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Remembering 'The English' in four 'memory moment' portraits: navigating anti-Japanese discrimination and postcolonial ambiguity in mid-twentieth century Alberta, Canada

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ABSTRACT



This article explores anti-Japanese racial discrimination in the mid-twentieth century as it was experienced in everyday life from the 1940s to the 1960s. Drawing on oral-history interviews with *nisei* ('second generation') individuals, it presents four 'memory moment' portraits to consider the transformation of anti-Japanese discrimination, whereby colonial mechanisms prevalent during the Second World War gave way to make employment, education – and later, intimate – opportunities commonplace, even as 'micro-aggressive' forms of racism powerfully if subtly continued. Central to understanding how remembering narrators perceived discrimination were 'The English'. Emergent from memories of painful engagements with real individuals, 'The English' were a stereotype whose ambiguous indeterminacy could create opportunities at a time when Canada and Japanese Canadians' place within it were in a state of flux. The 'postcolonial ambiguity' that the four 'memory moment' portraits explore is not solely a characteristic of the past. Rather, the 'memory moment' portraits describe instances of remembering in close detail as performative acts animated by the remembering narrator's desire to script their histories and share them. These are also quantum moments in which past and present are straddled, sparking a potent conjuncture of history and memory.

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Portrait 1, discovering 'The English' – 'Harry': the early 1940s

'I don't recall being discriminated against', said 'Harry' (2017), a Japanese Canadian *nisei* ('second generation') born in 1935, 'except for one kid'.¹ At first, his story was delivered in such a matter-of-fact way that it seemed little more than an incidental anecdote to illustrate what it was like growing up in a small southern Alberta farming town one-hundred miles north of the Canada–United States border in the 1940s. He described:

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racist name-calling sometime around the commencement of the trans-Pacific war at the end of 1941

The kid comes to me and calls me a “Jap”.

recollections of regular altercations

He was in Grade 2 . . . he was a big tall kid and I’m just a short kid, eh. I remember fighting with him every year until about grade 6 or grade 7.

As ‘Harry’ recalled what ‘the kid’ did back then, something changed. Far from being a distant memory, its details faded and its immediacy dulled, it started to feel like the ‘the kid’ was with us. ‘Harry’s’ focus blurred momentarily, and in an instant, the story re-fixed. ‘Harry’s’ words sprung to life shifting the depth of field away from ‘the kid’ to put in high relief not just what ‘Harry’ did back then, but what he was doing now in this act of historical self-creation:

stepping away in reflection

Then I realize this guy doesn’t know what the hell he’s talking about. All he knows is what his mom or dad is talking about, so I forgive him for calling me a “Jap” all those years. [laughs].

explaining the discrimination

The parents are talking about the “Jap” did this, and the “Japs” are doing this . . . I found out that his parents were English . . . The English people were offensive toward the Japanese . . . this English couple were talking about Japan and they were fighting against Germans in Europe, . . . they hear about what’s going on in Japan and they just referred to them as “Japs”.

Introduction

In the wider context of the 1940s, ‘Harry’s’ encounter with ‘the kid’ seems quotidian. Yet it is not to highlight how the Second World War was experienced by the Japanese Canadians that I detail it above. Instead, consider the rupture that ‘Harry’s’ story isolates. On a vastly smaller order of historical magnitude than the war, ‘the kid’ might seem little more than a minor detail in the historical blur of everyday life. However, as ‘Harry’s’ narration suggests, so efficaciously potent was his memory of ‘the kid’ that it generated a long-term process of personal becoming. Racially affronted all those years ago to the moment of our interview engagement in which this rupture was re-collected and reconciled, ‘Harry’ asserted his place in the world and his right to script history, including the source of anti-Japanese discrimination *vis-à-vis* the mid-

century clash of empires. It is memories like this – instances of anti-Japanese racist discrimination that sundered everyday life – that this article will explore. Crucially, even as it seeks to give voice to such experiences and explore their wider contexts, this article does not treat them in a positivist manner. Rather, in order to apprehend why apparently fleeting instances had the power to rupture, we must also engage the quantum dynamic of remembrance, when the remembering narrator straddles past and present. In this process that I will refer to as a ‘memory moment’, the narration of one’s past is simultaneously a self-reflective moral assertion of who oneself is precisely in the moment of the interview engagement. In this light, ‘memory moments’ are conjunctures of history and memory.

This article will present ‘memory moment’ portraits drawn from oral-history engagements with four individuals who self-identify as *nisei* (‘second generation’).² Although the number of interviews treated in this article are too few to be representative of a wider Japanese Canadian experience, they do illustrate the diversity of memory and the narrative arcs of historical change. Together, the ‘memory moments’ assembled here might suggest a chronology of momentous transformation as follows: between the 1940s and the 1960s, a state of affairs in which the Canadian state enacted racist violence to disempower, displace, and dispossess Japanese Canadians gave way to one in which their full participation in society became incontrovertible. Yet as we shall see in portraits focussing on employment and education, as well as intimate relations, this mid-twentieth century transformation was in the subjective experience far more complex and contradictory; anti-Japanese racism hardly ceased, but instead, it was transformed as discrimination took on ‘micro-aggressive’ form.

Central to ‘Harry’s’ story is the act of forgiving ‘the kid’. Not only does this spark the realization of his own self-sense of righteousness to affirm the better man he has become. More pertinently, we identify the very point on which the narrative arc of his moral transformation pivots, namely, ‘The English’. In fact, ‘Harry’s’ naming of ‘The English’ was far from idiosyncratic. In all the oral-history interviews I conducted up to 2017, only ‘The English’ were identified amongst white ethnic/racial identities with any frequency. More pertinently, in nearly all instances ‘The English’ cued a curiously similar affective pattern of meaning-making, according to which historical understanding was darkened at the hands of ‘The English’, and in which personal hurt and injury was constructed as relational and adversarial: ‘The English’ *versus* me; ‘The English’ against me as Japanese. It must be emphasised here that our encounter with ‘The English’ in the ‘memory moment’ portraits aims less to understand who ‘The English’ actually were or are even when real individuals and actual acts are identified. As will become evident, ‘The English’ is a stereotype whose power to generate meaning comes not from its putative veracity, but from ambiguity: it generates a *kind* of

subjectively meaningful truth that can neither be “empirically proved or logically construed’.

Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity. (Bhabha 1994, 95, 117)

The stereotype is also efficacious since, as Rey Chow (2010) observes, it is ‘capable of engendering realities. . .’, ones that ‘[generate] belief, commitment and action’ (53). Indeed, ‘Harry’s’ discovery of ‘The English’ that is recounted in his narration of ‘the kid’ is a potent moral tale of inter-racial conflict overcome. It scripts the moment when the authority of the English-*cum*-British to exert violence – racist words in the schoolyard translated into physical aggression mirroring wider contexts of war – is re-inscribed by ‘Harry’ as a potent moral act. In his words, ‘The English’ were named to explain the discrimination, judged as guilty and pardoned according to ‘Harry’s’ standards; above all, ‘The English’ were defined and rendered a subject in his gaze.

