungent durian is associated with "Asianness" and often appears in Western writing as "a figure of the exotic, the primitive, or the inexplicably alien" (177). He contends that "[t]he durian as alien fruit resonates with the Asian human as alien subject in Canada and the United States" and suggests that the regulation of the fruit "offers an analogy to the regulation of human movement in immigration laws that have marked Asian North American populations for over a century" (178). Significantly, the durian and other "non-indigenous" fruit are subject to strict import regulations in Canada (178). Upon crossing Canada's border, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Department of Justice puts

imported durians and other “foreign” plant products through a “regime of purification” (178). This process, which can include treatment with sulphiting agents and radiation, attempts to cleanse durians of any pests or pathogens that might pose a threat to North American crops (178). Pungent odours have long rendered both Asian foods and bodies as objects of alterity requiring decontamination. Contemporary discourses that justify the “purification” of imported durians echo the explicit calls for sanitizing Canada’s pathologized Chinese population in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century; they also recall the implicit endorsement of sanitized cultural difference that occurs under official multiculturalism. Official government discourses abject pungent “exotic” fruits by framing them within a reductive logic of diffusion: the government constructs them as products that flow into the country from a “foreign” origin point and threaten the health of Canadians if they are not regulated and decontaminated. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency website claims that “[f]or the majority of consumers, eating products treated with sulphites is safe,” yet it acknowledges that “there is a sulphite-sensitive population, whose symptoms may range from nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhoea to seizures, asthma and even anaphylactic shock,” and notes that “[t]hese symptoms may be severe, life-threatening, and can lead to death” (“Use” n. pag). In other words, the government’s ostensible “cure” for decontaminating fruit may cause serious illness. Although the government acknowledges the potentially dangerous effects that cleansing agents may have on the population, it absolves itself of responsibility by asserting that exotic fruits like durian must be sanitized in order to enter the country. The government thus implicitly blames “foreign” countries for producing inherently contaminated fruit while obscuring Canada’s own role in transforming durian into a product that may make its consumers ill. Contemporary discourses of health and hygiene thus continue to justify

the pathologization of “Asianness” – and more specifically, “Chineseness” – through discourses that emphasize a connection between smell, contamination, and disease.

Pungent Odours, Pandemic Discourse, and the Dreaming Disease

Lai’s representation of the dreaming disease draws attention to how contemporary pandemic discourse continues to be informed by racist fears about “the Chinese” as a diseased population marked by contaminating scents. As I noted earlier, the Unregulated Zone’s racialized inhabitants suffer from a so-called disease: they are haunted by traumatic memories of exploitation and their bodies are marked by pungent odours. Significantly, Aimee’s daughter Miranda has a similar condition and is marked by the smell of durian. Lai’s representation of the dreaming disease re-imagines the metaphors and materialities of scent in a productive way that challenges essentialist frameworks of smell, race, and disease and emphasizes the diffuse connections that shape diasporic subjectivities. By exploring how those in power frame Miranda’s condition as a contagious pandemic disease, Lai interrogates how racialized odours come to be located in the absolute alterity of the Asian body. Moreover, by exploring how pandemic narratives operate in the near future, Lai appropriates the speculative mode from scientific discourses of pandemic aimed at producing fear in Western populations. In doing so, she invents a form of speculative fiction that exposes the subjective effects of pathologization on racialized diasporic subjects targeted by pandemic discourse.

Miranda’s durian odour disrupts Serendipity’s supposed scentlessness with the pungent traces of “Asianness.” To satisfy Aimee’s desire for durian, Stewart disobeys Serendipity’s laws and procures one of the fruits from the Unregulated Zone. Seduced by the durian’s distinctive smell, which they associate with their childhoods, the couple have

sex in its juices: “it tumbled between them, its green spikes biting greedily into their flesh, its pepper-pissy juices mixing with their somewhat more subtly scented ones and the blood of the injuries inflicted with its green teeth” (Lai, *Salt* 14-5). Nine months later, the post-menopausal Aimee gives birth to Miranda, a baby girl who reeks of the durian’s pungent “pepper and cat pee” odour (15). As Paul Lai notes, Miranda is the product of “queer reproduction” that involves a “trans-species, pseudo-immaculate conception” between her parents and the animalistic durian fruit (177).⁴⁰ According to Mansbridge, Miranda’s strange birth exemplifies how the novel “locat[es] origins in divergent places” and thus “subverts [...] the notion of a pure, singular point of origin” (125).⁴¹ I will discuss the question of origins and queer interspecies relationships later in this chapter, but for now I want to focus on Miranda’s condition.

Miranda’s odour confronts the Chings as a material trace of their repressed diasporic histories. As Wong argues, Miranda’s pungent smell reveals how “what is repressed from one outlet soon finds another path” (114). Miranda’s scent finally gives her parents “something to talk about, something on which to focus their discontent and give it a voice” (Lai, *Salt* 14). Miranda’s odour thus bears the traces of that which her parents repressed upon assimilating in Serendipity. The powerful smell seeps into the furniture, clothes, and rugs; it even “leache[s] through airtight containers into cookie jars and flour canisters, rice buckets and spice bottles” (16), thwarting the Chings’ attempt to carefully contain any other olfactory markers of difference, such as foods or spices, that may offend Serendipity’s residents. Miranda’s smell also “seep[s] into the skin” of her

⁴⁰ This moment recalls the queer sex scene between the narrator and the kappa in Goto’s *The Kappa Child*.

⁴¹ The narrative provides a number of possible “origin stories” for Miranda. For instance, the novel later suggests that Nu Wa managed to shrink and coil herself around a seed inside the durian involved in Miranda’s “conception” (Lai, *Salt* 209). Nu Wa thus participates in the Ching’s queer reproductive moment with the durian and may also be responsible for Miranda’s existence. I discuss Nu Wa’s relationship to Miranda in more detail below.

family, “rush[ing] up their nostrils and in through their ears” and “pour[ing] down their throats when they opened their mouths to speak” (17). As Miranda puts it: “So all-permeating was the smell that you’d think those who loved me at least would stop noticing it after a while, but that was not the case” (16-7). Indeed, Miranda’s pungent odour refuses to dissipate and only “intensifie[s]” as she gets older (15). Lai thus rewrites the olfactory convention that scents become familiar, and therefore less noticeable, over time. By suggesting that Miranda’s smell actually grows stronger with age, Lai emphasizes the need to directly address, and engage with, the memories and cultural practices diasporic subjects may repress when they settle in a new place. Indeed, the novel suggests that engaging with the olfactory traces of repressed diasporic pasts may be a pleasurable and fulfilling process. As I noted earlier, Aimee initially finds the pungent smell of durian unpleasant, which is unsurprising given that she has spent most of her life in a space that has been sanitized of scents that signify Asian alterity; but when she finally recognizes the smell as one she enjoyed in her childhood, she revels in the odour. Miranda’s durian odour also prompts Aimee and Stewart “[a]ll in love [...] for the first time” (17). Indeed, the entire family – not only Aimee and Stewart, but also baby Miranda and her older brother Aaron – becomes “engrossed” in a “newfound state of bliss” (17). Miranda’s scent may be pungent and all-permeating, but for the Chings, it is pleasurable rather than offensive.

Lai’s novel interrogates the relationship between smell and biological reductionism by exploring how racialized odours come to be located in the absolute alterity of the Asian body. Much to their neighbours’ chagrin, the enraptured Chings fail to notice when the house paint begins to peel, the yard becomes overgrown, and rotten plums in the front yard begin to emit a “sickly sweet smell [...] that combine[s]

unpleasantly with the sour odour already pouring from the windows of the house” (Lai, *Salt* 17-8). Mr. Burke, a man with a moustache that is “meticulously trimmed, just like the lawn outside his house,” represents the ideal law-abiding corporate citizen that the Chings, with their new penchant for pungent durians, no longer embody. Mr. Burke asks Stewart to take out the garbage and clean up the property, but it is clear that he has been “brewing resentment for a long time” (18). Mr. Burke’s barely-contained resentment reflects Euro-Canadian attitudes toward the increasing number of Chinese and other Asian immigrants settling in Vancouver’s “white” suburbs. Lai’s representation of Miranda’s durian odour, which combines with other scents that mark the Chings’ neglected property, evokes discourses that link Chinese settlement to squalid living conditions and the depreciation of Euro-Canadian properties and communities.

Miranda’s treatment by Serendipity’s residents underscores the intolerance for unpalatable forms of difference that occurs in Canada under contemporary multiculturalism. Eleanor Ty suggests that Miranda’s “racial identity is in many ways subsumed by other kinds of differences,” arguing: “There are so many other ways to be different – cloned of human and animal tissue, engendered from a durian seed – that to be Asian seems to be the least of one’s worries” (“Shape” 94). I contend, however, that all of these elements are connected in the construction of Miranda as a racially-pathologized subject. It is crucial to make the distinction, as Paul Lai does, that Miranda’s smell “displaces *visible* racial difference” in the novel (180, emphasis added). When Miranda begins school, her classmates tease her, calling her names like “Cat Box,” “Kitty Litter,” and “Pissy Pussy” (Lai, *Salt* 21). As Paul Lai notes, these names reflect how “immigrant children are frequently ostracized at school because they carry exotic, pungent items in their lunches” (180). By linking Miranda to animals and female genitalia, the names also

indicate that Miranda's "alien" status resonates on multiple levels (180). Discourses of smell, race, gender, sexuality, and animality intersect in the dehumanization of Miranda as an Asian subject. Unlike the beauty products and perfumes on Aimee's vanity, Miranda's durian odour smells like "unwashed underwear" (Lai, *Salt* 13), as I noted above; Miranda's smell thus not only fails to conform to Serendipity's acceptable forms of racialized difference, but also transgresses Serendipity's norms of gender and sexuality. Miranda's treatment by her classmates thus suggests that the desire to manage and contain racialized subjects is inextricably linked to the desire to control Asian femininity and sexuality.

