

Distinctions of Difference: Race, Queerness, & Homonationalism in Québec Cinema
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ABSTRACT

Distinctions of Difference: Race, Queerness, & Homonationalism in Québec Cinema

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This dissertation examines the distinct intertwining of race, queerness, and homo/nationalism in Québec cinema from 1960 to 2003. It traces important historical shifts in Québec and its cinema industries to frame the symbolic and material conditions of sexual and racial representation. Through the conceptual frameworks of queer of colour critique (Muñoz 1999) and homonationalism (Puar 2007), this dissertation questions how cinema has been used as a homo/nationalist tool to promote the notion of a modern and progressive Québec. It argues that Québec's narrative of LGBTQ+ inclusion regulates visibility and representation in a manner that obscures queers of colour from its cultural imagination.

Chapter 1 examines how the legacies of slavery and colonialism map upon the cultural homophobia of the emergent Québec nationalist project in Claude Jutra's landmark film, *À tout prendre* (1963). Chapter 2 traces how the neoliberal collapse of Québec's nationalist project gave way to new multicultural and sexual politics in Denys Arcand's celebrated films, *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and *Les Invasions barbares* (2003). Chapter 3 examines the convergence of sexual and multicultural pluralism in Hunt Hoe's independent film, *Seducing Maarya* (2000), the first Québec film to spotlight a queer character of colour.

These films collectively chart the historical conditions of homonationalism by elucidating significant shifts in the cultural representation of queer(ed) and racialized subjects in late-twentieth-century Québécois cinema. Through illustrating the rise of LGBTQ+ politics in Québec, I frame how sexual nationalism came to converge with cultural imperialism in Québec cinema; and how it centres white homonormative subjects as symbols of Québec's modernity. The dissertation contends that this progressive framework limits the possibilities for the representation of diverse racialized sexualities. Through films and historical materials, I challenge how Québécois queer people of colour have been rendered largely absent, silent, or tokenized within our cultural imagination. Overall, the dissertation challenges the notion of visibility and representation as a universal strategy for queers of colour to claim political agency and cultural citizenship.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Rosalina.

When I was teen, my mother student supported my exchange to Montréal, a journey which would catalyze both my affinity for Québec and my own queer coming of age.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- **AIDS:** Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
- **BanQ:** Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
- **BDSM:** Bondage, Dominance, Submission, and Sadomasochism
- **CBC:** Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
- **FLH:** Front de Libération homosexuel
- **FLQ:** Front de Libération du Québec
- **HAART:** Highly active antiretroviral therapy
- **HIV:** Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- **ADGQ:** l'Association pour les droits des gai(e)s du Québec
- **LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
- **NFB:** The National Film Board of Canada
- **PQ:** Parti Québécois
- **QCHRF:** Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms
- **QOC:** Queer of colour
- **STI:** Sexually Transmitted Infection
- **UK:** United Kingdom
- **UNESCO:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- **US/U.S.:** United States
- **WOC:** Women of colour

INTRODUCTION:

MARGINS IN THE MAINSTREAM



Figure i.1. While purchasing a wig as a surprise gift for her trans partner, Fred (right) attempts to convince her sister (left) of their (and Québec's) readiness to embrace queerness (screenshot: *Laurence Anyways*, dir. Xavier Dolan, 2012)

i.1. INTRODUCTION

Since the debut of his first film, the works of Xavier Dolan have been embraced as a vox populi for a new generation of queer nationalism in Québec. His films are now acclaimed both domestically and internationally, diffusing the global narrative of a modern and progressive Québec. Collectively, Dolan's films signal a crystallization of homonationalism in 21st century Québec. His films' evocation of the national(ist) cultural imagination has endorsed his queer ascendancy to the cultural mainstream. With his third and most accoladed feature, *Laurence Anyways* (2012), Dolan mobilized a transgender narrative of gender transition as an allegory of shifting cultural and political trajectories of the Québec national project. As Fred shops for a wig to surprise her trans partner, Laurence, she affirms to her sister of their and Québec's readiness to accept the queer family: Fred exclaims, "Our generation can take this. We're ready for it. The sky's the limit!" In line with many Québécois filmmakers before him, Dolan's films have deployed queerness as a framework to re-conceptualize (white) national subjectivity and its discontents. Yet, Dolan unequivocally rejects having his works labelled as *queer* cinema, instead proudly designating himself a *Québécois* filmmaker.¹ Such a post-gay ethos is only rendered possible by the history of Québécois homonationalism and its queer cultural forbearers like Claude Jutra. Paralleling Jutra's *À tout prendre* (1963), Dolan's first independent feature was also a self-financed work of queer auto-fiction. Like much of queer Québécois cinema, Dolan's filmography has been plagued by an air of whiteness and homonormativity, marginalizing (queer) racialized subjects either as absent or silent. Charting this historical trajectory of white queer ascendancy to the national mainstream, this dissertation

¹ This is best evidenced by his refusing of the 2012 Cannes Queer Palm prize. In an interview following the festival, Dolan remarked: "I define myself as a Canadian person because I live in Canada, I define myself as a Québécois filmmaker because my movies are soaked with the Québécois attitude, and culture, and language, and vocabulary, and history... so yes, I define myself as a Québécois filmmaker." See: Xavier Dolan on George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight: Interview. Web. October 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynEqZzz-EMs>.

inquires: how have we arrived at this place in which queerness has conjoined with nationalism in Québec?

This dissertation traces the historical conditions of homonationalism in Québec through the cultural representation of queer(ed) and racialized subjects in late-twentieth-century Québécois cinema. By “homonationalism,” I refer to the material-symbolic assemblages of sexual and racial politics that, while challenge heteronormativity, ultimately centre and affirm a francophone white-settler (*pure laine*) homonormative subjectivity.² Since the Québécois became agents of their own cultural (re)production in the 1960s, they have routinely exploited narratives of queer, racialized, and colonial marginality as a tactical leitmotif to represent the political struggles of Québécois nationalism. As with the expression of homonationalism in other geo-political contexts, this Québécois form of cultural imperialism has mobilized settler-colonial and nationalist tropes of racialized sexuality to sanction and normalize the representation of white homonormative subjects through the methodical exploitation and marginalization of Black and racialized queer subjects. I examine these dynamics within three sets of filmic case studies: *À tout prendre* (dir. Claude Jutra, 1963); *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (dir. Denys Arcand, 1986) and *Les Invasions barbares* (dir. Denys Arcand, 2003); and *Seducing Maarya* (dir. Hunt Hoe, 2000). I contextualize these cultural productions alongside a survey of late-twentieth-century queer Québécois films and social struggles to interrogate the complex representations of racial, sexual, and national subjectivity that have prevailed within the Québécois cultural imagination since the Quiet Revolution.³

In this introduction, I outline the historical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks of my study into the interfacing of homonationalism and cultural representation in Quebec. I begin this introduction with a brief historiography of sexuality, racialization, and whiteness to describe bio-political shifts that came to espouse a *Québécois homo/nationalist imaginary*. By this term, I articulate a set of social values, political institutions, cultural symbols, and legal frameworks which collude to privilege white-settler homo/normativity as a success symbol of the nationalist project. This has methodically rendered queer(ed) racialized subjectivity to the cultural and historical margins; but, in fact, vital and productive margins. I trace this narrative of “progress” to ground my investigation into Québécois cinematic representations of national identity and racial/sexual alterity. I concisely review the history of cinema and cultural industries in Québec to illustrate how visual representation has historically been deployed as a vehicle for nationalist rhetoric. Within this framework of Québécois sexual and racial bio-politics, I contextualize the cinematic representation and ascendancy of (certain) queer(ed) racialized subjects.⁴

² Homonationalism is a collusion of racial and sexual pluralism with white nationalism that was first coined by Puar (2007) and will be explained in detail in section 1.2a of this introduction.

³ I consult foundational works in Cultural Studies to orient my analysis the cultural imagination. See: Adorno (1944); Anderson (2006); Appadurai (1990); and Hall (1997).

⁴ As a shifting (a)political project that transgresses national and neoliberal interests, queer extends beyond the sexual alone to all factors of existence. In turn, I mobilize queer as a schema not just for cis-gender homosexuality, but also for those who fall outside of white-settler heteronormativity. This framework articulates race and sexuality with nationalism to demonstrate how racialized heterosexual subjects can be rendered queer(ed), sometimes even more so than LGBTQ+ subjects. As both a positionality and analytic, queer transcends the normative neoliberal paradigm of the acronym LGBTQ+. Anzaldúa (1981) frames such sexual categorization as a colonial act for queer racialized subject. In effect, I do not label film characters as gay or homosexual unless contextually evidenced or intimated.

I disrupt this cultural and political narrative of progress through mobilizing a distinct assemblage of theoretical foundations. Primarily this is archived through the conceptual lens of homonationalism and queer of colour critique. In turn, this strategy aims to disassemble standardized Québécois representations of queerness and racialization. Ultimately, I deploy these analytics to consider the limits of queer of colour visibility and representation as a homonationalist technology for claiming political agency and cultural citizenship.

Overall, this dissertation challenges Québécois homo/nationalist narratives of LGBTQ+ ascendancy from the margin to the mainstream by tracing queer(ed) and racialized aberrations, complicities, and resistances in culture and cinema. Most of the literature on homonationalism has focused on contemporary politics in “western” and “modern” neoliberal nation-states, leaving a wide body of history, culture, and geopolitics unexplored. This dissertation develops a complementary historical and cultural framework for the concept (*proto-homonationalism*) to extend it to a Québécois context starting from the 1960s to the present. This fresh approach frames the cultural and material conditions that engender homonationalism by historicizing the curious entanglements of sexual and racial bio-politics that have contributed to the mainstreaming of normative forms of LGBTQ+ cultural representation in Québec. As the first national body in North America to include sexual orientation within its Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (1977) as well as pass civil union legislation (2002), Québec has manifested itself as an inclusive, progressive, and modern nation.⁵ As LGBTQ+ political interests like Pride have been corporatized and mainstreamed by/for public commodification, a homonationalist narrative of progress has been reaffirmed by a proliferation of queer representation in mainstream Québec culture and media. Broadly, this summarizes the historical and cultural cornerstones of homonationalism in Québec during the late-twentieth century as *sanctioned* LGBTQ+ subjects and representations were ushered into the national body politic.



Figure i.2. Homonationalism in Action: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (*centre*) pauses for a moment of silence during the Montréal Pride parade (*left to right*), Québec Premier François Legault, Montréal Mayor Valérie Plante, Liberal MP Mélanie Joly, and former Green Party leader Elizabeth May (source: *The Canadian Press*, Aug 18, 2019)

⁵ Sexual orientation was included in the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1977 after pressure from Gay Liberation activists following the Truxx Bar raid earlier that year. As a result of the activism connected to the *M. v. H.* decision, the National Assembly of Quebec voted unanimously in 2002 to amend the Civil Code of Quebec to create a status of civil union, available to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples and largely having the same rights as marriage. This is explored more in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. See: Tremblay 2015.

Betraying this narrative of queer progress and (homo)national inclusion, mainstream Québec LGBTQ+ media and politics are haunted by the cultural memory of troublesome engagements with its (queer) racialized citizenry.⁶ As exemplified by the xenophobic polemics of the 1981 and 1995 Referendums as well as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission a decade later, Québec has long maintained an anxious relationship with race—one that is quite common to white-settler colonies as well as specific to Québec.⁷ This situation is no different within the recent history of LGBTQ+ politics and culture in Québec, which have routinely mobilized representations of settler-whiteness and sexual normativity to centre white homonormativity as a universal leitmotif for social difference and cultural accommodation. In turn, Québécois queer people of colour have been rendered largely absent, silent, or cliché within their (productive) marginalization across cultural representations of queer inclusion in the province. We have yet to pivot from the proverbial periphery to centre—*but do we (all) want to?* As an intervention, this dissertation surveys Québécois homonationalism and its cinematic representation of race and queerness in three case studies (Jutra, Arcand, and Hoe) between 1960 to 2003.

This dissertation queries how Québec has arrived at this homonational present in which LGBTQ+ representation is strategically entangled with white-settler governmentality. Akin to its nationalist project of bio-political futurity, Québécois cinema has acted as an apparatus to reproduce normative forms of national subjectivity within the cultural imagination.⁸ I examine the queer past to trace the socio-political conditions represented in cinema that signalled the rise of white homonationalist forms of cultural representation and regulation. In Québec and beyond, homonationalism has strived to recontour LGBTQ+ identity (and cinema) through distinct collusions with normativity, domesticity, and white respectability. In kind with the neoliberalization of this affirmationist gay liberation politic, homo/nationalist rhetoric has accordingly shaped queer cinema over the course of the late-twentieth century. But, in what ways have such cultural representations ignored and/or tokenized queers of colour to advance a white homonationalist narrative of modernity, progress, and national exceptionalism?

Approaching queer Québécois cinema as a cultural text, I disrupt a narrative of progress by way of a queer of colour critique of (proto) homonationalism in cinema. Through three case studies of independent and mainstream Québécois feature films, I trace how LGBTQ+ sexual diversity can reaffirm a *pure laine* racial hierarchy.⁹ I contend that this hegemonic (re)production of white homonormative subjects as mainstream(ed) figures in Québécois homo/national imaginary is predicated upon depoliticizing, sanitizing, and rendering of queer(ed) racialized bodies to the margins. Through unveiling the productive political potential of the margins, I mobilize Muñoz's concept of disidentification to outline strategies to subvert

⁶ See: Roy, Olivier. 'The colour of gayness: Representations of queers of colour in Québec's gay media'. *Sexualities* 15. 2 (2012): pp. 175-190.

⁷ See: Salée, Daniel. 'Quebec Sovereignty and the Challenge of Linguistic and Ethnocultural Minorities: Identity, Difference and the Politics of Ressentiment.' *Quebec Studies*, vol. 24 (1997): pp. 6-23.

⁸ See: Nielsen, Greg Marc. "Reading the Quebec Imaginary: Marcel Rioux and Dialogical Form." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie*, vol. 12, no. 1/2, 1987, pp. 134-49.; Hurley, Erin. *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Celine Dion*, UToronto: 2017.

by (Author)

⁹ For more on this history and use of the term, see: Scott, Corrie. 'How French Canadians Became White Folks, or Doing Things with Race in Quebec.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39.7 (2016): pp. 1280-97.

marginalization. In resistance, I argue that transgressive performances of queer(ed) and racialized subjectivity both subvert and comply with representational mandates of homonationalist sexual and racial citizenship. Ultimately, such a strategy stimulates alternative models for understanding the subtle dynamics of power and resistance and its impact on queer of colour representation and agency within neo-liberal regimes locally and globally.

i.2: LITERATURE REVIEW OF HISTORICAL & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

i.2A: CONTEXTUAL & CONCEPTUAL PARAMETERS

This dissertation engages with, and contributes to, the theoretical frameworks of homonationalism and queer of colour critique through its analysis of the Québécois historiography of queer and racialized representation. The francophone and anglophone literature on queers of colour in Québec in film, culture, and history is quite limited compared to similar homonationalist regimes. I intervene upon this absence of race within the literature on Québec LGBTQ+ history and cinema by articulating a queer of colour critique, which is rather unknown in Québec.¹⁰ I counter a cultural narrative of whiteness in queer Québécois cinema through the concept of homonationalism and its understanding of the material and symbolic entanglement of race and queerness in the national body politic. Whereas Québec locates the context of this dissertation, I also aim to articulate broader implications for the historical and cultural understanding of nationalist forms of queer(ed) racialized bio-politics in pluralist neoliberal regimes worldwide. Effectively, I mobilize existing work on sexual nationalism and exceptionalism in the fields of history, film studies, cultural studies, and human geography to outline my disciplinary and theoretical contributions to the overall discourse on homonationalism. Engaging these works, I demonstrate how such critical departures signal a framing of the historical conditions of homonationalism in Québec and beyond, which I term *proto-homonationalism*.

In the following literature review and my dissertation overall, I articulate three distinct fields to offer fresh insights on queer of colour representation and resistance: Homonationalism; Queer of Colour Critique; and Québec LGBTQ+ Studies. First, I detail the central tenets of homonationalism, tracing relevant critiques and disciplinary extensions to outline the historical and cultural limits of Puar's (2007) concept. Next, I turn to will position homonationalism in dialogue with queer of colour (QOC) critique to enliven the former's discourse on racial and sexual subjectivity, representation, and agency. Finally, I historically situate these conceptual frameworks (homonationalism and QOC critique) within a Québécois context through an exploration of scholarship on (queer) sexuality and racialization since 1960.

i.2B: HOMONATIONALISM

Originally developed as a critique of post-9/11 geopolitics and its shifts in the bio-politics of racialization and queerness in the US, Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism*

¹⁰ Corrie Scott (2013) contends that prominent and influential studies of Anglophone scholars such as José Muñoz, Hortense Spillers, David Eng, Michael Cobb, Tavia Nyong'o and Rey Chow are rather unknown in Québec (13).

in *Queer Times* (2007) introduced a novel framework for scrutinizing the contemporary collusions and collisions between homonormative subjects and nationalist projects. Homonationalism here narrowly refers to the phenomenon of neoliberal inclusion (and by extension, control) of gay subjects within the national citizenry through (hetero)normative human rights legislation (marriage, military service, adoption, etc.) within US geo-politics. Simply put, homonationalism details the dubious coupling of conservative patriotic rhetoric with the modern legal and cultural advancement of LGBTQ+ sexual citizenship to mobilize white imperialist campaigns of control and exclusion. To unmake this coupling, the project that Puar sets into motion tackles the nationalist standardization and political sanitization of neoliberal gay and lesbian subjects, drawing attention to the detrimental othering of non-normative and racialized queers in the process. Puar resists mobilizing the concept as a straightforward identity politic, assimilationist positionality, or diagnostic of gay racism; rather, it acts as a larger critique of (neo)liberal pluralism.

In subsequent work, Puar (2010/2012/2013) amends some of her earlier arguments. Her original work sought to critique the simultaneous national inclusion and exclusion of sexual minorities according to their compliance with the normative performance of sexuality and racialization. However, many academics and activists who have adopted the conceptual framework of homonationalism have neglected these central paradigms of Puar's original work by obscuring the roles of whiteness and racialization in sexual nationalism. In response to such oversimplification, Puar (2013) later amended her concept to function as a broader analytic of queerness and pluralist rights as a neo-imperial metric of modernity and national development. This version of development is made possible by what she calls a human rights industrial complex that "continues to proliferate Euro-American constructs of identity [...] that privilege identity politics, 'coming out,' public visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress"¹¹ Puar's (2013) update to homonationalism 2.0 now presents the phenomenon as a more general top-down process without critically evaluating the socio-cultural implications of activist resistance and/or racialized queer subjectivity. Western countries like Canada are framed as ostensibly more sexually tolerant, and effectively more "advanced" countries. Ironically, in the globalizing of homonationalism 2.0 as an inextricable facet of neo-imperial modernity, Puar's updated framework no longer details the complex dynamics of queer complicity with the heteronormative state apparatuses, or how this complicity can be a situational tactic for racialized queers. This is one of the fundamental limits to Puar's concept that I engage in my analysis of race, queerness, and cultural representation/imperialism in late-twentieth-century Québec cinema, which requires an engagement with other work beyond Puar 1.0.

Historical and Cultural Departures in Homonationalism

This dissertation addresses two vital elements of homonationalism that remain under-theorized in Québec as well as more broadly: history and cinema. Whereas Puar briefly discusses the notion of a national cultural imaginary, she rarely discusses cultural productions like film. Puar references some American media as examples of her critique without actually identifying the factors involved in homonationalist cultural representation. One way that some scholars have

¹¹ (Puar (2013): p. 338.

extended the concept of homonationalism is by looking at the complex elements that produce a homonationalist imaginary in cinema (Cherry 2018; Evang 2022; Fung 2013; Szulc & Kevin 2012; Yosef 2022). I build upon these works by charting how homonationalism has standardized and sanitized queer (of colour) cultural productions and representation in Québec during the late-twentieth century.

As a response to Puar's (2007/2013) grounding of homonationalism as a *contemporary* critique, there is now a significant body of literature that draws on, extends, and/or critiques this trans-historically. While Puar consults the genealogies of neoliberal pluralism and (orientalist) imperialism in her critique, she is largely concerned with recent history.¹² Attempts to account for other cultural and political manifestations of this phenomenon have resulted in the coinage of related concepts. Namely *gay imperialism* (Haritaworn, Tauqir, & Erdem 2008); *settler-homonationalism* (Morgensen 2010); *homonostalgia* (Wekker 2016); and *homocolonialism* (Dhoot 2015; Nadeau 2023) firmly anchor their critique historically. I expand upon this literature by proposing a complementary framework to trace the historical conditions that later gave rise to homonationalism at the turn of the twentieth century in what I term *proto-homonationalism*.

By expanding such temporal limits, scholars such as Perez (2015), Serykh (2017), and Morgensen (2010) illustrate the impacts of what I call *proto-homonationalism* in their historiographical accounts of queer sexual imperialism before neoliberalism. One major contribution of Perez (2015) to the critique of (proto)homonationalism is his literary analysis of the fetishized cultural imaginings of "exotic" brown bodies by modern gay subjects. This is an approach under-explored by Puar and central to my investigation into curious forms of queer exotic desire amongst many male Québec sovereigntists. By contextualizing Puar's concept within McCarthyist sexual politics, Serykh (2017) elucidates how US homophile organizations reaffirmed their patriotism by adopting proto-homonationalist discourses of Orientalist othering. Historically extending Puar's critique, Serykh (2017) illustrates how queers resisted necropolitics by forming paradoxical collusions between nationalism and homosexuality during a time of intense cultural and legal queer repression similar to Québec during the Quiet and Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 70s. By emphasizing the historical power of imperialist sexuality to erase native identities from LGBTQ+ modernity, Morgensen (2010) positions the naturalization of settler colonialism as a form of homonationalism.¹³ Morgensen (2012) later extended his analysis to Canada by exposing how legislative and popular multiculturalism actually buttress a settler-colonial project through liberal notions of sexual and racial diversity. In this critique, Morgensen argues that in spite of their layered marginalization, racialized queers can also act as agents of a Canadian settler bio-political project. I expand upon these works through my historical framework of (proto-) homonationalism, which traces shifting

¹² Through tracing the discursive shift on queer identity from the necropolitical (a narrative of death ossified by sexual repression) to one signifying life and productivity (gay rights and domesticity), Puar (2007/2013) is largely concerned with contemporary sexual subjectivities.

¹³ Morgensen (2010) illustrates how violent imposition of 'modern' European models of gendered sexuality is crucial to the sexual colonization of native peoples and the marking of indigenous sexualities as perverse, pre-modern, and queered. By presenting homonormativity's instrumentation of queerness as a regulatory frame, Puar (2003) elucidates how homonationalism and multicultural pluralism can pathologize queer(ed) people of colour as non-normative, racially/sexually perverse, and/or unworthy of entry into the national body politic.

bio-political and cultural conditions during the late-twentieth century rise of neoliberalism in Québec.

Despite a globalizing of the concept, work on homonationalism continues to be missing in many other contexts, including Québec¹⁴. The majority of Canadian critiques of homonationalism are focused on English Canada. Canadian scholars have employed Puar's concept to destabilize the notion of Canada as a paragon of queer rights and inclusion. Dhoot (2018) grounds his analysis of homonationalist interpellation by examining the history of Canadian legislative and popular multiculturalism as a white imperialist management of (diasporic) queer of colour subjectivity. In their introduction to an anthology on homonationalism(s) in Canada, Dryden & Lenon (2015) examine how white heteropatriarchy structures political and social relations by reinforcing the myth of the Canadian benevolence towards LGBTQ+ subjects. In this collection, Awwad (2015) scrutinizes the rhetorical strategies of the Harper administration's shift to include (certain) queer subjects within the larger body politic as a signpost of national exceptionalism. Alongside this homonationalist tactic, he confronts recent governmental restrictions to immigration/asylum as the espousal of a colour-blind modality of inclusion that routinely marginalizes racialized sexual minorities. Similarly, Murray (2014) queries how queer racialized refugees negotiate the homonationalist identity politics of the Canadian asylum system. He demonstrates that these refugees must authenticate their homosexuality through manifesting a narrative and performance of identity that aligns with white hegemonic western standards of queerness. In her investigation into narratives of Canadian sponsorship in same-sex family migration, White (2013) illustrates how both white and racialized queer subjects must ambivalently engage with homonationalist policies in order to access the privileges of national residency and citizenship. This attention to Canada is helpful, but needs to bring the specificities of Québec into the discussion and analysis.

