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Queer Eye for the Private Eye: Homonationalism and the Regulation of Queer Difference in Anthony Bidulka's Russell Quant Mystery Series

During the last few years, activists and academics have been pointing to and questioning the depoliticization of the gay and lesbian community in Western societies. Gay pride parades, once demonstrations for human rights, have become spectacles of queer tourism; advertising in lesbian and gay newspapers and magazines celebrates exclusive condo developments and circuit parties. Recently, at a pride organizing committee, a volunteer questioned how much longer we would need pride parades: after all, we have gay marriage. What else is there to fight for? Indeed, in Canada, the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005 was a major accomplishment for activists nationwide. At the same time, it is also a key factor in the depoliticization of the community. As Ishay (2007) notes in her newly revised book on worldwide human rights, “it is easy for gay politics to become politically conservative in an era of gay marriage and same-sex partnership benefits. These arguably assimilationist political moves also lead to the construction of some ‘queers’ as rights undeserving—the dangerous and the uncivilizable” (2007, 434). The problem, then, is that with the neo-liberalization of the community, those queers who do not form part of the dominant culture of mainstream lesbians and gays are further marginalized and oppressed. Indeed, this tendency was already apparent in 2002, when American academic Lisa Duggan sought to explain what she termed the “new Homonormativity.” Today, scholars continue to examine queer politics and queer culture for various manifestations of homonormativity (Johnston 2005).

Anthony Bidulka's detective series, featuring gay private eye Russell Quant from Saskatoon, is the first of its kind in Canadian literature. It not only includes lesbian and gay characters and themes, but also, in Bidulka's desire for the series to be as realistic as possible for his reading audience, he makes the Saskatoon lesbian and gay community and its internal relationships the primary focus of his work. In this paper I explore how lesbians and gays are

represented in Anthony Bidulka's imagined community and interrogate the relationship between Bidulka's fictional representations and the homonormalization of the lesbian and gay community in Canada today.

Using foundational concepts of post-colonial and queer theory, as well as recent applications of these theories by noted scholars, including Canadian Eva Mackey and American Jasbir Puar, I undertake a discursive analysis of Bidulka's work to demonstrate that the detective series presents a dominant gay culture that is primarily homonormative. As such, the novels can be read as a cultural site that reflects the management and regulation of contested forms of gender and sexuality, as well as the privileging of the white middle class that the gay community continues to hold up as the social ideal. I attend to the novels' embrace of gay consumer masculinity, their regulation of sexuality, and to the way the author literally makes a monster out of the only racialized gay male presented in the series.

I conclude that, whilst Bidulka's writing helps make lesbian and gay identities more visible and legitimate, it also participates in the Western political project of "homonationalization" (Puar 2007). By setting "proper" lesbian and gay citizens in opposition to the monstrous "queer terrorist," homonationalism melds good lesbians and gays into the heteronormative nation to the exclusion of perversely sexualized and racialized queers who are subject to exclusion and detention.

Lesbian and gay crime writing originated in the United States in the 1960s and began to flourish during the rise of the gay liberation movement, especially after the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Today, there are several well-known private-eye series, ranging from the dark and gritty Benjamin Justice Series to the more playful Tom & Scott Mystery Series. Until only five years ago, however, while a handful of lesbian crime writers were published in Canada, there were no gay Canadian authors and no gay Canadian crime-fighting heroes. Finally, in 2003, with the publication of Anthony Bidulka's *Amuse Bouche*, Canada's gay private eye had come out. He is Russell Quant, a first-generation Canadian of Ukrainian and Irish heritage living in Saskatoon. By October 2007, Bidulka had published *Sundowner Ubuntu*, his fifth novel and the most recent in what has become the first successful gay detective mystery series to be written by a gay male Canadian author and published by a Canadian press.

