

Mixed Race...Mixed Up?

**Presentation at the Canadian Critical Race Conference 2003
by Charito Gailling and Mee Lain Ling**

Program Abstract:

Our workshop will explore "mixed race experience" by referring to our own experiences as mixed race women. We are particularly interested in fostering discussion that critically examines racial binaries of whiteness vs non-whiteness and how mixed race voices are negotiated and made invisible. Using exercises, discussion and group work, we will invite participants to consider how **re**-presentations of power and privilege are present in popular and academic discourses on this topic. We hope to challenge participants to become aware of their own specific "lenses" and think through intersections of identity, racialization, gender, etc. which can be highlighted through the experience of being a mixed race person.

Presentation

Why am I interested in this topic (of 'mixed race')?

My interest in this topic really unexpectedly came out of a journey that recently began exploring how colonization and de-colonization lives in my body. I really didn't know where to begin and pretty much just fell into starting with analyzing the history of my family on both my mother and father's side. I have been exploring my roots and heritage for several years, but in this journey, using the lens of colonization, I uncovered a much deeper understanding of my Chinese, Scottish and English roots. *Through this lens of colonization, I have been able to name how my body and identity gets constructed as mixed 'race' or, is just made invisible.*

Through my journey of exploring this, I wrote a poem. I would like to start by sharing it with you (read aloud for group of workshop participants).

It should be noted that this online publication unfortunately does not include Charito Gailling's presentation from the Canadian Critical Race Conference held in May 2003. As such, this aspect of the presentation was given by Mee Lain. Concepts and thoughts mentioned here, however, reflect much discussion and sharing between Charito and Mee Lain.

this is mee
as i walk down this lane

everything's a process i see
life learning growing
it's all about change
sometimes growing
sometimes transformation
sometimes full metamorphosis
these are my awakenings

i enter these with
a craving so strong for inner change
my appetite for food leaves mee
yet i fear the change that will inevitably
take place in that space
deal with it i tell myself!
grit, grind and tackle that fear
be prepared to tai sabaki
or counter before being consumed
by its attack

name it
claim it
release it
throw and kick it away

this awakening of my colonized body
colonized gazes on mee
that aim to push and place mee here or there
as either OR
chinese white

assuming invading
cutting mee into half-this and half-that
so how much are you white?
how much are you chinese?
where?
you're just mixed up confused
you're really white like the rest of US/THEM
but still interestingly exotic

you talk and act like us
but you look more like your mother
both compliment and insult
beautiful milk olive skin
yet
white signifier of a higher privileged class who has
not known the hardship of toiling in the fields
and dealt with darkening skin
under the hot sun that screams PEASANT
how odd though

you talk and act like us

damn questions
damn judgments
like the gaze that looks up and down
i am also othered up and down
privilege can be a zero-sum game
who's doing the judging questioning?

i frown saddened shameful
as i think of mee as an embodiment
of my white colonizer history
yet when i voice my colonizer whiteness
betrayal envelopes mee
how DARE i speak of my
mother and my mother's family this way
and the herstory of the womb
from which i came
and nourished mee so

my own colonized gaze others half of mee
it's like a perverse game of tag
you're it
i am sick oh so sick
as these halves
like a body of their own
take turns othering the other
shaped by my place and space

i want to *CUT* the colonizer
out from my body
that colonizing whiteness
that racist chineseness

i resist! i refuse!
to succumb to viewing my very self
in these binary terms in halves
by those around mee
who attempt to mark me as either OR

i resist! i refuse!
to allow my person made
permanent unchangeable
and judged as such

i resist! i refuse!
to be sucked into this paradigm that
defines some types of privilege
as concrete, permanent
and other types as permanently non-privileged
across time and space

i continually negotiate
when how by whom in what way how much
i allow myself to be pulled or pressured
to conform to one or the other model

i continually negotiate
to dismantle binaries and boxes
to be comfortable with the uncomfortable
of not marking
of not concretizing

it is through this resistance
silent spoken active
i constantly struggle to make
and keep my own model
i am whole where i am

this is mee
as i walk down this lane

by mee lain ling
march 2003

. . . . As you may hear, I am speaking from a lot of different places—frustration, hurt, anger—anger with others, anger with myself, followed by a growing consciousness of resistance, and then some element of hope. I also speak using several different voices—my voice of how I see myself, my voice that sees/hears how White people construct me and my voice that sees/hears how Chinese people construct me.