Stewart's approach to his daughter's smell as a problem that must be fixed – or rather, a disease that must be cured – demonstrates how diasporic subjects may become complicit in racist and sexist ideologies that pathologize transgressive odours. Although Stewart initially revels in Miranda's durian odour, he becomes self-conscious about the smell when he realizes that it offends Serendipity's other residents. He soon internalizes the belief that his daughter must be ill and subjects Miranda to countless treatments, including pills prescribed by Serendipity's doctors and herbal remedies obtained from Chinese herbalists in the Unregulated Zone – all against her wishes. When these remedies fail, he ignores his wife and daughter's protestations and enlists Miranda in a series of medical experiments run by Dr. Rudy Flowers outside Serendipity. Lee argues that Miranda's parents are both "indoctrinated" by science's authority in diagnosing and treating "non-normative bodies" (98), but Stewart is much more committed to "curing" Miranda than Aimee is.⁴² Indeed, when Stewart first suggests that Miranda's smell

⁴² Aimee does become overwhelmed by her daughter's smell, however. At one point in the novel, she compels Miranda to take an "over-perfumed" bubble bath with the unspoken assumption that it might help

requires “treatment,” Aimee becomes furious and reminds him that they had agreed not to make Miranda “feel self-conscious” about her smell, particularly because she is “the only Asian child in her class” (Lai, *Salt* 23). I argue, then, that it is specifically Stewart who “accept[s] science as ‘truth’ and not as a body of knowledge that is open for interrogation,” and in doing so, “risk[s] giving up [his] daughter’s agency to a scientific establishment” (Lee 98). By exploring Stewart’s obsession with curing daughter’s smell, Lai’s novel emphasizes how diasporic subjects may internalize forms of racialization, and in doing so, become complicit in racist ideologies and practices. Moreover, by suggesting that Stewart disregards Miranda’s opinions about her body and asserts control over her health, the text underscores how patriarchal authority may be used to disempower female diasporic subjects and regulate their bodies.

The overt pathologization of Miranda as a carrier of a new disease gestures toward how racism continues to function in ostensibly tolerant societies under the guise of pandemic discourse. Dr. Flowers – a man whose name has fragrant connotations that hint at his superior status over his foul-smelling patients – diagnoses Miranda as having a pathological condition.⁴³ I read Dr. Flowers’ pathologization of Miranda as a foil for Canadian multiculturalism’s functioning in an era of pandemic discourse. Crucially, his medical rhetoric reflects the neoliberal racism theorized in Shukin’s work on contemporary pandemic discourse. In his correspondence with Stewart, Dr. Flowers claims that Miranda has a “new and undocumented disease” (Lai, *Salt* 71) that becomes known as the dreaming disease or the Contagion. The doctor asserts that it is “necessary”

with her odour (Lai, *Salt* 43). It is crucial to note, however, that this occurs only after Stewart fights with Aimee to take Miranda to treatment. Otherwise, Aimee does not confront Miranda about her smell. The couple are therefore divided on how to deal with Miranda’s odour while living in Serendipity.

⁴³ As I noted in the Introduction, doctors once wore flowers to protect against the plague, which was thought to be spread through malodorous scents. Dr. Flowers’ pathologization of the dreaming disease may therefore be read in relation to discourses of smell and disease that predate modern medicine.

for his medical team to “monitor her [...] over the long term” at his facility, where she will undergo drug trials and minor surgery (71). Dr. Flowers’ desire to monitor Miranda’s condition mirrors the neocolonial discourses of health and regulation that inform contemporary pandemic discourse. Yet in Lai’s novel, information about the dreaming disease is not created and disseminated by large organizations legislated to monitor global health like the World Health Organization (Shukin 208). In *Salt Fish Girl*, pandemic discourse spreads through word of mouth. Stewart hears about Dr. Flowers, a radical doctor operating outside Serendipity’s borders, from a co-worker and keeps his communication with Dr. Flowers secret. Lai’s novel thus underscores how pandemic discourse spreads not only through official channels, but also through the informal, decentralized networks of rumor.

Lai’s novel also highlights the complex stakes involved in the production of pandemic discourse. The CEOs of the Big Six’s corporate compounds deny the disease’s existence, calling it “mass hysteria” and prohibiting research on the topic; consequently, Dr. Flowers relocates his lab and conducts his research in the Unregulated Zone (Lai, *Salt* 100). For the Big Six, it is more useful to deny the disease than promote it. As I noted earlier, Serendipity and the other corporate compounds depend on the illusion of impermeable borders to function. Denying the disease thus allows the Big Six to assure residents that the compound walls work effectively and the situation is under control. The Big Six thus shore up their power by producing mass hysteria so that it may be contained. By denying the existence of the disease, the corporations not only discursively manage and contain the threat of the dreaming disease as a potential pandemic; they also regulate the disease itself by removing contaminated subjects, like Miranda, from the corporate compounds. As the novel later reveals, Dr. Flowers is a lead scientist behind genetic-

modification experiments endorsed by the Big Six – experiments that may have given rise to the dreaming disease, as I discuss later. By performing his research on patients in the Unregulated Zone, Dr. Flowers helps the Big Six remove the diseased from within the borders of their corporate compounds. This system enables the Big Six to obscure their role in creating the conditions for the disease’s emergence, and in turn, allows the corporations to absolve themselves of any responsibility to the infected populations – all while their consumer-capitalist societies continue running smoothly.

The pathologization of Miranda’s condition is inextricably linked to the threat she poses to Serendipity’s system of sanitized efficiency: her smell bears the traces of broader diasporic histories that implicate the Big Six in the kind of systemic violence and displacement from which diasporas emerge. As Lee argues, the odours marking those with the so-called dreaming disease represent “the memory of capitalism’s history of exploitation and violence”; the smells thus “present a counter-narrative of oppression, exploitation, and neglect that has almost been forgotten beneath the tide of corporate interests” (105). For instance, one man with the disease “smelled of milk and could remember all the famines that had ever been caused by war”; another girl “smelled of stainless steel and could recite the lives of everyone who had ever died of tuberculosis” (Lai, *Salt* 101-2). In Miranda’s case, she remembers the experiences of Nu Wa, which blend history and fantasy. In one memory, Nu Wa is enticed by a “pale” Western woman to migrate from nineteenth-century industrial Canton, where she struggles to survive as a thief, to the mythical city of “Hope” on the “Island of Mist and Forgetfulness” (124); once there, she suffers through years of labour exploitation in the service industry, unknowingly participates in smuggling drugs, and ends up in jail despite the promise of

“Progress” and “Democracy” inscribed on the city gates (125).⁴⁴ As Wong notes, Nu Wa’s experience is defined by “[t]he gap between false promises and experienced exploitation” (116) and “bears more than a passing resemblance” to the situation in Canada, where so-called illegal migrants – who are often attracted by the promise of upward mobility – cannot meet the criteria to enter through Canada’s “front door,” as I noted earlier (109). It is because Miranda’s pungent odour bears the traces of these histories of violence and exploitation – histories that are inextricably connected to diaspora and recall ongoing forms of violence and exploitation in the Unregulated Zone – that Miranda is constructed as a pathological threat that must be removed from Serendipity.

I read Miranda’s relationship to Nu Wa in terms of diffuse connections, as it emphasizes how diasporic subjectivities may be shaped by mutually-constitutive intersubjective interactions connected to a range of times and spaces. Nu Wa’s diasporic experiences form the content of Miranda’s dreams, and Miranda recalls them as if they are her own experiences. The narrative structure of Lai’s novel emphasizes how Miranda and Nu Wa’s experiences blend together and inform one another. Mansbridge argues that *Salt Fish Girl* “employ[s] a double narrative movement that shifts between the futuristic Pacific Northwest and ancient China” and “blends fantasy and myth to disrupt the notion of Canada as a homely nation, and remembers or imagines forgotten histories and

⁴⁴ To escape her loneliness as the world’s creator, Nu Wa becomes a human born into nineteenth-century rural South China. As a teenager she falls in love with the Salt Fish Girl and they move to industrial Canton, where Nu Wa steals to survive and the Salt Fish Girl finds work in a factory making wind-up toys. After spending a number of years on the “Island of Mist and Forgetfulness,” Nu Wa eventually manages to return to South China – after killing the pale woman who enticed her there – without having aged. In China, Nu Wa must negotiate her relationship to the elderly Salt Fish Girl and must also navigate the heteropatriarchal structures that form around her when she marries a man as a favour to her brother.

endangered futures in its place” (121).⁴⁵ Building on Mansbridge’s argument, I read the novel’s narrative structure as diffuse in the sense that it blends multiple times and spaces in a way that undermines the Big Six’s attempt to make diasporic subjects “move on” from the past.