The creation, performance, and representation of queer-identified space in contemporary culture offer fruitful research areas for cultural studies today, especially in the United States where queer theory was arguably born. In Canada, however, gay cultural productions are fewer. As Terrie Goldie (2003) points out in his recent collection of essays, *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction*, this is very likely because it is harder to maintain the attention of a gay Canadian audience given its attraction to overwhelmingly hegemonic American and globalized gay culture (2003, 235). At the same time, in Canadian popular culture—indeed in society at large—Canadians have a penchant for defining themselves in opposition to Americans, rather than in terms of “authentically” Canadian characteristics. What Eva Mackey (2002) terms the “Benevolent Mountie Myth” is a classic example of this. As Canadians, we tell ourselves that the Canadian government and police have always behaved much more kindly and gently towards Aboriginal Canadians and other minorities than has the American government. Canada is a multicultural nation built on diversity; the United States is an assimilationist melting pot. If we are not like Americans, we do spend a lot of our time immersed in American popular culture. Aniko Bodroghkozy (2002), among other cultural studies theorists, argues that popular culture does not necessarily only re-present the dominant ideologies of the times. Rather, it is “popular to the extent that [it] help[s] socially situated readers work through fundamental dilemmas” (572). If, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has theorized, the nation is an “imagined community,” then I suggest that we can look to the imagined lesbian and gay community in Anthony Bidulka’s popular detective series to see what issues that community is struggling with and how the author reflects our “nation” back to us. I believe it is imperative that we undertake to analyse critically our lesbian and gay cultural productions, especially if we wish to transform hegemonic heteronormative discourses that continue to marginalize and oppress.

From (Hetero)Normativity to Homonormativity

Any discussion of homonormativity presumes an understanding of heteronormativity. Arguably the first to use the term, Michael Warner (1993) defined heteronormativity broadly as systemic

power relations that govern society. These power relations operate under “common sense” assumptions, which have been normalized over time, such as the “fact” that people are born either as men or as women and that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual orientation.

In *American Homo: Community and Perversity*, Jeffrey Escoffier (1998) sets out the trajectory of the contemporary gay project of normalization and underscores how it represents a double-edged sword for the gay community. At their most general, movements that work to normalize gays and lesbians seek to transform the sexual outlaw or pervert into a citizen with rights and obligations like the heterosexual majority. This presents challenges to the majority as well as to the sexual minority. While the perversity of homosexuality opposes hegemonic values regarding sexuality and gender, normalization also challenges the gay community in that it threatens the pervert and/or outlaw status that helped gays and lesbians recognize each other and form liaisons and communities in the first place. Accordingly, there is the attraction of acceptance on the one hand and the draw of diversity on the other. Just as normalization offers rights such as legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation, it also further prescribes codes of acceptable behaviour and circumscribes gay and lesbian agency. As Escoffier observes, “the normative expectation is that the gay man as sexual outlaw must give up his public sex in the park in order to become the sexual citizen who qualifies for the right to serve openly in the military” (1998, 226). Any normalizing project, therefore, functions with a disciplinary effect that helps to form the identities, political, economic and otherwise of citizens. Indeed, Escoffier suggests that corporate marketing and the commodification of gay culture are also normalizing projects that function in the same ways. Here, too, normalization regulates and disciplines: “It represents an improvement in some aspects by offering new goods and services—but it also shapes the psychological and physical need that those goods satisfy” (ibid, 226). Products and services that are not marketed and offered are not valued and become marginalized. Hence, as Escoffier observes, gay citizens who behave appropriately are assured the protection of some rights and access to a market that further normalizes and regulates on one hand and oppresses and marginalizes on the other. While Escoffier acknowledges that it is not possible to live outside a dominant society with its inevitable norms, he is optimistic that gays and lesbians

can continue to bring about social change through the triad of community, direct action, and alliances with other groups.

Lisa Duggan (2002) further explores the repercussions of normalizing projects in terms of developing tendencies on the American political front. In her less hopeful article, Duggan analyzes the forging of a new gay mainstream in the United States and introduces the term “homonormativity,” which she defines as:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (2002, 179)

Homonormativity opposes both radically conservative claims that gays and lesbians represent a threat to society and the State, as well as progressive calls for queers to work for radical change within the hegemonic heteronormative system. It represents in effect an unhappy “third way,” an ambivalent position that only stands opposed to certain forms of oppression—mainly homophobic attacks against the gay, white majority—while actively assimilating into a white heterosexual mainstream dominated by corporate capitalism and the marketing of appearance and behaviour.