On ambiguity

As ‘Harry’s’ example illustrates, ‘The English’ as a stereotype could be efficacious. In the conjuncture of memory and history that the discovery of ‘The English’ triggered, a kind of energy was released so potent as to challenge the very authority from which anti-Japanese discrimination emanated. But what is this energy that could bring perceptions of one’s place in the world and the relationships that animate it into juddering flux? Before continuing onto the ‘memory moment’ portraits, let’s consider ambiguity in more detail, assembling it as a conceptual framework which along the way will provide an opportunity to consider the wider historical contexts of the Japanese Canadians and mid-century Canada, and their historiographies.

Japanese Canadian *nisei* – the space of hybridity

Closer scrutiny of the backgrounds of the *nisei* individuals I met reveals the approximate nature of the generational identifier. The oldest person I met, born in 1916, reached the age of 100 in the year of our meeting, whereas the youngest was born in 1947; the former spoke little English, had worked a trade, and identified closely with the values of his *issei* (‘first generation’) parents, while the latter, inter-married, degree educated and professional was closer to *sansei* (‘third generation’) of her age. While recognising Lisa Lowe’s (1991) caution against the tendency to essentialize Asian American cultures through exclusive emphasis on generational identities (26), *nisei* I encountered often called upon binary constructions of generational

difference that gave credence to opposition between *issei* as traditionally Japanese and *nisei* as assimilationist and/or Canadianized (Hirabayashi 1976, 30–32; Camelon, 1994).³ Listening more closely, however, appeals to this construction could be complex, involving a dynamic negotiation of one's own historical and cultural resources. This was precisely because, as David Yoo (2000) observes of American *nisei*, they often had to grapple with 'the challenges of living in two worlds', of being 'a generation "in between"' (295–296).

Born in Canada, the *nisei* were Canadian citizens and subjects of the British Empire. They were part of a population of Japanese Canadians that in 1941 numbered 23,149, of which nearly ninety-five percent lived in enclaves in the southwest corner of British Columbia (Kobayashi 1989, 6).⁴ But the *nisei*, as children of some one-million Japanese who emigrated from Japan to areas around the Pacific between 1868 and 1941 (Stanlaw 2006, 48), were also inheritors of Japan's efforts to modernize itself. To fend off western imperial ambitions, the emerging power projected its authority through the globalization of its economy, civilization of its society, the assembly of a formal empire, and the transplantation of its citizens to informal settler colonies in the Americas that developed the trans-Pacific Japanese presence and resource-base (Endoh 2009; Azuma 2005; Kumei 2002). A close historical analysis of the relationship of *nisei* to Japan, including how notions of 'Japanese race/nation' may have influenced Japanese Canadian identity, is beyond the scope of this article. Yet scholarship on the Japanese diaspora has compellingly argued that it generated complex, contradictory, 'eclectic', and 'hybrid' senses of self and community (Azuma 2005, 111, 133; Morimoto and Morimo, 2018, 27; Aoki, 2019). But, in calling attention to the potential 'in-between' situation of *nisei*, we are alerted to how the appeal to one's own Japanese-ness might be wielded as a resource in the navigation of anti-Japanese discrimination. This is especially pertinent in 'Harry's' portrait.

If remembering is a performative act conducted specifically for a listening (and reading) audience – me as interviewer, and by extension, you, the reader – Japanese-ness is part of a lifelong negotiation. As we will see in the 'memory moment' portraits, it is precisely because of what post-colonial scholar Ien Ang (2001) self-reflectively argues to be her own 'space of hybridity' – the ambiguous situation of 'living between Asia and the West' – that Japanese-ness re-/generates the remembering narrator as a historical agent, and lends what is remembered some of its authority (2).

Canada's British world in post-colonial flux

It is worth recalling that well into the 1950s Britain's Canadian 'white dominion' 'remained part of the British imperial system, bound by a web of cultural, defense, and economic ties' (Stockwell 2008, 272) and an imperial demographic network and identity (Thompson 2008, 49; Palmer 1985b,

29–30). In the case of Alberta, the demographic influence of British settlers – around half of Alberta’s population were of British ethnic origin from the 1900s to 1950s – as well as their foundational cultural and social influence cannot be ignored: their large concentration in south-western Alberta’s ranching industry, for example, created a ‘unique British lifestyle’ (Palmer 1985a, 8–11).⁵

As profound as the British-*cum*-English influence was, historians on either side of the Atlantic have approached Canada’s mid-twentieth century in terms of flux, specifically in the form of the withdrawal of British imperial influence or what Leowen and Friesen (2009) term the decline of ‘Anglo conformism’ (3–4; 8). In his studies of national identities in English Canada, José Igartua (2006) proffers the term ‘de-ethnicization’ to mark a largely unrecognized shift away from ‘ethnic nationalism’ to a ‘civic’ form (1). In the former, which corresponds with pre-1960s Canada, ‘national identity... continued to be represented as resting on British political tradition and culture’, not to mention the primacy of ‘whiteness’ (12–13, 20). In this racialized imaginary, Japanese were largely excluded (see Chapter 2). According to the latter, in the 1960s ‘English [ethnic] Canada had vanished, replaced by a broader, civic definition of Canadian society, ... to include citizens of whatever linguistic, cultural, or ethnic origins’ (1). Citing Igartua, C.P. Champion (2016) takes a more nuanced approach by qualifying the notion of ‘post-British identity’ (68). In an analysis of political debates in the 1960s concerning a national flag, Champion asserts that the new Maple Leaf flag ‘was a less dramatic break with the past than is commonly assumed’: it ‘was not explicitly British in appearance’, yet its genesis and look ‘represented a continuing, if more subtle, Britishness’ (68–69). Champion’s intervention is critical because it clears conceptual space to consider the ambiguities of identity fluctuations in Canada. Turning to Antony Hopkins, whose 2008 essay inserts the Empire’s white Dominions into the historiography of British-World decolonization (212), we can thus begin to conceive of Canada as ‘post-colonial’.

In this account, I do not foreground the notion of Canada as a ‘settler colony’ within the framework of Indigenous politics.⁶ But insofar as “‘the opportunities for non-Natives in Canada comes as a consequence of the land loss, resource expropriation, social upheaval, and political repression of Aboriginal peoples’” (Justice cited in Kim and McCall 2012, 6), we are alerted to why and how the erstwhile white Dominion ‘was and continues to be marked by unequal power relations’ (Kim and McCall 2012, 3). In this light, the place occupied by ‘The English’ in the ‘memory moment’ portraits comes into sharper relief. So too does the creativity which, in the flux of decolonization and the emergent post-colonial Canadian situation, is activated by ‘The English’ and the navigation of anti-Japanese discrimination.