By representing the dreaming disease as a condition in which scent serves not as a trigger for memory, but rather, as an embodied trace of memory, Lai re-writes olfactory conventions to challenge essentialist frameworks of smell, race, and disease. As Wong notes, people with the dreaming disease “come to embody their silenced histories”; Miranda’s durian odour thus constitutes “an undeniable symptom of social histories that are not speakable in the corporate compound” (114-5). By representing smell as a material trace of memory – a trace that is framed as a pathological symptom – Lai challenges racist discourses linking smell and contamination. In Lai’s novel, scents are not essential characteristics that signify how members of a particular race are inherently dirty and diseased; rather, they are physical manifestations of diasporic memories and histories that demand to be recognized. Lai’s conceptualization of the so-called dreaming disease thus suggests that scent and other common markers of racialized difference are not reducible to the body, but rather are produced through processes of violence and exploitation. By suggesting that pungent odours associated with “Asianness” precede and exceed the body, Lai emphasizes how the essentialized link between racialized bodies and smell is created through pathologizing discourses.

Lai underscores the affective implications of pathologizing discourses by emphasizing how Dr. Flowers’ diagnosis significantly alters Miranda’s relationship to her diasporic memories. Miranda has long been aware that her scent marks her as a different

⁴⁵ Paul Lai similarly argues that Miranda and Nu Wa’s stories are “fused” (169).

from Serendipity's other residents, but she has always insisted that nothing is wrong with her, asserting: "I don't want to be helped" (Lai, *Salt* 36). Notably, the narrative does not mention Miranda's dreams of Nu Wa until she discovers letters to her father revealing Dr. Flowers' diagnosis. Significantly, Miranda is specifically upset by the fact the letter – and Dr. Flowers' diagnosis – suggests that her parents "might know what [she] dreamt at night" (70). It is at this point in the novel that Miranda explains her relationship to her vivid memories of Nu Wa:

[S]ometimes the intensity of my dream world frightened me. But only sometimes. At other times it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should remember things that went on before I was born, things that happened in other lifetimes. They happened to me; I was there, and the memories are continuous. Why should they be anything but? I did not realize that other people did not have these memories. I did not think of myself as a child afflicted by history, unable to escape its delights or its torments. [...] I did not understand my condition as a 'condition,' nor did I know that there were others in other compounds or out in the Unregulated Zone who were afflicted with variations of the same bizarre symptoms.

(70)

In this passage, the novel implicitly normalizes memories of violence and exploitation – and by extension, connections to a sense of diasporic history, memory, and community – as key factors that constitute diasporic subjectivities. Lai thus not only undermines the pathologization of scent as a marker of racialized difference, but also explicitly challenges the pathologization of diaspora itself as a subjective condition shaped by

multiple mutually-constitutive experiences associated with a range of different times and spaces.

By focusing on how Miranda internalizes her pathologization, *Salt Fish Girl* extends work on both pandemic discourse and processes of internalization. While Shukin's work on pandemic discourse has been useful for my study, it does not explore the impact these discourses have on pathologized subjects. Shukin is concerned with "the seriousness of [pandemic's] effects even though it exists only as a virtuality," but her work specifically focuses on how pandemic speculation "infect[s]" people like herself – that is, "well-intentioned, white, liberal-minded, middle-class subjects living in relative security in affluent pockets of the globe" who "fear for [their] own survival" (207), as I noted earlier. Yet there is more at stake in pandemic discourse. As Lai's novel suggests, the ideologies promoted by pandemic discourse also threaten to "infect" pathologized populations. As I noted in Chapter Two, Frantz Fanon famously describes how the internalization of racism works in *White Skin, Black Masks*. Fanon recounts how, when a child pointed at him and cried out "Look, a Negro!", his "corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema" (112). Fanon claims that in this moment, he suddenly saw himself as a fragmented subject who occupied "not one but two, three places": "I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics" (112). Like Goto, Lai re-writes Fanon's visualist scene of racial identification. But while Goto focuses on the psychic effects of seemingly benign multiculturalist discourses of difference that construct smell as a sign of otherness, Lai focuses on the effects of overt pathologization of scent in pandemic discourse. After learning about her diagnosis by Dr. Flowers, Miranda states: "Suddenly, and for the first

time, I felt dirty. I felt the shame my father had felt since he had first plucked that dangerous fruit,” the durian (Lai, *Salt* 72). In a desperate attempt to counteract the feeling, Miranda tries to wash away her scent. She scrubs her skin “until it hurt[s]” and “blood rise[s] to the surface” (73). As Anne McClintock argues, soap has historically been used as a “technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration” (212). Miranda uses soap to try and “[wash] from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration” (214). By attempting to eliminate her scent in this way, she self-inflicts the “violence and constraint” of purification rituals (226). Indeed, Miranda’s cleansing process mimics the regime of purification to which durians are subjected by the Canadian government. Miranda’s attempted self-purification not only recalls how pungent odours have long been framed as a sign that Asian foods and bodies require decontamination; it also emphasizes the harmful physical and psychological impact that these pathologizing discourses may have on diasporic subjects.

Miranda’s internalization of pathologizing discourses not only alters her *relationship* to her odour and diasporic memories; it also affects her understanding of her scent’s very materiality, which in turn has a significant impact on her sense of self. When Miranda realizes that she cannot eradicate her smell, she thinks: “It was dirt. It came from the inside” (Lai, *Salt* 73). Miranda’s thought pattern here is significant, for the text explicitly notes that her odour “does not seem to emanate from any particular part of the body, but hangs over [her] like a cloud” (69). As I suggested above, the novel emphasizes how Miranda is *marked* by odour in order to undermine essentialist discourses that construct Asian bodies as the “source” of pungent odours and contagious disease. Yet the novel also demonstrates how pathologizing discourses lead Miranda to believe that she is

the source of both the scent and the disease. Miranda's inability to remove her scent ultimately leads her to conclude that her smell emanates from inside her; she thus internalizes the belief that she is inherently dirty and diseased. Lai's novel thus dramatizes how pandemic narratives frame racialized subjects as the source of contagion, and in doing so, divert attention from the role that social conditions – and pandemic narratives themselves – play in the emergence of disease. Significantly, Miranda's first menstrual period coincides with her internalization of the view that her smell is a sign that she is inherently dirty and diseased. Drawing on Kristeva's work on abjection, Elizabeth Grosz notes that menstrual blood is associated "not only with shame and embarrassment but [also] with disgust and [...] contaminati[on]" (206), and as I noted in the Introduction, Freud pathologized menstruation as a foul-smelling process. Unaware of what is happening to her, Miranda interprets her bleeding body as a sign that those in power "are right to send [her] away" (Lai, *Salt* 73). By linking the pathologization of Miranda's smell to menstruation, Lai emphasizes how the notion of racial contamination is inextricably linked to the construction of women's leaky bodies as uncontainable and contaminating.

Although Miranda is deeply affected by the harmful physical and psychological effects of pandemic discourse, she manages to assert her own agency in an attempt to avoid medical treatment. Her feelings of fear and shame soon motivate a rebellion that involves undermining her father's attempt to earn extra money to pay for Dr. Flowers' treatment. Yet Saturna still manages to contain the threat that Miranda poses to their sanitized space by expelling the entire family from Serendipity. Exiled from the only home she has ever known, Miranda and her family are forced to move into the Unregulated Zone. As Wong notes, it is never clear whether Serendipity expels the Chings because Miranda disrupts of her father's work as a tax collector or because of her

offensive smell (112). Ultimately, the expulsion has the same effect; it serves to manage and contain the threat that Miranda and her scent pose to Serendipity's sanitized space. Yet in the Unregulated Zone, Miranda meets Evie Xin, a clone who challenges pandemic discourses that pathologize the pungent smells associated with the dreaming disease.

Something Fishy: Re-imagining Interspecies and Diasporic Connections

Like Miranda, Evie Xin is marked by a strong smell that bears the traces of "Asianness," but she has a much more subversive relationship to the scent that marks her body. My reading of Evie Xin and her relationship to her smell departs from critics who read her in relation to Haraway's influential concept of the cyborg. Lee provides the most in-depth analysis of Lai's novel in relation to Haraway's cyborg theory, which frames the cyborg as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (qtd. in Lee 100). She reads Evie as a form of "commodified life that has been cloned for the sole purpose of maintaining an inexpensive labour force for the production of consumer goods," and suggests that she and the other clones – known as the Sonias – represent how "science has been co-opted by corporations that deploy biotechnology to their financial advantage" (100).⁴⁶ Mansbridge also invokes Haraway's theory of the cyborg in her work. She frames Evie and the clones – as well as Lai herself – as cyborgs who "re-writ[e] origin myths in a manner that problematizes the notion of origins determined by a patriarchal tradition" (128). This work is provocative for highlighting how science and capital structure bodies and for drawing attention to the subversive dimensions of Evie's hybrid "origins"; it is also useful for understanding how "[f]eminized Third World labourers become the

⁴⁶ Lee's essay also explores Miranda as a cyborg figure.

ultimate cyborgs due to the way their bodies [...] serve multinational companies that supply goods and services to a primarily Western market” (Lee 101).