The “depoliticized” politics of homonormativity and the management of difference represented in the Russell Quant Mystery Series are laid out from the beginning of Bidulka’s first novel. On only the second page of *Amuse Bouche*, Bidulka (2005) sets the tone for the whole series regarding Quant’s relationship to women and his misunderstanding of the Women’s Movement overall. Quant tells the reader about the history of the PWC building where his office is located:

Back in the early eighties when it was cool to delete the reference to ‘man,’ a group of professional women bought the building and rented space to female tenants who ran female-oriented businesses. For several years the Professional Womyn’s Centre was a success. But as the nineties matured and women overall became less hung up about the

‘man’ thing, what was once politically correct became a bit of an embarrassment and serious-minded tenants moved out. (2003, 8)

In one short paragraph Bidulka writes off decades of women’s struggle against oppression, reducing one of the most significant social movements the West has known to an early 1980s debate about political correctness, a game of semantics, and the creation of women-only work spaces. This implies that feminist struggles are immature and that serious-minded people have out-grown them. It works to depoliticize not only Russell Quant’s workplace but, more so, his relationship to the women in his community and the political struggles related to the formation of the gay community in the first place.

There is perhaps no more direct exposition of the author’s depoliticizing project, than in the explanation Russell Quant’s friend Anthony Gatt gives regarding how he and his partner Jared fit into the dominant culture of Saskatoon:

Although neither admits it, I believe Anthony and Jared do more for allaying homophobia in Saskatoon than a thousand gay pride parades. They do it not by raising placards or pushing their lifestyle into people’s faces, but by simply being there, existing with the ‘normal’ crowd and fitting in perfectly. Often, by the time anyone gets around to discussing the possibility that they might be a couple of homosexuals, it just doesn’t matter anymore. (Bidulka 2003, 119)

In this passage, gay activism and politicized queer difference are presented as antithetical to the “natural” social community or “*gemeinschaft*” (Anderson 1991). This normalization is further justified by its apparent effect of mitigating homophobia. Bidulka presumes here that the solution to homophobia is not political activism but rather assimilation into the “normal’ crowd.” This insists on the ability to “pass” for heterosexual and suggests that those who cannot pass would be excluded from the larger community. Furthermore, the normalizing project turns around the issue of heteronormative moral respectability:

Our connection to and success in the straight world is a tenuous one at best. We succeed at it because we play by their rules most of the time. Or at least we make them believe we are. We can escort a man to ritzy social events, refer to ourselves as ‘we’ and ‘us,’ make no excuses for leaving at the same time, and hold our heads high—just as long as we remain scandal free. But, one nasty homosexual imbroglio and we lose more ground than for a thousand straight divorces. And that’s our story. (Bidulka 2003, 142)

Bidulka’s gays and lesbians must maintain a normative respectability. It is their visible performance of moral respectability that allows them to claim a space in Anderson’s *gemeinschaft* and thereby be accepted as part of the authentic community. One is also reminded of Foucault’s panopticism here: Bidulka’s gays are disciplined to scrutinize and police their own actions in order that they remain within boundaries acceptable to dominant culture. Russell Quant himself illustrates this notion through his attempts to “pass” as straight acting and his self-reassurances of his masculinity. He regularly attends the YWCA and derives security from having his conventional masculinity confirmed by being “the hunkiest guy there” (ibid., 229). Furthermore, masculinity is the product of historical shifts in how men demonstrate their sense of it, such that today, masculinity is not defined by what a man produces but instead by what he consumes (Clarkson 2005). Anthony Gatt’s disciplinary role further underscores the panoptic device. As a gay clothier, Anthony both markets cultural commodities and polices their use in the community:

Anthony is my unofficial liaison to the gay world. He knows what we’re wearing, what we’re drinking, what celebrities we’re building up and which, sadly, we’re tearing down, what sun-drenched holiday spots are hot, which ones are not and, most of all, he knows who is, who isn’t and which of the aforementioned are sleeping together. I, on the other hand, had to be told to stop styling my hair in the George Clooney/ER/Caesar fringe. (Bidulka 2004, 98)

In effect, Anthony takes on the role of a *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* expert in the style of the Fab 5: “idealized manhood is centered on the consumption of beauty and hygiene products and

services, extravagant foods, high-end couture, expensive furniture and involvement in high culture” (Clarkson 2005, 239). Like the Fab 5, Anthony is the gatekeeper to gay consumer masculinity. He also acts like a deputy to the force of heteronormative dominant culture, ensuring that morally respectable gay members continue to pass. In completing this metaphor, Russell Quant positions himself both inside and outside the gay community and in league with the straight guy, who needs instruction, coaching and discipline in what to wear and how to wear it in order to embrace more fully a socially accepted version of consumer masculinity.