Stepping out of history – methodology and ethos

With Imperial Japan's attack on the British Empire and the United States in 1941, anti-Japanese xenophobia that had for decades sought to exclude Japanese Canadians from economic and public life⁷ finally exploded. In response to populist vitriol, Britain's Canadian Dominion embarked on a programme that forcibly relocated over 21,000 Japanese Canadians from their homes (Kobayashi 1989, 4) to a variety of incarceration settings across the nation: the sugar-beet farms worked by over four-thousand individuals as forced labour in Alberta and other prairie provinces formed one of Canada's main 'carceral spaces' (Oikawa 2012).⁸ Over the next seven years, waves of displacement over and over again as a result of wartime measures that extended to 1949 would see Japanese Canadians scattered across Canada and Japan. Their Pacific-coast communities were destroyed, property was taken, families were torn apart, and their racial presence was explicitly targeted by a policy of assimilation. Euphemistically called an 'Evacuation', Ann Sunahara (1981) has exposed in her pivotal work how the internment, with its trumped-up charges concerning a supposed Japanese Canadian threat to national security, was motivated by a 'politics of racism'.

More than any other topic, it is the internment that has triggered the discursive production of Japanese Canadian history. In scholarly enquiry and popular media and heritage representation, the internment as a historical construction has powerfully been writing the Japanese Canadians into history since the late 1970s.⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage fully with the extensive production of what Oikawa identifies as 'Canadian internment literature' (2012, 5). But to understand some of its narrative and analytical significance, let me briefly highlight the approach of two oral historians. The first is Oikawa (2012) whose research explores the effects of the internment. Amplifying the voices of women who were removed and their daughters, her approach to 'the traumatic experiences of past generations [and] experiences that haunt the present' (5) seeks to uncover the racializing mechanics of power and violence and, in turn, how Japanese Canadians are 'produced [as] subjects of internment' [7]. If the innovation of Oikawa's approach is the theoretical rigour of its Foucauldian premise, the grounded analysis of wartime memories of another scholar – Pamela Sugiman – well illustrates the power of linguistic sensitivity. For example, in her 2009 article "Life is Sweet" Sugiman develops a vocabulary of the effects of internment whose core concepts are framed in the language of post-trauma. Thus, 'vulnerability' is a state of being effected by 'persecution' – 'a remnant of traumatic events' leaving 'psychic scars' (191–192); while 'composure' – to 'remake or repress memories' – is an on-going process in which the past is 'still painful', 'unsafe', and where trauma has 'never been resolved' (199). The works of Oikawa and Sugiman are vital engagements that in their

treatment of the internment and its enduring effects powerfully inform Japanese Canadian historical subjectivity.

How does this article situate itself within Canadian internment literature? The research from which this article draws specifically asked remembering narrators how they might begin to narrate a history of the latter half of the twentieth century, and anti-Japanese discrimination was one of many concerns that they raised. But also evident was an ambivalent position towards the internment. ‘I don’t want to be remembered [in history] as a victim’ said a *nisei* women whose family was relocated to Alberta to supply sugar-beet labour.

I don’t want to be remembered only by or in terms of the suffering of the war years. We [*nisei*] built things, created the future, had fun, and moved forward looking to the future. (2018)¹⁰

A close analysis of this sentiment, interested in the traumatic legacy of internment, might productively apply concepts of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘composure’. But if we choose not to frame it in relation to internment, what *different* possibilities might it suggest? First, as the episodic structure of this article reflects, pursuing other narrative threads of enquiry – for us, everyday experiences of anti-Japanese discrimination across a range of historical contexts – can destabilise established chronologies and their underlying logic of causation. In the process, focus is directed onto how remembering narrators recollect their memories: what is said, pacing and pauses, rhetorical style, the embodied performativity of recollection – facial expression and bodily gesture. Together, these isolate the engagement with discrimination – then and years later – as affectively potent and ethically vital, a ‘memory moment’. The aim is not simply a style of description. Rather, the ‘memory moments’ describing anti-Japanese discrimination are temporally dynamic, since a reflection on the past is also an active appeal to a remembered future. It alerts us to creativity, aspiration, and authority, all of which are avowals of one’s own agency that complement the vocabulary of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘composure’ with the concept of ‘resiliency’. To this end, the ‘memory moment’ portraits call upon a ‘desire-based framework’ that is ‘concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives’. In a critique of ‘damage-centred research’, Tuck (2009) advocates an:

axiological intervention that is intent on depathologising the experience of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered. That is to say that even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression (416).

The privileging of ‘*desire* instead of damage’ (416) is not to skirt the internment. It is, however, to suspend momentarily the ‘aggression’ of the ‘incomplete story’ as Tuck might identify it (416) that is constructed in terms of perpetrator/victim, power/resistance, coloniser/colonised, trauma/post-trauma. In this suspension, how might the twentieth century or parts of it be re-scripted? The ‘memory moment’ portraits individually and collectively introduce some of these experiences.

One implication of desire is methodological. Sunahara (1981) argues that while the ‘[telling] of stories in their own words’ has the advantage of ‘fleshing out the facts with personal experiences’, the account nevertheless is ‘marred by . . . the frailty of human memory’ (2). For us, it is precisely this that gives *nisei* voices their value in the narration of the Japanese Canadian historical experience, by which I mean two things: a factual record of the past which in their narrators’ intent faithfully describes transformation as lived, shaped, and effected in their everyday lives; and as memory, moments of recollection in the present through which the past as it is re-lived and re-shaped acquires truthful meaning. These two processes – the record and memory – are not automatically in opposition, but in their dissonance, we begin to appreciate how the performative act of narration can be empowering because it is imbued with moral urgency. As Ruthellen Josselson (2009) reminds us, ‘autobiographical memory . . . is a process of reconstruction rather than a faithful depiction . . . the present can be viewed as constructing the past and creating an implicit dialogue between the remembered and the remembering self’ (647). To this end, it may be that as so many of the *nisei* I met have entered their twilight years, their interviews sparked ‘memory moments’, a will to remember one more – maybe last – time, to talk with the purpose of sharing in order to narrate the past – one’s own past and the Japanese Canadians’ past – and to lend it moral weight before it is irrevocably silenced. In the purposeful sharing that ensues, the past and present inspire each other.

Before turning to the ‘memory moment’ portraits, I’d like to define ‘micro-aggressions’. According to the typology of ‘micro-aggressions’ which Sue et al. (2007) deploy, ‘Harry’ was the target specifically of a ‘micro-assault’, that is, ‘explicit racial derogations that are verbal (i.e. racial epithets), nonverbal (behavioral discrimination), or environmental (offensive visual displays) attacks meant to hurt the person of color . . . [they are] generally deliberate and conscious.’ Sue et al. give the example of ‘calling someone a “Chink” or “Jap”.’ We’ll encounter racial micro-aggressions again since, often ‘innocuous . . . overlooked, and unacknowledged’, they suggest *how* ‘racism has evolved into more subtle, ambiguous, and unintentional manifestations’ in everyday experience (72–73).