This dissertation expands historically, culturally, and geo-politically upon this literature on homonationalism. Through this concept and its departures, I trace how Québec has arrived at this homonational present in which LGBTQ+ representation is entangled with white-settler governmentality. Homonationalism has endeavoured to recontour LGBTQ+ identity through strange collusions with normativity, domesticity, and white respectability. In extending this framework to Québec, I trace how LGBTQ+ sexual diversity can reaffirm a *pure laine* racial hierarchy. Moreover, I build on this literature to demonstrate how this hegemonic (re)production of white homonormative subjects as mainstream(ed) figures in Québécois homo/national imaginary is predicated upon depoliticizing, sanitizing, and rendering of queer(ed) racialized bodies to the margins.

i.2C: HOMONATIONALISM & QUEER OF COLOUR (QOC) CRITIQUE

Within this section, I re-calibrate homonationalism vis-à-vis queer of colour (QOC) critique (Munoz 1999; Ferguson, 2004; Gopinath, 2005) to broaden Puar's historicization and

¹⁴ The majority of work on homonationalism consults Puar's concept in their discussion of related social phenomena (Benhadjoudja 2017 and Bilge 2013). Recently, Huang (2018) and Lapointe & Turgeon (2021) explore homonationalism explicitly in Québec, but do not detail its history.

theorization of race and cultural representation. I harness their use of women of colour (WOC) intersectional frameworks (Anzaldúa 1981; Hill Collins 1990) such as historical materialism and interpellation to further the theorization of QOC representation, resistance, and agency in the Québec cultural imagination. In sum, QOC critique tackles subtle forms of resistance within homonationalist frames, and it is this work that helps locate the strategies performed by *queer(ed)* subjects in the margins who, in many cases, are heterosexual (but not heteronormative).

Queer of colour (QOC) critique broadly examines the interfacing of racial and sexual bio-politics as social formations that compose (neo)liberal capitalism and (settler-colonial) nationalism/imperialism (Reddy 1997, Muñoz 1999; Ferguson 2004.) While Ferguson (2004) is generally credited with coining the term ‘queer of colour critique,’ scholars such as Reddy (1997), Muñoz (1999), and Johnson (2001) (in concert with WOC feminists) forefronted this historical materialist intersectional approach to sexuality and racialization. In *Aberrations in Black* (2004), Ferguson describes queer of colour critique as an “interrogat[ion of] social formations as the intersections of racial, gender, class with a particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices. [It is a] heterogeneous enterprise made up of [WOC] feminism, [historical] materialist analysis, poststructuralist theory, and queer critique.”¹⁵ Simply put, QOC critique is a queer deconstructionist and WOC feminist response to queer theory’s failure to critically engage the conceptual, political, and cultural complexities of race.

Both QOC critique and the concept of homonationalism use a queer post-structuralist analysis in their investigation of the complex relationships between relations of power such as white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and (neo)liberal nationalism. In examining queer sexualities through the historical and theoretical prism of racial(ized) nationalism and imperialist state power, QOC critique (like homonationalism) is critically attentive to the rights and privileges associated with the normative, assimilationist, and regulatory forces of neoliberalism and multiculturalism. QOC critique differs, however, in critical ways¹⁶. Unlike homonationalism, QOC critique assembles a range of other methods from WOC feminism and Marxist historical materialism to explore the symbolic and material conditions of sexual and racial difference.

There are two differences between QOC and Puar’s concept that are important to my work: intersectionality and representational agency. First, QOC critique offers a richer conception of the intertwined social meanings of queerness and racialization. In her resistance to intersectionality as a method, Puar limits her conceptualization of the complex dynamics of queers of colour within (homo)nationalist identity politics. Puar argues that intersectionality has standardized the neoliberal practice of visibility and representation as a political response to systematic obfuscation of racialized queer subjects. This focus on the symbolic nature of race obscures its material consequences, and QOC critique’s use of WOC intersectionality frames the historicity of race as both a material and symbolic formation.

¹⁵ Ferguson 2004: p. 149.

¹⁶ While Puar and Ferguson deploy a Foucauldian discursive analytic, methodologically the two differ, with Puar turning to a queered Deleuzian assemblage framework and Ferguson mobilizing WOC feminist intersectionality. While Puar recognizes her work on homonationalism is indebted to WOC feminism and QOC critique, she attempts to unseat intersectionality as the primary rubric for theorizations of difference.

In his QOC reading of the representational absence and presence of queer(red) African-American subjects, Ferguson (2004) outlines how QOC critique examines the materiality of cultural formations and productions as a historical repository for racial and sexual bio-politics. He disidentifies with the traditional mandates of historical materialist analysis through his use of a WOC intersectional lens to highlight the Marxist obfuscation of race and sexuality as social formations. Moreover, he mobilizes a WOC intersectional-oriented materialist analysis of race and sexuality not as static inter-related categories, but as shifting modes of difference that unpack cultural and political history. The most critical element of WOC feminist intersectional analysis is that it renders visible the socio-legal erasure of multiply-oppressed subjects (such as queers of colour), while also making present their constitutive absence from representational identity politics.

Ferguson (2004) cites Cohen's (1997) ground-breaking article on coalitional politics as a ground-breaking work for Black feminism, queer theory, and QOC critique. Cohen's article mobilizes intersectionality to conceptualize race and class norms as they interface with sexual normativity. She proposes a challenge to the queer/heterosexual binary through her intersectional engagement with the race and class politics of white bourgeois heteronormativity in ways that parallel my own intervention into queer Québec. In her presentation of the 'welfare queen' as a queer(ed) non-normative heterosexual subject, Cohen predates Puar in demonstrating how queerness and racialization correlate as interdependent neo-liberal bio-political projects. Cohen deploys this queer intersectional analytic as a call for cross-class and cross-racial coalitional queer politics to confront the emergent privileged homonormative subject that Puar would later come to examine in *Homonationalism* (2007). Like my work in this dissertation, Cohen's conceptualization of queerness seeks to address insidious collusions between class, racialization, and neoliberalism to parse out the material implications of not recognizing race as central to queer politics. Cohen's particular queer analytic would later come to greatly influence the development of QOC critique by virtue of their shared focus on intersectional difference, power, and privilege in political and material terms. Her focus on the intersectional materiality of non-normative (often racialized) heterosexuality is vital to my examination of the homonationalist deployment of transgressive Black and brown female sexuality in queer Québec cinema. Through Cohen, I advance the present discourse on race and queerness in Québec by demonstrating how colonial anxieties of racialized sexuality can queer both homosexual and certain racialized heterosexual subjects as non-normative and subject to (homo)nationalist regulation. Importantly, I will also trace examples of resistance to homonationalism in my case studies in both homosexual and heterosexual figures that are rendered queered.

In her ambivalence to engage with the materiality of race as a sexual issue,¹⁷ Puar critiques intersectionality as an essentialist construction aiming for ontological authenticity. In his discussion of the colonial rendering of racialized sexual subjects as queer, Ferguson demonstrates how marginalized subjects can sometimes engage tropes couched in the notion

¹⁷ In this reluctance to engage with the materiality of race as a sexual issue, queer theory's dedication to anti-essentialism and anti-identity can quickly realign with norms of whiteness (Cohen, 1997; Barnard, 2009; Ahmed, 2011). QOC scholars (Reddy 1997; Muñoz 1999; Eng 2001) have conceptually aligned themselves with the WOC feminist critique of the neutral sexual subject in queer studies by emphasizing how racialization ossifies hegemonic logics of white-settler heteropatriarchy.

of ontological authenticity to maneuver white heteropatriarchy. In response to this queer pathologizing of racialized sexualities, Ferguson cites various ways that Black and racialized subjects subvert essentialist social formations to expose the materiality of the cultural imagination as a social practice. Effectively, QOC critique presents homonationalism with a historical materialist framework to challenge modernist linear narratives of racial and sexual social formations. QOC critique's intersectional framework exposes how racialized and queer(ed) subjects are exploited as homonationalist apparatus for legitimizing national narratives of modernity, progress, and exceptionalism. In kind, it provides a more thorough schema to examine the historiography of racial and sexual bio-politics and its correspondence with and divergence from nationalist normative ideals and regulatory practice. In effect, I investigate how the representational absence of queers of colour from the Québécois national imaginary is just as politically potent as their strategic presence in the form of tokens of a homonationalist politics of accommodation (Munoz 1999; Ferguson, 2004; Gopinath, 2005).

The second difference between QOC and Puar's work that I harness is the former's critique of queer of colour representation and agency. In reading homonationalism through the QOC critiques of cultural and political agency, I examine how marginalized subjects can simultaneously resist certain normative representations while appearing complicit in others. QOC and WOC scholars and activists have historically undermined hegemonic notions of race and sexuality by mobilizing their marginalized queer of colour positionality to develop various forms of political resistance.¹⁸ In her theorization of homonationalism as a ubiquitous facet of neoliberal modernity, Puar offers few options for queer of colour political resistance or agency. A number of postcolonial and (WOC) feminist scholars have examined how marginalized intersectional subjects perform their identities in a manner that refuses to either fully conform or fully resist hegemonic notions of race and sexuality in order to navigate the violence of normative social formations.

As a foregrounding text of QOC critique, I employ Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999) to detail the complicit and transgressive strategies enacted by queers of colour to survive (homo)nationalist forms of bio-political control in neoliberal regimes like Québec. Muñoz presents his concept of disidentification to critique the performative methods queer racialized subjects employ to relate and/or respond to dominant representations of identity. Resisting the normative binary of identification/counter-identification, Muñoz positions disidentification as a third stance to dominant ideologies of racial and sexual representation that refuses to *both* fully conform or fully resist. Muñoz argues that "at times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color [...] need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously" (5). As a form of strategic infiltration into mainstream public culture, disidentification describes the complex ontological praxis that queers of colour occasionally enact to assert a type of agency that undermines normative regimes of identification. In outlining how "the politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse," (19) Muñoz

¹⁸ See: Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2005.; Eng, David L. *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Duke University Press, 2010; and Koshy, Susan. 'Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness'. *Boundary 2*, vol. 28, no. 1, Feb. 2001, pp. 153–94.

exposes how shifts in culture and politics materialize the constructed ontological performances of queer racialized subjects.

As a strategic survival tactic, disidentification outlines the factors involved in queer of colour contingencies with mainstream politics of representation. By capitalizing upon their marginal positionality constructed both inside and outside of the mainstream, many queers of colour strategically mimic neoliberal ‘authentic’ representations of difference. The aim of this is to claim agency as a legible subject sanctioned for inclusion within the national body politic. In this frame, queers of colour can subversively mobilize the epistemic privilege derived from their experiential knowledge of oppression and inclusion to symbolically collude with the very normative scaffolding they are attempting to resist.¹⁹ Disidentification acts as a site of resistance in which queers of colour can transgress the cultural and political mandates of homonationalism. In effect, Muñoz provides a paradigm for understanding ambivalent queer of colour complicities with Québécois imperialist logics of sexuality and racialization as a tactical strategy for claiming cultural citizenship.

This dissertation builds upon QOC critique to illuminate how queer(ed) racialized subjects can antagonize and/or conspire with homonationalism and its representational politics. I first detail how WOC intersectionality informs QOC historical materialism as a dynamic method to trace material and symbolic entanglements of racial and sexual politics. This QOC framework affords a deeper understanding of queerness beyond homosexuality alone, to detail how racialized heterosexual subjects can be queered by sexual pluralism. Next, I mobilize QOC historical materialism to disrupt queer Québécois cultural representations which have ignore and/or tokenize queers of colour to advance a white homonationalist narrative of modernity, progress, and national exceptionalism. I turn to Muñoz’s concept of disidentification to parse out how transgressive performances of queer(ed) and racialized subjectivity can both subvert and comply with representational mandates of homonationalist sexual and racial citizenship. Ultimately, I build on Muñoz to demonstrate how such a strategy stimulates alternative models for understanding the subtle dynamics of power and resistance and its impact on queer of colour representation and agency in Québec.

i.2D: RACE, SEX & (PROTO-)HOMONATIONALISM IN QUÉBEC

In the closing of the introductory chapter to his canonical opus on queer Canadian cinemas, Waugh (2006) delivers a call for critical research into the “intersections of Québécois nationalism and sexual identity politics, [and] of racial difference with[in] sexual identity politics” (19). Within the Québécois cultural imagination, the historiography of queerness and cinema has been framed through an anxious yet omnipresent sense of whiteness. One simply needs to look at Xavier Dolan’s corpus to understand how whiteness remains unchallenged within the cultural narrative of queer Québec. Disrupting this narrative, this dissertation examines the trajectories of (proto-)homonationalism in three filmic case studies between 1960 to 2003: *À tout prendre* (1963); *Le déclin de l’empire américain* (1986); *Les invasions barbares*

¹⁹ See: Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Persephone Press, 1987. Anzaldúa, Gloria & Cherrie Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Persephone Press, 1981; and Cohen, Cathy J. ‘Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?’ *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3. 4 (1997): pp. 437–65.

(2003); and finally, *Seducing Maarya* (2000). Homonationalism is generally framed as a contemporary construction; however, I contend *queer* assemblages of national subjectivity and representation extend far earlier. In this section, I outline the literature on queerness and race in Québec to contextualize my historical analysis of (proto-)homonationalism and its cultural representation of social difference and show how my work complicates and contributes to this literature.

Following police inaction to a series of homophobic assaults and murders in the late 1980s and early 1990s, LGBTQ+ Montréalers were divided as to how to respond.²⁰ While queers were already organizing radical actions in light of the AIDS crisis and police violence, homonationalist gay activists formed political associations with the Québec Human Rights Commission (QHRC). Meanwhile, scholars united at the 1992 *Ville en rose* conference to found the first-generation of Québec gay/lesbian studies.²¹ While Waugh's (1981) work on queer Québec cinema pioneered the field a decade earlier, studies on homosexuality in Québec extend as far back as Leznoff's (1956) MA thesis. Most of the scholarship emerging from this conference (Chamberland 1996; Demczuk & Remiggi 1998; Higgins 1999) adopted a particular gay liberationist and second-wave feminist maneuver in building a sense of identity and community by historicizing the demography, geography, and identity politics of Montréal gay and lesbians.



Figure 1.3. Police violence against queer (of colour) activists following the Sex Garage Raid in 1990 (source: Buckley Couvrette fonds, Québec Gay Archive)

Whereas many of these scholars saw Anglo-American queer theory as an imperialist import,²² others during this period embraced queer conceptual frameworks. Challenging gay identity politics, some of these queer scholars historically analyze nationalism and sexual politics

²⁰ See: Crawford, Jason B. 'Forgetting Montreal's Gay Downtown: The Popular Gay Geographic Imagination and a Miş-Mash History of the Present'. *Quebec Studies*, vol. 61 (2016): pp. 165–86. Crawford, Jason B., & Karen Herland. 'Sex Garage: Unspooling Narratives, Rethinking Collectivities'. *Journal of Canadian Studies* 48.1 (2014): pp. 106–31.

²¹ See: Tremblay, Manon. 'Social Movements and Political Opportunities: Lesbians, Gays and the Inclusion of Sexual Orientation in the Québec Charter of Human Rights.' *World Political Science* 11. 1 (2015): pp. 47–73.

²² See: Namaste, Viviane. 'The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality'. *Sociological Theory* 12.2 (1994): pp. 220–31.

(Schwartzwald 1991/1993; Stychin 1994). In his ground-breaking work on the Québécois national imaginary during the Quiet Revolution, Schwartzwald (1991) examines the rhetorical (homo)sexualizing of the (post)colonial relationship between Québec and Canada. Schwartzwald (1993) expands upon his earlier critique to unveil the particular gendered and sexualized scripts that assembled Québécois notions of national identity and colonial marginality. Stychin (1994) traces the legal accommodation of homosexuals through the frame of the multicultural other as a signal of postmodern politics of citizenship and nationalism. Collectively, these early queer works exemplify what I call *proto-homonationalism* in their charting of the shifting and interfacing conditions of racial and sexual nationalism the Québec.

This work occurred in a particular social context. The narrative of a progressive and inclusive Québécois sexual nationalism solidified during the early-1990s gay mobilization of the QHRC in the wake of the Sex Garage police raids. This assault on queers by police in downtown Montréal club would provoke large protests and capture the public sympathies, which contributed to a more expansive (homo)national embrace of (white) LGBTQ+ Québécois. Yet, this narrative is indebted to earlier political assemblages emergent from Québécois Gay Liberation movements succeeding the 1969's Omnibus' partial decriminalization of homosexual acts. The emergent homonationalism of these movements crystallized in light of an earlier police raid on a gay bar, the 1977 Truxx Police Raid. In light of what is commonly known as Montréal's Stonewall, the ensuing political pressure of gay activists alongside shifting public attitudes to homophobic police violence manifested in a national declaration of gay rights.²³ With the inclusion of homosexuals into the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (QCHRF) in 1977, Québec nationalism and gay activism were equipped with a legitimizing narrative of modernity, progress, and exceptionalism as this legislation was the first of its kind in North America.

Scholars and activists have questioned how political resistance to state, institutional, and police repression transformed into a type of LGBTQ+ activism that sought to claim the rights and privileges of Québécois sexual citizenship (Arsenault 2000; Gentile 2013; Smith 2011; Stychin 1997). In his critique of the Québec nationalist myth of inclusion and its modernist discourse of progress, Stychin (1997) revisits gay sexual nationalism in 1976 and the early 1990s to illustrate how the outlawing of (homo)sexual discrimination not does necessarily diffuse into cultural and social change. He charts the particular conditions that have (re)produced an idealized (white) Québécois gay subject that regulates the homonationalist parameters of sexual citizenship. In her exploration of this movement in Montréal, Gentile (2013) emphasizes how its political orientation was as a response to police surveillance, raids and other oppressive measures during the late 1960s and early 1970s. With her presentation of the organized gay resistance to the pre-Olympics and Truxx bar police raids of 1976, Smith (2011) further contextualizes how the violence of state repression can breed an institutionalized type of legislative activism as a route to counter-act police oppression. She also describes how the articulation of rights was central to the gay liberation movement during this period as they embraced the Québécois feminist tactics of mobilizing the Parti Québécois's modernist framework to claim sexual citizenship.

²³ Arsenault, Mathieu. "Contribution de l'Association pour les droits des gai(e)s du Québec (ADGQ) dans l'affirmation des gais au Québec : 1976-1988." *Bulletin d'histoire politique* (2000), Vol. 9, n. 1, p. 128-135

While there has been a lacuna of work detailing homonationalism in Québec,²⁴ a few scholars have identified similar conditions and/or employed its conceptual language (Benhadjoudja 2017; Bureau & Papy 2007; Lapointe & Turgeon 2021; Tremblay 2015). Some identified a range of episodes in Québécois history when gay liberationists strategically partnered with nationalist governmentality to mutually advance a discourse of modernity and progress. Both Bureau & Papy (2007) and Tremblay (2015) survey nationalist rhetoric on pluralism and the socio-legal advancement of queer subjects since the 1960s to trace the deployment of a progressive national imaginary as a form of sexual exceptionalism. Bureau & Papy (2007) demonstrate how notions of (sexual) citizenship and normativity shift with neoliberal extensions of pluralist inclusion. In her analysis of recent national sexual diversity re-education programs for ethnocultural immigrants, Tremblay (2015) demonstrates how even scholars fall prey to the homonationalist tendency to conflate racialized minorities with a predisposition for compulsory homophobia. This particular reading illustrates how many Québécois scholars have been long concerned about promoting the white hegemonic representations of sexual and racial diversity. Resisting this trope, some have recently articulated how central racialization is to the project of homonationalism. Benhadjoudja (2017) details how Québec homonationalism operates through a narrative of secular modernity and Islamophobia. Lapointe & Turgeon (2021) through an analysis of articles published between 1990 and 2017 in various Quebec newspapers to identify the shifting symbolism of the “Other” in Quebec. These articles are fundamental to my reading of racialized othering and queer ascendancy in the Québec (homo)national imagination; however, they also illustrate critical gaps in anti-racist and queer work in their scant attention to their intersection, especially in film.

Charting the White History of Queer of Colour Québec:

This dissertation brings together work on race in Québec to further the conversation on racial dynamics in Québec history and cinema. Since the decolonial debates of the Quiet Revolution, Québec (homo)nationalism has been long concerned with authenticating a white settler-colonial mythology through the systematic obfuscation and exploitation of racialized subjects. In this investigation, I consult scholarship on the Québécois history of settler-colonial whiteness to ground my critique of homonationalist representation of racial and sexual politics (Scott 2016; Leroux 2014; Vallières 1969; Cornellier 2017; and Austin 2010). I expand this discussion on white settler-colonial (also known as *pure laine*) nationalism through a detailed outline of work on race and multiculturalism in Québec since the 1960s (Williams 1997; Austin 2013; Mills 2010/2013; Tremblay 2015; Bouchard 2015; Haque 2014; Leroux 2013; and Bilge 2013). Through the historical framework of black community formation and liberation politics (Williams 1997; Austin 2013; Mills 2010/2013), I explore the interfacing of (sexual) nationalism and settler-colonial racial bio-politics in Québec. I also harness the works of Black and racialized feminists in Québec and Canada as an intervention into the masculinist parameters of sexual and racial nationalism (Vacante 2017; Bilge 2013; Mills 2010). With this

²⁴ Homonationalism has been little studied in Quebec. This concept is sometimes referenced, but research on sexual and gender nationalisms focuses instead on cis-feminist movements (for example: Bilge 2012; Deschâtelets 2013; Jacquet 2017; Lamoureux 2001) than on LGBTQ issues.

literature, I examine how Canadian nationalism (Scott 2016), settler-colonialism (Morgensen 2010) and multiculturalism (Leroux 2014), and the conflation of racialized otherness with Québécois colonial marginality (Vallières 1969; Cornellier 2017; and Austin 2010) inform the homonationalist imaginary. As a (homo)nationalist strategy of managing racial difference, I review the social and political history of Québécois and Canadian logics of inter/multiculturalism (Bouchard 2015; Haque 2014; Leroux 2013; and Bilge 2013). Through these works, I explore the impacts of francophone nationalism (Bouchard 2015; Haque 2014), white-settler/*pure laine* colonialism (Leroux 2013; Haque 2014) and secularism and gender equality (Leroux 2013; Bilge 2013) on homonationalist forms of pluralist regulation and inclusion.

This dissertation builds upon this collective field of scholarship, recently termed *Critical Québec Studies*, in order to further the development of a QOC critique of race, nationalism, and settler-whiteness in Québec. Existing work on LGBTQ+ representation in Québec is quite limited in its discussion of racial dynamics, and this is what the critical race analysis of *Critical Québec Studies* exposes. Through this literature (Mills 2010/2013; Leroux 2013; Bilge 2013; Scott 2016; Cornellier 2017), I aim to provide a new way of interrogating Quebec queer cinema. For example, Chapter 1 intervenes upon decades of scholarship on Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre*. I examine the racial bio-politics of Johanne Harrelle during the 1960s in, a critical element in the film which has been scantily discussed. Through mobilizing the critical race insights of *Critical Québec Studies*, I trace how her Blackness exposes the colonial and sexual legacies of *pure laine* whiteness in Québec nationalism.

My intervention is not without some precedent. During the *Sortir ses Couleurs* colloquiums of 2004-2005, a collective of scholars and activists united to engender a new body of scholarship on Québécois queer(ed) racialized subjectivities (Brotman & Lee 2011; Wong 2012; Chbat 2017; El-Hage & Lee 2016; Lee 2012; Roy 2013; Hayes 2016).²⁵ While the majority of these works examine particular case studies of the material politics of queer racialized immigration, community organizing, and socio-cultural integration, some scholars have harnessed QOC frameworks to critique (homo)nationalism and neoliberal multiculturalism (El-Hage & Lee 2016; Hayes 2016). Wong (2012) uncovers how these queer Asian Quebecers maneuver the discursive forces of white settler-colonialism and sexual imperialism. Brotman & Lee (2011) outline the homonationalist scripting of the Canadian asylum system through the normative neo-liberal mandates of multicultural citizenship. Roy (2012) demonstrates the limits of strategic multicultural representation within mainstream(ed) gay publications. Hayes (2017) re-imagines Montréal through Gilroy's (1993) Black Atlantic to illustrate how marginalized subjects must invest in transgressive forms of identification and representation to challenge a white-settler cultural imaginary. Various works also detail the cultural obfuscation and marginalization of Québécois queers of colour to propose progressive forms of representation as a political tactic to assert agency and citizenship. (Chbat 2017; El-Hage & Lee 2016; Lee 2012). These works ground my objective of advancing the knowledge

²⁵ For more information on the *Sortir ses Couleurs* colloquiums, see: Wong, Alan, Edward Lee, et al. 'Identité Invisibles : Diversité sexuelle des minorités visibles, des communautés culturelles et des personnes bi-spirituelles au Québec'. *Mémoire présenté dans le cadre de la Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles*. Coalition Multimundo, 2007.

of homonationalism in Québec (and beyond) through a QOC critique of some important episodes in its national history of queer cinema and culture.