It is not only queer appearance that is regulated by depoliticized homonormative values in Bidulka’s writing. In her review of *Stain of the Berry* in *Spinetingler Magazine*, Sandra Ruttan (2007) observes:

This book is not filled with descriptive sex scenes—in fact, there’s little sex at all and it is primarily off camera—so I hope people won’t confuse my point. I have read other stories where sexual orientation was a critical factor of the plot and the protagonist was gay, but I have never read one where the majority of the characters were openly gay. As a result there is always the sense throughout the storyline that the issue of sexuality is very important. It is a central theme to the book. (2007, 77)

I would argue that while sexuality is indeed a central theme to the series, the sex act itself, is not. An ironic side effect of Bidulka’s normalizing project is the erasure of homosexual activity in his novels. In the first novel, Russell Quant does not engage in sex with the Catholic priest in spite of the drawn out dance of desire that unfolds in the last half of the book. A final page of striptease at the end of the novel reveals only that a sexual encounter might take place between Quant and another man outside the narrative, yet only if the reader imagines it. At the beginning of *Flight of Aquavit*, what appears to be a hot cruising and pick-up scene turns out to be something completely different, and Quant flees the scene to save his life, while sex between Quant and James later in the narrative is reduced to phone sex, again, only if imagined by the reader. Finally, once Quant is involved in a relationship with Alex Canyon, a potential sex scene between the two in Quant’s car ends prematurely. Quant forgets to turn the engine off after he has parked it in his garage, so due to an influx of carbon monoxide, the sex act becomes

poisoned. Effectively, the possibilities for “immoral” sex acts with a priest and as a result of cruising in the outdoors are disciplined out of the narrative. Sex is returned to the privacy of the bedroom and, if imagined at all, takes place outside of the text beyond the prying eye of reader. The homosexual outlaw in *Quant* is indeed quarantined. In fact, all sex is quarantined in these novels: this gay community is comprised of desexualized homosexuals.

Homonormativity, then, underscores the importance of “passing” and how the homosexual outlaw who is morally antithetical to the heteronormative system can be accepted, so long as he is a white, masculine consumer. Eva Mackey’s (2002) exploration and analysis of the ways “dominant culture” functions to maintain its hegemonic position in the Canadian nation are also very useful in helping to explain further homonormative processes and the concomitant development and self-maintenance of a gay “dominant culture” within the heteronormative mainstream. In *The House of Difference* Mackey (2002) reads a variety of Southern Ontario community festivals with her own queer(ing) eye to elucidate the various ways in which “dominant culture” reveals itself through its management and regulation of difference. She analyses various aspects of festivals, including event policies and promotions, the performances themselves, and interviews with community members.

Difference is not allowed if it threatens the imagined community’s non-political *gemeinschaft*. Repeatedly, people who embody forms of political difference perceived to threaten community consensus, are cast outside of the boundaries of ‘community’, and nation. Those left inside the ‘community’...may feel pride in the supposedly natural and authentic solidarity and consensus that remain in the community. (2002, 134)

Mackey posits a “construction of innocence” that occurs within the dominant community such that the attitudes and behaviours of the majority just make “common sense” in the Foucaultian use of the term. The community’s attempts at inclusion of minorities, so long as this inclusion is not politicized, can reveal colonialist, racialized, and paternalistic undertones and privilege the continued whitening of the community. The suggestion that the “dominant culture” is guilty of these attitudes is, however, met with disdain, since their embrace of difference is innocent of

controversy. In the examples of Anthony and Jared cited above, the two gay men are not a threat to the dominant community so long as they neither act politically nor create scandal.

Both Bidulka and his fictional hero struggle to maintain part of conventional heteronormative society while at the same time attempting to negotiate difference: for example, Bidulka homosexualizes the traditional hardboiled detective genre but maintains its form; Quant claims an affinity with straight-acting hegemonic masculinity but accepts the market's version of gay consumer masculinity, as well. Moreover, Bidulka's subjectivity reveals the author to be, like his hero, negotiating space within the dominant culture—as a gay, white man who “passes” well enough to blend in with the “normal” people—and outside it as a member of a community who advocates diversity on behalf of sexual outlaws. In an interview with Sandra Ruttan (2007), Bidulka further reveals the tensions he faces in mapping difference in his construction of the Saskatoon gay community. Ruttan asks about crime in Saskatoon and how Bidulka uses it to develop the criminality in his novels. She raises a specific incident that took place in November 1990 where two Saskatoon policemen transported an Aboriginal youth outside the city limits and left him to die in the cold. Ruttan asks Bidulka how this affects his writing. He responds:

It does and doesn't ... Certainly our population leans towards aboriginal population and *there's a lot of crime amongst aboriginals*, the way statistics run, and in our province *we're still shifting to that reality* and making sure *we're doing the right stuff for the aboriginal population*, that's really important to me. *We* need to get smart about that. *We* have to work together ... But certainly stuff like that is damaging to a community as a whole overall, to have a situation where you have allegedly two policemen who have taken an aboriginal youth out and dumped him on the edge of the city. It's *horrendous*. (2007, 67-68)

(italics mine)

This passage clearly displays colonialist and paternalist sentiments and reveals the “construction of innocence” that Mackey explores in her work. It reiterates discourses of the “dominant culture” - about who belongs within community and who is not acceptable. Readers of Bidulka's novels will realize that this real crime against Aboriginal people is re-presented in the “survival”

scene in *Stain of the Berry* in which a client's jealous wife trucks Russell Quant and Jared out beyond Saskatoon city limits and dumps them in a field at night during a blizzard. In Bidulka's whitened version, however, the Aboriginal people have been erased. As the racialized subject of a "horrendous" action, the Aboriginal body is abjected, intentionally forgotten. In Bidulka's retelling of the story, Russell Quant and Jared Lowe are brought back into the community and the symbolic order, guided by Detective Kirsch who represents the law force that Quant originally withdrew from in order to become a private eye. Most significant, however, is that in Bidulka's version, as Kirsch welcomes the two gay men back into the symbolic order of the "*gemeinschaft*," they are flanked by two members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This can be read as a direct reference to the "Benevolent Mountie Myth" and functions as a device to signal the tolerance of the Canadian "nation" in its acceptance of gay people—who until very recently were excluded from dominant culture. Because most gay detective novels are American, this scene also serves to remind its Canadian (and American) readers who we are as Canadians: apparently, we are not intolerant like Americans who continue to discriminate against gays.

Homonationality and the Case of the Boogeyman

The Russell Quant Mystery Series does not, however, present a "nation" that is free of intolerance, discrimination, and hate. On the contrary, as a product of Canadian popular culture, the series acts as a site where community and national struggles regarding queer race are played out. These struggles, I argue, include the move from the homonormative to the homonational. According to Jasbir Puar (2007), who develops the concept in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, homonationalism involves the use of good homosexuals to help support and reaffirm contemporary neo-liberal nationalist projects.

The Orientalist invocation of the terrorist is one discursive tactic that disaggregates U.S. national gays and queers from racial and sexual others, foregrounding a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national

rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves: homonationalism. (Puar 2007, 39)

Accordingly, the queer body always already stands in opposition to the heterosexual body and thereby helps to reinforce the latter as natural. At the same time, “proper” white lesbians and gay consumers also stand in contrast to other “queers.”

As we will see below, *Stain of the Berry*, the fourth novel in the series, stands apart from the other novels as the most dark and sinister. It is central to the series in that it is the only novel to place the Saskatoon gay community, Russell Quant’s friends, and the private eye himself under threat. In *Stain of the Berry*, this threat comes in the form of a character who lives both inside and outside the lesbian and gay community. Known throughout most of the novel only as the “boogeyman,” this character terrorizes the gay community, wounding some members and literally scaring others to death. I argue that it is significant that the boogeyman is revealed to be the only racialized gay male in the mystery series.

Indeed, the boogeyman is Jin (Jinny) Chau, an occasional member of the Pink Gophers gay choir who is not accepted by his gay peers. Although he is a member of the Pink Gophers, his marginalized status as non-white, non-masculine, and non-middle-class renders him a threat. I suggest that this points to homonationalist discourses at work. Bidulka’s initial description of Jinny Chau is revealing:

Jin Chau was very thin, his shoulders scrawny under a well-worn, pink B.U.M. Equipment T-shirt that just barely reached the top of a pair of waist-squeezingly tight black jeans. He wore no socks and his narrow feet were noticeably paler than his face. At first I thought it was a no sunblock thing...until I looked closer and saw that Jin was wearing makeup; concealer to even out the ochre tones of his elongated face, mascara to make his dark eyes pop, eye shadow, a hint of lipstick and a pinch of pink on high but sallow cheeks. His once black hair (roots were showing) had been dyed red but ended up a faded, pinky-orange hue and was styled into a feathered puff that dominated the crown of his head, reminiscent of the Bay City Rollers. (Bidulka 2005, 140)