'The English'

Portrait 2, resisting 'The English' – 'Fumio': the late 1940s

On 5 March 1949, an editorial appeared in the daily newspaper catering to southern Alberta's economic and service hub, *The Lethbridge Herald*, entitled 'Our Japanese Citizens' (4). It posited that 'most of the Japanese evacuees have found Southern Alberta too much to their liking to want to leave'. The timing was significant because in just twenty-six days, anti-Japanese wartime measures implemented by the Canadian government in 1941 were finally to be officially terminated on 1 April 1949. Even more remarkable than the sea-change in attitudes towards the Japanese the article seemed to herald, was the tone it took. Self-congratulatory, it boasted: 'they have found more tolerance here than along the Pacific Coast'.

they have discovered that they could live at least as well from the fruits of their work in this area and they have seen a brighter future for themselves in Southern Alberta than they could ever expect of the West coast.

Never mind that just five-years earlier, Lethbridge City Council in solidarity with the Union of Alberta Municipalities – and in sentiments reminiscent of their Vancouver counterparts in 1941 – publicly affirmed its opposition to 'having the Japanese established in Alberta as permanent resident, and further that it is our desire at the conclusion of hostilities that they be removed' (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 20 June 1944, 7).

Yet 'Our Japanese Citizens' did not draw an entirely clear-cut demarcation line between a dark wartime past and a sunny future for inter-racial relations, even as it positioned southern Alberta's citizenry as this story's enlightened protagonist. Projecting paternalistic authority, it pronounced on the Japanese to re-assess their worth – and economic value – as a people suitable to inhabit, share, and partake of this land: 'through their industry and thrift, many of the evacuee families have managed to accumulate savings with which to buy farms or small businesses' ('Our Japanese Citizens' 1949, 4). This bountiful opportunity emerged not simply as a result of the material potential the land itself offered, however. Rather, the privilege of settling in southern Alberta was a gift whose bestowal had had to be earned: 'the experience *with* Japanese evacuees in Southern Alberta would suggest that they are being successfully re-established, largely through their own efforts [emphasis mine]'. The benevolence symbolized in the rescinding of the Dominion's anti-Japanese measures was not an automatic right, as the warning to Japanese-Canadians in the article's last line made passive-*micro*-aggressively clear: 'It is hoped there never again need be a so-called "Japanese problem" in any part of Canada' (4).

That Japanese Canadians' wartime treatment through the internment apparatus had entailed a display of imperial power was not lost on them.

‘They regarded [this/Canada] as their country’, explained ‘Fumio’ (2013) specifically naming ‘The English’: ‘and everyone else who wasn’t one of them, you know, we’re foreigners’. When we met in 2013, ‘Fumio’ was ninety-two years old. Our conversation took on a stop-start rhythm, and it was clear that recollecting the past required much energy. When it came to describing the racial climate of the latter half of the 1940s, however, he was animated as he pointedly emphasized, ‘but there was a lot of discrimination going on’. His words were few but the emotion they betrayed was as potent as the meaning they conveyed. On discrimination, he referenced some of the restrictions instituted by the City of Lethbridge: controls on individual movement and employment; bans on residence in the city; Royal Canadian Mounted Police surveillance; and the maintenance of social measures like race-based differential pricing for hospital treatment and barring Japanese from the City’s beer parlours (Ichikawa 1994, 46–49; Summary of City of Lethbridge Council Minutes, 1941–49; ‘Conference Report’ 1948). The social effect was to render the Japanese Canadians invisible; the institutional consequences were ethnically nationalist, to ‘keep Alberta for citizens of British origin’ as one Calgary Alderman stated in 1945 (Palmer 1980, 153).

By the end of the war, ‘Fumio’ was in his mid-twenties. Uprooted from Vancouver, he had arrived in southern Alberta with the first wave of ‘Evacuees’ in 1942 to work the region’s sugar-beet farms at official behest. In the process, the opportunity to pursue his chosen career as an accountant was taken away. This spurred a sense of injustice that helps to explain his commitment to advancing social justice, as evidenced by his joining the southern Alberta Japanese Canadian Citizen’s Association (JCCA) in the mid-1940s, which *inter alia* provided Japanese with legal representation. ‘There was a movement to kick them out, because ... the law stated that no person of Japanese ancestry evacuated can work in the City limits’, he explained of around two-dozen young Japanese women secretly hired by households in Lethbridge as domestic servants: ‘The first thing we tried to do was to get one of the girls to stand up and make a case of it’ (‘Fumio’ 2013). True to form, *The Lethbridge Herald* (1945) invoked ‘yellow-peril’ rhetoric about the inscrutable Oriental when it observed how the ‘Girls Grin About It ... “Sneak Into City”’ and described the JCCA as a ‘Mysterious “Japanese Committee”’ (April 10, 7).

The JCCA failed in its attempt to take the City to court: ‘we couldn’t get a female to stand up and ... battle this’ (‘Fumio’ 2013). In any event, the secret of Japanese domestics became so open that little could be done to control increasing demand especially among the city’s ‘big-shots ... who’ in the words of one citizen writing to *The Lethbridge Herald*, ‘have disregarded the Council’s dictums by acquiring Japanese maids’ (Morrison 1945, 4). This episode is of paramount importance, because it alerts us to a crucial element in how Japanese navigated the transformation of society and racial

discrimination in the aftermath of the Second World War: namely, work. ‘You can’t be choosey [with] the background that the laborer [has]’ recalled ‘Fumio’ (2013) acerbically. Indeed, southern Alberta’s flagship sugar-beet industry survived its labour shortages throughout the 1940s only thanks to the ‘irritating Japanese problem’ (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 5 August 1944, 6) whose hand labour worked 19,500 acres, producing two-thirds of the 1945 crop (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 24 January 1946, 4).

Even before war’s end, the reputation of the Japanese began to precede them. Robert Broder, owner of a vegetable canning plant, regarded the Japanese as ‘hardworking, dependable and honest . . . he was all for hiring Japanese so, you know, an awful lot of us, we got work there’ (‘Fumio’ 2013). By one account, this was as many as 165 men (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 26 October 1943, 5; 6 June 1944, 6). Of course, the importance of the cannery to the city economy, supplying major international food companies like Campbell’s and Heinz, made the City more amenable to granting special hiring permission. Working in the receiving department was particularly meaningful because it enabled ‘Fumio’ to put to use his accounting experience.