While my reading of *Salt Fish Girl* builds on these arguments, I am particularly interested in how Lai’s representation of Evie Xin interrogates historical and contemporary discourses that link “the Chinese” to pathological forms of human-animal intimacy. Moving beyond Haraway’s theorization of the cyborg, I read Evie in terms of Haraway’s concept of “companion species.” In contrast to Haraway’s cyborg theory, which focuses on human-machine hybrids, her notion of companion species emphasizes mutually-constitutive relationships between humans and animals. Crucially, Evie – an incarnation of the titular “Salt Fish Girl” – is cloned using the DNA of freshwater carp, and the sharp smell of salt fish marks her body as a sign of her hybrid human-animal origins. Haraway’s theory of companion species provides a useful framework for understanding Lai’s representation of the diffuse connections associated with interspecies mixing. Drawing on Haraway’s concept of companion species, I read Evie’s productive relationship to blurred human-animal boundaries as a counterpoint to the fear of human-animal intimacy that informs pandemic speculation. I also contend that Lai’s approach to interspecies mixing emphasizes intersubjectivity in ways that are useful for thinking through the diffuse connections that emerge in relation to diaspora. Before turning to a discussion of companion species, however, I want to build on Paul Lai’s claim that *Salt Fish Girl* is characterized by a “fishiness, or questionableness” (170) by suggesting that Evie’s fishy scent unsettles past and present forms of exploiting racialized, feminized Asian labour.

Evie’s fishy odour bears the traces of her status as a racialized, feminized labourer and human-animal hybrid created for capitalist purposes. Evie’s genes are “point zero

three per cent *Cyprinus carpio* – freshwater carp” (Lai, *Salt* 158). Socially and legally, her hybrid genetic makeup means that she is “not human” and is therefore exploitable (158). Evie describes herself as “a patented new fucking life form” (158), genetically engineered by Dr. Flowers as part of his job to produce a labour force for the corporate factories in the Unregulated Zone. Yet it is not only the animal dimensions of Evie’s genetic makeup that render her an exploitable commodity; as a clone created using the DNA of racialized populations that already constituted the world’s exploitable underclass, Evie’s “ancestors” were not seen as individuated subjects. As I have already noted, Chinese immigrant labourers have long been framed as an exploitable workforce that is inherently suited for menial labour and easy to control. According to Lisa Lowe, the development of Western capitalism has relied on “the racialized gendered character of Asian immigrant labor” since the mid-nineteenth century and “has been further exaggerated, refined, and built into the regime” of global capitalist expansion (158-9). As Haraway notes, this form of labour is not only racialized, but also feminized in the sense that both male and female workers are “made extremely vulnerable,” are “disassembled, reassembled, [and] exploited as a reserve labor force,” are “seen less as workers than as servers,” and are “subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day” (“Cyborg” 166). Asian and other “third world” women in particular are thought to constitute a more “flexible,” “casual,” and “docile” workforce that can be easily managed and controlled (Lowe 160). In Lai’s novel, then, the undifferentiated pool of racialized, feminized workers who provided the genetic material for clones like Evie were rendered clone-like long before their DNA was mined for genetic replication. In other words, it is not only Evie’s carp genes that render her non-human, as her supposedly human DNA was not considered fully human in the first place.

Evie's fishy smell also recalls the exploitation of Chinese immigrant labourers in Canada in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. It is rumored that Evie's "source" may be a Chinese woman who died just after the Second World War (Lai, *Salt* 160); whether this is true or not, Evie's treatment as an exploitable commodity recalls the treatment of early Chinese immigrant workers in Canada. Lai's emphasis on Evie's fishy scent specifically invokes the exploitation of workers in British Columbia's canning industry. I read Evie as a future embodiment of the "Iron Chink." As Deer explains, the Iron Chink was a fish-butchering machine used in the canning process in the early-twentieth century ("New" 27). The machine's pejorative name, which references the Chinese migrant workers who were replaced by the machine, underscores the dominant perception that Chinese contract labourers were "living machines" who "possessed no inner life, value systems, or emotional integrity" and their "labour and bodies were replaceable with machines because their function [...] was that of a tool without an identity" ("New" 27).⁴⁷ Lai's novel challenges these stereotypes by emphasizing how Dr. Flowers and the Big Six literally produce Evie and the other clones as exploitable populations engineered to work in the factories.

Evie and her fishy scent undermine the Big Six's attempt to conceal forms of exploitation that recall histories of Chinese immigrant labour in Canada and related racialized and gendered forms of labour across the world in the current era of global capitalism. As Lee notes, Evie "jam[s] the production machines" by using them to "to produce [her] own subversive products": shoes with activist messages on the soles (104). Evie also manages to escape from the factories, and she credits her fish genes as the

⁴⁷ Lai's representation of Evie provides a provocative counterpoint to Daphne Marlatt's poem, "Steveston." Marlatt's poem emphasizes the strong smell of fish that marks Japanese-Canadian women working in the canneries of Steveston, British Columbia.

“unstable factor” that allows her to overcome the fact that she was “not designed for wits or willpower” (Lai, *Salt* 158-9). Evie’s fishy odour thus represents the instability that Dr. Flowers and the corporations could not “control for” (158-9). Crucially, Evie’s subversive power emerges from the very genetic hybridity used to suppress her. Evie’s scent may therefore be read as a symbol and a material trace of her exploitation and her subversive potential.

Evie’s fishy scent also links her to queer forms of sexuality and thus marks her as different from other clones who circulate in the sex industry in Lai’s novel. Evie’s odour is gendered and sexualized in a particular way. Historically, vaginas have been linked to the smell of fish, a scent that suggests women’s genitals are inherently unclean (Mills 89-90). Evie’s fishy scent thus exceeds heteronormative codes of femininity that suggest women should smell fragrant rather than foul, a perception linked to notion that women should be sexually desirable to men.⁴⁸ Her scent marks her as different from Karen, a clone who Miranda’s brother Aaron purchases as a mail-order-bride. Karen is identical to Evie except for her smell: “She had no odour. She was an empty vessel” (Lai, *Salt* 214). Karen’s apparent lack of odour not only underscores her (genetically-engineered) passivity, but also emphasizes the value of this racialized, feminized trait in the sex trade. The global sex industry depends on “[t]he construction of Asian women as hyperfeminine erotic exotics who willing and passively service male desires” (Võ and Sciachitano xvi). I read Karen’s apparent scentless as a sign of the Big Six’s sanitization of her interiority and the histories of exploitation in which she is embedded. Aaron narrates Dr. Flowers as a saviour who “[h]elped [Karen] get her picture into *New World Brides* magazines when

⁴⁸ It is crucial to note, however, that the very notion of what is “foul” or “fragrant” is constructed. I explore how Nu Wa and Miranda find the supposedly foul smell of fish pleasurable below.

she was starving to death” (Lai, *Salt* 217). This narrative not only obscures how Karen continues to circulate within a heterosexual male economy as an exoticized, racialized commodity; it also masks the role that Dr. Flowers plays in contributing to Karen’s impoverishment by engineering her in the first place. Karen draws attention to the complex material conditions informing Asian women’s participation in the sex industry, as they are often “desperately trying to escape conditions of poverty often created by capitalist expansion in Asia” (Võ and Sciachitano xvi). When Miranda questions Aaron about whether he knows about Karen’s background, Aaron insists: “We’re happy. Don’t spoil it” (Lai, *Salt* 217). He not only speaks for Karen, but also suppresses the complicated questions about her background that might challenge – or contaminate – his superficial state of happiness.

Lai re-imagines repressive heteropatriarchal frameworks of Asian femininity by suggesting that Evie’s fishy scent mediates queer desire. As Paul Lai argues, same-sex desire “erupts through the olfactory sense” in the novel (169), particularly through the smell of salt fish. Lai deepens the connection between queer desire and the smell of fish in Nu Wa’s narrative, which, as Paul Lai argues, fuses with Miranda’s future world to “create a fishy genealogy of the mythological future” invested in “queer kinship” (171).⁴⁹ Nu Wa’s narrative of growing up in rural South China in the late-nineteenth century recounts how she falls in love with a fish merchant’s daughter, the Salt Fish Girl. Nu Wa is attracted to the Salt Fish Girl because she smells of the stinky salt fish congee her mother used to wean her as a child. For Nu Wa, “[t]he scent calls up all the kinds of complicated tensions having to do with love and resentment, the passive-aggressive push-pull of emotions of a loving mother who nonetheless eventually wants her breasts to

⁴⁹ I discuss how these worlds fuse through scent in more detail below.

herself, not to be forever on tap to the mewling, sucking creatures that come so strangely from her body to take over her life” (Lai, *Salt* 49). Salt fish congee thus symbolizes women’s desire to detach from their babies and regain control of their bodies, and through its scent, defamiliarizes the naturalized role of women as reproductive beings.⁵⁰ Nu Wa claims that the congee’s “stinky saltiness, nothing like mother’s milk,” is a “source of [...] tension” between mother and daughter (47), a statement that highlights the smell of salt fish as a site of resistance that underscores the limits of idealized versions of heterosexual femininity. The fact that Nu Wa’s desire for the Salt Fish Girl is predicated upon this odour further indicates the subversiveness of her desire. Nu Wa’s mother inadvertently helps her daughter cultivate a “peculiar taste” for saltiness as opposed to the sweet sesame pudding symbolic of conventional femininity (50). When Nu Wa first smells the Salt Fish Girl’s scent, she feels “a warmth to spread in the pit of [her] belly” (51). The “stink” of salt first makes Nu Wa “want to live more than ever” and consequently motivates her to endure the physical attacks of the Salt Fish Girl’s father and hatch a plan to run away together (56). Nu Wa’s queer desire for the smell of salt fish drives her to undermine the heteropatriarchal order.