This characterization of Jinny Chau stands in stark contrast to the descriptions of the other gay men presented in the novel. For example, our protagonist, Russell Quant, is described as a “six-foot-one, fresh-faced, sandy-haired Adonis” (Bidulka 2005, 21). The other gay men in the novel are variously presented as tall, dark or blonde (but not pink!), strong, masculine, rugged, sensual and/or sexual. It is clear that there are two principal aspects to the description of Jinny Chau that differ from the characterizations of the other men portrayed in the series. One aspect is Jinny Chau’s effeminacy, the other is his race. The feminization of Jinny Chau is signaled by the description of his body and the clothes and make-up he wears, as well as by his mannerisms and voice.

As a gay Asian-Canadian, Jinny Chau becomes doubly different from the rest of the members of the gay community of which he is (a)part. According to Puar’s thesis, racialized—in particular Orientalized—queers have little range within which to move in terms of their expression of gender and sexuality. When they do not meet the mainstream model of the dominant culture, their bodies arouse terrorist suspicions. As Puar writes,

The multicultural proliferation of the cosmopolitan ethnic (...) has some demanding limitations in terms of class, gender, and especially sexuality. That is, what little acceptance liberal diversity proffers in the way of inclusion is highly mediated by huge realms of exclusion: the ethnic is usually straight, usually has access to material and cultural capital (both as a consumer and as an owner), and is in fact often male. These would be the tentative attributes that would distinguish a tolerable ethnic (an exceptional patriot, for example) from an intolerable ethnic (a terrorist subject). (Puar, 2007, 25)

Accordingly, it is not wholly surprising that in the neo-liberal and post-9/11 context of the novels that Jinny Chau becomes the boogeyman suspect. Moreover, further analysis can help to theorize how Jinny Chau’s abject set of campy stylizations has been preserved within the gay community and how it comes back to haunt gay men like Russell Quant who would fearfully check themselves for what Quentin Crisp (1968) once termed the “lice” of effeminacy and with trepidation ask, “I’m not macho?” (Bidulka 2006: 94). Indeed, as evidenced in contemporary

Western gay communities, camp is still employed today, and in many of the same ways as it was some eighty years ago. Bidulka clearly presents Jinny Chau in a camp role that repels Quant when they first meet:

‘I’m Russell Quant,’ I told him, feeling rather unglamorous.

‘Yeeeessssss, you are,’ he purred, placing a hand on a hip in a gesture that was meant to be sexy. I noticed his nails were long and shone with clear polish and he wore a multitude of rings. ‘What can I doooooooooo for yoooooooouuuuuu.’ (ibid., 140)

Camp can be read as subversive play but also as abject in both hetero-dominant society and within the straight-acting segment of the mainstream gay community. Jinny Chau’s hand-on-hip posture in his initial encounter with Quant renders him abject through his performance of camp stylizations which he intends as sexy but which are rejected by Quant. Julia Kristeva’s (1982) theorization of the abject in *Powers of Horror* is helpful here in that it explains how the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (1982, 4). Jinny Chau troubles the boundaries of gender, race, class and sexuality. Accordingly he represents a significant terrorist threat to the symbolic order and is abjected by it and, consequently by Quant, who represents, through his role as private eye, one whose job it is to restore order/the symbolic order. Jinny Chau, even before becoming the boogeyman, is radically excluded from the community—indeed, he is kept by his parents in a West End Saskatoon apartment owned by his uncle because no one wants to live with him—and as a representative of the abject, his flirtation with Quant draws Quant close to that boundary where all meaning collapses (1982, 2).

Yet Jinny Chau does not become the boogeyman overnight. Although Bidulka makes few ostensible judgments regarding his characters, he does use Quant’s quiet reflections to infer certain ‘truths.’ Accordingly, he implies that Chau has long suffered from marginalization and oppression: “Something told me Jin Chau had had many fearful boogeymen of his own to deal with in his lifetime” (Bidulka 2006, 284). Chau is not employed. His parents pay him to live in his small apartment in one of the poorest neighbourhoods far from the centre of the city where

more ethnically and sexually diverse people would be more likely to associate. He has long been the object of hatred because of his race and gender performance.