It was when ‘Fumio’ turned to describing Broder and his relationship with the Japanese that his narration began to change. ‘Oh, yeah. Absolutely!’ he declared, increasingly animated, ‘well, he talked to [Federal-government internment officials] too and says, “my factory! If you want me to operate the factory, I have to hire Japanese labor. If you say no, I’m going to shut down the factory”’ (‘Fumio’ 2013; see also ‘Minutes’ 585D 1945, 46, 61, 90). It was at this point that the boldness underscoring his feelings of admiration gave way to a hush, and in that instant, the hazy recollection of a distant story transformed into a revelation, a moment in the present illuminating something hitherto unknown, a discovery to re-configure memory: ‘In fact, you know’, he said, gaining momentum, ‘in order to have us work there, he constructed bunk houses’. Repeating the phrase, as its implications began to unfold:

He constructed bunk houses . . . We lived in there and they had a kitchen, and they made food – Japanese food. And there’s a bath, [a] Japanese *o-furo* you know, a hot tub, and every day, washing, we used to jump in the hot tub and then work in the factory. (‘Fumio’ 2013)

It was certainly the case that Broder’s housing provision made good business sense. Otherwise, workers faced time-consuming, arduous commutes from the area’s farms where their families resided as sugar-beet labour. But, for ‘Fumio’, something of an inter-racial alliance also emerged: based not only on economic rationale – labour in exchange for desperately needed *and* equal wages – but also on nurturing conditions in which these Japanese men might find camaraderie, familiar culture, and self-respect in their everyday lives.

Broder wasn't alone in seeking Japanese workers. There were the 'hundreds of Japanese evacuees who left Southern Alberta sugar beet farms ... to relieve the manpower shortage in the province's lumbering industry' during wartime winters, whose graft earned them 'letters of praise from employers over the work done' (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 4 April 1944, 7). Small businesses also sought the skills of Japanese individuals: in 1945, Alberta Poultry Marketers won their bid to hire chicken sexer, Mr. Yamada ('Minutes' 505D 1945, 323); Bird Construction engaged Mel Murakami who became one of the city's leading builders; Logan Garment took on seamstress Mary Oseki [*sic.*] ('Minutes' 585D 1945, 58, 160, 305). So conspicuous had the demand for Japanese become that *The Lethbridge Herald* reported on 'fears over the possibility of large numbers of the three thousand Japanese evacuees ... moving and settling permanently in Lethbridge' (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 30 May 1945, 7). Yet, by the end of the 1940s, the Japanese were being welcomed, albeit with caution. It may have been the case that southern Alberta's white population was enlightened in its civilising acceptance of the Japanese as 'Our Japanese Citizens' boasted. Yet the local activism of the JCCA had also successfully exposed the exclusionary logic of the internment underlying the city's wartime measures.

There is one more perspective to consider. As 'Fumio' observed of the late 1940s, 'people have to get used to you because [they need] labour' (2013). His words were matter-of-fact, but in their dead-pan delivery, they alert us to agency and change. Indeed, in their efforts to survive and in how they did it, ordinary Japanese each day effectively took advantage of an ambiguity in the emerging economic and social environment. Responding to the demand for their labour, they undermined restrictions on Japanese Canadians: employment had political consequences even if providing labour was not obviously strategic in intent. Japanese workers helped core industries survive and in turn, they imperceptibly created a labour demand which they then supplied. Each time that business lobbied for special dispensation to hire one or many, anti-Japanese discrimination was undermined: individual businesses themselves became what Pratt (1992) calls 'contact zones', that is 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often structured by highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination' (4). This brought dynamic change, since in the inter-racial interaction that these businesses necessitated and animated, people could get used to each other. In their creative navigation of racial discrimination, people like 'Fumio' helped to transform its forms, words, and attitudes. At the very least, they created an opening through which they might emerge from their erasure as they began to inscribe the postwar social tableau.

Portrait 3, enduring 'The English' – 'Naoko': the 1950s

'I started to work [for an important law office]' said 'Naoko' (2011) of her first full-time job having just graduated from Lethbridge's Garbutt Business College. Her words were careful and considered, so it was a surprise when she threw in, '... and he was a son of gun. Actually, the word "B[itch]" comes to mind'. She laughed and over the next few minutes, she described in detail a difficult man to work for. His demands for perfection were uncompromising: 'taking down shorthand, you know, you couldn't make any mistakes'. In 'Naoko's' recollection, the actions of her 'short-tempered' boss were unusually regimented and obsessive: 'He crumpled up a page that I made a mistake on, oh my he reprimanded me. That paper was to be saved for scratch. So was the adding machine tape. You never ever tore it. So after you used the whole roll, you reversed it and used the other side'.

Through all of this, she felt targeted. Even for minor errors, he was relentless: '[he] went up one side and down the other side', not ceasing even when she could no longer hold back her tears. He seemed to go out of his way to make her job difficult: 'he had a terrible habit of steeple-ing his fingers, putting it under his chin, and swivelling his chair right around so I couldn't see his face ... it muffles the voice, and he's directing his voice towards the window. It was difficult taking shorthand'. When I asked why he might have been like this, her answer was unexpected: 'He is the epitome of an Englishman ... He had a very short and clipped attitude towards me'.

The tapestry of racialized images that 'Naoko' wove as she assembled this memory-anecdote was coloured by a palette of emotions; individual scenes of interaction created less a chronological scheme than a skein of tangled sensations, visceral and aural to amplify 'The English'-ness this man epitomized: the crinkling sound of the paper – her work – that he crumpled in his hand in front of her. In its telling, as her past unfolded in the present, her invocation of race to explain the discrimination she suffered transformed the emotional reality – then, now – into a stereotype that imagines and maintains 'The English' position of colonising master, and that accepts oneself as colonized (Bhabha 1994, 117).

When she invoked 'The English'-ness of her boss to understand the litany of mistreatments she suffered, her allusion to race betrayed a sense of uncertainty: indeed, when I asked her if he treated others this way, her response was tentative: 'he wasn't this way with his clients', on the one hand; 'I don't think his son put up with it', on the other ('Naoko' 2011). This ambiguity is critically important because it signals how the perception of discrimination is insidious in its capacity to put into doubt its occurrence. In their exploration of racial microaggressions, Sue et al. (2007) observe that 'Instead of overt expressions of White racial superiority ... the "old fashioned" type where racial hatred was overt, direct, and often intentional, ...

[this] has increasingly morphed into a contemporary form that is subtle, indirect, and often disguised' (72–73). 'Naoko's' boss's acts were certainly less than subtle. Yet, the intent and attitude of 'The English'-man were nonetheless inscrutable, so much so that the power of this discrimination as she perceived it undermined not only her self-assuredness at the time but also her authority now to determine what happened then.