Through a QOC critique of homonationalism and cultural representation, I advance the literature on Québec LGBTQ+ studies via my focus on racialized queerness. By detailing the queer departures in the field, I outline the discursive groundwork on sexual nationalism in Québec. These works demonstrate how the Québécois narrative queer ascendancy historically hinges on the symbolic inclusion and exclusion of the *other*. In turn, framing the cinematic emergence of the *modern* homonormative subject in Québec's national cultural imaginary. The literature on race and sexuality insofar has cloistered these social formations in the interests of reaffirming LGBTQ+ *pure laine* supremacy. This dissertation builds upon the Cohen's coalitional politics as well as *Critical Québec Studies* to interest this scholarship through the introduction of QOC critique to Québec. Such an assemblage furthers an understanding of Québec history, culture, and cinema by drawing attention to the curious interfacing of cultural representation and political agency engendered by homonationalism. Moreover, through its focus on the whiteness and racialization in the queer cultural imagination, I ultimately aim to stimulate a new body of scholarship on queers of colour in Québec.

i.3: QUEER OF COLOUR APPROACHES TO QUÉBEC CINEMA

This dissertation engages QOC historical materialist methodologies to address the hegemonic whiteness of existing scholarship on homonationalism and queer cinema in Québec. I deploy Québécois cinematic case studies as a cultural corpus to chart the representation of queer(ed) racialized subjects, broadening existing Québécois work in cultural studies, film studies, and history. Through the WOC intersectionality of QOC critique, I advance the concept of homonationalism through introducing my historical materialist framework of *proto-homonationalism*. This fresh approach traces nascent forms of homonationalism by historicizing the material conditions that engender the strange entanglements of sexual and racial bio-politics articulated in LGBTQ+ cultural representations. During the late-twentieth century, Québécois homonationalism has mainstreamed hegemonic forms of white homonormativity, and this rhetoric extends into the cultural imagination as expressed in/by film.²⁶ Whereas studies of homonationalism are routinely on contemporary politics such as marriage legislation and refugee policies, I extend this discourse to Québec both *historically and culturally* to unveil the representational absence, political erasure, and symbolic presence of queer racialized subjects as a political force. Race and queerness mutually construct/disrupt the idea of the nation, and such material and symbolic entanglements have historically infiltrated cinema. In brief, films often act as a repository for the national and its (queer) cultural imagination.

²⁶ See: Evang, Jenny Andrine Madsen. "Nordic homonationalism in post-cinematic times: The 'good ethnic' and sexual exceptionalism in SKAM," *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*. Mar2022, Vol. 12 Issue 1, p37-45.; P Cherry. "'I'd rather my brother was a bomber than a homo': British Muslim masculinities and homonationalism in Sally El Hosaini's *My Brother the Devil*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2018; Kevin Smets & Lukasz Szulc. "Homonationalism and Western progressive narrative: locating 'conservative heartlands' with Zenne Dancer (2012) and its Western reviews," *Asian Journal of Communication*; and Raz Yosef. "Beyond homonationalism: queer temporality in contemporary Israeli gay and lesbian cinema," *Feminist Media Studies* (2022).

i.4: THESIS OUTLINE

This section will outline the central components of this dissertation. Homonationalism mainstreams sanctioned forms of white homonormativity, and this rhetoric extends into film. As an infrastructure to my QOC investigation, I consult the literature on Québécois cinema and cultural industries (Marshall 2001; MacKenzie 2004; Waugh 2006; Raboy 1997; Allor 1993). In their historicization of cinema as a vehicle for authenticating (white) Québécois identity, Raboy (1997) and Allor (1993) discuss how nationalist cultural industries regulated the representation of social difference. Both Marshall (2001) and MacKenzie (2004) frame the socio-cultural and political trajectories of Québécois cinema. Alongside Waugh's (2006) grand historical survey of Canadian and Québécois queer sexual representation, I place my case studies in referential context of other similar examples and specific literature on the films themselves (Leach 1999; Loïselle 2008; Brazier 2003; Hayes 2016; Pidduck 2015; Massimi 2015; Marshall 2016). Overall, there is a lacuna of scholarship on racialized sexualities in Québec cinema. While some authors have explored the impacts of race (Scott 2016; Leroux 2013) and queerness (Waugh 2006; Boisclair et al 2020) in the Québécois cultural imagination, queers of colour representation often remain marginal in the general discourse. This dissertation connects film studies and QOC methodologies to advance an analytical framework for conceptualizing intersectional, racialized, and diasporic queer sexualities in Québécois culture and beyond. I engage these works to contextualize the history of (homo)nationalist racial and sexual politics in the Québécois cultural imaginary, introducing a novel approach to Canadian (as well as international) scholars.



*Figure i.4. Claude Jutra in a downtown Montréal alley during the filming of *À tout prendre* (1963)
(source: La Cinémathèque québécoise)*

I examine both the *content and context* of my visual case studies to illuminate normative and transgressive cultural representations of racial and sexual difference. I first begin my analysis by harnessing traditional cultural studies methods of political economy and textual analysis (Pickering 2008) to destabilize the economic, industrial, and political factors as well as the historical and social discourses that configure cultural productions. I mobilize a textual analysis approach through film studies methodologies to situate my reading of films as cultural texts. I position Waugh's (2006) canonical survey of Canadian and Québécois sexual representation as an inspirational analytical model for my investigation into the visual texts that comprise a (homo)national imaginary. I employ his methodological elements of semiotics

(symbolic representations), narrative analysis (plot, content, diegesis), formal analysis (audio-visual elements: mise-en-scene, staging, editing), and a historical materialist-oriented industrial analysis (distribution, funding, reception) to examine my visual case studies.

Additionally, I engage a QOC historical materialist reading of archival materials (letters, telegrams, biographies, production stills, etc.),²⁷ which I gathered at various archives and repositories (Archives gaies du Québec, BanQ, and the Cinemathèque Québécoise, etc.). Over the last decade, I assembled an exhaustive database of over 100 Québécois films with racialized and/or queer(ed) content in the form of short and feature film, independent cinema, video art, documentary, and community video. This database will later be published online to support future generations of queer (of colour) scholars. I mobilize this database to contextualize my case studies (and cinema overall) as a product of its socio-cultural milieu that archives the representational bio-politics regulating queer(ed) racialized subjectivity in a (homo)nationalist cultural imagination.

This dissertation engages three case studies to trace *and* disrupt Québécois cultural narratives of exceptionalism, progress, and inclusion engendered by homonationalist entanglements of racial and sexual bio-politics. Since the development of a modern film industry in Québec during the mid-1950s, race and sexuality have often been manifested as separate vectors, yet they have always been intertwined subtextually. I disrupt the white nationalist anxieties behind such subtext through tracing in/explicit portrayals of racialized queerness in four Québécois films: *À tout prendre* (1963); *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and *Les invasions barbares* (2003); and *Seducing Maarya* (2000). Through these films, I trace how (proto-)homonationalist rhetoric has scripted the cultural representation of queer(ed) and racialized subjects in Québec cinema, and how these filmic characters symbolize disidentification with such representational politics through distinct forms of complicity often as a form of resistance.

Since the turn of the century, the proliferation of LGBTQ+ visibility has coincided with a slow emergence of queer of colour content in Québec. Like most Québécois productions, the majority of such cultural productions have been situated in/around Montréal. This dissertation looks to the queer past to better understand our homonationalist present. In turn, my case studies are located in the multi-racial metropolis of Montréal across periods ranging from the Quiet Revolutions of the 1960s until the 2003 federal legalization of same-marriage. I have assembled this selection of films because they collectively evidence a cultural trajectory of homonational ascendancy through their strange yet common collusions of race and queerness. As a timely product of their production, these films frame queerness in plain sight through a cultural discourse on inter-racial sexual anxieties. These films' characterization of the sexual and racial subjectivity signals how such cultural productions often position a white (queer) subject as an instrument to legitimize a normative (neo)liberal political agenda. Through these films, I seek out subversive queer of colour performances to look to beyond the assimilation/rejection matrix and shape new paradigms of resistance to the complex and dynamic forces of homonationalist citizenship. This dissertation also seeks to disrupt our

²⁷ For an example of a QOC historical materialist reading of the archive, see: Zepeda, Lizeth "Queering the Archive: Transforming the Archival Process," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*: Vol. 27 (2018): Article 17.

historical as well as our present understanding of the distant positioning of race and queerness in Québec cinema which led to the contemporary ascent of homonational directors like Xavier Dolan. In the next and final section, I outline my chapter structure and detail the contribution of each film to my overall dissertation.



Figure i.5. Cultural Case Studies examined in Chapter 1 (*À tout prendre*); Chapter 2 (*Le déclin de l'empire américain* -&- *Les invasions barbares*); and Chapter 3 (*Seducing Maarya*)

Chapter Outlines:

In Chapter 1, I unpack how the cultural politics of sexuality, racialization, and anti-colonialism during the Quiet and Sexual Revolutions of the 1960s came to engender a modernist and exceptionalist Québécois nationalism. As the first cinematic example of both a queer confessional and interracial eros in Québécois cinema, Jutra's *À tout prendre* (1963) functions as my first case study. Until recent posthumous sexual allegations censored his public memory, Claude Jutra was celebrated as Québec's pioneer of modern cinematic sensibility. While *À tout prendre* was arguably the first mainstream feature in Québec to debut in over a decade, it was first received quite marginally. This is in part due to the film's representation of the period's rapid shifts in cultural politics vis-à-vis Jutra's re-envisioning of his former interracial affair with the Black model, Johanne Harrelle. Inventive in its form and content, *À tout prendre* signalled the cinematic emergence of a modern Québec and its historical and political polemics. By deciphering Claude's queer subtext and Harrelle's Blackness in the film, I detail how Jutra disrupts the (inherently white and heteronormative) emergent Québécois national identity during the period. Placing the film in the context of its film and documentary contemporaries, I frame how disruptive *À tout prendre* was to the Quiet Revolution's representational politics. In charting the racial and sexual geographies of the film, I unveil its archiving of the material and identity politics of the period. Starting with Claude/Jutra's queer performance of self, I trace how his fragmented identity exemplifies the crisis in cultural and cinematic codes emergent during Québec's own coming of age. Next, I detail how the strategic representation of Johanne/Harrelle's exotic black female subjectivity functions as *both* a disidentification with nationalist cultural mandates *as well as* a foil for white homonational liberation. I conclude the chapter by illustrating how Jutra and Harrelle's transgressive performances triggered white sexual anxieties of political emasculation and national failure. Curiously yet tactically this angst was repackaged by nationalist intellectuals (like Denys Arcand) to exploit queerness and Blackness as frameworks to re-imagine the Québécois nation

and its body politic. This strange assemblage would come to signal the conditions that gave rise to homonationalism in Québec within the next few decades.

In Chapter 2, I disrupt a progressive narrative of the (neo)liberalization of Québécois cultural industries and bio-politics. *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and its sequel, *Les Invasions barbares* (2003), dramatize how the collapse of Québec's elite heteropatriarchal national project gave way to new sexual politics. In this chapter, I trace how post-Referendum national and sexual identity politics expanded the conditions for homonormative inclusion of white gay subjects through racist and xenophobic representations of cultural and sexual difference. Films by Denys Arcand, one of the province's most celebrated directors, have formulated Québécois identity amongst the cultural remnants of separatism. *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) discusses these politics by narrating the complex sexual lives of a group of bourgeois intellectuals during the mid-1980s. The film was a major international success for the Québec film industry, but more significantly, it was the first major mainstream film to include a homosexual cis-man as the main character in a heterosexual ensemble cast. While the film centres on second-wave feminist challenges to sexual relations, I am particularly interested in Arcand's strategic inclusion of Claude (a bourgeois gay white man) vis-à-vis the queering of Mario (a working-class hetero man into BDSM) as a paradigm for the sexual exceptionalist accommodation of certain gay subjects during this period. Within this tentative form of homonationalism, I explore how sexual pluralism in the film is predicated on the colonial fetishizing of racialized subjects as sexual objects. Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares* (2003) revisits this friendship group to explore similar concerns in the wake of September 11th and same-sex marriage legislation. Although the sequel privileges generational rather than sexual difference, the treatment of Claude as a domesticated normative gay subject makes apparent the homonationalist prerequisites for sexual citizenship.

In Chapter 3, I trace the impacts of post-referendum cultural and bio-politics at the turn of the twentieth century by charting the (homo)nationalist regulation of racialized sexualities. Hoe Hunt's *Seducing Maarya* (2000), an independent film lost to the archival margins, is one of the first films in Québec to center queer of colour subjectivity. The racialized content of the film has no doubt attributed to its omission within the mainstream queer imagination in Québec as there has been no work on the film (or its director) before this chapter. The film examines the cultural legacies of empire and settler-colonialism within the sexual and household dynamics of a diasporic South-Asian family in the Plateau-Mont-Royal neighbourhood during the late 1990s. I begin by framing the film's representation of Aashish, a 'closeted' diasporic queer of colour and the negotiation of his arranged marriage to Maarya as well as his inter-racial relationship with his white boyfriend, Michel. While the film is largely isolated from a francophone context, I historicize it as a product of its contemporary queer and multicultural politics. I ultimately question Aashish's quest for domesticity, as well as his discomfort with his own sexual identity, to critique how his homonationalist desire for cultural inclusion is reliant on the simultaneous embracing of whiteness and the sanitization of cultural difference. Emblematic of the late 1990s/early 2000s proliferation of the 'coming-out' genre, the film deploys progressive neo-liberal logics of pluralist diversity to legitimize the cultural inclusion of depoliticized gay subjects. This chapter directly challenges this homonational narrative of coming out as a linear path to liberation by drawing attention to the inherent whiteness of this hegemonic practice. Next, I shift to a QOC analysis of his wife, Maarya, a recently arrived

Indian student. I articulate her *queered* representation as a sexual terrorist and threat to the (homo)nation by way of her incestuous relationships with her father-in-law and brother. This chapter is especially invested in how the director (also a diasporic person of colour) positions the entire family as queer and/or non-normative by way of illicit, incestuous, or homosexual transgressions, and thus melodramatically overstates Québécois anxieties around racialized sexual difference. Through QOC critique, I question how queer(ed) racialized subjects can perform ontological strategies to disidentify with the traditional pressures of the diasporic family as well as neo-liberal individualism and its homonationalist mandate of queer recognition and visibility.

CHAPTER 1:

BLACK BODIES & QUEER DESIRES OF A WHITE NATION



Figure 1.1. Production stills from Johanne's (orientalist) model shoot in *À tout prendre*
(source: La cinémathèque québécoise)

1.1. INTRODUCTION: THE QUEER PIONEER

Claude Jutra was once known as one of the most provocative and widely respected filmmakers in Québécois cinema. His works have collectively traced the paradoxes of assembling a modern national identity in Québec. In his first solo feature film, *À tout prendre* (1963), Jutra introduced an avant-garde cultural sensibility to Québécois screens and audiences.¹ Inventive in its form and narrative, his film has been critically celebrated for pioneering a modern approach to Québec cinema. Moreover, the film has also been historically embraced by queer scholars and publics for its transgressive content.² Within its historical milieu of 1960s white heteropatriarchy, *À tout prendre* assumed a remarkable frankness in its challenging of cultural taboos of adultery, abortion, homosexuality, and interracial sexuality. The film featured the first interracial sex scene in North American film history.³ Additionally, it staged the first allusion to coming out in Québec cinema years before homosexuality was partially decriminalized in Canada.⁴

As one of the pioneers of modern Québec cinema, critics and scholars have been discussing Jutra's films for the past fifty years. Although *À tout prendre* has historically been overshadowed

¹ Leach, Jim. *Claude Jutra: Filmmaker*. McGill-Queen's Press, 1999: p.15.

² Waugh, Thomas. *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2006: p. 81.

³ Marshall, Bill. *Québec National Cinema*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2001: p. 47.

⁴ Waugh 2006: p. 13.

by his later film, *Mon oncle Antoine* (1971), the former cemented his status as an innovative voice in Québec (cinema). The film has been noted for its cutting-edge advancements in film technique and genre aesthetics (Leach 1999; Pallister 1995), its postcolonial criticism (Green 2003), and most importantly, its radical discussion of sexual (and racial) identity (Waugh 2006; Marshall 2001). During its time, the film was initially panned by nationalist intellectuals such as Denys Arcand (1964) for its presentation of an interracial love affair and queer subtext. Since then, *À tout prendre* has become venerated as a landmark Québécois queer film by scholars (Waugh 1981; MacKenzie 2004; Pidduck 2018). His classic film was celebrated by the Cinémathèque québécoise in the form of a public colloquium and an extensive online film archive. I participated in this 2015 colloquium, and part of this presentation has been published in a special issue on Jutra in *Jumpcut* (2018). More recently, Julie Vaillancourt's (2023, forthcoming) addition to the *Queer Film Classics* (MQUP) series extensively examines the LGBTQ+ politics of *À tout prendre*. While regarded as an important queer film, the racial dynamics of the film have historically received less attention—something I will elucidate in this chapter. Jutra's *À tout prendre* plays with early-1960s cultural politics of modernity, secular nationalism, and anti-colonialism to illustrate Québec's burgeoning national crisis of sexual and racial anxiety. The film signaled a shifting discourse in the cinematic and cultural representation of the Quiet Revolution through its brave attempt to interface Blackness with queer desire.

This chapter examines the racial and (queer) sexual politics of Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre* as they intertwined with emergent nationalist rhetoric in Québec. Through turning to cultural, journalistic, and (auto)biographical archival and digital materials, I deploy a queer of colour critique to develop fresh insights into the film's distinct representation of race and queerness. The central plot of *À tout prendre* centers around a dramatic reimagining of Jutra's prior relationship with Johanne Harrelle, a Black model and actress. By analysing this interracial affair, I begin first by framing how queerness and Blackness posed a necropolitical threat to the white supremacy of Québec nationalism. This rhetoric exploited such racial/sexual vectors of alterity as a foil for a colonial myth that legitimized white nationalism in Québec. By deciphering Jutra's queer subtext and its use of Johanne's Blackness in the film, I outline how Jutra challenges an inherently white and heteronormative Québécois national identity emergent during the Quiet Revolution. Most literature on *À tout prendre* scantily discusses Johanne/Harrelle's racialization in the film. Contesting this white narrative, I turn to Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification to illuminate Johanne's strategic representation of her Blackness. In effect, I dissect how her performance disidentifies with nationalist cultural mandates by subverting her positioning as *both* an exotic tool of and erosive threat to white francophone supremacy. Finally, I demonstrate how the film supplants Claude's homoerotic desire onto the erotic exoticism of Johanne's Blackness to frame Otherness as a political device for white homonationalist liberation.

Jutra's white queer framing of Johanne's Blackness signals a paradoxical political assemblage that will re-emerge decades later as *homonationalism*. Puar's concept of *homonationalism* (2007) underlines the political manipulation of race as a discursive apparatus to support the ascent of white queer subjectivity into the national body politic. In the film, Jutra adapts

Johanne's complex racial otherness as a paradigm for articulating (his own) queer desires and struggles. The core question of this chapter examines how Blackness and queerness were deployed together as a paradoxical metaphor for the nation, and how this political assemblage revealed acute truths about the cultural crisis of white hetero-nationalist masculinity during the Quiet Revolution. Furthermore, this chapter traces how these conditions act as a harbinger of future homonationalist assemblages in Québec. Jutra's framing of racial otherness as a prism to queer subjectivity mirrors later components of Puar's concept of homonationalism. A key tenet of homonationalism rests in a symbolic dialectic between homosexuality and racial oppression as a barometer of progress.⁵ However, this liberal conception of progress often masks how cultural notions of sexual and racial normativity are central to this process. Responding to the contemporary neoliberal parameters of Puar's concept, I propose a historical extension: *proto-homonationalism*. By this term, I mean to describe the complex and often paradoxical deployment of racial difference as a framework for queer affinities with Québec nationalism *before* neoliberalism. *Proto-homonationalism* operates as a transhistorical method of tracing enigmatic junctures between (homo)sexual and racial rhetoric, which strategically embrace national(ist) discourses of normativity in order to claim agency.

1.2. CRISIS IN CULTURAL & CINEMATIC CODES

To situate these shifting conditions in *À tout prendre*, I must first emphasize the importance of remembering how Québec functions as both a settler colony and postcolonial space. What is now known as the Canadian province of Québec was originally inhabited by the Ten First Nations as well as Inuit communities. The setting of the film, Montréal, was first named Tiohtià:ke by the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. The place we now call Québec was first colonized by the French in 1608, then again in 1763 by the British. Following the Confederation in 1867, francophone Québécois communities remained subject to the Anglo-Canadian elite and federal clientelism until the reforms of the Quiet Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s. For these reasons, the rhetoric of colonialism re-emerged once again at the centre of a renewed modern nationalist movement during the 1960s. The pioneering Québécois queer theorist, Robert Schwartzwald (1991) asserts that

“‘Quebec’ was then figured as a voiceless, disempowered collectivity of francophones of French ancestry, one in which others sharing its territory were regarded either as invader-occupiers or, if immigrants of non-Anglo-American descent, their potential pawns in an aggressive campaign of assimilationist design. In the 1960s and 1970s, these views were condensed through an anti-imperialist lens that focused on Quebec as oppressed and overdue for decolonization.”⁶

⁵ See: Schotten, C. Heike. ‘Homonationalism: From Critique to Diagnosis, or, We Are All Homonational Now’ *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18.3 (2016): pp. 22-35.

⁶ Schwartzwald, Robert. “Fear of Federasty: Quebec’s Inverted Fictions” in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text*, Hortense J. Spiller, ed. Routledge, 1991: p. 179.

This atmosphere of white anxiety fostered a recalibration of francophone nationalism that would come to form strange political assemblages with Blackness in both material and symbolic ways. From early conversations on Négritude and the work of Césaire and Fanon in *Parti pris* (1963-1968) and Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* (1963), the newly leftist Québec nationalist project deeply embraced Black anti-colonial thought as a framework for their own political struggles.⁷ These intellectuals exploited the racialized marginality of Third-World and American Black peoples by colonial state apparatuses as a metaphoric equivalent for Québécois subordination by Anglo-Canadian clientelism. More often than not, these works entirely obfuscated the presence of Indigenous and Afro-Québécois communities in favour of propagating a white colonial mythology.⁸ Such publications from the modern nationalist intelligentsia (like *Parti pris*) considered themselves to be the voice of a new generation. Their strategic exploitation of Blackness signals a critical theme that Jutra tackles in *À tout prendre*.

The nationalist rhetoric of the Quiet Revolution also fostered the development of a modern cinematic sensibility in Québec. During the proceeding Post-war period of the 1950s, Québec witnessed the birth of a national form of documentary filmmaking under the auspices of the National Film Board (NFB)'s *l'équipe française*. Through visualizing francophone communities that had been historically absent from screens, directors (such as Jutra) attempted to cinematically engender a modern Québécois national subject (often white, cis-male, heterosexual). These documentaries strived for a *white francophone* sense of national collectivity through the deployment of allegorical notions of tradition, community, and cultural memory.⁹ More critically, they also signalled the critical importance of cinema as a popular apparatus for the nation-building project. While these NFB films produced advancements in techniques such as *direct-cinema*, virtually no commercially-produced fictional feature films were produced in Québec between 1953 and 1963.¹⁰ Moreover, all films and cinemas were subject to the strict religious dictates of the parochial censorship board until the secular reforms of the 1960s introduced a more standardized rating system.¹¹

A fundamental element of the Quiet Revolution was the nationalist project's cinematic promotion of *pure laine* heteropatriarchy. This articulation of francophone whiteness was particular to Québec's revisionist history. The white supremacist terms *pure laine* (pure wool) and *de souche* (of stock) refer to a particular ethno-nationalist identity politics that grounds

⁷ Mills, Sean. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2010: pp. 27-29.

⁸ One of the most significant and widely known examples of this can be found in Pierre Vallières' revolutionary biography/political treatise, *White Niggers of America* (McClelland & Stewart, 1969.) For a critical analysis of the *queer* use of Black masculinity as a model for white francophone nationalist manhood, see: Cornellier, Bruno. "The Struggle of Others: Pierre Vallières, Quebecois Settler Nationalism, and the N-Word Today." *Discourse* 39.1 (2017): pp. 31-66.

⁹ MacKenzie, Scott. *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and the Public Sphere*. Manchester University Press, 2004: pp. 30-33.

¹⁰ *À tout prendre* was one of the first commercial films produced outside of the public NFB system. While the NFB produced feature films during this period, such as *Les Brûlés* (dir. Bernard Devlin, 1959), the independent financing of Jutra's film afforded him more latitude as a director. See: Marshall 2001: p. 72.

¹¹ MacKenzie 2004: p. 44.

“authentic” Québécois identity within white French colonial bloodlines.¹² The majority of NFB documentaries produced before the reforms of the Quiet Revolution focused almost exclusively on *pure laine* identities, communities, and narratives. Some films did highlight the presence of white ethnic communities such as Jewish communities on the Main in *Montreal by Night* (dir. Jean Palardy, 1947). Yet very few films even acknowledged the presence of Black and racialized peoples in Québec, let alone featured one. The NFB documentary *Quartier chinois* (dir. Bernard Devlin, 1955) was an early exception to this, but was predicably mired by an orientalist and ethnographic white gaze. Narrated by Jutra, *Golden Gloves* (dir. Gilles Groulx, 1961) marked a shift at the NFB away from folkloric films towards works that dealt with contemporary Québec society. The film broke with narrative convention by featuring Ronald Jones, an anglophone Black boxer, as a central protagonist in the documentary. In a trailblazing scene, Jones is shown voicing doubts about Québec’s ability to achieve independence.¹³ Given Jutra’s involvement in the film, these sentiments ostensibly later filtered into *À tout prendre*, offering a background to Jutra’s presentation of Johanne’s blackness. Moreover, it ultimately also forecasts his use of this racialized otherness to also voice his (queer) discontents with Québec nationalism.