Lai’s novel emphasizes the diffuse connections between past and present by suggesting that Miranda recognizes the same fishy odour on Evie’s body in the future. In two provocative moments in the text, the past seeps into the present when Miranda encounters Evie. When Evie enters Dr. Flowers’ lab in the Unregulated Zone where

⁵⁰ The smell is also linked to the pain that emerges from the eventual separation of mother and child. The novel does not suggest that this pain is “natural” for mothers invested in their daughters, but rather indicates that such pain occurs after “giv[ing] away too much of yourself, especially intimate bodily fluids, when you know you’ll eventually be abandoned, with or without gratitude depending on luck” (Lai, *Salt* 49). The smell of salt fish congee thus evokes the violence produced by a patriarchal economy that relies on, takes advantage of, and takes for granted women’s reproductive role and the fruits of their labour. Evie’s fishy scent also points to this history.

Miranda works as an assistant, Miranda notes: “I didn’t recognize her at first. Thin and wiry, she did not have the obvious beauty of her previous life” (Lai, *Salt* 105). Although the text never confirms it, Miranda’s statement implies that Evie is a future embodiment of the Salt Fish Girl. It is only when she smells Evie’s fishy odour that Miranda recognizes her as such. When taking Evie’s blood, Miranda catches “a whiff of a familiar fragrance, briny and sweet” – that is, the smell of salt fish (104). Miranda immediately falls into a “reverie,” stating: “It’s you” (105).⁵¹ In this moment, Evie’s fishy smell seems to transport Miranda, her memories flooding into the present through smell as she recognizes the Evie as her past love, the Salt Fish Girl. Later reflecting on the moment, Miranda knows that she “recognized something, but had no idea what”: “Afterwards I felt a terrible hunger inside, a hunger without a name. An ache that had always been there had suddenly become material” (105-6). Evie’s fishy odour thus seems to awaken Miranda’s desire for an embodied sense of connection in the present. Indeed, Miranda notes that in this evocative olfactory encounter, she “had the distinct impression the past was leaking through into the present” (105). A similar moment of olfactory recognition occurs later that day when Miranda encounters Evie in disguise. Again, Miranda smells Evie’s fishy odour and falls into a reverie, repeating: “It’s you” (150). In these scenes, Lai emphasizes how powerful connections forged in the past may emerge through scent in the present.

Although the novel sets up the expectation that this will be a pleasurable moment of agential connection between Miranda and Evie, Lai complicates the notion of diffuse connections by suggesting that this is not the case. Both times Miranda claims to know her, Evie immediately challenges her, retorting: “You’re full of shit. How can you know

⁵¹ Although Liu briefly notes this moment in her discussion of recognition, she does not provide an in-depth analysis of Lai’s conceptualization of smell and recognition.

anything?” (Lai, *Salt* 105). The second time, Evie declares with even more self-assurance: “You don’t know what your talking about” (150). Significantly, Miranda seems to make her statements unconsciously. After she snaps out of each reverie, Miranda seems unaware of her claims about knowing Evie and actively denies any familiarity: “What are you talking about? I don’t recognize you” (105). In her brief discussion of these scenes, Mansbridge draws on Sara Ahmed’s theory of stranger fetishism to suggest that Evie embodies an uncanny stranger who is both “terrifyingly strange and intimately familiar” in her ability to disrupt the boundary between past and present, self and other (128). Building on Mansbridge’s point, I contend that Lai complicates the notion of diffuse connections in these scenes. The novel does not idealize Miranda’s recognition of Evie’s scent; rather, it complicates the assumption that certain aromas provide essential points of connection for diasporic subjects who may have intersecting histories. As I noted in the Introduction, Ahmed argues that encounters are mediated by other experiences; they “presupposes other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times” (7). Particular encounters both inform and are informed by the general, and they “always carr[y] the *traces* of those broader relationships” of power and antagonism (8, original emphasis). In *Salt Fish Girl*, Miranda presupposes that Evie is the Salt Fish Girl based on her memories of Nu Wa. So while Lai explores how memories of the past inform the present, she also complicates the assumptions that inform new encounters when they are framed through the lens – or more appropriately, the scent – of the past. In *Salt Fish Girl*, encounters in the present challenge preconceived notions of the other informed by the past – even if these assumptions seem to be positive, as is the case with Miranda’s unconscious recognition of, and attraction to, Evie’s salt fish scent.

Lai also underscores the uneven distribution of power in such moments of recognition by demonstrating how Miranda uses her knowledge to interpret Evie as an object of recognition. As Ahmed argues, histories that come to bear upon the present are always partial (11). Moreover, encounters may involve conflict because they are shaped by “asymmetr[ies] of power” (8). In *Salt Fish Girl*, Miranda occupies a place of power by presuming to know Evie through scent. Evie seeks to challenge such power asymmetries, for they recall the power imbalance that has shaped her entire life as a clone. Evie’s unexpected, aggressive responses to Miranda thus subvert the assumption that one can presume to “know” another through scent, even if they seem to share olfactory codes and diasporic histories.⁵² The past may inform the present – Miranda and Evie seem to have known each other in nineteenth-century South China – but it does not determine the present. Ultimately, Lai suggests that it is not only Euro-Canadians who claim to recognize “the Chinese” as an essentially inferior “race” because of the scents that mark their bodies; racialized subjects may also rely on such forms of recognition in an attempt to forge diasporic connections. *Salt Fish Girl* thus complicates conceptualizations of diasporic memory and community that implicitly essentialize markers of difference, like smell, as signs of automatic connection. As Ahmed asserts, “*we may not be able to read the bodies of others*” (8, original emphasis). Evie makes this point in *Salt Fish Girl* by challenging Miranda’s claim that she knows Evie through scent.

Extending Liu’s brief suggestion that “the act of recognition [in *Salt Fish Girl*] means empowerment through coalition and historical reconstruction, rather than biological determinism” (320-1), I contend that Lai imagines alternative forms of

⁵² Significantly, it is never clear if Evie actually shares the same memories as Miranda, so whether or not Miranda and Evie have actually met in a previous life, or Evie is the Salt Fish Girl, remains ambiguous and defies any desire to locate Evie’s origins.

diasporic community that are not predicated upon essentialist forms of olfactory recognition. In doing so, *Salt Fish Girl* reformulates conventional approaches to smell, memory, and diaspora. Miranda and Evie do not automatically form a relationship based on shared olfactory codes rooted in overlapping diasporic memories; rather, they gradually develop a relationship through their shared critical engagement with the forms of oppression linked to racist epistemologies of “knowing” Chinese immigrants through scent. More specifically, Miranda and Evie’s relationship is predicated upon activist work that undercuts the mobilization of smell as a tool for pathologizing racialized diasporic subjects. While critics such as Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and Lee consider Evie’s role as an activist with the Sonias, for the purposes of this chapter, I am more concerned with the way Evie’s political investments shape Miranda. In contrast to Miranda, who unconsciously assumes a position of power over Evie by presuming to “know” her through her fishy odour, Evie has a more nuanced approach to the politics of olfactory recognition and challenges Miranda to consider the power dynamics involved in the pathologization of their condition.

Evie embodies a new form of posthuman kinship that complicates thinking about smell, diaspora, and diffuse connections. Evie’s politics, which arise from an alternative model of interspecies intersubjectivity based on her own ethical relationship to her hybrid genetic makeup, align with Haraway’s theorization of companion species. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway argues against the “the fantasy of human exceptionalism” that assumes “humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies” (11). In contrast to pandemic discourses, then, Haraway’s theory of companion species acknowledges interspecies intimacy. As Anna Tsing puts it, “[h]uman nature is an interspecies relationship” (qtd. in Haraway 19). This view challenges the dominant

approach to human-animal relationships that has informed definitions of what is and is not human. Haraway contends that her “maker” is not a God or Father, but companion species (4). Arguing that only about ten percent of the cells in the human body are made up of human genomes, Haraway explains that the other ninety percent are “filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm” (3-4). In other words, “[t]o be one is always to *become with many*” (4, original emphasis). Like Ahmed, Haraway suggests that the encounters involved in interspecies mixing are prior to ontology: “partners do not precede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters” (4). For Haraway too, then, the past comes to bear upon the present when species meet. Companion species constitute one another, or “make each other up,” through their encounters (16). *Salt Fish Girl* aligns with Haraway’s approach to companion species in a number of ways. Evie rejects Dr. Flowers, a figure deeply invested in the fantasy of human exceptionalism, as her father and creator.⁵³ At the micro-level of her hybrid DNA and at the broader level of her clone Sonia sisters, Evie knows well what it means to become with many. She thus draws attention to the complex interspecies genetic makeup and broader interspecies encounters that constitute species life.