If 'Naoko's' memories illustrate the ambiguities which make micro-aggressive discrimination powerfully effective, they also reveal how larger historical trajectories in flux – recalling Igartua, the transformation of the ethnic-nationalist Dominion into a civic nation-state – are negotiated in everyday life. Here, consider that as soon as the opportunity arose, 'Naoko' walked across the corridor to join a competing firm where she acquired book-keeping skills. Two decades and another post later, at the height of her career, these skills saw her managing the million-dollar budget of the area's main radio station whose payroll included some of the city's most prominent white male media personalities. They would come to her when they mis-managed their own spending. More potently and true to form, it was her love of a good time that could be subtly subversive, her characteristic brass. Where once she gave colonial currency its value by submitting to the 'ornery', haughtiness of 'The Englishman', she would later command the attention not only of her office but also the wider southern Alberta public in her parodic play with demurely demurring racial images: 'I did a lot of fun things like showing up at work with a platinum blond wig, and gave the DJs something to talk about: "we have this Japanese accountant in the corner in the back who's wearing a platinum white wig!"' she chuckled ('Naoko' 2011).

In the risks they took, 'Naoko' and 'Fumio' were intrepid. Part of a distinctive group of *nisei* individuals coming of age or starting anew in the late 1940s and 1950s, they went outside of the Japanese Canadian community, mixing with a society that had excluded them as unassimilable and unwelcome. They divined ambiguous spaces in which opportunity might be cultivated as, for example, Kathleen Iwabuchi broke the colour barrier by enrolling at Garbutt Business College, following her successful request to the City for special dispensation in 1945 ('Minutes' 585D 1945, 305). Inserting themselves into southern Alberta's public sphere, *nisei* went further afield. 'Well, we were just little country kids' said 'Rosemary' (2011), born in 1938, describing her residence in Calgary in the latter half of the 1950s with two Japanese friends to earn their teaching certification. Her words conveyed the trepidation she felt: 'I mean, you know, so we didn't venture out far ... the three of us just kind of stuck together'. For his part, 'Fumio' returned to high school at the age of 27, sitting in classes with pupils a decade his junior at the end of the 1940s to complete his Senior Matriculation which eventually saw him achieve his MA at the University

of Alberta in 1957 ('Fumio' 2013). The significance of the *nisei* precedent, shaping and shaped by a society in flux, cannot be over-estimated. It gave younger Japanese aspirational role models and opened integrated spaces in education and industry, professions, enterprise, and services from entry-level to management. Dismantling institutional structures of discrimination, and – as 'Naoko' illustrated – navigating micro-aggressive discrimination individually, these *nisei* demonstrated through the example of their lives what the world could be like, calibrating inter-racial relationships which might act as the foundations for the future shaping of mainstream society by Japanese.

Portrait 4, loving an English – 'Hanae': the 1960s

'Hanae' (2017) was born in 1944 to family who, like Harry's, arrived in Alberta in the early twentieth century. By the time she entered nursing school in Calgary in the mid-1960s, education and employment were generally open to Japanese. Young for a *nisei*, she would contribute to one of the most transformative of social innovations, the dismantling of the barriers to inter-racial intimacy. 'It was when I went to Holy Cross, that was when I had my first *hakujin* [Caucasian] boyfriend'. It was in a tone of unexceptional matter-of-fact-ness that she mentioned this relationship: her college was attached to the hospital where she trained, and he worked as a member of the ambulance service. On dates, they enjoyed antics like immobilising her classmate by tying her to a stretcher and going to see films. Yet, the nostalgic happiness that coloured these memories turned as the story of her boyfriend unfolded into something more troubling.

There was her father who 'didn't really approve of *hakujin* boyfriends . . . Oh, he made it known'. Her voice lowered to emphasize the gravity of his disapproval, 'I can't remember exactly what he said, or if he even said anything, I just knew that he didn't approve'. All of this was despite the fact that her younger brother – having married a *hakujin* – broke the pattern of four older siblings taking Japanese partners to bear the brunt of the parental conflict that erupted: 'he felt that he should have married a Japanese girl. But, my mother talked him down, and said that, [we're] the ones that moved to Canada, so therefore we should be accepting of all the different cultures'. Her mother's intervention was sage since in her reference to diversity, she prepared the family for a change whose inter-racial impact would be immense.

In contrast to the United States, Canadian lawmakers had never instituted anti-miscegenation legislation, with the result that 'disapproval of white-Asian intermarriage was left to the social realm and never given legal imprimatur' (Girard and Phillips 2011, 619). Moreover, the role of the family and community in the regulation of the intimate sphere was being

overhauled. By the time that ‘Hanae’ met her first *hakuji* boyfriend, inter-racial Japanese-white marriage was evolving from being unusual to becoming a dominant demographic trend among Japanese. Hirabayashi found that, based on the number of marriage licenses issued in Lethbridge, forty-two of the seventy-seven unions involving Japanese Canadians – or 54.5 percent – were mixed. Ten years earlier between 1955 and 1959, the inter-racial marriage rate was only 8.5 percent or six of seventy-one unions (Hirabayashi 1976, 33). Far from being anomalous, this was increasingly the norm not just across Canada (Kobayashi 1989, 26, 32–33), but in the continental United States, too (Hirabayashi 1976, 31–32; Spickard 1996, 146).

If inter-racial intimacy was becoming more commonplace, perhaps the difficult tenor that ‘Hanae’s’ tone took on the topic of her boyfriend is only partially explained by parental disapproval. Consider the following conceptual implication that Debra Thompson (2009) identifies in her legal-historical research on interracial relationships in Canada and the United States in the twentieth century. Amongst other themes like ‘the transgression of gendered/raced social boundaries [and] the exposure of raced/gendered sexualities’, she observes the power of the:

predicament of racial categorization precisely at the points at which categories come undone, classification schema crumble and “race” is most clearly illustrated as a social and political construction with *real* consequences [emphasis in original] (357).

Real consequences, not just for ‘Hanae’s’ father, but more pertinently, herself:

on her life in Calgary at the nursing school, the people with whom she regularly associated, the body she imagined herself to be, and the sense of who she is

Well, you got to the point you didn’t think you were Japanese, ... everywhere you go, you were with all these Caucasian people, and so you, kind of, start thinking and talking like them, to a point where you, don’t really forget, but you don’t really think about being Japanese.
(‘Hanae’ 2017)

... these are, as Thompson (2009) alerts, the ‘social and political constructions with *real* consequences’ (357).

On the ambiguities not simply of charting the new terrain of inter-racial relationships, but navigating intimacy in hitherto unshared languages of different cultures

It was a new experience, . . . lot of emotions, right, that you're not used to, you had to work through all that. Then, plus the fact that he was not Japanese, you had to work to that. ('Hanae' 2017)

... these are the 'categories come undone ... [with] ... real consequences' (Thompson 2009, 357).