Central to Quiet Revolution was the re-configuration of the national subject from a colonial paradigm of emasculation to a liberated and virile *pure laine* model. Through its promotion of the myth of a homogeneous white nation, queer and racialized subjects were rendered invisible. As Schwartzwald indicates, “the Manichean construction of decolonization (colonizer vs. colonized) created the totalizing view necessary to make ‘internal’ differences secondary.”¹⁴ In Québec, social difference has historically been articulated within a Francophone/Anglophone framework, which firmly centered whiteness as its base. With the British conquest of New France, whiteness operated as a technology of dominance over francophone subjects. British colonial and later English Canadian elites regarded francophones as a non-white race.¹⁵ This practice mirrors the racialized othering of white ethnic groups ranging from European Jews to Italians across North America.

In Québec, such rhetoric was paradoxically crystallized by the racist expression, *nègres blancs*. First coined in 1959 and almost a decade before Pierre Vallières’s (1968) infamous text of the same name, Raoul Roy deployed the expression to re-articulate the historical racialization of francophones by clientelist forces as akin to Black slavery in the US.¹⁶ Following their example, Michèle Lalonde’s (1968) activist poem “Speak White” equivocated language with Blackness in

¹² In a 2017 Radio-Canada interview, the anthropologist, Serge Bouchard claimed the term *pure laine* dates back to the mid-19th century. For more background on this history of whiteness in Québec, see: Scott, Corrie. “How French Canadians Became White Folks or Doing Things with Race in Quebec.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39.7 (2016): pp. 1280–97.

¹³ Ronald Jones was later cast in a small role in Michel Brault’s film, *Entre la mer et l’eau douce* (1967) and Denys Arcand’s NFB documentary on the Québec’s first sovereignty referendum, *Le confort et l’indifférence* (1980). More recently, he appears in *Dear Jackie* (dir. Henri Pardo, 2021), a documentary on Little Burgundy, Montréal’s historically Black neighbourhood.

¹⁴ Schwartzwald, Robert. “La fédérostrophie, ou les lectures agitées d’une révolution tranquille” *Homosexualités : Enjeux scientifiques et militants* 29.1 (1997): p. 138. [my translation]

¹⁵ Scott 2016: p. 1288.

¹⁶ Mills 2010: p. 20.

her summation of “racialized” nature of francophone political and economic oppression.¹⁷ According to the Critical Québec Studies scholar Corrie Scott (2016),

“Blackness [w]as a sign of disempowerment, an experience of marginality, [and] a sense of collective revolt and injustice. But the revolt and the injustice conveyed in the expression[s] ‘nègre blanc’ [and ‘speak white’] stem from what Rosalind Hampton (2012) calls ‘the implicit premise of moral outrage over white people being treated as poorly as Black people.’”¹⁸

As with the recalibration of their national identity from French-Canadians to Québécois during the Quiet Revolution, Québec nationalists became the arbitrators of whiteness in the province. In this process, nationalist writers exoticized and eroticized Blackness as a metaphorical political device for their white entitlement, despite routine amnesia of their own history of Black slavery and its Afro-Québécois decedents.¹⁹ Accordingly, the material presence of Black communities posed a threat to the *pure laine* reproductive futurity of the nation.

As much as a modernized sense of whiteness was central to the nationalist project, heterosexuality was as equally intertwined. Québec historian Jeffrey Vacante (2005) contends that “whether sex was promoted as a function of ‘racial’ duty or the source of non-reproductive pleasure, heterosexuality has remained stubbornly at the centre of nationalist discourse, as well as of the historical narrative.”²⁰ Such *pure laine* sexual politics also extended far into Québec cinema, virtually effacing representations of sexual difference during the first wave of post-war films.²¹ This is not to suggest that homophobia was absent from this period of Québec cinema. A prime example of this is found in *Le Rossignol et Les Cloches* (dir. René Delacroix, 1951), one of the last fictional feature films released before Jutra’s landmark work in 1963. In this earlier film, the then film critic, Denys Arcand framed the priest’s relationship with a teenage male soloist as pederasty in his infamous *Parti pris* article (1964) on cinema and sexuality.²² This homophobic theme would come deeply influence nationalist sexual rhetoric in the years to come. Through its queer subtext and sensibility, Jutra’s film would also come to acutely transgress such heterosexist scripting of sexual difference. While Jutra’s was the first, more overt yet deeply conservative homoerotic content emerged soon after in films such as *Trouble-fête* (dir. Pierre Patry, 1964) and *Délivrez-nous du mal* (dir. Jean-Claude Lord, 1969).

Although *À tout prendre* was released a year earlier, Gilles Groulx’s *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964) captured the public and political zeitgeist of the Quiet Revolution in its neat presentation

¹⁷ The title of this poem references Henri Bourassa, the ideological father of Québec nationalism. In 1897, he opposed the ideas of his English-speaking colleagues in Parliament and was booed and shouted to ‘speak white’. See: Ruschiensky, Carmen. “Revisiting ‘Speak White’: A lieu de mémoire Lost and Found in Translation.” *TTR* 31.2 (2018): pp. 65–87.

¹⁸ Scott (2016): p. 1292.

¹⁹ See: Fabre, Gérard. “Return to Analogy: Quebecers and African Americans in Pierre Vallières’s White Niggers of America.” *Quebec Studies* 62.1 (2016): pp. 47–70.

²⁰ Vacante, Jeffrey. “Writing the History of Sexuality and “National” History in Quebec.” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études Canadiennes* 39.2 (2005): p. 34.

²¹ Waugh, Thomas. “Nègres blancs, tapettes et ‘butch’: les lesbiennes et Les gais dans le cinéma québécois.” *Copie Zéro* no. 11 (1981): p. 13.

²² See: Denys Arcand. “Cinema et sexualité.” *Parti pris* no. 9-11 (1964): pp. 94-97.

of a white heterosexual affair.²³ The film engages the period's currents of sexuality and colonialism through its similarly named protagonist, Claude. Through his relationships with an anglophone Jewish woman and Black anti-colonial literature, the *pure laine* Claude comes to discover his own "colonized" white masculinity. This practice of Black metaphorization was a common strategy amongst bourgeois intellectuals and leftist nationalists during the Quiet Revolution.²⁴ These shifting political and cultural conditions of the Quiet Revolution manifested themselves heavily in the way modern national cinema developed in Québec. Public spheres and censorship boards were secularized, resulting in the introduction of new themes, ideas, and identities to Québécois screens. As cinematic codes continued to modernize, Quebec film scholar Scott Mackenzie (2004) suggests that cultural codes regulating depictions of race and sexuality in the film also began to shift in line with secular Québec nationalism and decolonization.²⁵



Figure 1.2. Claude reading Black literature in Gilles Groulx's *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964) (screenshot)

Claude Jutra(s) was Québec's first internationally renowned auteur. Born into a bourgeois francophone family, by age 16 Jutra began making amateur films with a 16mm camera gifted to him by his father. Disavowing his family calling as a physician, Jutra first launched his career as an actor and screenwriter at Radio-Canada. Within a few years, he would join the NFB's legendary *équipe française* in 1956. Collectively, Jutra's career "would prove to be an allegory of the tremendous promise and failure of Québec's socio-political and cultural coming of age."²⁶ At the debut of his career, Jutra was already uneasy with the emergent collective nationalist ethos and decided to remove the *s* from his original surname, Jutras. Given the commonality of his former surname, this change was a bohemian expression of his distinct individuality and a break with tradition. Jutra was deeply involved in several technical and aesthetic developments at the NFB such as *direct-cinema*, which would engender a new voice for the emergent modern nationalist

²³ See: Waugh (1981): p. 14.

²⁴ Mills, Sean. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2010: p. 33.

²⁵ MacKenzie 2004: p. 51.

²⁶ Pidduck, Julianne. "The "Affaire Jutra" and the figure of the child." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 58 (2018).

movement. He visited France in 1958 to meet the ethnologist and documentarian, Jean Rouch, whose work radically transformed Jutra's understanding of documentary film.²⁷ Rouch's deep-seated criticism of colonial anthropological methods in cinema ignited a newly found consciousness in Jutra about his own connection to the post-colonial world. This is evidenced in his documentary *Le Niger, jeune république* (1961), which would later profoundly influence his framing of Blackness in his first feature film, *À tout prendre*.



Figure 1.3. Jutra in *A Chairy Tale* (1957, left) meets John Greyson's porn pastiche of McLaren's classic short in *Four Safer Sex Shorts by Famous Dead Artists* (1989, right) (screenshots)

Despite the relative absence of homosexuality in Jutra's subsequent filmography, Waugh (2006) nonetheless celebrates Jutra as an "ancestor, enigma and martyr of lesbian and gay cinema in Canada."²⁸ In the collaborative climate of the 1950s NFB, Jutra joined forces with Norman McLaren, the acclaimed (gay) animator. Together, they produced one of the earliest and most esteemed queer short films in Canadian history, *A Chairy Tale* (1957). On a black box stage, Jutra is shown alone while reading and walking next to a wooden chair. Somewhere between a bullfight and a game of musical chairs, the chair incessantly moves away each time Jutra attempts to take a seat. Under this playful guise, this classic short film presented coded queer desire in plain sight. Both Waugh (2006) and Marshall (2001) have asserted that this narrative represents a dynamic tension between 'topping' and 'bottoming,' wherein the chair refuses to bottom until it first has the opportunity to top. Upon mutual agreement, the chair willingly returns to its socially expected position(ality). The chair's reluctance to be fucked illustrates an analogy of unequal power relations, a nationalist theme that will soon frame the heteropatriarchal anxiety of political emasculation during the 1960s. Alongside McLaren's short film, Jutra's *À tout prendre* would come to influence the queer sensibilities of future generations of filmmakers.²⁹

For more than five decades, Jutra was celebrated as one of Québec's greatest filmmakers until his posthumous fall from grace. In 2016, allegations of pedophilia were published in Jutra's

²⁷ Leach 1999: p. 54.

²⁸ Waugh 2006: p. 437.

²⁹ In a scene from *Four Safer Sex Shorts by Famous Dead Artists*, John Greyson (the pioneering Canadian queer filmmaker and scholar) reimagined Jutra as a Black queer man in a pornographic pastiche of McLaren's *A Chairy Tale*. See: *The Pink Pimpernel* (dir. John Greyson, 1989)

latest biography by Yves Lever. Unlike the heterosexual scandals surrounding Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and other film directors, no formal charges have ever been filed against Jutra. Almost three decades after his dramatic suicide, the Québec cultural establishment hastily mobilized into expunging his name from city streets and national cinema awards to sanitize its national history of perverse, queer(ed) elements.³⁰

As the first independently produced feature fiction film in Québec, *À tout prendre* marked a monumental shift in Québec cinema both in terms of its edgy modern style and its provocative subject matter. Claude Jutra endured personal and economic burdens self-financing the film. The film re-imagined his former inter-racial love affair with Johanne Harrelle. Filmed between 1961 and 1963 during a period of virtually no industrial support, it was released very much like a mainstream film at the Festival International du Film in August 1963.³¹ Before its release, Jutra already stood at the forefront of establishing new genre-bending modes of cinema (*direct-cinema*, New Wave, “auto-fiction”), and destabilizing traditional demarcations between history and storytelling. Employing a documentary film aesthetic to reimagine the past, Jutra challenged audiences to reconsider relations between ‘truth’ and fiction during the Quiet Revolution. This is reinforced by Jutra’s use of an improvised script that allowed actors to develop their dialogue and characterization according to their own personal histories.³² Alongside their personal narratives, *À tout prendre* also highlights the complex racial and sexual politics during this period of decolonization and nationalism. Jutra’s exploration of his queer self crystallizes in his representation of the colonial racialization of Blackness that Johanne Harrelle experienced. In this intertextual assemblage of fiction, personal memoir and national history, Harrelle and Jutra play fictionalized characterisations of themselves. Because of this, I will refer to the filmic characters by their first names and the historical figures by their surnames respectively. This chapter begins by outlining the colonial rhetoric that scripts Claude and Johanne’s interracial affair against the backdrop of the early Quiet Revolution. Next, I discuss Claude queerness and Johanne’s Blackness respectively, and the performative strategies they employ to mitigate the pressures of *pure laine* hetero-nationalism. While *À tout prendre* explores an interracial heterosexual relationship, my analysis demonstrates how queerness has always existed in plain sight. Interfacing, I conclude the chapter by outlining how these transgressive performances both challenge *and* reinforce white anxieties of sexual and national failure, a paradoxical assemblage which will later crystallize under *homonationalism*.

³⁰ Pidduck, Julianne. “The “Affaire Jutra” and the figure of the child.” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no.58 (2018).

³¹ Daudelin, Robert. “Les images, les sons, les visages : Rencontres avec Jean-Claude Labrecque, Marcel Carrière, Victor Désy, Barbara Ulrich et Claude Godbout.” *24 images*, no. 166 (2014): p. 13.

³² Leach 1999: p. 57.

1.3. WHITE GAZES & EXOTIC DESIRES

At the nexus between memory and fiction, *À tout prendre* presents a performative reproduction of Claude Jutra and Johanne Harrelle's former love affair. Their interracial relationship was filmed with a frankness remarkable for Québécois screens in 1963. Harrelle and Jutra first met in June 1956 at a party celebrating the relocation of the National Board Film's office to Montréal. As a celebrated member of *l'équipe française*, Jutra was present, and later that evening Harrelle arrived with a band of white musicians.³³ Jutra candidly evokes this memory at the beginning of *À tout prendre* as Claude and Johanne begin their cinematic romance. The film begins with Claude's neighbour and friend, Victor, attempting to convince him to attend a film industry event. As Claude reluctantly arrives at a lively soirée filled with young white bourgeois bohemians, Johanne is introduced enigmatically. After Jutra quickly scans the room, the camera panning arrests upon an upturned and extended Black woman's slender wrist while her delicate fingers seductively reposition her gold bangles. This disarticulated image of exotic sensuality playing for the lens will come to characterize Johanne.

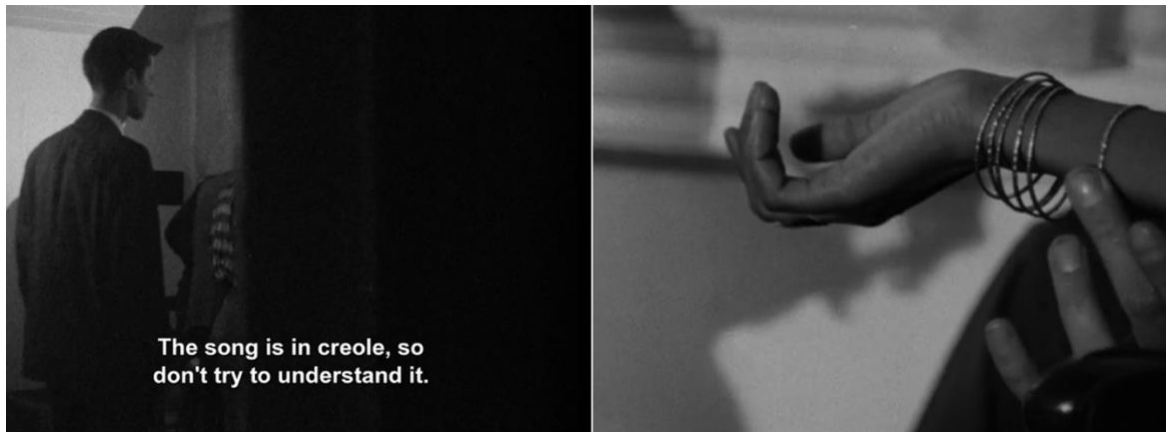


*Figure 1.4. Johanne seductively playing with her gold bangles, entrancing the audience with the exotic mystery of her Haitian origins (screenshot, *À tout prendre*)*

Throughout the film, Johanne is framed as the exotic other, the Haitian *chanteuse* and model. As Claude settles into the party and flirts with the hostess over Canadian whiskey and French cigarettes, the suddenly off-screen male voice requests everyone for silence as Johanne prepares to perform a song. Next, an off-screen woman's voice notes that the song will be in Creole, and the party is directed to not attempt understanding "even if it's adorable", as if Johanne was an ethnographic native spectacle. As the music begins, the camera image first rests upon Johanne's right hand extending upwards rhythmically resting upon her forehead as to frame the first reveal of her face. As her body is presented piece by piece, Johanne is imbued with an exotic sense of mystery and incompleteness that will posit her as the Haitian other. Quite emblematically, Johanne chooses to sing "Choucouné," a poem written by the nationally venerated Haitian poet

³³ Daudelin (2014): p.14.

Oswald Durand in 1883.³⁴ The poem recants a failed romance between Durand and a marabou woman who leaves the poet for a white Frenchman. This racial symbolism comes to manifest further in the film as the already-married Johanne comes to forge a relationship with Claude.

This scene was pivotal in establishing Johanne's racial alterity and Haitian authenticity in the film. Yet, the footage for this scene was originally shot for another film. Johanne's musical performance was produced by a team of filmmakers at the Université de Montréal for a student film, *Seul ou avec d'autres* (1962).³⁵ The most notable member of the team was then a novice filmmaker, Denys Arcand, who would later become a public intellectual with *Parti pris* and one of the most vehement critics of *À tout prendre* before launching his career as an internationally celebrated Québécois director. Whereas Arcand et al left Johanne's haunting performance on the cutting room floor, Jutra understood the weight of this moment and skillfully repurposed it for his own film.

Jutra posits Johanne as a spectacle of interest not only by way of her talent as a performer, but also by the nature of her Blackness in a white milieu. Following her performance, Johanne is shown speaking to a group of male fans and admirers while Claude attempts to get her attention from behind. Claude's inner voice then pleads "Look at me!" thrice while Johanne playfully replies, "I don't see you!" in kind. Central to the language of the film, Jutra employs non-diegetic voiceovers to communicate Claude and Johanne's flow of consciousness. Johanne briefly turns around and glances at Claude; finishing her drink, she turns to him for a refill. As he asks her if she'd like a drop of whiskey, through a wide smile she replies, "a pour," clearly engaging in the same game of seduction that Claude is attempting to orchestrate. She hastily downs the glass and skips away. As he finds her on the terrace, both with their racialized differences obscured as silhouettes in the darkness, Claude and Johanne embrace and share their first of many kisses.

As the soirée winds down and the guests begin to disperse, a non-diegetic melody starts to play. This sonic leitmotif will come to script Claude and Johanne's relationship. The melody comes from the instrumental version of "tes yeux blancs," a song written by Jutra for the film. As the title suggests, the song presents a racial subtext that capitalizes upon Johanne's Black corporeality. This is further affirmed by lyrics of the song:

*Your white eyes took me
At the edge of the night
Your white eyes led me
Elsewhere where I am
I followed, at night,
Your eyes until
And here, finally, I understood.*³⁶

³⁴ Sirois-Trahan, Jean-Pierre. "Le devenir-québécois chez Claude Jutra. Autofiction, politique de l'intime et le je comme faux raccords" *Nouvelles vues sur le cinéma québécois*, no. 11 (2009).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ These song lyrics can be found in a digital archival collection celebrating the 50th anniversary of *À tout prendre*. This archive hosts a plethora of historical materials from and connect to the film. For the original French lyrics, please see: http://collections.cinematheque.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/1984_0049_05_SC_02.pdf.

Beyond foreshadowing of the eventual course of their relationship, the song more importantly alludes to Claude's (white) gaze in the narrative. Whereas the song seems to sanitize their difference by fixing on a shared human element, the lyrics in fact amplify Johanne's Blackness. Regardless of its original intent, Jutra's choice of white as adjective to describe a Black subject's corporeality signals the colonial logics by which she is framed. Marshall (2001) asserts that Claude's gaze upon Johanne at times subverts the standard male heterosexual gaze of mainstream Hollywood and even art cinema. Nonetheless, his positionality is undermined by what we might term 'the apprenticeship of difference' that Johanne rouses him to experience.³⁷ Interestingly, a similar sense of female objectification and scopophilia is also associated with French New Wave films of the period. In fact, Jutra's connection to the French New Wave extends beyond *À tout prendre* to the late 1950s, with his literary and cinematic collaborations with the director, François Truffaut (who made a cameo in the film). As exhibited through *À tout prendre*'s auteurist narration via a narcissistic bourgeois male perspective, this film also reflects Geneviève Sellier's (2008) claim about French New Waves films, that they were typified by a "cinophilic gaze [that] is necessarily male, heterosexual, and directed toward icons, fetishes, and female sexual objects."³⁸ Here, the same kind of "cinophilic gaze" structures the discourses of objectification that present Johanne's racialized difference.

Transgressing the racial and cultural politics of the period, Claude and Johanne depart together to share their first night of intimacy. After arriving to Claude's apartment, non-diegetic West African drums begin to play in an escalating tempo signalling their growing passion. This sonic leitmotif shadows Johanne over the course of the narrative, from her exuberant jive in a Black Jazz club to Claude's fantasies of Johanne's Haitian youth. This leitmotif not only symbolize Johanne's exotic spectacle; rather, it suggests something more essential. It evokes what T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (1999) would describe as colonial notions of the Black (female) body as robust and primitive sites for white desires and anxieties. Throughout the film, this leitmotif will come to symbolize profound moments when Jutra mobilizes Johanne's Blackness to explore his (queer) sexuality. While later undressing one another in Claude's apartment, Johanne's nude shoulders and back juxtapose against Claude's white body as they slip into the nearby bed. Marshall (2001) has identified *À tout prendre* as the first time in North American cinema that a bed scene between a white man and a Black woman was screened in cinemas.³⁹ This presentation of an interracial sexual relationship was a novel sight on Québécois screens, and the film served as an important vehicle to engage with the moral and sexual taboos of Québec secular nationalism. This would have not been possible prior to political reforms of the Quiet Revolution as Québec cinema was subject to the religious dictates of the clerical censorship board.

As the first commercial feature film produced in Québec since 1953, *À tout prendre* signalled the intense cultural and cinematic shifts of the Quiet Revolution. Whereas sexual liberation emerged later as a part of the emancipatory rhetoric of the period, it only demarcated to

³⁷ Marshall 2010: pp. 33-34.

³⁸ Sellier, Geneviève. *Masculine singular: French new wave cinema*. Duke University Press, 2008: p. 23.

³⁹ Marshall 2001: p. 47.

white-settler and heteropatriarchal models of representation. Re-framing a long history of political control over racialized subjects, the Quiet Revolution was typified by “an intense anxiety about the spread of the biological and political spread of Blackness through Black-White solidarity and sexual encounters.”⁴⁰ Almost five years before the release of *À tout prendre*, the English unit of the NFB produced *Crossroads* (dir. Don Haldane, 1957), one of the first portrayals of an interracial relationship in Canadian history.⁴¹ Aired the same year by the CBC on televisions spanning all of Canada, the short film featured a twenty-something white woman and Black man in Toronto meeting the former’s family. Central to the plot is the visible anxiety and discomfort of the white characters over the potential mixed progeny of the interracial couple. This narrative was grounded in a colonial pathology of Black male virility and white female innocence, and it demonstrated how the fear of interracial sex and political subversion interfaced to control Black bodies.



Figure 1.5. Johanne and Claude exploring their corporeal difference together (screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

The racial symbolism of Johanne corporeal difference in *À tout prendre* will later come to metaphorize Claude’s (and Québec’s) own identity crisis. In the light of the next morning as the couple lounge in bed, the camera shifts to Claude’s point of view. In a close-up of Johanne’s sleepy face and dishevelled hair, Claude’s white hand enters the shot and highlights Johanne’s contrasting Blackness. Caressing her face, Johanne kisses Claude’s hand and remarks “Your fingers are white.” Claude pauses for a moment in surprise, and replies “True, they are white,” as if her Black skin was a canvas to recognize his whiteness. Through such interactions with Johanne’s racial difference, Claude’s identity as a white bourgeois subject comes to be re-articulated as a dialogue with Otherness. In step with the Québec intelligentsia’s fixation on Black anti-colonial discourse, the film deploys Johanne’s Blackness as a metaphor to explore white social positionality. Unlike others, Jutra realizes the complexities of Johanne’s Black otherness as a cypher to explore his own white marginality as queer and Québécois. As mentioned earlier, 1960’s Québec intellectuals

⁴⁰ Austin, David. *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal*. Between the Lines, 2013: p. 11.

⁴¹ Baker, Michael Brenden. “Who’s on the Home Front? Canadian Masculinity in the NFB’s Second World War Series “Canada Carries On,” in *Making It Like a Man: Canadian Masculinities in Practice*, Christine Ramsay, ed. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011: p. 45.

articulated political affinities with Franco-African post-colonial and U.S. Black Power movements often without even acknowledging their own racialized communities. Québécois nationalist discourse during this period often exploited the racial oppression of Third-World and American Black peoples by colonial and state apparatuses as a metaphoric equivalent for Québécois marginality vis-à-vis English Canada.⁴² Jutra's film symbolically rearticulates this racialized rhetoric to launch his own exploration of sexual difference.