⁵³ The text reveals that Evie not only escaped the constraints of the factory, but also subverted Dr. Flowers’ attempt to make her a part of his fantasy of a nuclear family. Dr. Flowers took two clones as a wife and daughter, but “[w]hen the daughter turned out no good” – that is, when Evie refused to conform to his ideal of a docile daughter – he “sent her to the factories and forgot about her” (Lai, *Salt* 252); the wife, his assistant Dr. Seto, eventually killed herself. Near the end of the novel, Evie explicitly identifies with the clones, rejecting Dr. Flowers’ attempts to control her: “I am not your daughter any more. I am the same as them” (255). As Robin Morris argues, Evie “has neither a devoted, dutiful or a docile attitude towards her father” and subverts the femininity embodied by Eve in the Christian myth of origins (88). Morris asserts that Evie also “rejects the narrativizing of women, and more particularly, women of Asian descent as passive and silent under white, western, patriarchal scrutiny” (89).

By emphasizing scent's role in Evie's companion species relationship, Lai's novel extends Haraway's theory of companion species. Haraway contends that a physical and symbolic "touching" occurs in encounters between companion species that "make[s] us more worldly" (*Species* 31). In *Salt Fish Girl*, however, Evie's fishy odour is a sign of her relationship to the companion species that constitutes her very DNA.⁵⁴ Evie's fishy odour also confronts those around her, forcing them to acknowledge that they too participate in forms of posthuman kinship that undercut the notion of the self-same individual. By engaging deeply with her interspecies connections, Evie fulfills Haraway's ethical imperative to "not just celebrate complexity, but to become worldly and respond" (*Species* 41). In addition to her activist work, Evie displays worldliness by "kicking up a stink" about the treatment of her scent as a symptom of her illness, rather than a sign of her relationship to her companion species. When Miranda first suggests that they both seem to show signs of the Contagion, Evie asks if Miranda "feels unwell"; when she replies no, Evie asks: "Then what's the problem?" (Lai, *Salt* 164). Although the Big Six makes a concerted effort to repress the fishy traces of their complicity in her "contaminated" hybrid form carried by her unruly odour – they implant tracking chips in her body, mark her as a fugitive, and throw her in jail – Evie perpetually rebels against those in power and never internalizes the view that her scent is a sign of her pathological origins.

Miranda gradually learns from Evie that it is important to develop an ethical relationship to her own "contaminated" origins. When Evie challenges Miranda's view

⁵⁴ Haraway uses this tactile model to expand visualist approaches to companion species. She thus describes "fingery eyes" and the process of "visually fingering," which involves "touching all the important ecological and political histories and struggles of ordinary small cities that have asked, Who should eat whom, and who should cohabit?" (*Species* 5-6).

that they are ill, Miranda reconsiders her condition for the first time since her diagnosis: “It was true, I did not feel unwell. Through all the years of my strange durian odour, it never occurred to me to tell anyone that nothing hurt. And as for the dreams [...] if the truth must be told, they comforted me. [...] I only worried because I felt I should” (Lai, *Salt* 168). It is crucial to note, however, that Miranda’s transformation is by no means instantaneous. After this moment of reflection, for instance, Miranda surmises: “Perhaps Dr. Flowers was more benign than I thought. Not that it mattered one way or another now” (168). At a later point in the novel, Miranda sells the rights to her mother’s songs to an advertising company selling Pallas running shoes. She even participates in reproducing heteronormative conventions surrounding women’s scent and seduction – the very conventions that inform the pathologization of her odour – when she is hired by ad executives to write copy for Trembling perfume.⁵⁵ Miranda’s taglines contrast starkly with the short, subversive statements printed on the footwear that Evie and the other rebel Sonias distribute in the Unregulated Zone. *Salt Fish Girl* thus emphasizes how the path towards learning a new ethical framework is not linear, but rather complex and often contradictory.

Evie’s close relationship to her companion species eventually informs Miranda’s relationship to her own “fishy” origins. Although I have focused primarily on the pungent durian’s role in Miranda’s “contaminated” origins, the traces of Nu Wa’s fishiness also mark Miranda’s body through scent. For instance, Miranda has small fistulas on each ear

⁵⁵ One tagline reads, for instance: “You think my head is full of percentages and decimal points / You think that all I care about is the bottom line / But what gets me through the day / Is not the thought of accomplishment / It is the thought of you ... / Trembling” (Lai, *Salt* 243). The fact that Miranda writes the copy without smelling the perfume further serves to highlight the constructedness of olfactory conventions.

that emit a pus that release a liquid that “smells of the sea” when pressed (Lai, *Salt* 108).⁵⁶

Miranda’s pathologization of these fishy body parts extends to the way she first judges

Evie: “She creeped me out. I may not be the most natural creature that ever walked the face of the earth, but there was something sordid about her origins” (158). Evie leads

Miranda to shift her perspective, however. Encouraging Miranda to acknowledge her own

interspecies connections to Nu Wa’s fishy origins, Evie takes Miranda to the aquarium

and suggests: “Why don’t you go say hello to your mom while I’m gone?” (261).

Although the text that follows seems to shift Evie’s meaning – Miranda responds with the

question “your mom?” and Evie specifies that she means the carp that constitutes her

genetically-modified DNA – the meaning implied by Evie’s first statement becomes more

evident as the text continues. When Miranda states that the aquarium is “a terrible, sad

place,” Evie counters: “Don’t say that. Many lives began here” (261). Consequently,

Miranda rethinks her understanding of humans in relation to the fish.⁵⁷ Evie chooses to

acknowledge the fish’s role in her “origins.” As Haraway argues, “[s]pecies

interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of

response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention”

(*Species* 19). Evie acknowledges, responds to, and respects the often-ignored animal life

that constitutes herself and the world around her.

⁵⁶ Miranda believes that the fistulas “served the function of memory, recalling a time when we were more closely related to fish, a time when the body glistened with scales and turned in the dark, muscled easily through water” (Lai, *Salt* 108).

⁵⁷ Evie’s comment literally changes Miranda’s perspective: instead of seeing a fish trying to escape the tank, for instance, she sees a man and woman on the other side of the tank who “looked as though they were standing under water” and begins to contemplate the place of humans in the world of fish, rather than the other way around (Lai, *Salt* 261). Miranda notes that the humans “were not remotely as beautiful as the yellow, blue and orange fish that swam between us and them” (262). By shifting her perspective, Miranda rethinks the fantasy of human exceptionalism. This scene may emphasize the visual, but as I argue below, Miranda’s shifting relationship to her companion species is primarily represented in olfactory terms.

Miranda eventually begins to acknowledge, respond to, and respect her own fishy origins. After Miranda accompanies Evie when she confronts Dr. Flowers and refuses his paternal claims, Nu Wa's voice seems to permeate Miranda's narrative: "I am your grandmother, I wanted to tell [Evie]. I am the maker of your maker. Both of us, such putrid origins, climbing out of the mud and muck into darkness. But I did not want to unmake what I made, imperfect and wicked as it was" (Lai, *Salt* 253). From this point on, Miranda and Nu Wa's narratives intersect in a way that reflects the diffuse connections that link the two characters. According to Robin Morris, at this point in the text Nu Wa acknowledges her role in the creation of the world and assumes responsibility for what she has produced rather than seeking retribution for what the world has become (89). As Morris argues, Nu Wa understands that creation is not a seamless process, but one that contains randomness and can lead to mutations (89). Significantly, at this point in the novel Miranda learns that the durian fruit growing in the Unregulated Zone was part of a corporate attempt to grow genetically-modify plants and control women's reproduction. By implanting human genes in fruit, medial teams associated with the Big Six tried to find alternative ways to reverse the high rate of infertility in women.⁵⁸ However, "the pollen blew every which way and could not be contained" (Lai, *Salt* 258). The modified genes thus "fertilized the fruit of trees bred for other purposes," including "trees bred to withstand cold climates," such as durian trees (258).⁵⁹ The fruit of these trees were deemed "too dangerous" because women could become pregnant "without any need for

⁵⁸ The experiments are said to have begun "a century ago" (Lai, *Salt* 258). This is stated in the year 2062, which suggests that the experiments began in the 1960s.

⁵⁹ My reading of the genetically-modified durian's connections to Miranda's durian odour problematizes Deer, who asserts that Miranda's durian odour "represents how an organic, non-technologically modified essence can persist and thwart the power structures of Serendipity" ("Remapping" 138). I argue that Miranda's scent challenges Serendipity's power structures precisely because it is linked to genetic modifications that subvert reductive notions of essential purity.

insemination”; “[t]he fertility those durians provided” was therefore considered “neither natural or controllable” (256-8).⁶⁰ In other words, these experiments resulted in queer forms of reproduction that the Big Six could not control. Miranda’s sign is a material trace of these queer “contaminated” origins.