I have found that it's through the concept of the 'colonized gaze' that colonization informs how racial constructs shape mixed race identity. How is mixed race identity constructed through the colonized gaze—as raced in particular ways?—either OR/in parts, or invisible?

Colonized gaze—a gaze that desires to possess, dominate over, construct and instruct (but this definition doesn't equate with the strong feelings of frustration, anger and resistance that I have about this). A *male gaze is one type of colonized gaze*—one that objectifies women, hyper-sexualizes women using shape or bust size; a male gaze also sees women as the derivative of men, or constructs women to have characteristics that denote deficiency relational to men (women are 'just emotional' and it's based in biology thereby essentializing women and men's characteristics—either through menses or menopause); belittles women's experience, roles and knowledge and ways of knowing.

In a similar way that the male gaze views women, so does the colonized gaze view

mixed race bodies---essentializes the mixed race body, exoticizes, hyper-sexualizes, 'mystifies', speaks of mixed race in parts, not as a whole, and this gaze is constructed juxtaposed to concepts of whiteness and 'purity' of race as the norm. *It's critical to note that the mixed race female body as opposed to the mixed race male body is viewed differently; mixed race female bodies face colonized gazing from both male and racial dominant groups.*

Just as an example of how WHO's doing the GAZING shapes my mixed race identity.

My *mother*, in dominant White society in Canada, gets constructed as "a remarkable woman" because of being perceived as having transgressed the boundaries of race and marrying outside of the dominant (White) racial category. My father is invisible in this space. And so am I as a mixed race person.

My *father*, in Chinese circles in Canada and in China, gets constructed as "a great man" because of being perceived to be 'great enough to attract a white woman in marriage'. My mother is invisible in this space. And so am I as a mixed race person.

This demonstrates the relationality of identities and the several layers of colonized gazes.

It also demonstrates how race very intricately intersects with gender.

Colonized gazing is relational—it depends on WHO's doing the GAZING. I don't think my parents would be constructed and perceived by White and Chinese people in the same way were it the other way round—if my mother were Chinese, and my father White.

A woman of colour marrying a white man is often seen as weaker to the dominant white race and as 'succumbing' to white culture thereby losing her own culture when she marries a white man.

And a White man then when he marries a woman of colour? Any consequences for him?

Through this gazing, people come to know who they are themselves through how other people see them (social mirrors—see self through eyes of others). Mixed race individuals have identity when others name it on one's body. Mixed race identity develops when compared and juxtaposed to something/one else that is viewed as the 'normative', the 'pure' version of the mixed race individual constructed as 'derivative'.

Mixed race identities are relational—they are shaped by WHO is looking and how the individual in question perceives what the *looker* sees. Colonized gazing of the mixed race person is especially perpetuated when there is no space, room, time, or interest to engage in dialogue. And there is no space, room, time or interest because of silencing, privilege and power differences. The converse notion to the colonized gaze then, is the supportive gaze. Supportive gazing arises and flourishes when open dialogue can occur on how those gaps, in how we view ourselves, and each other, can be understood and bridged.

Thus, creating spaces, opportunities and time to dialogue about these gaps, breaks down the colonized gaze and builds a supportive gaze. This is where we want to

move towards. Creating more language and deconstructing the language already used are two (of several) important aspects in this dialogue.

Brief Bibliography

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If you have any comments or thoughts, the presenters would be delighted to engage in dialogue. If you would like to use any part of Mee Lain Ling's poem, please seek the author's permission. meelain@yahoo.com Thank you.