While it is far from explicit whether her presentation of difference is what attracts Claude's attention, it is certain that her otherness is central to their romance. Johanne's mystery as the Black other is further symbolized through her absent husband, whose identity or race is never revealed. However, as her previous string of white lovers indicate, Claude is not Johanne's first inter-racial partner, but she may ostensibly be his. As their love affair flourishes, Claude decides one afternoon to photograph Johanne in Parc Mont-Royal. The scene is accompanied by the uniting of both of the film's non-diegetic sonic leitmotifs. As West African drums intersplice with instrumental of "Tes yeux blancs" play in synchronization to Johanne promenading across a field. The juncture of these sonic leitmotif symbolizes Claude and Johanne's growing union. This African drumbeat arises repeatedly throughout the film to signal Johanne's performance of her Black alterity as well as Claude's growing (queer) desires. While Claude snaps of photographic mementos of Johanne and their nascent love, she plays and poses for the camera amidst the natural landscapes of Parc Mont-Royal.

Despite her modern attire and choreography, this symbolic musical accompaniment authenticates Johanne's Blackness through arousing colonial tropes. In impersonating such a colonial racialized pastiche, Johanne demonstrates the systematic nature by which "[Black] women [have] construct[ed] sexual meanings and practices within this overarching structure of heterosexual power relations"⁴³ Performing her Blackness as she sashays across the field, Johanne seems to understand her subaltern agency in this masquerade. During this sequence, Johanne asserts her abilities as a model to manifest her own representation. Her performance is one which is conscious of Claude as the spectator as Johanne adapts herself to suit his creative direction and imagining of her otherness. This visualization of Johanne's racial difference is symbolic of Québec nationalist efforts during this period to exploit Blackness as a frame for exploring their own sense of colonized white subjectivity. It is through this type of symbolic engagement that Claude will come to confront his own marginality.

1.4. CLAUDE'S QUEER QUÉBEC

As the main protagonist and narrator of *À tout prendre*, Claude illustrates the paradoxes of modern Québécois masculinity during the early 1960s. From his subscription to *Life Magazine* to his habitual dalliances with various women, Claude keenly performs his role as the urbane bourgeois

⁴² Mills 2010: p. 38.

⁴³ Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2000: p. 131.

intellectual. During the opening sequences of the film, Claude acknowledges the camera's presence as he holds up a nude centerfold of Marilyn Monroe; cuing the spectator to expect a film that will not operate according to the norms of classical narrative cinema. Moreover, this disruption functions as a means of involving the audience with a character's viewpoint.⁴⁴ During one of the first scenes in which he prepares for the party, Claude dresses in various costumes in front of a mirror. He playfully shifts through various masculine stereotypes: a gangster, a detective, a Pierrot figure reminiscent of an earlier experimental work, *Pierrot des bois* (1956). This multiple performance of masculinity literally fractures as Claude shoots at his reflection in the mirror with a revolver. This fragmentation of self is semiotically representative of Claude's personal quest for identity, encompassing the concurrent national crisis of identity politics during the Quiet Revolution. As discourses of modernity and national sovereignty took hold, re-articulations of Québec national identity were in constant shift since at the same time urban culture faced the disruption of traditional notions of masculinity and heterosexuality associated with the Sexual Revolution.⁴⁵



Figure 1.6. Claude's (and Québec's) fragmented identity
(screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

As Claude shatters his image in the mirror, Jutra alludes to the failures of hetero-nationalist masculinity that he will tackle in the film. Akin to many other nationalist movements, the re-configuration of Québec's nationhood during the Quiet Revolution was articulated as a homogenizing androcentric and heteronormative project.⁴⁶ The period's rapid program of secularization and modernization was haunted by a sexual anxiety stemming from their long paternalistic history of colonial domination and Catholic supremacy. In Québec, the Quiet Revolution and Sexual Revolution converged as intellectuals and artist began expressing a modern form of hetero-masculinity that resisted the precedent devirilizing forces of religious and federalist

⁴⁴ Leach 1999: p. 68.

⁴⁵ Vacante, Jeffery. *National Manhood and the Creation of Modern Quebec*. UBC Press, 2017: p. 3.

⁴⁶ Vacante, Jeffery. "Writing the History of Sexuality and & National History in Québec." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39.2 (2005): p. 33.

control.⁴⁷ Furthermore, such nationalist discourse also associated the gilded extravagance of the Church with the figure of the homosexual as emasculating threats to the modern nation. During this campaign of nationalist remasculinization,

“the impotence of the ‘skirted fathers’ of Catholicism and the association between homosexuality and Canadian federalist discourses (as implicitly and sometimes explicitly pointed out by Parti pris, or the now famous manifesto of the Front de libération du Québec), [resulted in] a re-enactment of patriarchal Oedipian narrative.”⁴⁸

Effectively, Claude’s bourgeois performance in the film stands in stark opposition to its contemporaries such as *Pour la suite du monde* (dirs. Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault, 1963) and *Le chat dans le sac*, which lauded the white virility of working class and rural masculinities.⁴⁹ Such a climate of compulsory ethno-heterocentrism narrates Claude’s clumsy quest to be ‘straight’ as he attempts to portray the modern urban(e) nationalist man. In challenging compulsory nationalist scripts of Québécois masculinity, Jutra mobilizes the memory of his transgressive love affair to *queer* the emergent logics of Québécois modernity.



Figure 1.7. A (homo)erotic self portrait of Jutra, 1963
(source: La cinémathèque québécoise)

Preceding this scene in question, Jutra subliminally signals Claude’s queerness by portraying him(self) through a homoerotic lens. As Claude prepares to attend the party where he will meet Johanne, he is shown almost nude in the shower. Considering the parochial censorship regulations prior to the film, this erotic visualization of Claude’s semi-bare white body was ground-breaking. During the short years before the production of the film, such imagery of

⁴⁷ Schwartzwald, Robert. “Symbolic’ Homosexuality, ‘False Feminine’, and the Problematics of Identity in Québec,” in *In Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Michael Warner, ed. UMinnesota Press, 1993: p. 266.

⁴⁸ Cornellier, Bruno. “Sexe, sexualité et nationalité : Coït interrompu ou orgasme continuuel?.” *Nouvelle Vues* no. 2 (2004).

⁴⁹ Waugh (1981): p. 12.

(*partially*) disrobed men was mainly relegated to fitness magazines and documentaries.⁵⁰ One such example is the NFB documentary, *Golden Gloves* (1961), which is often famously remembered for its homoerotic scene of (white and Black) male boxers in briefs weighing in before a competition. Coincidentally, the documentary was narrated by Jutra himself, as he was heavily involved with the NFB prior to debut of *À tout prendre*. Waugh (2006) has written at length about how clandestine queer symbolism were abundant in some cultural productions (e.g., NFB films and fitness magazines), as such industries offered a liminal space in which Jutra was quite involved.⁵¹ Effectively, as Jutra portrays in Claude semi-nude in grooming himself in the bath, he evokes a sense of queer voyeurism with the spectator. Jutra demonstrates that the thirtysomething filmmaker was very comfortable with his body and its erotic representations. Claude acts with such brazen liberty with his body in this opening bathing scene as in the film's sex scenes with Johanne.

As Claude and Johanne's amorous exchanges shift from gifts to confessions, the pair begin a precarious game of disclosure. From the Catholic Church to the Victorian medical clinic, the act of confession has been historically linked to the moral regulation of sex and sexuality. In *À tout prendre*, the bedroom assumes the confessional space where Claude and Johanne divulge their closely guarded secrets. Their game of disclosure eventually leads Johanne to inquire about Claude's possible homosexuality. One afternoon after a few months together, Claude and Johanne are shown seated in embrace on the floor of Claude's apartment. While caressing his face, her Black fingers juxtapose against the white skin of his forehead and brow. Claude's inner voice remarks "Endless caresses grazing the flesh, leaving the soul as smooth as a pool. Performed with skill and cruelty, now her hand explores a pimple or a scar back and forth as if she was opening a wound with her finger. Curious weaving of pleasure and punishment." As Johanne lovingly cradles Claude and strokes his face, she in fact is about to lacerate a wound deeper than them both. Whispering softly into Claude's ear, Johanne inquires intuitively, "My love, you like boys?"⁵² Sitting motionless with a blank stare, Claude appears perplexed by the question and hums in confusion for Johanne to repeat it. In a voiceover accented by a haunting chamber echo effect, Johanne reiterates more directly, "*DO YOU* like boys?" Johanne's questioning ostensibly does not arise from judgement, but from a desire to better know her lover. Yet, this question is immediately followed by a non-diegetic sound of broken glass and crashing cymbals, denoting the sexual fracturing of Claude's identity. Claude does not verbalize any response to his moment of truth. Rather, Jutra articulated by a poetic voiceover declaring Claude's repressed queer desires:

"I don't say yes any more than I say no. In this way has escaped the secret that I've kept inside me even longer than I can remember. Johanne did this. With her

⁵⁰ Waugh 2006: p. 84.

⁵¹ Ibid: p. 38.

⁵² In the film, Johanne says first says "Aimes-tu les garçons?" then after Claude's silence, reiterates more firmly, "Est-ce que tu-aimes les garçons." In this context, Waugh clarifies: "it must be stressed that in the context of the idiomatic French spoken in Montreal's lively early 1960s bohemia frequented by the characters of the film as well as the real-life Jutra and Harrelle, "garçons" obviously meant "men," and not children or even adolescents." See: Waugh, Thomas. "'Do you like boys?' Claude Jutra's disappearances: confession, courage, cowardice." *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no.58 (2018).

woman's hands, she has lifted up the heaviest part of my burdens. She made me confess the unmentionable and I was not ashamed, and I was not hurt. Now that everything has changed, so this longing—imperious and unsatisfied—that torment, has taken at last the form of hope”

Claude's secret queer desires torment him so much that that he is unable to verbalize his confession in the diegetic world of the film. While the cultural homophobia he has been conditioned to represses his non-normative desires, Johanne's racial difference elicits Claude to deliver one of the first allusions to a *queer* coming out in Canadian cinema. Neither confirming nor denying Johanne's accusation, his affirmation of homosexual desire remains beyond the level of verbal discourse for Claude, as Jutra's later allusion to a sexual encounter with another man suggests.



Figure 1.8. Johanne catalyzing Claude's landmark queer confession (screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

This queer subtext was quite novel for the period. Prior to the federal Omnibus Bill of 1969 that partially decriminalized homosexuality, the Canadian government actively intruded into their citizens' bedrooms and cinemas. In kind, Québécois intellectuals also policed heterosexual orthodoxy and moral taboos ranging from inter-racial sex to homosexuality during the Quiet Revolution. In the scene immediately following Claude's confession, Claude is shown at a Radio-Canada film stage directing a rehearsal with an actor that will come to embody his queer desires. Like the NFB, Radio-Canada was also known as “a haunt of closeted middle-class intelligentsia playing out high-cultural alibis.”⁵³ Furthermore, Waugh (2000) suggests Claude's confession “is permissible in 1963 only in the social and artistic context established by the film. The social context—bohemian and artistic— was one of the few in which lesbians and gays could be relatively open before Stonewall.”⁵⁴ In turn, the placement of Claude's confession alongside this milieu reinforces Jutra's queer sensibility in the film.

⁵³ Waugh 2006: p. 85.

⁵⁴ Waugh, Thomas. *The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writings on Queer Cinema*. Duke University Press, 2000: p. 203.

Alongside one of the first declarations of homoerotic desire in Québec cinema, the film also delivers one of the first filmic allusions to homosexual sex in Canadian history.⁵⁵ Following Johanne's questioning, the scene cuts to Claude directing actors at the Radio-Canada film stage. After the rehearsal ends, Claude is shown playfully kissing his leading actress on the neck. Meanwhile, Claude's male co-star stands nearby in a corner and reacts with a confused and uncomfortable expression on his face. Claude notices his response and turns towards him to suavely light the actor's cigarette. Revealing Claude's latent attraction to this man, his inner voice then repeats the end of his confession: "And so, this longing—imperious and unsatisfied—has taken at last the form of hope." This repeat voice-over signals Claude's queer desire for his actor, and they are subsequently shown in Claude's apartment enjoying laughter and libations after their rehearsal. Most of their playful conversation is muted except for a few phrases: "no joke" (Claude) and "now that we're there..." (Actor) while non-diegetic drums play to the increasing temperature of their homoerotic interaction. Claude coyly smiles at the actor while skillfully adjusting himself in his armchair so as to appear more seductive. The camera begins to flash between close ups of Claude and the actor's faces as they stare at one another from across the room; their playful glances bridging their physical and symbolic distance. The actor asks "finally, today's work—was it any good?" Claude quickly retorts that "that's not what is important" while the drum tempo frantically intensifies. While this percussive beat is different from Johanne's sonic leitmotif, it nonetheless establishes a symbolic connection to Johanne, and reiterates Claude's use of her Blackness as a foil to explore his own queer desires. Through a cunning smirk, the actor replies "what's important?" as the camera hyperkinetically zooms upon both of their faces, drawing them ever further together. As laughter turns into knowing stares, the screen shifts to Black as Claude breathes a sigh of relief: "*en fin*" (*finally*). The audience is provided with little more than a suggestion of homosex, but such an insinuation spoke volumes during the 1960s by transgressing Québécois moral and censorship regulations. This landmark queer scene was cut from CBC broadcasts of the film two years later, much to Jutra's chagrin.⁵⁶

Alongside the queer haunts of the NFB and Radio-Canada, the film also manifests Parc Mont-Royal (commonly known as "the Mountain"), one of the most historically significant (homo)sexual spaces in Montréal. Waugh reveals that "[the] film seems to have one spatial mythology strategized for 'national' audiences, and another for private recognition by queer audiences knowing surveys of *our* undergrounds, *our* ghettos and *our* liminal spaces."⁵⁷ Throughout the film Claude often frequents Montréal's Anglo West End downtown, which incidentally housed the embryonic gay ghetto of the sixties. The more infamous section of Parc Mont-Royal was historically known as "the Jungle" due to its association with queer public sex.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Waugh 2006: p. 85.

⁵⁶ Waugh (2018).

⁵⁷ Waugh 2006: p. 86.

⁵⁸ In 1945, the rape and murder of a nine-year-old boy in Parc Mont-Royal led to witch hunts and reinforced the public perception of homosexuality as evil. See: Allen, Luther A. "L'aventure sexuelle clandestine: le cas du mont Royal," in *Sortir de l'ombre: histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*, Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi, eds. VLB (1998):p. 90.

During a typical Montréal snowstorm, Claude and Johanne ascend “the Mountain.” While climbing the park stairs, Claude realizes that a white leather biker is following them. Noticing the biker staring at them, Claude follows him and leaves Johanne sitting on the top of the stairs to investigate. He begins to fantasize that Johanne starts being assaulted by the leather biker.⁵⁹ As he runs up the mountain to save her, the biker pulls out a gun and begins shooting at Claude.⁶⁰ Covered in snow with a bloody hand, Claude finds Johanne laying helplessly in a snowbank and carries her away as the leather biker speeds away on his motorcycle. The scene then shifts back to Johanne still sitting alone on the top of the stairs where Claude had previously left her before following the biker. Tellingly, he does not answer her inquiry about his whereabouts.

Contextualizing this homoerotic symbolism in the film, Claude’s masochistic fantasy can be better understood as a metaphor for an illicit public sexual encounter. Since the late nineteenth century, Parc Mont-Royal has served as a popular queer cruising spot. In response to such “deviant” activities, Mayor Jean Drapeau ordered for the trees and bushes across the park to be cut down and removed just nine years before the film. This action buttressed the concept that gay men were criminals requiring constant discipline and punishment. Drapeau’s solution caused serious erosion issues but did little to curb gay cruising.⁶¹ In symbolic response to Drapeau’s measures, Jutra visualizes the Mountain as a towering sexual underground, bustling with furtive eroticism—even in the dead of winter. This site is surely personal for Jutra “who resided at the time barely ten minutes on foot from the upper Peel Street entrance to the park, its snowy stairway represented in the film.”⁶² While Claude’s fantasy on the Mountain may appear to the *straight* gaze as another abstract New-Wave sequence in the film, the queer coding renders the scene to be far more existential. Jutra’s assemblage of hypermasculinity and violence in his fantasy ultimately manifests Claude’s repressed queer desires and fears. Whereas the leather biker aesthetic would later become a homosexual trope in the 1970s, the hypermasculine and illicit nature of the figure was already inscribed with a sense of queer symbolism at the time of the film.⁶³ When Claude notices the biker watching him and Johanne, it is unclear whom he is looking at. Yet, as Claude walks towards him to investigate, the queer coding makes it appear as if Claude was following the man to a more secluded space for sex. In kind with this fantasy, there are two other sequences that read as violent paranoid delusions of Claude’s fear of his nascent queerness. From his hallucination of being assaulted by three gangsters in trench coats on the side of a rail bridge, or his delirium of being chased by businessmen, Jutra employs violence for a metaphor for repressed

⁵⁹ The symbolic placement of Johanne’s imagined attack in “the Jungle” evokes longstanding legacies of imperial conquest and anti-Black violence. Interestingly, in *Jusqu’au cœur* (dir. Jean Pierre Lefebvre, 1968) is a brief scene in which a Black man is shot in Parc Mont-Royal by a white man (the uninjured Black man is shown later shooting his assailant). Importantly, this film also marks the first on-screen kiss by a gay couple and lesbian couple in Québec history. See: Waugh 2006, p. 78.

⁶⁰ While Claude is killed by the biker in his fantasy, the gun is an obvious stand-in for a phallus, which is further reiterated by the blood (or semen?) on Claude’s hand.

⁶¹ Demczuk, Irène & Frank W. Remiggi, eds. *Sortir de l'ombre: histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*. VLB, 1998: p. 91.

⁶² Waugh 2006, p. 94.

⁶³ Levine, Martin P. and Michael S. Kimmel. *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*. NYU Press, 1998:p. 80.

queer desire. By exploring his sexual otherness, Claude also discovers the potential violence of alterity.

Whereas Claude's coming out was certainly ground-breaking for the period, his confession is oriented around a homoerotic desire, and not a queer identity per se. Although clandestine homosexual spaces were nascent during Quiet Revolution, it would not be until the early 1970s that a modern homosexuality identity would crystallize in Montréal.⁶⁴ Effectively, it is imperative to resist an ahistorical essentialization of Claude (or by extension, Jutra) as gay, queer, or homosexual. Rather, Claude's performance in the film reveals the power of queerness to destabilize modernist and nationalist foundations of *pure laine* masculinity. Sedgwick (1990) contends the coming out ritual is both a narrative trope as well as a performative political statement, which has the "immense potency to trigger of a 'flow of power.'"⁶⁵ Considering that homosexuality was often associated with a sense of arrested development and deviance during the Quiet Revolution, Claude's confession deploys an alternative frame for understanding the shifting sexual politics of the period. By inscribing queerness upon Claude's otherwise normative identity, the film challenges nationalist homophobic discourses on homoerotic desire and emergent gay subjectivity. As with the advent of homonationalism in following decades, this method of visibility would be refashioned to affirm a francophone white-settler queer subjectivity at the peril of racialized subjects—a paradoxical connection further explained in the penultimate section of this chapter. Jutra's critical interfacing of queerness and the nation illustrates the power of alterity as a lens to reconceptualize normative discourses of the collective self. Such a symbolic interfacing of queerness and white nationalism becomes rearticulated through Johanne's confession of her own origins, which catalyzed Claude's own coming out.

1.5. JOHANNE'S BLACK DISIDENTIFICATIONS

Notwithstanding her position as a central character in the film, the realization of Johanne's identity is quite elusive. Claude's role as narrator of the film means the storyline prioritizes the exploration of his identity. For the audience, Johanne's identity appears even more fragmented than Claude's by way of the construction of her difference. From her foreign origins to her estranged husband, Johanne's personal history is largely obfuscated. This air of mystery grounds Johanne's representation as exotic, upon which both the film and Harrelle *herself* will capitalize. One of the first Black models/actresses in Canada, Harrelle's centrality to the film narrative transgressed the period's *pure laine* cinematic and cultural conventions. The central narrative of *À tout prendre* relies upon the racialized spectacle of Johanne's otherness as a conduit for Claude's own search for subjectivity. Before the debut of the film, Black subjects were virtually absent from Québec cinema and rarely presented as a member of the national body politic—an injustice that

⁶⁴ Higgins, Ross. "Baths, Bushes and Belonging: Public Sex and Gay Community in Pre-Stonewall Montreal," in *Public Sex/Gay Space*, William L. Leap, ed. Columbia University Press (1999): p. 193.

⁶⁵ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press, 1999: p. 76-77.

systematically continues to present day.⁶⁶ Alongside Marshall's (2001) classification of Claude and Johanne's affair as the first visualization of inter-racial sexuality in North American feature films, *À tout prendre* also presents one of the first filmic attempts to explore racial difference in Montréal through Jutra's portrayal of a Black woman as *Québécoise*. This is important considering that *Québécoise* usually connoted white (womanhood) during this period (and arguably even today). Most literature on *A tout prendre* scantily discusses Johanne/Harrelle's racialization in the film. In re-contextualizing Johanne's performance of self through a queer of colour critique, I will destabilize the colonial dynamics of Johanne's racialization as a Black woman to implode *pure laine* nationalist logics of citizenship during the Quiet Revolution.

From her enigmatic introduction while singing Choucounne, Johanne makes a conscious effort to portray herself as Haitian in the film. This stylized presentation of her foreign origin frames Johanne's Blackness as *exotic* and distinguishes her from other local Afro-Canadians. While laying together in bed during the spring of their romance, Claude asks Johanne to share some childhood memories of Haiti. As Johanne begins to reminisce, the image shifts into a montage of young Black men cutting grass with scythes to the rhythm of drums.⁶⁷ Johanne's memory of the dark world of the plantations and the morning heat is in fact fabricated, and not just by way of Johanne's false performance of self. These images that accompany Johanne's childhood memory are actually assembled with leftover footage from Jutra's earlier NFB documentary *Niger, A Young Republic* (1961). Johanne's Haitian exoticism thus finds its origin in a French-Canadian ethnographic documentary filmed in Africa. As Claude's attraction rests upon Johanne's exotic difference, this also becomes *queerly* re-articulated by Claude's homoerotic gaze of muscular Black men evoked by Johanne's fictitious memories. This queer gaze on the Black male body becomes more apparent as Johanne and Claude visit the only Black space in the film.

Following Johanne's mediated retelling of her youth, the couple is next shown on an evening out at a Black jazz club. Before meeting Johanne, Claude was reluctant to socialize at parties or dinners, but becomes more willing with an exotic Black model on his arm. Just as much as Claude delights in showing her off, Johanne also enjoys being the centre of the spectacle among his impressive lot of white friends. Conversely, the jazz club is the first and only milieu in the film mainly populated by Black Montréalers. The scene begins with a seamless visual and sonic transition from Claude's homoerotic African fantasy to a montage of Black faces. As the camera pans across the room, zooming onto the joyous faces of Black men and women, we realize we're not in Haiti (nor Africa) any longer; rather, it's Little Burgundy, a historically Afro-Canadian neighbourhood near downtown Montréal.⁶⁸ Next, interracial heterosexual couples are shown

⁶⁶ Austin, David. *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal*. Between the Lines, 2013: p.23.

⁶⁷ While this is not the same drum sequence described earlier, it nonetheless establishes a symbolic connection between Johanne's Black performance and Claude's latent homoerotic desire for the Black male body, a common trope among nationalist intellectuals during the period like Pierre Vallières (1969).

⁶⁸ Montreal was once the major centre for railway transportation in Canada. Montreal's Black community in Little Burgundy began with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in the 1880s. The CPR often hired Black workers in order to avoid unionization and paying fair wages. See: High, Steven. "Little Burgundy: The

dancing the mambo together. This is during a time when across the US border such daily activities were violently policed. The space in question in the film is Rockhead's Paradise, Montréal most well-known Black nightclub founded in 1928 by the Jamaican-Canadian entrepreneur Rufus Rockhead. The Black-owned club hosted American jazz legends ranging from Louis Armstrong to Nina Simone and launched the careers of local greats such as Oscar Peterson and Oliver Jones.⁶⁹ From its inception and extending into the early 1960s, the club was also known for featuring some of Montreal's first drag performances by pioneering Queens such as Dick Montgomery, Malva Bolda, and Billie McAllister.⁷⁰ Jutra's evocation of this legendary Afro-Canadian space, like "the Mountain," is stamped with histories of sexual subcultures and transgressive desire.