The image of a visibly and sexually deviant Chau entombed in his family's apartment in a community where he is clearly marginalized recalls images of repression and haunting. In my reading of Jinny Chau, I am reminded of Himani Bannerji's (2002) article on racism in Canada, entitled "On the Dark Side of the Nation," where the author writes about the marginalization of non-white immigrants to and citizens of Canada:

We cannot be successfully ingested, or assimilated, or made to vanish from where we are not wanted. We remain an ambiguous presence, our existence a question mark on the side of the nation, with the potential to disclose much about the political unconscious and the consciousness of Canada as an 'imagined community.' (2002, 3)

This notion of an unassimilable and ambiguous presence that questions the legitimacy of an "imagined community" helps one theorize Jinny Chau's ambiguous role in *Stain of the Berry*. Publicly ridiculed as an effeminate, gay Asian male, he cannot be accepted and assimilated into the normal gender and ethnic roles of his family, or into the white, masculinist gay consumer community of Saskatoon. Living separately from his family and visiting the gay community only occasionally for choir practice, Chau lives a liminal existence. As he moves between the gay community and his family or ethnic community, he becomes publicly the question mark that Bannerji speaks of, a question mark that forces the interrogation of the racial, economic, gender, and sexual power relations that shape each of those "imagined" communities, gay and straight, and draws borders between them.

In *Stain of the Berry*, the racial and sexual hatred that causes Jinny Chau to move from a marginalized gay Asian man in the Saskatoon gay community to queer terrorist occurs on a trip to Regina with the Pink Gophers, where they compete at a music festival. What begins as a seemingly innocent game of "Tequila pigs," soon turns into a scene where the other community members ridicule, mock, and shun Chau. While Bidulka does not overly provide justifications for Chau's treatment, he implies racism and homophobia are the cause. The author explains:

Maybe to a regular person their actions wouldn't have seemed as devastating, but to someone like Jin, a damaged soul, someone who lived his life in constant defense of who he was and couldn't help being it was, simply, the final straw that broke the camel's back. (Bidulka 2006, 281)

He became their boogeyman. In his mind, this seemed a fitting sentence for those who'd made his life so miserable...really none of the Pink Gophers — were specifically to blame for the greater woes of life as lived by Jin, but they were handy scapegoats. (ibid., 283)

Accordingly, Jinny Chau takes on the form of the boogeyman and begins to terrorize his victims. I argue that Chau's evolution into the boogeyman signifies that he is no longer performing the role of Bannerji's question mark on the face of the gay community. Rather, Chau has become the queer terrorist/exclamation mark that rips into the side of the gay community, at the same time exposing its abject racism, masculinism, and internalized homophobia.

The boogeyman's reign of terror in Saskatoon causes people to get hurt and threatens the integrity of the community. Lesbian partners Tanya Culinare and Moxie Banyon die of fright. As the only sexual partners in the group, their destruction could signify the destruction of the fundamental basis for the formation of the community: same-sex relationships. Before Russell Quant can bring about the unmasking of the boogeyman and put a stop to his violent attacks, Jinny the boogeyman attacks Quant's best friend Jared, a former male model and member of the Pink Gophers. When Jared opens his apartment door, Chau throws a bucket of acid in his face, which effectively burns into his skin, causing his skin colour to darken and appear stained (hence, *Stain of the Berry*). This type of attack clearly signifies terrorism and in effect "racializes" Jared the model. Russell Quant recounts the events of the tragedy and offers an interesting perspective on Chau's motives: "Jin did not have the physical strength to physically kill Jared, so he did what came to mind. He destroyed the object of his affection: Jared's beautiful face" (284).

Jared's beautiful, white, masculine model face may be read as the face of the dominant culture: Jinny's oppressor. It symbolizes all the white, racist, masculinist, colonialistic

determinations that have entombed him in that place of ambivalence that Bannerji writes about, neither in community, neither fully outside of it, where by crook of question mark he asks: how can I belong?

When along comes Russell Quant, trouble-maker ... getting too close for comfort, and another one of those unattainable kinds of gay guys who habitually scorn him. (281)

Racism, masculinism, and homophobia all express themselves through bio-power and body politics (Puar 2007). Consequently, the story of the boogeyman/queer terrorist is also about body politics, the right to perform one's body as one chooses, and to have that body included in "gemeinschaft" with others. In *Stain of the Berry*, however, the metaphorical struggle over bodies becomes a veritable bodily struggle for domination.