On devastation when inter-racial intimacy is undone by inter-racial animosity

It was, kind of, hot and cold . . . I thought everything was so wonderful, and then all of a sudden it was nothing, and then it was on again, and then off again. And, I said, what was the reason for all that? He said, he came from England when he was 15, I think, 15 or 16, and his father just really hated Japanese people, because of the war. Because, they were there during the bombing of World War II, right, and so his father really disliked me, obviously, because I was Japanese. ('Hanae', 2017)

... these are the 'classification schema' that crumble because of the 'social and political construction' of race with 'real consequences' (Thompson 2009, 357).

To this we must add, historical construction. As John Dower (1986) in the 1980s influentially argued with reference to East Asia and the West, the Second World War 'was also a race war' that 'exposed raw prejudices and was fuelled by racial pride, arrogance and rage on many sides' (4). In describing this 'war without mercy', Dower speaks of 'war words and race words [coming] together in a manner which did not just reflect the savagery of the war, but contributed to it by reinforcing the impression of a truly Manichean struggle between completely incompatible antagonists' (11). This is no hyperbole and instead explains why inter-racial intimacy posed a potentially historical challenge. That this is profoundly felt is seen in the wavering uncertainty of 'Hanae's' and her erstwhile boyfriend's relationship. The devastating force of the racial imaginations it conjured, not hers but her boyfriend's and her own father's, transmitted across generations and continents, time and space, causing visceral hurt. This endured for decades until she finally contacted her former boyfriend to ask what had happened, and she learnt that intimacy in this case could not overcome race.

Well, you know, I thought, he could have told me, and then I wouldn't have had to think about that for 30 years . . . Because, it affects your character, and it affects the way you think of people, and your relationships, because you think it was really good, and then all of a sudden there

was nothing there. You know, like, it, kind of, made you feel like you weren't worthy, right, and you didn't know why. ('Hanae', 2017)

... the encounter and separation at the moment of their experience, the memory of that moment over and again, and the re-construction of it when 'Hanae' shared her story with me, these are the 'real consequences' of the inter-racial predicament, of emotion and reasoning, intensities of feeling collapsing time in each moment of its remembrance.

In the classification of 'micro-aggressions' we've encountered above, we might identify 'Hanae's' boyfriend's rejection of her, not to mention her father's disapproval of *hakujin* boyfriends, as a 'micro-assault'; and indeed, Sue et al. (2007) list as an example, 'white parents discouraging a son or daughter from dating Asian Americans' (73). Yet, the prefix 'micro-' seems somehow inadequate, because 'micro-aggression' suggests a demarcated moment that one enters into and leaves. But as 'Hanae's' story suggests, the event had lasting effects shrouding her on-going sense of being, so that even when the discrimination event was over and one moved on – 'Hanae' did, marrying a *hakujin*, having children, later divorcing – it is like being shrouded in a net. It clung to her form, shaping each and every move, enveloping perceptions: suspicion, sensitivity, doubt, pain. These are some of the effects of discrimination and the 'memory moment' it effected across time.

Turning back to 'Naoko' (2011), 'The English' as epitomized by her boss formed one of the threads of 'Naoko's' net of discrimination. It was present throughout her interview recollections, including amongst other things being shunned by all the white boys at her graduation dance; after that, 'you couldn't have paid me a million dollars to date a *hakujin*'. Yet, it was with a wry smile and a wink that 'Naoko' told me this since sitting opposite us was her white husband, 'my attitudes have changed quite a bit'. So have 'Hanae's', since in confronting her former boyfriend, she could call out the discrimination and the net loosened:

But, when he told me, I thought, you know what, if that's the reason why, because your father disliked Japanese, then that's your problem, it's not mine. So, after I found out, I think my life got on track better. ('Hanae' 2017)

Conclusion

In four 'memory moment' portraits, this article has narrated instances of anti-Japanese racist discrimination. Yet it is less the sociological, cultural, or even historical origins of this discrimination that has been our concern than

how our remembering narrators navigated it in the past and negotiated it years later to share histories of Japanese Canadians in the mid-twentieth century. In this sense, ‘The English’ – the stereotype – is potent in manifold ways. There is the rupture of everyday life, the affronts issued to ‘Harry’, ‘Fumio’, ‘Naoko’, and ‘Hanae’ that so unsettled their sense of self then and years later in their recollection. Moreover, the self-realization which is described in each of the ‘memory moments’ reveals intersections of oneself and historical change. War and empires clashing, nations transforming, racist violence both systematically perpetrated by the state and in ‘micro-aggressive’ form, these irrepressible forces of history are woven into scripts of highly potent affirmations of self: inter-racial alliances; ambitions and clever-choices made – or not; setbacks and injury; working hard to survive and working harder to assert self-respect; endurance and innovation; anti-Japanese hatred – longings to ignore, escape, reverse, or vanquish it – and desires of/for ‘The English’; resilience.

This scripting reveals how encounters with ‘The English’ shaped narrative arcs of individuals’ life stories. Some of this was painfully experienced as we have seen. But, the nets of affective racial perception and embodied racialized experiences that shaped what it means to be Japanese Canadian also indicated how these pasts might also be overcome. In privileging desire over damage, the ‘memory moment’ portraits do not argue that the British Dominion’s racist apparatus victimizing the Japanese *en masse* was rendered irrelevant. Nor does it propose that post-colonial Canada saw an end to anti-Japanese discrimination. It does however suggest how anti-Japanese racist discrimination transformed. By exploring how our remembering narrators made sense of it then and now, we gain insight, too, into how they shaped the communities they inhabited while also asserting their authority to script the histories of these communities.

The ‘memory moment’ portraits are ‘autobiographical’ insofar as they twine dialogues between past and present, the remembered and remembering selves. Insofar as their narration is performative, consciously done as an act of sharing in part because we have cared to listen, this is also a collective project. Its significance is more than methodological. It is also moral. It invites remembering narrators and us to suspend a history that is premised largely on inexorable loss, displacement, dispossession, and damage, a narrative of victimhood and powerlessness traceable to the Internment. In this light, the ‘memory moment’ portraits seek to blur dominant and determining narratives in order to apprehend the possibilities opened by ambiguity: of Japanese Canadians exploiting Canada in social, economic, and cultural flux as it became post-colonial; of *nisei* negotiating the inheritances of their Japanese background and the demands of their Canadian situation. And, then there is the conjuncture of history and memory. The past, present, and future in momentary communion generating a potent

ambiguity that invites the remembering narrator to step out of Japanese Canadian History into an ‘*inbetween* space’ (Bhabha 1994, 56). It is an intervention’ to quote Bhabha, one which ‘quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force’ (55–56). In the ‘others of ourselves’ that emerge in this space, histories of the mid-twentieth century may be scripted anew by remembering narrators to affirm how lives are also creatively lived and recollected.