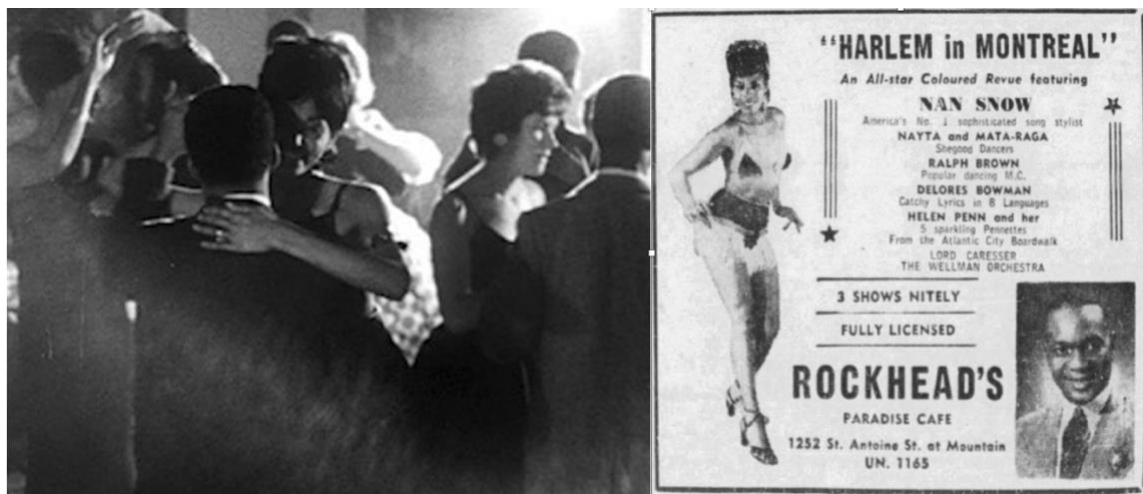


Figure 1.9. Images of Black Montréal: Johanne dancing with a Black man at Rockhead's Paradise (right) and a promotional poster for the famous nightclub (left) (source: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec)

Sitting at a table amidst the gaiety of the Black patrons, the Claude and Johanne already seem at odds in this non-white space. Whereas Johanne appears jubilant at Rockhead's, Claude clearly appears uncomfortable despite reassuring Johanne otherwise. Claude then comments to Johanne, "you like it here, eh? You're in your element." Seemingly shy and reluctant to answer Claude's racially charged question, she deflects, "it's the music, you know..." Failing to mention her enjoyment of the Black milieu, Johanne sanitizes the space to make Claude comfortable. Abruptly, a man appears from out of the shot to ask Johanne if she would like to dance. Johanne agrees only if she has Claude's permission, which the man requests. As they come together to dance, it is revealed that he is Black. They first dance to what sounds like a sophisticated minuet, then as Claude watches there is a white flash as the music shifts into wild drumbeats accompanied by Johanne's exotic choreography. As this pair dance cheek to cheek, the non-diegetic drum

Interwoven Histories of Race, Residence, and Work in Twentieth-Century Montreal." *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 46.1 (2017): pp. 23–44.

⁶⁹ Lelièvre, Denys. "Les Noirs et le Jazz au Québec" *Cap-aux-Diamants* no. 79 (2004): pp. 36–41.

⁷⁰ Namaste, Viviane. *C'était du spectacle!: L'histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal, 1955-1985*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005: p. 12.

leitmotif doesn't signal their desires per se, but that of Claude's growing jealousy. In a voice-over monologue, Claude stewes over this lack of white agency while sitting alone in this Black space:

"All of the Black flesh around us, and the heat and the music, her eyes are too bright tonight. She is determined to charm the world even if that means infuriating me. There is defiance in the air. So, our first battle has begun and both of us know in advance that the first victory will be hers."

As Johanne embodies her Blackness in dance, she is performing not just for Claude, which briefly challenges their existing power dynamic. Claude's inner voice irritably yells: "Johanne, are you making a fool of me?!", to which her inner voice replies, "Exactly my dear!" This is compounded by her dancing with a *Black* man. As the percussive tempo increases, a now barefoot and exuberant Johanne is shown dancing wildly with another Black man in a white suit ending in a round of applause from the club patrons.

Insofar as much as Claude enjoys parading Johanne as *his* exotic spectacle, Claude's anxiety in this scene is far more complex than a simple lover's spat. While Claude's jealousy seems rooted in Johanne's dancing, there is also a queer element to his reaction. Similar to Claude's fantasy of Johanne's youth, Claude's conception of Johanne's Blackness is configured through his own repressed homoerotic desire for the Black male body. This is further reinforced by Claude's employment of Johanne's racial difference as a catalyst to explore his own queer desires. Such queer fetishization is most notably paralleled a few years later in Pierre Vallières' infamous text, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (1967).⁷¹ In step with the Québécois nationalists, Vallières text capitalized upon Black anti-colonial thought as a lateral frame to understand his marginalization under federalist clientelism.⁷² While he completely dismisses the presence of Black communities in Québec, his latent *homo-exotic* desire of the Black male body is keenly illustrated in his racist fetishization of violent Black masculinity as inspiration for Québec nationalism.⁷³

Noticing his bitterness, Johanne returns to the table with Claude and begins to disarm herself with a confession of her most private secret. Johanne's representation in the film rests upon her exotic performance as Haitian, a fallacy which will come to reveal deeper truths about her subjugation as a Black woman in Québec. Back at Claude's apartment following their tense evening at Rockhead's, Johanne appears deeply remorseful for her behaviour. In concession, Johanne decides to bare the deep secret of her origins to Claude. In a close shot, as Johanne is shown seated in an armchair smoking with Claude standing behind, she begins to unravel. Johanne sobs, "I have to tell you something that I've never told anyone. I must be sure you love me. Because its' ... I must tell you because I love you. You think I come from Haiti..." As she begins to speak, Claude embraces her behind and kisses her cheeks to comfort her. But as Johanne falls silent upon mention of her assumed origins, Claude turns away and mutters "it's not true?" With Claude now

⁷¹ See: Nadeau, Chantal. "Queer Noir: Homocolonialism in Vallières's *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*," in *Queer Courage: The Birth of a New Nation*. UMinnesota Press (forthcoming 2023).

⁷² Mills 2010: p. 22.

⁷³ Burton, William M. "Translatibility and Queer Desire in *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*: Three Theses + a Hypothesis." *Quebec Studies* no. 61 (2016): p137-164; Cornellier (2017): p. 39.

anxiously pacing back and forth behind Johanne unsure how to process her Blackness, Johanne begins to disclose how an arduous childhood in Québec led to her reinvention as the exotic Haitian:

“You already know. I am not Haitian at all. I had to say I was since I was born here. I was an orphan brought up in an orphanage. Being Brown, it was hard to find Negro parents who had money and wanted children. The adoption bureau was furious with me. They said that we can’t place you anywhere, so I went hand to hand like that. I didn’t know anything about the world. They said that I should pretend I’m Haitian. I didn’t know the country, so I studied the history of the country. I could just say, you didn’t see me before because I’m from Haiti.”

Confessing her deepest truth, Johanne details the racist conditions of her youth and the systemic mistreatment she endured as a ward of the francophone white-settler state. In order to thrive as an orphaned young Black woman in Montréal, Johanne was manipulated by the (probably white) officials to transform her entire identity to someone more exotic. The couple is united as much by their love as the secrets they conceal together (her elided Québécois Blackness and his latent queerness). Effectively, Johanne’s colonial maneuver works to capitalize upon fetishistic notions of Black Haitians as more compelling or valuable than Afro-Québecers.⁷⁴ In this manner, *À tout prendre* fortuitously presents one of the first tentative filmic attempts to explore Blackness in Québec through Johanne.



Figure 1.10. Johanne's confession of her Haitian performance
(screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

Claude’s infatuation to Johanne’s difference becomes dislocated by her confession. As he embraces Johanne again from behind, she begins to weep deeply as the shot rests directly on Johanne’s face as if she is cornered and exposed with nowhere to hide. Fearing the worst from her disclosure, Johanne laments:

“I don’t know why I am telling you this because you’ll be disappointed just like the others. You love me because you think that I’m different, Haitian, from an exotic origin, or something. I am not looking for pity. I’m just tired. There are times when

⁷⁴ Mills, Sean. *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec*. McGill-Queen’s Press (2016): pp. 66-70.

I ask myself how long will it last? When will I settle down, have something of my own, know who I am?"

Sharing her profound racial trauma, Johanne appears broken down by the years of effort she has devoted to the maintenance of her exotic façade. As she will explain, such a performance was originally her only option for survival—a subject which I expand upon further in this section. Johanne's cascade of truth is far too much for Claude's white consciousness, and in turn he simply replies, "I love you for you." Claude is clearly not the first person with whom she has shared this information, and in kind she fears his desire for her will also begin to diminish.

Notwithstanding being born and raised in Québec, Harrelle felt obligated to present herself as foreign and exotic to compensate for her Blackness. In both her material and cinematic world, Johanne/Harrelle was not born in Haiti but learned to become Haitian as one would realize a role. Originally baptized as Joan Harrell, by age 3 she was placed in an orphanage apart from her two older brothers following the death of their African-American father and the hospitalization of her white Québécoise mother.⁷⁵ Categorically, Johanne/Harrelle often referred to herself Brown, not Black, further denoting herself from normative ideas of Blackness in Québec. First placed at the Children's Memorial, an anglophone hospital, she later spent the rest of her youth at the Youville crèche, a francophone orphanage where she would francize her name by adding an e to Harrell and translating Joan into Johanne.⁷⁶ While this name change seems to parallel Jutra's own at the debut of his career, Harrelle's was not an expression of individuality; rather it was a strategic embrace of Québécois tradition. After leaving the crèche in 1947, Harrelle notes that she "made things right" (given the spelling of her name, the colour of her skin, the way she pronounced certain words, etc.) in order to relaunch herself as a recently-arrived Haitian student at Université de Montréal.⁷⁷ Entering this elite milieu, Harrelle associated predominately with white European émigrés. Soon after, she became one of the first Black models to enter the fashion industry in Canada.

Johanne/Harrelle was not alone in being advised by adoption agencies to present herself as Haitian to increase her chances of adoption. Before the bureaucratic secularization of the Quiet Revolution, Black children in Québec were sometimes advised to engage in similar performances.⁷⁸ The logic behind this practice "drew on narratives of heritage which occlude the complex creolized constitution of Black Canadians. In Canada, Black identities must be rooted elsewhere and that elsewhere is always outside Canada. Black subjects become knowable objects through a simple, uncomplicated story of origins."⁷⁹ In Québec, social difference has historically been articulated within a Francophone/Anglophone paradigm, which is firmly centered within a white perspective, no matter which side one is located. Due to her complex Blackness between these two white poles of difference, Johanne's presentation of her identity subverts such a

⁷⁵ Harrelle, Johanne. *Une Leçon*. Stanké (1980): pp. 12-14.

⁷⁶ Gervais, André. "LES BIOGRAPHIES: Johanne Harrelle." *Les Collections: À tout prendre de Claude Jutra: 50 ans*. La Cinémathèque québécoise (2014). <http://collections.cinematheque.qc.ca/dossiers/a-tout-prendre/les-biofilmographies/johanne-harrelle/>.

⁷⁷ Harrelle 1980: p. 24.

⁷⁸ Dubinsky, Karen. *Babies without Borders Adoption and Migration across the Americas*. NYU Press, 2010: p. 40.

⁷⁹ Walcott 2003: p. 105.

hegemonic dynamic. This type of adoption scheme allowed Johanne/Harrelle to capitalize upon the increased focus on the Francophonie during the Quiet Revolution, coupled with an increased desire for the exotic other.⁸⁰

During the Quiet Revolution, Anglophone and Francophone Black subjects assumed very different roles within Québécois nationalism. It must be noted that Montréal has been for centuries home to a Black population descended from slaves as well as more recent arrivals from the United States and the anglophone Caribbean, but increased migration from Haiti during the late 1950s began to reconfigure the parameters of Black identity in the city.⁸¹ During this period, an exodus of often lighter-skinned French-speaking (rather than creolephone) educated classes fled Haiti for Québec with the rise of Duvalier's *Négritude* regime. Whereas Québec and Haiti cultivated a cultural connection over the twentieth century as former members of the French Empire, their relationship has been plagued by an air of racist paternalism. Long before the intense secular shifts of the Quiet Revolution, Québec maintained a religious foothold in Haiti through their Catholic missionary programs. These missionaries along with the Catholic establishment propagated narratives of uncontrolled Black sexuality, which circulated back to the Québécois public and influenced racist cultural attitudes.⁸²

In such an atmosphere, racialized immigrants were (and continue to be) positioned as *both* capital assets and political threats to the fabric of the nation, with Blackness framed as intrinsically foreign. During the 1960s, being associated with the Black Francophonie promised more social capital than most anglophone Black communities in Québec, who were viewed with suspicion not only due to their Blackness but also their perceived affiliation to federalism.⁸³ Rather than embracing her Afro-Québécois origins, Johanne/Harrelle's fabricated representation strategically capitalizes upon such an association, exemplifying the uneven ways in which race and racism have operated in Québec. Insofar as Afro-Caribbean subjects were only rarely and ambivalently included in the Québécois nationalist project, all Black communities were routinely subjected to racism regardless of their background.⁸⁴ As with political control over Black sexuality, Quebec nationalist discourse attempted to propagate a divisive myth to prevent Black political organizing. Yet, Mugabo (2019) has contended that linguistic differences functionally did not forestall collective activism. Within this milieu, speaking French offered little protection for Blacks in Québec, as "their experiences were over-determined by anti-black racism."⁸⁵ As Haitian

⁸⁰ Mills, Sean. *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2016: pp. 28-31.

⁸¹ Austin 2013: p. 55.

⁸² Mills 2016: p. 4.

⁸³ Mugabo, D. "On haunted places: Encountering slavery in Quebec," in *Black Writers Matter*, Whitney French, ed. University of Regina Press, 2019: p. 91.

⁸⁴ While Quebec did not have a system of legal segregation, proprietors had the right to serve whomever they wished, so there was always uncertainty. For example, in 1936 a Black man by the name of Fred Christie was refused service at the Montreal Forum and took the case to the Supreme Court of Canada where he lost. Even the Prime Minister of Barbados, Bentley Adams, was refused a room at a major hotel during an official visit to Montréal in 1954. See: High (2017): p. 25.

⁸⁵ Mugabo, Délice. "Black in the City: On the Ruse of Ethnicity and Language in an Antiracist Landscape." *Identities* 26.6 (2019): p. 636.

immigrants arrived in Québec, they encountered a cultural climate of leftist nationalism heavily shaped by Black thought. This *pure laine* nationalist language of dissent and revolution borrowed heavily from racial theories of decolonization, civil rights, and Black Power. These racial metaphors “rarely recognized the racial diversity *within* Québec, thereby marginalizing understandings of the internal colonization and multiracial nature of Québec society [and] blind to its own gendered biases, with women often acting only as symbolic figures [in] film rather than as complex characters in their own right.”⁸⁶ While this assemblage mirrors Johanne’s general portrayal in the film, Harrelle’s unique involvement in the production of the film afforded her with the power to partly configure her own Black representation.

Johanne/Harrelle’s personal performance capitalizes upon colonial notions of race and sexuality to develop survival strategies as a marginalized subject. Many preeminent scholars (Vaillancourt 2023; Waugh 2006; MacKenzie 2004; Marshall 2001) have focused on the national and queer elements of *À tout prendre* but have scantily discussed the intersectional aspects of her Black womanhood. We can come to a more nuanced understanding of Johanne’s tactical performance of her identity by turning to José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification. As Muñoz (1999) states,

“disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.”⁸⁷

Such disidentificatory performances expose the messiness of identity for marginalized subjects, providing intersectional texture to Johanne/Harrelle’s characterization. Effectively both on and off screen, she played with racialized cultural codes to articulate a performance of self that disidentifies with white colonial stereotypes of Blackness. While her performance does not *explicitly* challenge these notions, it operates under the surface to fashion a new set of political conditions to express her agency.

The exotic representation of Johanne/Harrelle strategizes a disidentification with emergent nationalist cultural mandates in Québec. She constructed an exotic identity to conceal her Afro-Canadian origins and exaggerate her otherness. Ostensibly, this enabled a sense of agency in a white milieu where she would otherwise feel disempowered. In her landmark article on Canadian Black Women’s history, Afua Cooper (2000) contends

“Using the concepts of self-reliance and survival strategies to study Black women’s lives is also a good way to interrogate the opposing duality of victim and resister.

⁸⁶Mills 2016: p. 83.

⁸⁷ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. U-Minnesota Press, 1999.31

This model shows that Black women were victimized by class, race, and gender oppression, but they resisted as much as they could in very creative ways.”⁸⁸

Whereas the film seems to present Johanne as accepting of her own objectification, she in fact subversively exploits racialized scripts for her own advantage. She performs within the dominant culture in a fashion that exposes the colonial conditions of her racialization and racist exoticification.



Figure 1.11. Harrelle's disclosure of her origins in a promotional interview for *À tout prendre* (source: Rudel-Tessier, "Johanne n'était pas haïtienne mais elle avait ses raisons" *Photo-Journal* 16-23 May 1964)

In an interview with *Photo-Journal* shortly before the debut of *À tout prendre*, Harrelle elucidated some of the francophone nationalist dynamics involved in her decision to disidentify as Haitian:

⁸⁸ Cooper, Afua. "Constructing black women's historical knowledge." *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 25.1 (2000): p. 45.

"RT: At one time, you believed that if you presented yourself as Haitian then French-Canadians would accept you, but if you presented as Canadian, they would reject you?

JH: Yes...

RT: And since then, did you ever tell yourself that maybe you could be wrong?

JH: [Vigorously shaking her head] As a Haitian, I was welcomed everywhere. I was 'exotic'!"⁸⁹

Within this short dialogue, Harrelle exposes the colonial racial dynamics that she would later come to display and subvert in her 'exotic' Black performance. She performs in such a manner to secure a legible and accepted positionality within a white francophone nationalist matrix. In this vein, I propose that Johanne/Harrelle's elusive performance of self is quite tactical. Through the presentation of a fragmented subjectivity, Johanne can to some degree control the masquerade of her identity and capitalize upon her evasive social location(s).

Although Johanne is rarely presented on her own in the film, her confession equips her the space to present her story within her own words. During their precarious game of disclosure, Johanne breaks her silence and reveals her own closely guarded secret about her origins. This scene serves as the crux to destabilizing Québécois colonial logics of authenticating Blackness as exotic/foreign. The pressures of re-enacting this emotional episode were so great that Jutra permitted Harrelle to co-direct her own confession.⁹⁰ In a conversation by Harrelle with co-star Victor Désy, she exclaims: "I don't really play a character in *À tout prendre*. Victor, that's me."⁹¹ The improvisational nature of the script—inherited from direct cinema methods of unfiltered and spontaneous dialogue—matched with the film's basis in the couple's collective memory, equipped Harrelle with an increased level of agency to influence her own representation in *À tout prendre*.⁹²

Whereas Jutra provided the space for Johanne's deepest truth, Harrelle was conscious of her own representation. As Mary Green (2003) puts it, "Jutra [gave] Johanne a voice while representing the conditions of her oppression in a situation of colonial domination."⁹³ While her reading may reinforce a white saviour complex, Jutra certainly regarded Johanne as an equal contributor to the film. In the process of drafting the dramatic re-enactment of Johanne's confession, she and Jutra worked closely to capture the 'honesty' of the event.⁹⁴ In a handwritten letter from Harrelle to Jutra, she shares an epiphany regarding her confessional monologue, which eventually became directly integrated into the film.

⁸⁹ Rudel-Tessier, "Johanne n'était pas haïtienne mais elle avait ses raisons" *Photo-Journal* (16-23 May 1964): p.14 [my translation].

⁹⁰ Leach 1999: p. 69.

⁹¹ Daudelin (2014):p. 13.

⁹² Affirming the inventive nature of the film, Désy stated: "Even if *À tout prendre* is in the first person singular, it is more about the film of others than of my film. It was teamwork, a collective creation. And everyone influenced the film. It is up to Johanne in particular; it's up to Victor; it's to everyone who was there. It was really a group work". See: Daudelin (2014): p. 13. [my translation]

⁹³ Green, Mary. "Toward Defining a Postcolonial Quebec Cinema: The Films of Claude Jutra." *Québec Studies* 3 (2003): p. 97.

⁹⁴ Leach 1999: p. 87.

“I have found the secret for ‘Johanne’s confession’. Rather than saying, ‘My love, I’m not Haitian, etc.’ what if I were to say this: ‘My love, you think that I’m from a rich family, don’t you? But no, that’s not it at all. I didn’t know my parents, I am an orphan, brought up in an orphanage and then in a convent. They couldn’t find me, adoptive parents, because I was Black, etc., etc.’ (this phrasing, more or less). I think that this is much better from all points of view, and more comprehensible for an international audience”⁹⁵

Harrelle was conscious about her reception in the film and real-life, and this letter documents one of her strategic attempts to influence the direction of her character development. Her concern illustrates the complex nature of her identity, and the pressures to be legible for *white* audiences. Moreover, Harrelle would have been aware that this confession would extend far beyond the film into her personal life, rendering the fallacy of her performance public.

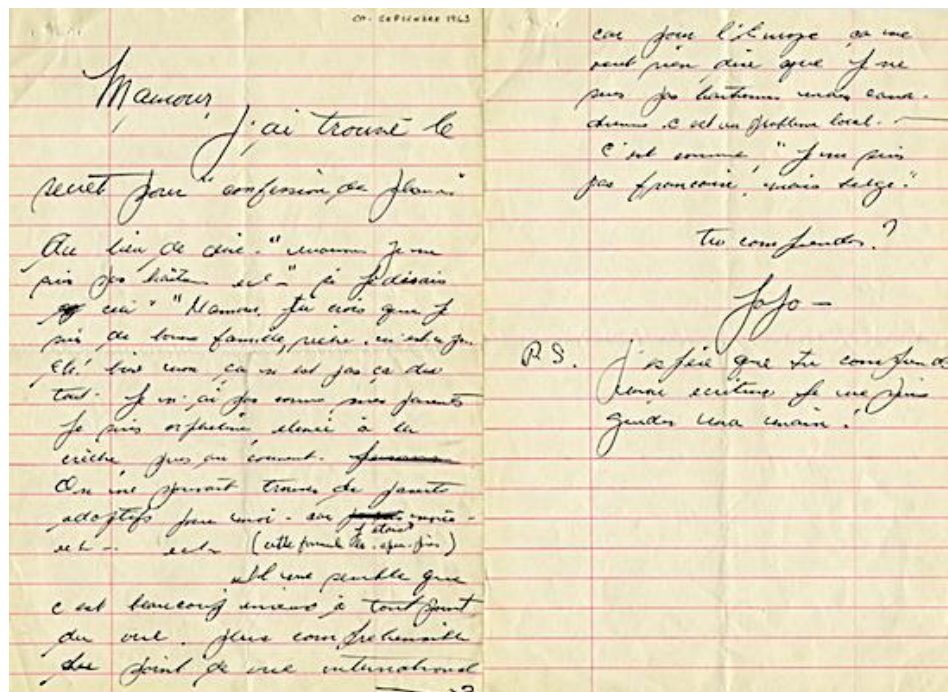


Figure 1.12. Letter from Harrelle to Jutra scripting the presentation of her confession (source: La Cinémathèque québécoise)

Johanne assembles her fiction of identity through her disidentificatory performance as Haitian. Her experience of marginalization as a Black woman provides her with an epistemic advantage to perform her identity through the codes of the oppressor. This presents an example of the strategies marginalized subjects employ to situate themselves in history and seize social agency.

⁹⁵ Harrelle, Johanne. “Lettre de Johanne Harrelle à Claude Jutra” (September 1963). *Les Collections: À tout prendre de Claude Jutra: 50 ans*. La Cinémathèque québécoise [my translation].

“Black people in the Americas have had an immediate relationship to identity and identification as twin acts which constitute performativity. This stems from the ways in which slavery produced spaces for particular forms of identity, identifications and disidentifications. Being forced to perform for the master in a number of different ways meant that a relationship to identity for diasporic Black people manifested itself as something that could be invented, revised, and discarded when no longer useful. We might think about identity as a performance or acting out which puts into operation or responds to a set of discourses that have been a conscious and unconscious part of Black diasporic cultures. Without being exhaustive, these un/conscious gestures can be looked at in terms of Black peoples' use of language and their (re)writing [of identity in] a plethora of other act(ion)s that make clear a notion of fashioning and invention of the self.”⁹⁶

Effectively, Johanne's disidentification works as a performative praxis, operationalising a sense of self that never fully coheres into a monolithic entity. Johanne's performance of Blackness capitalizes upon a colonial articulation of intersectional difference, which she maneuvers into a set of survival strategies available to her as a marginalized subject. This ontological tactic renders Johanne's difference legible, while sanitizing it enough to secure inclusion within the national body politic. Johanne's performance of self deploys Haitian customs to strategically avoid the traumas of her own lineage and her sense of belonging and outsidership, in turn, engendering an avatar to engage with the white bourgeois public.