At the end of the novel, Nu Wa’s subjectivity begins to merge more seamlessly with Miranda’s than ever before, signalling Miranda’s acceptance of her “contaminated” interspecies connections. Lai indicates, however, that learning to accept one’s “putrid origins” is an ongoing process. When Evie and Miranda discover a shack in the woods containing a new group of male clones made in Dr. Flowers’ image, Miranda suggests that they “torch it” but Evie refuses, stating: “Those are my cousins [...] And I am not a murderer” (Lai, *Salt* 267). Pondering Evie’s response, Miranda/Nu Wa thinks: “This is a story about stink, after all, a story about rot, about how life grows out of the most fetid-smelling places” (268). Re-shaped by her experiences with Evie, Miranda/Nu Wa learns to respond to her own interspecies relationships, and to the new ones she encounters, by acknowledging that the contamination symbolized and materialized by pungent odours is a central part of species life. Indeed, it is also productive of new life, as Miranda/Nu Wa and Evie give birth to a baby girl that is potentially the product of their pungent first sexual encounter and fertilized by the genetically-modified durian fed to her by the Sonias. Miranda/Nu Wa gives birth in a hot spring as her and Evie’s legs fuse into fish tails. Like the sourceless “rotten-egg smell” that marks Nu Wa’s narrative in the beginning – a “stink of beginnings and endings” that marked her own creation of people – the “faint smell of salt” permeates the air around the sulphurous hot spring in the novel’s

⁶⁰ For a discussion of how Lai’s subversion of conventional modes of reproduction “writes back” to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Ridley Scott’s film *Blade Runner*, see Morris (2004).

final scene (268). Lai does not offer a hermetically-sealed, circular ending, however. Significantly, the text concludes: “Everything will be all right, I thought, until next time” (269). According to Mansbridge, the ending’s “ominous tone” rejects the utopian feminist assertion of a “new, pure point of origin” (131). If, as Liu argues, *Salt Fish Girl* asks readers to consider what “recognition” means and how we “recognize” others (333), then the novel – like the pungent odours that permeate it – forces us to confront the varying ways in which we may be implicated in the politics of olfactory recognition.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored what I call the olfactory turn in Canadian diasporic women's writing. I have investigated why three prominent Canadian diasporic writers – Shani Mootoo, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai – turn to smell to represent the complex dynamics of diaspora as a condition of subjectivity marked by race, gender, and sexuality. As I noted in the Introduction, my understanding of diasporic subjectivity stems from Lily Cho's 2007 essay "The Turn to Diaspora." Cho's essay investigates the increasing critical interest in diaspora as a concept, a shift that she describes as the "diasporic turn" (15). Near the beginning of the essay, Cho writes: "In exploring what I have noted as the diasporic turn, I am not just talking about the turn to diaspora in academic discussions; I am also proposing that diasporic subjects emerge in turning, turning back upon those markers of the self – homeland, memory, loss – even as they turn on or away from them" (15). Cho's suggestion that diasporic subjects are constituted through a process of turning has provocative resonances for discussions of smell and diaspora. Turning involves either opening oneself up to, or closing down the possibility of, engagement; one turns away from or turns toward something – or, as Cho suggests, one may turn towards and away from something at the same time. On a fundamental level, turning emphasizes relationality. It is an action that occurs in relation.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, smell is also a key site of relational engagement. Scents mediate encounters between different subjects, spaces, and temporalities, and smelling – in the dual sense of the term as a process of emitting and perceiving scents – constitutes a powerful form of intersubjective interaction. My dissertation has focused on how diasporic subjects engage with a range of scents and how

these relationships are in turn shaped by the olfactory perceptions of others in new sites of habitation. I have explored, for example, how anxieties may make one turn away from scent, while pleasure may make one turn toward it. Indeed, the same scent may produce very different affective responses depending on the cultural connotations of the scent in question and the contingencies of the circumstances; one thus turns away from a scent that another turns toward, which may end up making both subjects anxious about the odour. I have also examined how scents produce ambivalence – which way do I turn? – while other odours may form the basis for agential connections.

Smell, like diaspora, may therefore be thought of as a process of turning. What does it mean for one to turn toward, or away from, scent? What does it mean to acknowledge or disavow diffuse connections with other subjects, spaces, or temporalities? As Cho writes in the final lines of her essay: “To turn to diaspora is to turn to the power of relation and the enabling possibilities of difference. To turn to diaspora is to turn away from the seemingly inexorable march of history and towards the secret of memories embedded within the intimacies of the everyday. To turn to diaspora is to turn to restless specters of sorrow bound by that which is lost and to obscure miracles of connection marked by that which is found. Let us then turn to diaspora” (28). If turning to diaspora means turning toward relationality, difference, memory, intimacy, and ultimately, forms of connection, then turning to diaspora may be enhanced by turning to olfaction and exploring the complex and often unacknowledged ways that scent shapes diasporic subjectivities.

To this end, this dissertation offers a framework for thinking about the intersubjective interactions mediated by scent that emerge in relation to diaspora. Appropriating diffusion from its scientific and technical genealogies and re-

conceptualizing it as a model of movement and mixing that complicates notions of linear time, bounded space, and singular origins, I have conceptualized diffuse connections as a framework that emphasizes the mutually-constitutive intersubjective interactions that emerge through scent and shape diasporic subjectivities in subtle yet significant ways. The chapters have explored literary works by Mootoo, Goto, and Lai that turn to smell to represent the complex dynamics of diaspora as a condition of subjectivity marked by race, gender, and sexuality.

In Chapter One, I explored the relationship between smell, queerness, and diasporic domesticity, a phrase I use to describe how domestic space in the diaspora becomes a crucial site through which the social, political, and cultural politics of the homeland are played out. Focusing on Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, I read the anxious reassertion of heteropatriarchy in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora as a compensatory mechanism for the way in which diaspora queers identity. I also investigated the impact that this reassertion has on diasporic women, who are often responsible for both embodying and reproducing the homeland in the domestic spaces of the diaspora. I explored how Mootoo represents smell as a site of colonial mimicry and the colonial education of aesthetic taste, as a medium for the anxious reproduction of heteropatriarchal forms of Indian nationalism, and as a trigger that evokes memories of incestuous violence. I also examined how smell may be re-signified as a subversive, anti-colonial tool that challenges the heteropatriarchal structures of kinship and reproduction that inform repressive constructions of "home." It is precisely because smell functions as a tool of colonialism and a mode of heteropatriarchal oppression that Mala Ramchandin turns to scent to queer the home from within. I also read smell as an alternative "language" that allows Mala to articulate the unspeakable trauma associated with her

father's abusive home. Ultimately, I suggested that scent mediates diffuse connections between queer diasporic subjects and thus forms of the basis for alternative forms of diasporic community that remake the "home" from within.

In Chapter Two, I examined the relationship between smell, diaspora, settler colonialism, and indigenization. Complicating the binary of "Europeans" as colonizing and "Aboriginals" as colonized subjects, this chapter conceptualized what I call "diasporic settlement." Drawing on diaspora's etymological connection to the practice of scattering seeds, I approached diaspora as a concept that emphasizes techniques of settlement rather than racialized identities and argued that diaspora offers a useful framework for considering how a range of racialized communities may be complicit in ongoing forms of colonization. Using Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* as an intertext, I examined Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *The Kappa Child* as novels that explore the complexities of Japanese-Canadian diasporic settlement through the lens of cultivation and represent smell as a key mode through which diasporic subjects relate to the Canadian landscape. In my discussion of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, I read agricultural odours as a byproduct, or residue, of cultivation, which I framed as a primary process of indigenization. In my analysis of *The Kappa Child*, I suggested that Goto's representation of blocked nasal passages explores how diasporic nostalgia may contribute to the perpetuation of colonial violence in new sites of settlement. Although scents associated with the kappa seem to allow the narrator to productively engage with her past homeland and present site of settlement in a way that queers heteropatriarchal frameworks of diaspora, I interrogated Goto's representations of diffuse connections and suggested that the celebration of the kappa – like the celebration of Naoe in *Chorus of Mushrooms* –

risks obscuring how Japanese Canadians' presence on the prairies is predicated upon the absence of Indigenous peoples.

In Chapter Three, I focused on the relationship between smell, diaspora, contamination, and pandemic in Lai's novel *Salt Fish Girl*. Moving beyond analyses of colour-based "yellow peril" discourses, I explored how dominant narratives of Chinese immigration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century mobilized representations of smell to construct Vancouver's Chinatown and its inhabitants as sites of contagion. I also explored how contemporary pandemic discourses pathologize racialized "Asian" subjects through scent and thus draw attention to the limits of multiculturalist policies that claim to celebrate cultural difference. I explored how Lai's novel constellates these historical moments and re-frames them through the lens of the future to explore how past, present, and ostensibly future discourses of "Chineseness," smell, and disease are inextricably linked. I also examined how Lai maps the complex spatio-temporal dimensions of diasporic subjectivity in her representation of Miranda Ching's shifting relationship to scent, memory, and pathologizing discourses. Reading Lai's speculative future as a counterpoint to the fear-mongering discourse of pandemic speculation, I suggested that Lai challenges Western fears of human-animal intimacy that inform pandemic discourse through the figure of Evie Xin, a clone with a fishy scent whose genetically-modified DNA blurs species lines. Bringing Donna Haraway's theory of "companion species," or interspecies mixing, into conversation with my concept of diffuse connections, I read Lai's representation of posthuman kinship as a productive approach to intersubjective interactions that not only challenges racist epistemologies linking smell, animality, and contamination, but also provides a useful framework for reconceptualizing the notion of diasporic community.