In the final action scene in the novel, Chau, ambushes Quant in a dark alley in the Hagar's Heath trailer park and knocks him unconscious. Sense of place is very important to Bidulka in his desire to make his novels realistic for his audience; realistic locations are necessary ingredients for a believable narrative. Accordingly, the trailer park is like a character to Bidulka, as he explains in his interview with Sandra Ruttan (2007):

In this fourth book, I was at a book club meeting in Saskatoon and there's a couple scenes in the book that take place in *a trailer park* within Saskatoon city limits and people were just so excited about it because they had no idea that was there. People have actually gotten in their cars and driven there to take a look because *it is kind of an oddity*. That's part of the reason I wrote about it. About two years ago I came across it, just by *turning the wrong way down a street*, I ended up in this kind of *No Man's Land*, something that looked like nothing else in our city, and there it was and had been for decades. (2007, 66)

(italics mine)

Bidulka's description of the trailer park as being within city limits but also an "oddity" gives it a blurred, liminal quality. At the same time, it does not belong within the acceptable community; it

is abject (Kristeva 1982). You get there “by turning the wrong way down a street” and it is a “No Man’s Land.” The treatment by Bidulka *and* his audience of a trailer park as somehow exotic and somehow uninhabitable by them (an empty border area), draws on the idea of community being built on consensus, where there is pride in similarity and a perceived authenticity. The trailer park is the site that attracts yet also disgusts. Bidulka builds the trailer park into the narrative, as well as into the website he uses to market his books. Here a photo of a trailer park is captioned: “Where the streets have no name.” The trailer park passes quickly from exotic locale to the liminal site of the boogeyman’s attack on Quant, and is summarily abjected.

When Quant comes to, he finds himself wounded, bound hand and foot, and nauseous. The boogeyman, Jinny Chau sits astride Quant, preparing to rape him. The scene unfolds with Quant himself now in a liminal, feminized state, moving in and out of consciousness. From above him, Chau expresses his hurt, his oppression, and how he intends to take revenge. It is a one-sided conversation, however, as Quant is incapable of entering into dialogue with his assailant. In this most terrorizing of all scenes in the series, Chau’s brief domination and feminization of Quant also renders subordinate and feminine the gay community and the larger “nation” which Quant represents. It is also significant to note - as does L. Pauline Rankin (2002) in her article on queer nationalism -that the nation is often represented as female in nationalist discourse. Nationalists “use this powerful metaphor to encourage male citizens to protect the ‘mother country.’ In military propaganda, the metaphor has been used to rationalize rape as a weapon of war or nation-building” (Rankin 2000, 178). Chau’s attempted rape, then, can be read as a terrorist attack on the dominant culture and on the “nation.”

Before Chau can effectively dominate the “six-foot-one, fresh-faced, sandy-haired Adonis” (Bidulka 2006, 21), however, a group of Hagar’s Heath inhabitants pulls Quant to safety and subdues the boogeyman/queer terrorist until the police arrive.

It is significant that the white, masculine, sexy and *gay* hero has been rescued from the racialized terrorist, and accordingly sanctioned, by the heteronormative community of Hagar’s Heath. This white working-class community strips Chau of the last remaining power he has to exert over his oppressors. The future for Chau thus includes deportation from the community and detention in a psychiatric hospital until authorities figure out what to do with him. Perhaps, like

presumed terrorists, he will be held indefinitely, so that his perceived threat can be erased. He will be entombed, as it were, in a “state” where he will not be able to be successfully assimilated, or made to vanish from where he is not wanted.

As Mackey (1997) notes, “the notion of the nation and the community as made up of non-political and natural ‘people’ draws on notions of ‘civil society, and ‘the popular’ which are fundamental to Western modernity and the development of ‘the nation’” (1997, 160). A queer reading of Anthony Bidulka’s Russell Quant Mystery Series can reveal not only the legitimization of the lesbian and gay community in Canada, but also that community’s homonormativity, by demonstrating how the dominant culture works to privilege white economically productive and sexually privatized (or deprived) consumers. Moreover, in this neo-liberal, post-911 era, the “imagined” gay community can also be seen to serve the homonational projects of the “nation” through its self-regulation and the proscription of the racialized queer terrorist.

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