1.6. SEXUAL FAILURES OF THE MODERN NATION

The transgressive sexual and racial subtext in *À tout prendre* challenged emergent nationalist mandates for white heteronormativity in Québec culture. Through Claude's interactions with Johanne's racial difference, his quest for identity as a white bourgeois subject becomes re-articulated as a dialogue with Otherness. This practice is deeply symbolic of the crisis of identity politics during the Quiet Revolution. As Claude and Johanne explore their corporeal difference, the cultural normalization of Claude's whiteness becomes exposed vis-à-vis Johanne's racialized alterity. Moreover, the film supplants Claude's homoerotic desire onto the erotic exoticism of Johanne's racial difference, and ultimately frames Blackness as a space of sexual liberation. In his treatise on the spectacle of race and representation, Stuart Hall (1997) contends, “We need ‘difference’ because we can only construct meaning through dialogue with the ‘Other’... The representation of ‘difference’ through the body became the discursive site through which much of this ‘racialized knowledge’ was produced and circulated.”⁹⁷ Johanne's racialized otherness stabilizes Claude's performance of masculinity and initially averts attention away from *his* implicit otherness. This elucidation of Claude's whiteness exposes the nature of his quest to present himself as a normative heterosexual subject, especially after he learns of Johanne's ontological charade of

⁹⁶ Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black like who?: Writing black Canada*. Insomniac Press, 2003: p. 75.

⁹⁷ Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage, 1997: p. 244.

‘passing’ as Haitian. Through Jutra’s gradual destabilization of Johanne’s Blackness and origin, he effectively also disrupts *pure laine* nationalist biopolitics.

Johanne’s racialized otherness initially reinforces Claude’s hetero-masculinity and momentarily diverts attention from his implicit otherness. With Claude’s confession of his homoerotic desires, his bourgeois heterosexuality is revealed to be in fact only a pretense. As Claude and Johanne mirror their deepest truths in their game of disclosure, their twin game of *passing* as normal becomes spotlighted. In kind, both Harrelle and Jutra’s name change acts as a break with their past and the ontological mandates associated with their subjectivities.

“As a member of a visible minority, Johanne appears foreign even though she was born in Quebec, whereas Claude (as a white male from a well-to-do family) ought to feel at home. Yet his sexual activities are as much a mask as Johanne’s exotic image. He attempts to deny his impotence within a colonial culture, a situation made all the more frustrating because the marks of his difference are not visible. *As Claude discovers, Johanne’s gender and race do not make her into the exotic other but rather render visible the colonial mechanisms that govern cultural life in Quebec.*”⁹⁸

In both cases, their refashioned identity acts as a façade, a fugue from their failure to adequately perform the social roles culturally assigned to them. In their refashioned roles, Claude (heteromasculine) and Johanne (exotic Haitian) attempt to *pass* as normative and legible subjects. Although the notion of *passing* historically has referred to the practice of racialized bodies performing whiteness as a survival strategy, nationalist forms of heteronormativity have also prompted similar tactics among queer(ed) subjects.⁹⁹ In as much as Claude’s homosexual desire is marginalized, Johanne is also *queered* as a Black threat to the *pure laine* nation—which I will expand upon later in this section. In the film, *passing* unveils the hegemonic conditions that conscript strategic performances that camouflage their forbidden sexuality and liminal racial status. Claude and Johanne are linked through their engagement with such practices of conforming with identities associated with social and cultural capital. *Passing* operates as a disidentification with such mandates; a method to gain inclusion into the Québécois body politic.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it signals the type of performative collusions between state power and sexual/racial normativity engendered by homonationalism.¹⁰¹ In effect, Claude’s own *passing* initially employs Johanne as a beard, it is her Blackness that engenders his queer confession. I continue this line of inquiry in the penultimate section of this chapter, where I outline how the paradoxical conditions of the film and Quiet Revolution gave way to homonationalist forms of inclusion simply a decade later.

Some of the couple’s public interactions in the film manifest the power of such normalizing conditions. Following Claude’s confession (prompted by Johanne’s own), he becomes acutely more aware of cultural intolerances. These scripts are directly reflected in the film through the public treatment of his interracial relationship (and by extension, his covert queer desires).

⁹⁸ Leach 1999: p. 86 [my emphasis].

⁹⁹ Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007: pp. 38-41.

¹⁰⁰ See: Rottenberg, Catherine. "Passing": Race, Identification, and Desire." *Criticism* 45.4 (2003): pp. 435-452.

¹⁰¹ Puar 2007:p. 7

Although Claude and Johanne are shown visiting various public places together, most of these excursions are under the cover of night to niche venues such as artsy soirées and Black nightclubs. As they make way to their second visit to the Mountain, the couple receives judgmental stares from white passersby while they kiss on the sidewalk. Becoming attuned to the hypercritical reception of their relationship, Claude laments that “excursions in broad daylight are dangerous for lovers; the crowd shelters the enemy.” Following this quote, Claude and Johanne are shown being followed and assaulted by a biker clad in leather.¹⁰² Not to be taken literally, this enemy Jutra references is in fact a cipher for the hegemonic pressures of white heteronormativity levied against the couple by both the new nationalist establishment as well as conservative legacies of the past.

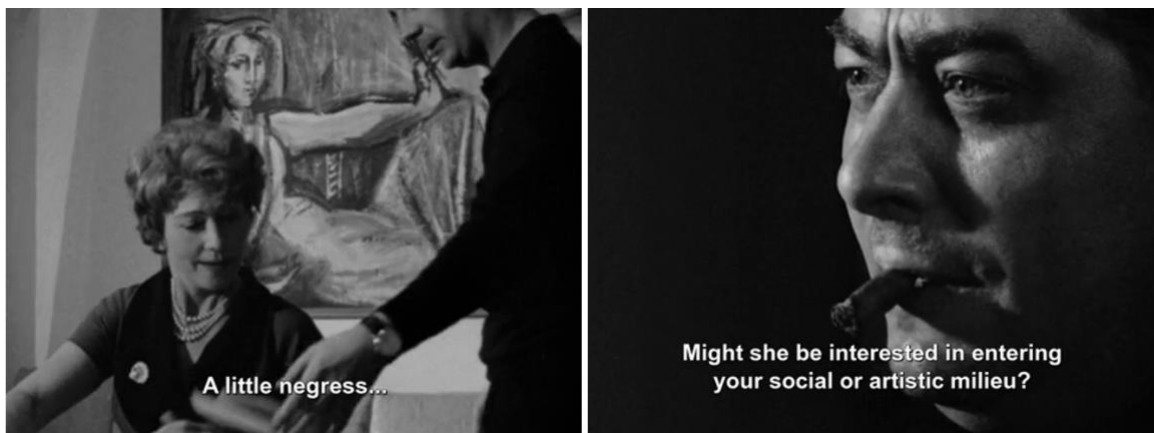


Figure 1.13. Claude's agents of heteropatriarchal tradition: Mother and Priest
(screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

Such hegemonic cultural vestiges materialize in *À tout prendre* through the form of Claude's mother and priest. Shortly after meeting Johanne and eager to share news of his new relationship, Claude visits his mother, portrayed as a bourgeois overbearing woman living in a grand old home. Pacing around nervously, Claude displays some photographs of Johanne to his mother and untastefully comments “Look at my last one, a little negress” as to diffuse the shock her Blackness may elicit. With a blank stare, she flips through the snapshots as an ominous guitar riff plays in the background to heighten the tense air; she glibly replies, “pretty girl.” When Johanne becomes pregnant, Claude visits his mother again to inform her of his desire to marry his lover. She quickly ascertains the pregnancy, but alternatively asks about Johanne's estranged husband as her face conceals what she'd probably like to say about Johanne's Blackness and her own fears of miscegenation. Instead, she reminds her son of the impact that marriage will have on his “bohemian lifestyle¹⁰³” and advises him to seek counsel from his absent father as well as their priest. Claude's visit to his priest proves to be more a confession than a conversation, as the priest

¹⁰² While I discuss this scene in reference to symbolizing the violence of Claude's queer desires, the scene *could* also be read more literally as a racist attack.

¹⁰³ This reference could be seen as a coded reference to Claude's non-monogamous arrangement with Johanne and his suspected queer dalliances.

seemingly attempts to put Claude off women all together referring to them as “cunning and covetous.” While the priest is unaware of Johanne’s racial difference, Claude’s mention of their non-monogamous arrangement and her lack of conformity to “bourgeois norms or Catholic standards” is enough for the priest to condemn Johanne as immoral. These figures from Claude’s and Québec’s past (overbearing mother, absent father, and corrupt priest) ultimately operate as vestigial agents of heteropatriarchal tradition and control that the Quiet Revolution sought to unseat.¹⁰⁴

À tout prendre received acute criticism off-screen from Québécois cultural intellectuals. Given that queer and interracial sexual content was still considered respectively illegal and taboo during the early Quiet Revolution, the film challenged Canadian civil laws and Québécois censorship regulations. Pidduck (2018) asserts that “Jutra’s masterpiece *À tout prendre* is widely recognized as one of the inaugural films of a new wave of Québécois cinema for a secular and progressive independent nation. Formally audacious and daring in its ‘fuck you!’ to much of what a traditional Quebec Catholic society held sacred in 1963.”¹⁰⁵ Upon the film’s release, noteworthy francophone film critics ranging from Gilles Marsolais to Denys Arcand panned the film’s plotlines as avant-gardist and unrepresentative of national(ist) interests.¹⁰⁶ Waugh contends

“this [racist and homophobic reception] is an indicator of two things: the ways problematical questions of sexuality and class were postponed or papered over by the nationalist consensus of the intelligentsia and the left, and the ways cinema was assumed to be a privileged medium of national expression in the sixties and pre-Parti Québécois seventies. The struggle to end film censorship during the Quiet Revolution had been in every way a “national” struggle, yet Québec filmmakers were called into line when they diverged from some undefined but sentimentally monolithic fantasy of the young *pure laine* heterosexual couple”¹⁰⁷

As heteronormative sovereigntist standards crystallized in Québec, Claude and Johanne’s queer and racialized performances transgressed the cultural and cinematic codes of the white normative visual milieu.¹⁰⁸ Waugh asserts that “a whole generation of Quebec documentarists from cineaste laureate Pierre Perrault to Denys Arcand evinced hardly any interest in the sexual revolution that was battering down the doors.”¹⁰⁹ The then critic and amateur director, Denys Arcand, who would later become a lauded ambassador of Québec cinema internationally, penned one of the most

¹⁰⁴ Schwartzwald, Robert. “Rush to Judgment? Postcolonial Criticism and Quebec.” *Québec Studies*, vol. 3 (2003): pp. 113-132.

¹⁰⁵ Pidduck (2018).

¹⁰⁶ Marshall 2001: p. 120.

¹⁰⁷ Waugh 2006: p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ While *À tout prendre* would later come to be celebrated by directors and scholars, its transgressive storyline was initially not well received by Québécois audiences. This is made evident by the film’s initial poor box office sales. See: Waugh 2006: p. 86.

¹⁰⁹ This is also evidenced by the film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (dir. Alain Resnais, 1959), which was censored in Québec with 17 cuts retracting up to 13 minutes in total. See: Waugh 2006: p. 83.

referenced criticisms of Jutra's first film shortly after its debut.¹¹⁰ In his article on cinema and sexuality in the "Portrait du colonisé" issue of *Parti pris* (1964), Arcand lambasted *À tout prendre*. Beyond his banal comments on style over substance, Arcand was most upset that a notable filmmaker such as Jutra failed to represent a "normal" heterosexual relationship in the film. Arcand's cultural antagonism was twofold, as he both degraded Claude/Jutra's queerness and his inter-racial relationship as symptoms of national immaturity. In turn, Arcand framed such themes through a heteropatriarchal anxiety of biopolitical impotency.

Whereas scholars (Waugh 1981/2000/2006, Schwartzwald 1991) have historically focused on Arcand's critique of Claude/Jutra, Johanne/Harrelle's representation in the film was also chastised. In his article, Arcand denounced the film's portrayal of an interracial relationship:

"Beyond the farms and rural churches of our ancestors...to a 'foreign' woman...Why can Claude have a valid relationship only with this foreign Johanne whom he wants to make even stranger? There are after all 'everyday' Québécois women all around him... both on-screen and psychologically. *À tout prendre* doesn't succeed in getting close in tenderness and satisfaction to real everyday women. And in that, the hero is like lots of 30-year-old French Canadians, sensitive and cultivated, who have to have women who are Black, yellow or red, in any case 'foreign,' in order to have their intoxicating affairs. There is here, it seems, an unconscious refusal to coincide with his collective self..."¹¹¹

In line with other nationalist intellectuals, Arcand delegitimized inter-racial relations as a symptom of immaturity. Effectively, Arcand expelled Johanne's Black female subjectivity as a location of beyond Québec. Entirely omitting Johanne's plot in the film, "Arcand yearns for the day when filmmakers can confidently undress the girl next door whose name is Yvette Tremblay or Yolande Beauchemin."¹¹² This linking of the collective self and white heteronormativity unmasks the *pure laine* supremacist foundations of Arcand's conception of a modern Québec.

Arcand's condemnation of Black female sexuality reflects the nationalist racial politics of the period. Arcand's "Black, yellow or red" style of rhetoric erases Québécois women of colour from the national body politic. Arcand even went as far to suggest that Jutra's film would be more insightful "if it would have ended with Johanne's death."¹¹³ Decisively, Arcand echoes the nationalist strategy of rendering these women solely as foreign sexual objects—a racist fetishism that even extended to his own cinematic work. This rhetoric was "buil[t] on the long legacy of slavery and empire, [wherein] Black sexuality was defined as abnormal and outside of the well-established boundaries of the Western family, [and ultimately] shaped the lives of Black Quebecers in myriad ways."¹¹⁴ Such colonial biopolitics framed Black women's bodies as sexually

¹¹⁰ Virtually all academic publications on *À tout prendre* reference Arcand's historically significant *Parti pris* article. See: Vaillancourt, Julie. *Sorties du placard, dans la rue et sur pellicule: À tout prendre & Il était une fois dans l'Est*. McGill-Queens University Press (forthcoming): p. 11.

¹¹¹ Schwartzwald (1991): p. 183.

¹¹² Waugh, Thomas. "Nègres blancs, tapettes et 'butch': Les lesbiennes et les gais dans le cinéma québécois." *Copie zéro* 11 (1981): p. 12.

¹¹³ Arcand (1964): p. 97.

¹¹⁴ Mills 2016: p. 63.

available.¹¹⁵ Dismissing Johanne's confession of her struggles as a Black woman, Arcand objectifies her as a foreign obstacle in Jutra's quest to become a Québécois modern man. In kind, Johanne's transgression of white heteropatriarchal norms and fears (inter-racial adultery and abortion) further queers Johanne as a Black threat to the nation.

Johanne's acts of disidentification in the film reveal her delicate balance of complicity and resistance as a Black woman in mid-20th century Québec. While her exotic presentation as the Haitian other suggests a desire for inclusion within the white nation, her performance is far more nuanced. In fact, Johanne's façade illustrates a deeper epistemic understanding of the material and symbolic dynamics that underline the artifice of racial difference. As exhibited by Johanne's own re-telling of her adoption story in the film, her quest for inclusion is as innocent as it is insidious. Johanne's Haitian performance embellishes her otherness as foreign in order to neutralize its potential interior threat, and this is often expressed through her sexuality. However, it is this interfacing of her dubious Black origins and her modern sexual attitude that comes to frame Johanne as a *queered* Black threat to the nation, as clearly conveyed by Claude's mother and priest. In particular, it is her audacious transgression of white heteropatriarchal sexual taboos (inter-racial adultery and abortion) that ultimately queers Johanne. In Arcand's (1964) scathing review, he even went as far to suggest that the film should have concluded with Johanne's death, a symbol of his nationalist anxiety of interracial sexuality and miscegenation. This necropolitical reception of Johanne's Blackness further reveals how Johanne is queered as a threat to the white nation. Moreover, this framing of Johanne unveils the colonial mechanisms by which Blackness is always subject to being queered. Muñoz would suggest that "specifically with the performative charge of queerness, [and] its ability to redo and challenge the conventions of heterosexual normativity, it can also explicate the workings of various 'minority' identifications."¹¹⁶ While the nascent Sexual Revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s would later come to liberalize taboos such as abortion and adultery, this modern attitude would be available primarily to white heterosexual couples. Hill Collins (2000) suggests that the Black enactment of such sexual liberties operated more as a warning of their foreign and primitive sexuality than a symbol of their modern orientation.

Johanne/Harelle's performance of self in *À tout prendre* complicates such white colonial narratives of Black sexuality and diaspora. Her representation threads this line as her confession demonstrates a strategic awareness of her own exotic objectification. In turn, Johanne/Harelle's personal narrative on and off-screen challenges this *pure laine* supremacism that grounded Québécois nationalist rhetoric. Her confession uproots nationalist conceptions of Blackness as intrinsically foreign to Québec. Her disidentifactory performance as the exotic Haitian ultimately exposes the symbolic and material conditions of her marginalization as an Afro-Québécoise. While attempting to suppress centuries of Black presence in Québec, nationalists repackaged Black anti-colonialism as a foil to frame their own oppression. This political strategy did not engage with the materiality of Blackness, only its symbolic power to the fledgling white nation. In fact, Arcand's

¹¹⁵ See: Lomax, Tamara. *Jezebel unhinged: Loosing the Black female body in religion and culture*. Duke University Press, 2018; Hill Collins 2000: pp. 23-27.

¹¹⁶ Muñoz 1999: p. 98.

patronizing dressing-down is not even directed at Johanne/Harrelle; and that misdirection further demonstrates the nationalist dismissal of Black subjectivity.

In Jutra's choice of a Black woman as a romantic interest, Arcand concludes that men like the director are unable to achieve an "everyday" virile heterosexuality essential to national liberation.¹¹⁷ Despite the conflicting relationship between tradition and modernity during the Sixties, both the frameworks firmly positioned heteronormativity as a cornerstone of their cultural mandates. In rejecting the Church and matriarchal influence as hegemonic emblems of an anterior Québec, intellectuals like Arcand denounced its former colonial and clerical control as devirilizing to emergent nationalist concepts of hetero-masculinity. Furthermore, these "traditional" forces were articulated as proponents of a sense of arrested development—which I will discuss later in this section as a reference to sexual anxieties among Québec nationalists. As Claude and Johanne's relationship dissolves following the news of her pregnancy and its attendant domestic responsibilities, the weight of heteronormativity and reproductive futurity become fodder for their own undoing. Their relationship succumbs to pressures associated with what Jack Halberstam (2005) terms "the schedule of normativity," which "connects the individual and the family to the historical past of the nation and the future of both familial and national stability."¹¹⁸ Arcand's reactionary discourses of progress and modernity championed nationalist heteronormality in exclusively *white* terms. Claude and Johanne's non-normative relationship (interracial/queer desires) directly challenged such emergent frameworks. In turn, exposing the latent fault lines of such hegemonic structures of sexual and racial citizenship.

Judiciously, some critics and filmmakers recognized the cultural significance of *À tout prendre*. The (discreetly) gay critic, Jean Basile, warmly reviewed the film in the mainstream Francophone liberal periodical, *Le Devoir*. Basile (1963) commended Jutra's "extraordinary potential, originality, innovative technique, and his 'talent fou' (extraordinary talent). He also noted that "few reviewers directly address the film's coming out sequence, evoking instead its 'moral strip-tease' and its unfashionable focus on a bourgeois 'bohemian' milieu'" (intimating its transgressive nature and queer context).¹¹⁹ In kind, the director Jean-Claude Lord intertextually acknowledged the film as a queer milestone in his first film, *Délivrez-nous du mal* (1966). The film bravely explores a tormented clandestine relationship between a bisexual sadomasochist and a bourgeois gay banker. During one of the final meetings between the pair, Lord symbolically placed a promotional poster of *À tout prendre* on the living room wall of his gay protagonist. The poster functions as a nod to Jutra and his queer sensibility. Jutra's film would come to represent in time a queer classic for future queer generations.¹²⁰ As mentioned earlier, when the English-

¹¹⁷ Pidduck (2018): p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press, 2005: p. 33.

¹¹⁹ Basile, Jean. "À tout prendre, de Jutra, au Festival." *Le Devoir* (12 August 1963).

¹²⁰ Moffat, Alain-Napoléon. "À tout prendre de Claude Jutra: Le docu-drame de la confession." *Québec Studies* no. 12 (1991): p. 149.

language version aired to Canadian audiences on CBC television in April 1965, Claude's confession was cut from the broadcast, removing all references to queerness in the film.¹²¹



Figure 1.14. A film poster for *À tout prendre*, a queer intertextual nod to Jutra's film in Jean-Claude Lord's *Délivrez-nous du mal* (1969) (screenshot)

À tout prendre was released to mixed reviews in a modernizing albeit still conservative Québec. Arcand and Jutra were already connected through their work at the NFB and other cultural circuits, and as mentioned earlier, Johanne's emblematic introduction was originally filmed for and cut from Arcand's early student film. Arcand's critique of Jutra's film in *Parti pris* alleged that

"This impossibility of achieving 'daily sexuality' undoubtedly has something to do with an unresolved Oedipus complex... No wonder the film then seems to be claiming the right to homosexuality... Nothing very new or very immoral in that. The only question is to what extent homosexuality is a solid form of sexual activity and in what manner it has a special state of self-affirmation, given our overall context of existence in relation to artistic expression."¹²²

In his discontent over the absence of a white heteronormative relationship in the film, Arcand dismisses the significance of the queer narrative of the film entirely. Rather, Arcand psychoanalytically skirts the appearance of outright bigotry by sanitizing the homosexual plot to an artistic expression/metaphor, but not a valid or legible subjectivity.

This is best evident as Arcand questions the validity of homosexuality as a "solid form of sexual activity." Notably in a landmark article on gay and lesbian cinema in Québec, Waugh (1981) directly responded to this claim almost 15 years later, contending "is assertiveness about agreeing

¹²¹ Knelman, Martin. *This Is Where We Came In: The Career and Character of Canadian Film*. McClelland and Stewart, 1977: p. 60.

¹²² Arcand, Denys (Summer 1964): p. 36.

with the 'collective self' at the expense of one's own sexual personality and sense of dignity?"¹²³ Claude's confession of queer desire as "a source of hope rather than despair," is undoubtedly the most courageous moment of this pioneering film. Nevertheless, for nationalist intellectuals like Arcand, it could not signify a true liberation as a heteronormative relationship would. Effectively, "the diagnostic urge proved to be especially volatile around homosexual articulations of identity, which [were] compulsively read for clues that might explicate the identitary impasse of the Québécois subject-nation."¹²⁴ As nationalist intellectuals were convinced of the homosexual threat to the nation, they were also invested in exploiting the symbol of the homosexual as a framework to explain their own "colonial" status.

1.7. PROTO-HOMONATIONAL ASSEMBLAGES

Key to Québec's "modernization" was the articulation of its nationhood as a hetero-masculinist project. Robert Schwartzwald's (1991; 1993; 1997) ground-breaking work in gay studies in Québec has insistently linked the nationalist fear of hetero-masculine failure to the (homo)sexualized arrested development of the nation. For Schwartzwald (1993), Arcand's critique of the film stems from "the burden of a collective shortcoming [that] haunts the colonized consciousness," [and] the figure of the homosexual (who is unable to reproduce or parent) marks a "failure of filiation."¹²⁵ This privileging of heterosexuality is a fundamental component of nationalist programs of collective (white) reproductive futurity, and rests upon the systemic disavowal of homosexuality.¹²⁶ Yet, this sentiment was also met concurrently by a curious trend in which "this discourse of decolonization gave new value to the metaphorical, sometimes allegorical, often sentimentalized conscription of homosexuality in Québec popular culture."¹²⁷ Primarily located in literature at the time, one such example was Claude Jasmin's *Délivrez-nous du mal* (1961), which perpetuated a dialectic between homosexuality and the Catholic establishment as repressive forces against Québec nationalism. Within a few years after the debut of *À tout prendre*, the works of a gay playwright would rise to national prominence. In Québec, "homosexuality has served as an accepted metaphor for national oppression."¹²⁸ For example, Michel Tremblay's "early plays [act] as sites for exploring the fears, insecurities, and damage wrought to the colonized psyche."¹²⁹ André Brassard and Michel Tremblay's *Il était une fois dans l'est* (1973) was the first explicitly queer Québécois film production. Waugh notes that "Tremblay provocatively liked to tell English-speaking gay activists that he has always been more oppressed

¹²³ Waugh (1981): p. 24.

¹²⁴ Schwartzwald, Robert. "Symbolic' Homosexuality, 'False Feminine', and the Problematics of Identity in Québec," in *In Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Michael Warner, ed. U-Minnesota Press, 1993: p. 266.

¹²⁵ Schwartzwald 1993: p. 277.

¹²⁶ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. NYU Press, 2009: pp.20-22.

¹²⁷ Schwartzwald 1993: p. 265.

¹²⁸ Schwartzwald 1991: p. 176.

¹²⁹ Ibid: p. 167.

as a Quebecker than as a gay man.”¹³⁰ Nonetheless, his gay sensibility and subjectivity deeply impacted his work, which the Québec cultural establishment continues to herald as a (queer) representation of their own sense of marginalization as Québécois. In his reluctantly *proto-homonationalist* critique, Tremblay metaphorically juxtaposes (homo)sexual and national identities to re-imagine the marginal and unresolved status of Québécois sovereignty.