There is much room for further study on the relationship between smell and diaspora. In this dissertation, I specifically focused on novels by Canadian diasporic women writers that explore the relationship between smell and female diasporic subjectivities. As I argued in Chapter One, diasporic women are typically responsible for both reproducing and embodying the “homeland.” Scents – particularly those associated with the domestic space, a crucial site for reproducing home – thus resonate in particular ways for diasporic women. As I noted in the Introduction, a number of male diasporic writers in Canada, including Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, Fred Wah, André Alexis, and David Chariandy, privilege the olfactory realm in their work. Examining how these writers engage with olfaction might further illuminate the gendered dimensions of smell and diaspora. How do male diasporic authors write about scent and gender? How do their representations of smell subvert or reinforce patriarchal frameworks of diaspora?

The writers I examined in this dissertation also emphasize the provocative way in which smell is connected to queerness. Since the concept of diaspora is predicated upon the scattering of seeds, a practice associated with heteronormative frameworks of reproduction, Mootoo, Goto, and Lai explore scent’s potential for imagining alternative approaches to diaspora. This dissertation interrogates how smell may be mobilized for heteronormative purposes – particularly in my analysis of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, which explores how odour may be mobilized to both fortify and queer heteropatriarchal constructions of “home” in diaspora – but it would be useful to explore how other diasporic writers represent smell and sexuality in ways that reinforce heteronormative gender relations. How do these writers engage – or resist engaging with – scent’s queering potential? How do they discursively contain this potential in their work? Examining how other diasporic writers represent smell’s transgressive materiality and

relationship to sexuality would provide useful context for how Mootoo, Goto, and Lai queer smell – and by extension, diaspora – in their work.

This dissertation focused primarily on smell and non-white forms of racialization, but further analyses of the link between smell, whiteness, and diaspora would help map scent's complex relationship to multiple forms of racialization. How does smell function in relation to white communities that might be considered diasporic?¹ In other words, how does scent operate *within* the category of whiteness to differentiate between different races and ethnicities? Ukrainian, Italian, and Irish immigrant populations are just a few of the diasporic communities once marked by race that are now considered “white.” How did Euro-Canadians from the so-called founding nations of England and France rely on discourses of smell to differentiate themselves from these communities? Early Ukrainian-Canadian immigrants, for example, were said to smell of garlic; in the 1930s, Dr. G. E. Lloyd, the Anglican Bishop of Saskatchewan, famously described Ukrainian Canadians as “dirty, ignorant, garlic-smelling, non-preferred continentals” (qtd. in Czuboka 30).² How does smell's role change in the absence of markers of skin colour and other visual signs of difference? Does it become even more important as a tool of differentiation?³ What do these forms of olfactory differentiation suggest about Anglo- and French-Canadian anxieties surrounding the settlement of Canada by other European immigrants, a move that was supposedly necessary due to labour shortages? For literary scholars, it

¹ The relationship between whiteness and diaspora is a contentious issue in Canadian diaspora studies. For a discussion of the relationship between whiteness and diaspora in the Canadian context, see Jennifer Bowering Delisle's 2008 essay “A Newfoundland Diaspora?: Moving Through Ethnicity and Whiteness” in *Canadian Literature*.

² For further examples of how Ukrainian-Canadians have been historically associated with the smell of garlic, see *Prisoners in the Promised Land: The Ukrainian Internment of Anya Soloniuk*, a diary written by a young Ukrainian-Canadian girl in 1914, and Ken Mitchell's play *Cruel Tears* (1977), published just before multiculturalism was made an official policy.

³ These questions would be provocative to consider in relation to the Jewish diasporic community in Canada, given its particular historical relationship to diaspora.

would be useful to examine how these historical discourses of olfaction inform the work of contemporary “white” diasporic writers. For instance, Ukrainian-Canadian author Janice Kulyk Keefer often foregrounds smell in her work, particularly when she explores characters’ relationships to past homelands and other issues that resonate within the context of diaspora.⁴ How do “white” writers like Keefer, who do not face the same kind of racial discrimination as Canada’s so-called visible minorities, represent the relationship between smell and diaspora? How does her work differ from writing by racialized diasporic women writers like Mootoo, Goto, and Lai? Exploring these questions would provide valuable insight into how smell functions in relation to a variety of forms of racialization.

This dissertation explored the relationship between unmarked forms of whiteness – that is, the privileged forms of whiteness associated with Euro-Canadian populations – and concepts such as olfactory neutrality in order to underscore the cultural stakes of smell for dominant populations that racialize non-white diasporic communities through scent. Recent events demonstrate that these questions are important ones to consider in contemporary Canadian society and that issues of scent continue to take on new forms. For example, in the last few years the concept of olfactory neutrality has emerged under a different guise in the proliferation of “scent-free policies.” These policies, which restrict the use of scented products – particularly perfume, cologne, and other fragrant personal care products such as deodorant, lotions, shampoos, and soaps – have been adopted in many workplaces, schools, hospitals, government buildings, and other institutions across

⁴ See, for example, Keefer’s novel *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998).

Canada.⁵ According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, scent sensitivities fall under the category of “environmental sensitivities” and are a health and safety issue (“Scent-free” n. pag). The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety defines environmental sensitivities as “a chronic condition whereby a person has symptoms when exposed to certain chemicals or other environmental agents at low levels tolerated by most people”; these symptoms “range in severity from mild to debilitating” (Women’s College Hospital qtd. in “Scent-free” n. pag). Symptoms may include include headaches, dizziness, nausea, skin irritation, difficulty concentrating, respiratory problems, depression, and anxiety (“Scent-Free” n. pag). Yet there is still some debate on whether or not environmental sensitivities exist. In a recent article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Emily Senger writes: “[T]he science supporting such [scent-free] policies is fuzzy and inconclusive. While scents can trigger both physiological and psychological symptoms in some individuals, there is no reliable diagnostic test for fragrance allergies” (n. pag). As I suggested in the Introduction, olfactory perception has a long history of being classified as highly subjective and therefore difficult to measure using quantitative scientific methods.

The discourses surrounding environmental sensitivities are provocative for those interested in the cultural study of smell. How might contemporary discourses surrounding scent-free policies and environmental sensitivities risk reinscribing anxieties about the contamination of personal space and bodily boundaries? How might they reify the notion that certain spaces and populations should be scentless? The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety stresses that scent-free policies are “being implemented

⁵ There are few statistics on the number of scent-free policies currently in place across Canada, but in a Globe and Mail online survey of over 7,500 people, forty percent of respondents claimed that their employer had a policy restricting fragrances in the workplace (Immen n. pag).

as a result of medical concerns – not merely because of a dislike for a certain smell” (“Scent-free” n. pag). Scent-free policies particularly target fragrances and other scented products associated with women’s beauty regimes, thereby complicating long-held notions that women must cleanse themselves of foul odours and perfume their bodies in order to be desirable to men. Future studies could therefore consider how scent-free policies are gendered in particular ways and complicate conventional approaches to scent and femininity.

It is also important to consider how these new constructions of olfactory neutrality intersect with processes of racialization. How do scent-free policies and discourses of environmental sensitivities operate in relation to Canada’s official multiculturalist policies? How might these policies and discourses reinscribe forms of racism that liberal narratives of multiculturalism relegate to the past? Scent-free policies may seem to target perfumes and other personal care products, but how might they work to discipline bodies marked by other scents? As I noted in the Introduction, the city of Gatineau, Quebec introduced a 16-point “values guide” for new immigrants in 2011 that advised against cooking foods that create “strong smells” (qtd. in Wallace n. pag). The controversial guide, which has since been removed from Gatineau’s programming, stated: “In some cases, especially at school, in an apartment setting and at work, it is important to keep this deeply-rooted value in mind as it could result, in some cases, in isolation and exclusion” (qtd. in Wallace n. pag). The guide underscores how the attempt to create “scent-free” spaces cannot simply be understood as an attempt to accommodate medical issues, as the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety suggests, but rather must be read in relation to the desire to manage and contain racialized notions of cultural difference under Canadian multiculturalism. Certain scents – particularly those connected to “ethnic food”

– are still acceptable in designated spaces like restaurants, where cultural difference is commodified and made palatable for Euro-Canadian consumption; but similar odours are not acceptable in the supposedly scent-free workplaces, schools, hospitals, and other shared spaces where bodily markers of cultural difference should be “neutralized.”

With this dissertation, I hope to provide an entry point into the study of smell and diaspora. By turning to smell as a crucial site where diaspora, race, gender, sexuality, and a range of other issues intersect, I hope to have shown that olfaction is a valuable critical framework that offers enabling possibilities for thinking through the complex forms of relationality that emerge in relation to diaspora. I also hope to have demonstrated that the field of Canadian diasporic women’s writing may be enriched by further studies that explore how diasporic authors engage with the metaphors and materialities of scent. To echo Lily Cho’s words at the end of “The Turn to Diaspora,” let us turn then to olfaction.

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