Portrait 1 re-view, inventing ‘The Japanese’ – ‘Harry’: 2017

Apropos *nisei* creativity, I’d like to conclude this article by way of the following proposition. The imagination of ‘The English’ was, arguably, an act of self-creation not simply of the individual, but also of ‘The Japanese’ temporally and spatially. ‘Very proud!’ exclaimed Harry (2017). ‘Proudest Jap kid in Fort Macleod!’ he beamed when I asked him how he felt being promoted to Warrant Officer in the late 1950s and then leading the Fort Macleod Cadet Corps of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. It was a stirring moment in his interview not least because he reversed the direction of ‘the kid’s’ racist epithet to own it. It served to amplify the full force of his emotion animating a scene from the past – ‘stripes . . . on my sleeves’, he described – to be re-lived vitally: ‘I became Sergeant Major and marched the little buggers all over town’, he exclaimed with voice raised, jubilant and rhythmic in its conviction, ‘I was the big shot! I was the commander of 60 white kids, Caucasians and marched them up and down the streets in Fort Macleod [“Harry’s” emphasis]’. And, then, the moment passed and the memory became that, the vigour in his physical form to embody the stature of a youthful Sergeant Major dissipated, he slumped and his voice softened into reflective narration: ‘see, these are the stories I remember’.

‘Harry’s’ ebullient pride narrated a story that affirmed his own personal integrity as a historical fact of becoming: from his youth – ‘yes mom, I’ll be the best Cadet’ he recalled of parental advice that doubled up as a warning that he should strive to emulate the dignity of his uncle in the Imperial Japanese army; and on receiving honorary recognition from the Cadets in his twilight years – ‘I am who I am, and [I] try to become the best person that I am. And, in the Cadets, they were trying to teach you that’. But there was more, something about being Japanese whose emphatic assertion suggested that this edifice of racial identity needed shoring up. As the only Japanese family in that area around Fort Macleod, he hinted at a sense of isolation as a ‘minority’ – a net of discrimination barbed by the racist taunts of ‘the kid’ – and he confessed that he ‘wanted so much to be like the rest of the Caucasians’. It may be that ‘Harry’ gave voice to what Michael Omi (2016) observes as a psychologically encompassing ‘desire to be defined as white’ (43), or it might have been a venting at never fully

fitting in. Either way, this ‘search for whiteness’ which Eiichiro Azuma (2016, 266) identifies in the Japanese migrant psyche came powerfully to the fore in a crescendo of excitement: ‘I wanted so much to be like the rest of the Caucasians . . . and I did, and I was, and I became even greater than the majority of Caucasians’ (‘Harry’ 2017). It was a moment of overcoming the past through the wilful assertion of his race, now, then, thumping his chest with his clenched fist: ‘And, that made me proud! . . . I’ll tell you what a Japanese is. *Here I am!* I’ll show you what we can do, and I went and did it [“Harry’s” emphasis].’

As ‘Harry’ declared it, ‘Japanese’ was a generalized term, ambiguously if powerfully mixing race and culture, whose origins are before history and which endures unchanged across history. Yet, in his reference to his uncle’s imperial Japanese military service, another history is invoked, one in which ‘The Japanese’ might be understood as a modern invented myth (Gluck 1985). It is traceable to Meiji-era (1868–1912) modernization and nation-building, where the attempt to define Japanese race was shaped by, as Oguma (2002) described it, ‘the discourse of the day [which] contrasted the “West” (synonymous with “white”, “civilised”, and “rulers”) with the “East” (synonymous with “coloured”, “barbaric”, and “ruled”)’ (331). From this perspective, the West – especially the British Empire – was simultaneously an inspiration and in opposition; and it was a conflict that was powerfully felt in the ‘contact zones’ of pre- and postwar Canada.

In the clash of empires which ‘Harry’s’ tale of defiance narrated, we begin to re-orient the lens that discrimination provides in order to understand how ‘The English’ is asserted by ‘Harry’ as a Japanese Canadian construction. It is a stereotype that doesn’t reverse or replicate structures of dominance. But insofar as it generates another power to discriminate, the assertion to find, protect, and nurture a safe place, this is a post-colonial projection whose empowering assertion could be efficacious as a result of Canada’s mid-century flux and Japanese Canadians’ place in it.

Notes

1. Interviewee names are pseudonyms.
2. Between 2011 and 2017, I met fifty-one individuals as part of an oral-history project exploring the postwar experience of Japanese Canadians in southern Alberta, one of Canada’s largest Japanese Canadian populations. Forty-one individuals self-identified as *nisei*.
3. Adachi (1976; see Chapter 15) and Sunahara (1981; see Conclusion) separate out politicised *nisei* committed to the defence of civil liberties from the general mass of *nisei* who, in their Japanese values, are compliantly acculturated, middling and mediocre in their social and cultural accomplishments.

4. Small Japanese Canadian settlements dating to the early 1900s formed Canada's second largest pre-Second World War population. See: Iwaasa (1978), Fujioka (2010).
5. It should be noted that Britain is not England. Yet, as scholars of the English diaspora have argued, 'Englishness . . . provided the core values of Britishness' (Buelmann, Gleeson, MacRaild, 2012, 2).
6. As I argue elsewhere (Aoki 2019), 'Natives' occupied a necessary place in the racial hierarchy of many Japanese Canadians. How the Japanese settlements of Imperial Japan's informal colonial presence related to North American settler colonial projects remains a largely unaddressed topic of research.
7. For example, the denial of the suffrage, exclusion from professional organisations, restrictions on fishing licenses, and unfounded if inflammatory accusations of disloyalty (see: Adachi 1976, Chapters 6–7; Miki 2005, Chapter, 1).
8. Between 1941 and 1949, thousands were removed to or transited through southern Alberta, increasing the province's Japanese Canadian population eightfold. One of Canada's main communities well into the postwar period, the experience of Japanese in southern Alberta nevertheless 'seems to be outside of "mainstream" Japanese Canadian collective memory' (Fujiwara 2012, 63). Although this study doesn't expressly address this history, its research forms the basis of a longer-term oral-history research project, the Nikkei Memory Capture Project. Co-lead by Aoki and Carly Adams, it aims to co-create with its interviewees and community stakeholders the history of southern Alberta Japanese Canadians.
9. Foundational texts shaping historiographical treatment include Adachi (1976) and Sunahara (1981). Miki (2005) and Miki and Kobayashi (1991) extend this tradition by exploring the Redress Movement that saw the Canadian Government issue in 1988 an official apology including symbolic monetary payments. The proliferation of critical approaches takes other forms, for instance, regional case studies (Roy 1990; Bangarth 2005; Oiwa, 1986; Fujiwara 2012b), trans-continental approaches (Robinson 2009; Bangarth 2008), and Japanese-language treatments (Masako 1997).
10. Anonymized by request.

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Interviews

All Interviews conducted by author Darren J. Aoki.

Anonymous, 2018.

'Fumio', 2 April 2013.

'Hanae', 30 June 2017.

'Harry', 30 June 2017.

'Naoko', 18 March 2011.

'Rosemary', 14 March 2011.