This strange collusion of Québécois colonial subjugation and the homosexual as metaphor evokes a political strategy that perversely mirrors *homonationalism*. Schwartzwald contends that “the anxiety produced by such a situation leads to the homosexual panic that rereads virtually all previous discursive engagements with national oppression as deceitful half-measures, as failures of manhood. These in turn become embodied in the figure of the homosexual.”¹³¹ Such a dubious coupling of conservative patriotic rhetoric and queer marginalization performs as what can be best described as a duplicitous and performative type of homonationalism which I refer to as *pseudo-homocolonialism*. Not to suggest that there is a *true* form of homonationalism by any means; *pseudo-homocolonialism* borrows from Puar (2007) and Nadeau (forthcoming, late-2023)’s concepts to describe the fabulation of duplicitous affinities with the bio-political domination of queer and “colonized” subjects as a critique of federalist hegemony. Queerly coupled with the figure of the homosexual, the notion of a colonized Québec was homophobically re-invoked by a modern generation of intellectuals and nationalists as a foil to symbolize their second-rate status.

The homophobic underpinnings of such a political strategy explicate the chronic sense of heteropatriarchal anxiety that the film engages. This climate of sexual anxiety diagnosed the cultural paradigm of the homosexual (in concert with the figure of the Church and the matriarch) as a devirilizing extension of colonial and federalist control. Cornellier (2004) deduces that

“in reaction to what [nationalists] perceived as the ‘feminization’ and of the nation under colonial and clerical power, the discourses of national affirmation emerging around the Quiet Revolution [center] a phallocentric ‘remasculinization’ of the national through the schemes, ideas and techniques of modernity and liberalism. Against the impotence of the ‘fathers in skirts’ of Catholicism and against the association between homosexuality and Canadian federalist discourses.”¹³²

Alongside the figure of the overbearing mother, the homosexual (and by extension, the skirted priest) were positioned as agents of castration that delimited the modern possibilities for national development of a sovereign white and heteropatriarchal Québec. Aptly, Arcand (1964) addresses this anxious fixation in the film, noting that “it is also remarkable that Claude, who nevertheless claims his freedom with loud cries throughout the film, when his difficulties assail him and when he must make a decision, he thinks only of seeking refuge with his mother and a parish priest.”¹³³ Again, deploying the homophobic notion of arrested development, Arcand (alongside a generation

¹³⁰ Waugh (1981): p. 15.

¹³¹ Schwartzwald 1993: p. 266.

¹³² Cornellier, Bruno. “Sexe, sexualité et nationalité : Coït interrompu ou orgasme continué?” *Nouvelle Vues* 2 (2004).

¹³³ Arcand, Denys. “Cinéma et sexualité.” *Parti pris* 9-11 (1964): p. 35.

of other nationalist intellectuals) rested upon this assemblage as a red herring for Québec's delayed progress toward self-determination.

This deep-seated sexual anxiety among heteropatriarchal nationalists was also uniquely encapsulated in the neologism, *federasty*. Although this term was not coined after the debut of *À tout prendre*, it crystallized the nationalist crisis of masculinity during the Quiet Revolution. Akin to nationalist's deployment of *psuedo-homocolonial* rhetoric as an insidious lens for their political oppression, the concept of *federasty* articulated a more directed form of homophobia. Schwartzwald (1991) asserts "this homophobic sexual anxiety accompanies a new nationalist project that found those to be traitors or sell-outs to the cause of national revolution [were] gendered as passive/seductive men."¹³⁴ First conceived as a pun in *Parti pris* (1964: 174), the term *federast* described such men (like Claude) who resisted the nationalist mandates of "revolutionary" white masculinity."¹³⁵ A portmanteau of federalist and pederasty, it sought to discursively emasculate them as homosexual due to their suspected alliances to Anglo-Canadian hegemony.¹³⁶ Articulating the de-virilising forces of federalism with petty-bourgeois pederasty, *federasty* describes a "reactionary response to political oppression that attempts to turn the tables on these national traitors by figuring them as effeminate and penetrable, hence weak."¹³⁷ Notwithstanding its homophobia, this application of *pederasty* was quite apt as a symbol for "colonial" subjugation given the clientelist relationship Québec and the ROC. While understood interchangeably, the symbol of the *pederast* and the *homosexual* functionally occupy opposing positions of sexual agency.

Although both applications evoked homosex(uality) differently, they were inextricably tied by a nationalist fear of political impotency. On one hand, the notion of *federasty* condemned an eagerness to be dominated by Federalist hegemony. On the other, the nationalist's *pseudo-homocolonialism* exposed their own panic of political submission. The homophobic nature of such nationalist rhetoric emanates from what could be best characterized as a Freudian masculinist fear of penetration and castration.¹³⁸ These lateral political strategies both describe a crisis of heteropatriarchal agency, and a sense of political insolvency brought about by previous generations of Federalist economic control. In both strategies, "the heterosexual syntax in relation to which the homosexual is a failure is necessarily evocative of the Québécois' own failure to achieve national 'maturity.'"¹³⁹ Effectively, this sexual syntax exposes the Québec nationalists' own anxiety of being reluctantly positioned on the bottom-end of modernity and national development. Simply

¹³⁴ Schwartzwald 1991: p. 179.

¹³⁵ This is the context in which the term was first introduced: "Once seduced, these trained young men do not go on to become not the defenders of Québec independence, but true "fédérastes" like the "fifis" of Radio-Canada, the radio announcers on the French-language network with their European accents, or the "tapette" (the common Québec equivalent for "queer") Trudeau, as the former Prime Minister" See: Schwartzwald, Robert. "Mon parti pris." *Spirale* no. 246 (2013).

¹³⁶ *Pédéraste*, the word used to signify homosexuality, is not usually used in Québec. Its foreignness as a continental French signifier for homosexuality further underlines the "exotic" framing of sexual difference. See: Schwartzwald (1991): p. 186.

¹³⁷ Schwartzwald 1991: p. 179.

¹³⁸ Waugh 2006: p. 88.

¹³⁹ Pidduck (2018).

put, while Québec nationalists claimed *federastes* were bent for Ottawa, they were the ones actually being fucked over by their own modern anxieties. While Arcand did not employ *federasty* in direct reference to Jutra or his film, Arcand's critique obliquely articulated similar homophobic discourse. Overall, these rhetorical strategies deployed the figure of the homosexual as a symbol of colonial emasculation for the Québécois nation and its clientelist relationship with anglophone hegemony. While this homophobic rhetoric certainly defamed nascent gay subjects, it functioned more as an anxious critique of Québec's place in modernity.



Figure 1.15. Jutra's queer ethos of national failure as liberation
(screenshot, *À tout prendre*)

Towards the conclusion of the film, Jutra *queerly* disengages with the growing hegemony of Québec nationalism during the early Quiet Revolution. Following his breakup with Johanne, Claude is shown walking past nationalist graffiti, and remarks to himself, “better to concentrate on something else...” Afterwards, Claude is shown standing on the end of a wooden jetty where he symbolically commits suicide. On the surface, this surrealist New-Wave scene suggests that he is ready to begin a new chapter in his life; however, its implications are far more political. Claude's character development in the film chronicles his struggles to contend with the audacity of nationalist hetero-masculine scripts. As his identity becomes increasingly fragmented, his performance comes to also unravel the tenets of the Quiet Revolution's own sense of national collectivity. Pidduck suggests that “shadowed by the stigma of perverse sexuality and ‘failed’ queer masculinity, the figure of Jutra profoundly disturbs an insistence on a teleological movement of progress or liberation shared by the Québec sovereignty movement and gay liberation.”¹⁴⁰ In an about-face from Arcand, Jutra deploys queerness as a prism to critique the heteropatriarchal nature of the modern nation. While Jutra's film routinely manifested a sense of modernity associated with the period's political movements, this scene is one of the few in which he directly addressed the emergent Québec nationalist establishment. By “concentrating on something else...,” Jutra challenges Québécois audiences to consider aspiring for more than just heteropatriarchal forms of liberation. Articulating sovereignty with suicide, Jutra's queer assemblage positions the figure of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

the homosexual as a specter of *both* national failure and liberation.¹⁴¹ Through embracing failure as an alternative form of liberation, Jutra attempts to queer the necropolitical potential of the sexual margins. This is expressed by his symbolic killing of the self as a declaration of freedom from nationalist mandates. Analogously, Johanne/Harelle's place within Jutra's narrative of failure also hints at the nationalist fear of maintaining *pure laine* supremacy, a biopolitical fallacy that rests upon the cleansing of Black communities from Québécois historiography.

Race has long operated as a spectre within Québec. From Arcand to Vallières, Blackness has also operated as a foil for the white colonial myth that engendered a modern Quebecois sexual subjectivity. As an articulation of their marginalized status as white francophones, such nationalist rhetoric rested upon racist and (homo)exotifying notions of virile Black anti-colonial masculinity as a framework to resist their own sense of emasculation.¹⁴² While Arcand attempts to dismiss Johanne's Black narrative, and by extension, the history of Black communities in Québec, his own sense of anti-colonial nationalism was deeply informed by his own engagement with Black literature like his nationalist compatriots.¹⁴³ Unlike Arcand and Vallières, Jutra's film is invested in the symbolic as well as (*some of*) the material elements of Blackness in Québec. On one level, Jutra's complex scripting of Johanne seems progressive for the period by disrupting monolithic notions of Blackness as foreign by providing texture to Johanne's racialized representation. However, the characterization of her racial difference was also quite strategic as a framework for Claude/Jutra's to explore his own white queer subjectivity.

Claude/Jutra's white queer framing of Johanne's racial difference signals a political assemblage that will later re-emerge as *homonationalism*. Following similar lines of Black metaphorization as the nationalist cause, Claude/Jutra's deploys Johanne/Harelle's complex racial otherness as a paradigm for articulating his own queer desires and struggles. This interfacing evokes a political strategy very similar to Québec's reductive exploitation of Black anti-colonial discourse as a symbolic metaphor for their own struggles. While Jutra undeniably afforded Johanne/Harelle the latitude to express her own story of Blackness, it is also clear that her perceived exoticism is what originally attracts Claude/Jutra. This framing of racial otherness as a prism to the queer self is a central component of Puar's concept of *homonationalism*. While it would be ahistorical to use this term to describe Claude/Jutra, I propose an extension of this concept as *proto-homonationalism*. By this, I mean to describe the complex and often paradoxical deployment of racial difference as a framework for queer assemblages with Québec nationalism before neoliberalism.

Proto-homonationalism functions as a transhistorical method of tracing nascent signals of (homo)sexual and racial rhetoric that seek to engage national(ist) articulations of sexual normativity and citizenship. While *homonationalism* as a concept does not consider the visual aspects of the political phenomenon, I suggest that we consider homosexual scopophilia as a cultural factor in the *proto-homonationalist* imagination. As mentioned earlier in this chapter,

¹⁴¹ Puar 2007: pp. 12-15.

¹⁴² Cornellier (2017): pp. 33-34.

¹⁴³ Loiseleur, André. *Denys Arcand's Le déclin de l'empire américain and Les Invasions Barbares*. UToronto Press (2008): p. 8.

Jutra's New Wave "cinophilic gaze" structures the presentation of Johanne's racialized difference. However, Jutra's film does not abide strictly a mainstream male heterosexual gaze. In fact, Jutra's presentation of Johanne often aligns more with a longstanding tradition of the homosexual scopophilia. This term describes how homosexual men have historically subverted their male gaze to identify with the female protagonist as a means of embracing one's marginality and male desire.¹⁴⁴ In *À tout prendre*, Jutra not only uses Johanne's gender to as a conduit to explore his queer desires, he also more importantly does this alongside her racial otherness as a lens for his own white sexual oppression. In using the exotic mystery of the racialized Other and to understand himself, Jutra signals future homonationalist assemblages of Blackness as a prism for queer sexuality. Furthermore, while Jutra's presentation of Johanne as Afro-Québécoise appears progressive for the period, it ultimately signals how inclusion will come to serve as a dubious symbol of progress. A key tenet of *homonationalism* rests in a symbolic dialectic between homosexuality and racial oppression as a barometer of progress. However, this liberal notion of progress often masks how notions of sexual and racial normativity are central to this process. This ultimately renders those outside of such nationalist paradigms as illegible, other, and *queer*. As with the ascent of homonationalism in the decade following the film, this sense of liberal progress came to be shared by both shared by the Québec nationalism and gay liberation movements. Ground-breaking in form and content, *À tout prendre* displaces the homoerotic onto the erotic exoticism of Blackness as a space of homonationalist liberation, a signal which was entirely disregarded by Arcand and will discussed further within the next chapter.

1.8. CONCLUSION: QUEER HORIZONS

As a pioneering assemblage of fiction and memoir, Jutra's *À tout prendre* critically plays with the modern anxieties of white hetero-national masculinity emergent during the Quiet Revolution. Its unprecedented portrayal of an interracial relationship and queer sexual subtext introduced a palpable destabilization of *pure laine* nationalist rhetoric. The film featured *both* the first interracial bed scene in North American film history as well as the first allusion to a queer coming out in Québec cinema years before homosexuality was decriminalized. By re-articulating Claude's white queerness vis-à-vis Johanne's exotic Blackness, the film represents the complex taboos around sexuality, whiteness, and racial alterity in a modernizing Québec. In turn, Jutra unveils the hegemonic conditions that conscript strategic performances that camouflage their taboo sexuality and liminal racial status. The film's juxtaposition of racialized sexual difference and queerness offers an archive of these biopolitical tensions and the strategies that marginalized subjects employed to situate themselves in the national(ist) history of the Quiet Revolution.

While this chapter examines both Claude Jutra and Johanne Harrelle's representations, it is particularly invested in highlighting the latter's cinematic and off-screen Black subjectivity. Through tracing the nationalist intelligentsia's paradoxical fetishization of Black anti-colonial

¹⁴⁴ See: Kates, Steven. "Gay men on film: A typology of the scopophilic consumption pleasures of cultural text." *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 4.3 (2000): pp. 281-313.

masculinity and their concurrent obfuscation of Afro-Quebecois history, I illuminate how Johanne is positioned as an erosive threat to the *pure laine* nation. Resisting such necropolitical and colonial rhetoric, I outline how Johanne Harrelle's strategic representation of her Black female subjectivity functions as a disidentification with nationalist cultural mandates. Her representation both in and outside of *À tout prendre* rested upon her exotic performance as Haitian, a fallacy which unveils deeper truths about her subjugation as Afro-Québécoise. Decisively, Arcand echoes the nationalist strategy of dismissing Johanne solely as a foreign sexual object—a racist fetishism that extends to his own cinematic work, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Seeking agency through subverting her own exotification, Johanne Harrelle repackaged nationalist rhetoric against itself in a complex and often contradictory manner. Her disidentificatory presentation of Black female sexuality *both* critiques and capitalizes upon the codes of the oppressor to carve out a pragmatic place within the national body politic. As such, seeking inclusion can in of itself operate as a form of resistance. Aboundingly, a popular history of Black women's experience is lacking in Canada, especially in Quebec.¹⁴⁵ Despite the persistent debates about race, immigration, and national identity in Québec, little effort has been made to understand Québec from the perspective of Black women themselves and the forms of knowledge that they have produced through their engagements with Québec nationalism.¹⁴⁶ It is quite telling that the most well-known Black woman in Québécois history ostensibly is Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved Black woman who was wrongly tortured and executed for setting fire to what is now known as Old Montréal in 1734. Challenging this systemic lacuna of noted Afro-Québécoise historical figures, this chapter proposes Johanne Harrelle as an icon for Black feminist resistance and freedom in Québec. Like Angelique, Johanne's disidentifactory performance embodies the material and symbolic legacies slavery that interlock in a system of Black women's oppression.¹⁴⁷

Shortly following the debut of *À tout prendre*, Afro-Québécois activist and intellectual movements flourished in Montréal. This is well evidenced by the 1968-1969 Sir George Williams Affair, in which Black students (and white allies) organized two major conferences on Black Power as well as the largest student occupation in Canadian history.¹⁴⁸ While this movement would be as androcentric as Quebec nationalism, Black women in Québec have long been organizing to resist misogynoir by fostering a sense of community.¹⁴⁹ In examining the materiality of Harelle's personal history alongside her filmic persona, this chapter seeks to trace her narrative within an

¹⁴⁵ See: Small, Shirley, and Esmeralda MA Thornhill. "HARAMBEC! Quebec Black women pulling together." *Journal of Black Studies* 38.3 (2008): pp. 427-442.

¹⁴⁶ Mills 2016: p. 85.

¹⁴⁷ Cooper, Afua. *The hanging of Angelique: The untold story of Canadian slavery and the burning of Old Montreal*. University of Georgia Press, 2007: p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ See: Forsythe, Dennis. *Let The Niggers Burn*. Black Rose Books, 1971: p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ See: Hampton, Rosalind and Rochat, Désirée. "To Commit and to Lead: Black Women Organizing across Communities in Montreal." In *African Canadian Leadership: Continuity, Transition, and Transformation*, Tamari Kitossa et al, eds. UToronto Press (2019): pp. 149-169; Este, David, et al. "The Coloured Women's Club of Montreal, 1902-1940: African-Canadian Women Confronting Anti-Black Racism." *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social* 34.1 (2017): pp. 81-99.

archive of the Black experience in Montréal. This ultimately works to disrupt the notion of Blackness as exotic/foreign and implode *pure laine* nationalist biopolitics during the Quiet Revolution.

Both Claude and Johanne are linked by their pragmatic conforming to hegemonic (re)presentations associated with social and cultural capital. Johanne's transgression of white heteropatriarchal norms and fears (inter-racial adultery and abortion) queers Johanne as just as much as Claude, but as a Black threat to the nation. Their passing in the film operates as a disidentification with nationalist mandates to gain inclusion into the Québécois body politic. As much as Johanne's exotic passing initially benefits from Claude's bourgeois whiteness, her confession disrupts this dynamic. Similarly, Claude also uses her as a beard in his hetero-passing, but it is her Blackness that is more pivotal to the discovery of his white queerness. Whereas Jutra's inclusion of Johanne's Blackness seems progressive for the period, it also was in line with aspects of nationalist metaphorization of Blackness. By leaning into a narrative of progress, Jutra actualized his white privilege to give space to her story, while also reinforcing a paternalistic racist rhetoric of the white saviour. Notwithstanding his attempt to question the hetero-nationalist hegemony, he ultimately falls prey to similar forms of exploitation of the Black body as a foil for his white queer liberation. As Jutra succumbs to these desires, he ultimately uses his scopophilic presentation of Johanne's Blackness as a frame to explore his own white queer subjectivity. This practice signals the type of performative collusions between state power and sexual/racial normativity engendered by homonationalism.

Jutra's queer white vision of Québec details the cultural and political conditions of the early Quiet Revolution that will later give rise to homonationalism during the post-referendum crisis of the 1980s. Through the historical lens of *proto-homonationalism*, this chapter outlines how nationalist articulations of Blackness and queerness operated as a foil for the white colonial myth that engendered modern Quebecois subjectivity. In concert with the nationalist intellectuals' fetishization of virile Black revolutionary masculinity, they also assembled paradoxical and homophobic attachments to queerness. Notably *federasty*, the nationalist neologism, aptly details this enigmatic interfacing of the fear of white hetero-masculine failure with the homosexualized arrested development of the nation. However, it is Jutra's framing of Johanne's Blackness as a foil for his queerness that in fact operates as a harbinger of future homonationalist assemblages. Overall, many of these political strategies prefigure the discursive conditions of what will later be termed homonationalism. Once understood as both a measure of colonial oppression and federalist allegiance, such political engagements with the homosexual and the nation will reemerge as a calculated symbol of national progress only a decade later. These interlocking racial and sexual politics reveal the manners by which white normativity and racialized Otherness will come to configure homonationalism and re-centering a white queer francophone hegemony in Québec.

Despite being the first mainstream feature film released in a modernizing Québec, *À tout prendre* has historically been overshadowed by his later works. The film nonetheless has earned its place within the queer and national canon. By making an independent feature film in Quebec, when there was little cultural and virtually no industrial support, Jutra's film reveals the queer

possibilities for celebrating marginality with the mainstream. Through his transgressive presentation of Blackness and queerness, Jutra introduced Québécois audiences to a new vision to re-imagine themselves. As with the Omnibus's partial decriminalization of homosexuality and the wake of Stonewall, gays and lesbians began to mobilize more publicly to politicize their desires into identities. During the 1970s, Quiet and Sexual Revolutions coincided to relegate queers solely to sexploitation comedies like *Les chats bottés* (dir. Claude Fournier, 1971) in which they were evacuated of any agency beyond their role as a caricature. Undoubtedly after *À tout prendre*, the film adaptation Michel Tremblay's of *Il était une fois dans l'est* (dir. André Brassard, 1974) marks the most significant manifestation of homosexuality within Quebec national cinema.

While Jutra may have been one of the firsts, gays and lesbians began to *directly* engage with nationalist politics within the decade following his film.¹⁵⁰ This emergent activism was manifested in *Mainmise* as well as the Front de libération homosexuel (FLH), Québec's first gay liberation group and its magazine. Most notably, one the founders was George Khal, a biracial Québécois of Palestinian origin, an important figure which has be relegated to the proverbial historical footnotes.¹⁵¹ Overall, this chapter contends that the inter-racial and queer subtext of *À tout prendre* operates as an archive of the political tensions of racial and sexual alterity during the 1960s. Whereas the roots of modern Québec formed in the nationalist movements of the 1960s, the standard narrative of the Quiet Revolution needs to be challenged for what it ignores, suppresses, and pushes to the margins of historical memory. While not overlooking the posthumous allegations that effaced his public memory, Jutra's *À tout prendre* has influenced the sensibilities of several generations of filmmakers from Denys Arcand to Xavier Dolan. This program of sanitized effacement entirely ties into the neoliberal dynamics of homonationalism. As Québec ascended as a paragon of homonational progress and freedom in the decades to come, this would come at a great cost for those who resist the neoliberal frameworks that script acceptable forms of social identity and difference. During a period of intense political and cultural change, *À tout prendre* presented a crack in the closet door, one which would erupt within the next decade.

¹⁵⁰ The Front de libération homosexuel (FLH) aligned itself with the Québec nationalist movement and even participated in various nationalist demonstrations around the city. On July 1, 1971, in their first public action, members of the FLH joined a large anti-Confederation (nationalist) demonstration at Parc Lafontaine. See: "Première Apparition," *Montréal-Matin* (July 2, 1971).

¹⁵¹ While George Khal's story falls outside of the parameters of this chapter, please see the following for more information, see: Warren, Jean-Philippe. "Fondation et production de la revue *Mainmise* (1970-1978)." *Mémoires du livre/Studies in Book Culture* 4.1 (2012).

CHAPTER 2:

POST-REFERENDUM THREATS TO THE *PURE LAINE* NATION



*Figure 2.1. Claude and Mario united by the spectre of contagion (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)*

2.1. INTRODUCTION: THE ASCENT AND DECLINE OF THE NATION

Since the Quiet Revolution, the works of Denys Arcand have illustrated the tense political trajectories of Québec society and its cinema industry. Once voted as Québec's most important director, Arcand's success is best indebted to his 1986 hit film, *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*. This film not only marked a critical shift in Arcand's career; it also signalled the uneasy crystallization of a new neoliberal brand of national and sexual politics in Québec. While *Le Déclin* is most celebrated for its domestic and international acclaim by critics and film awards, the film has also been distinguished as one of the first Québécois mainstream films to include a gay main character in the central cast. Upon the 25th anniversary of *Le Déclin*, Isabelle Houde of *La Presse* commended its daring portrayal of homosexuality as normal during the 1980s. Although the film marked the global ascent of Québec and its cinema industry, the plot paradoxically signalled the immanent collapse of the nation. *Le Déclin* centres on a friendship circle of bourgeois white professors and their partners, which Arcand mobilizes as decadent symbols of the nation's decline under the weight of neoliberal sexual and racial politics. More importantly, the film posits these new politics as corrosive factors in the nation's decay through the symbolic and material vectors of racial and sexual difference. Arcand's landmark representation of homosexuality exposes the normative limits of pluralist inclusion into the Québec cultural imagination. Such ambivalent politics of inclusion also extend to the few racialized figures in his films. Through Arcand's framing of sexual (and racial) difference as potentially contagious threats to future of the *pure laine* nation, he reflects a latent heteropatriarchal anxiety abundant in post-Referendum Québec.

Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin*, and its sequel, *Les Invasions barbares* (2003) follow a group of bourgeois intellectuals during the two decades (respectively) spanning the defeat of the Québec independence referendum in 1981 and 1995. As such, they potently feature Arcand's political discontents of the period, and effectively posit the film's characters as symbols of the national dream's death. *Le Déclin* features an intimate co-ed circle of six history professors and their

heterosexual partners, with the exception of the circle's token homosexual, Claude. This circle of professors symbolizes Québec's decaying cultural elite, and their neoliberal dedication cosmopolitan preoccupations over political engagement, as represented by the defeat of the 1981 Referendum. Through the guise of witty erotic repartee, Arcand details the latent sexual angst of the 1980s, typified by the rise of feminist challenges to heterosexual relations, the uncertain ascent of homonormativity, and the looming invasion of multiculturalism. In *Les Invasions*, Arcand reunites this circle almost two decades later upon the imminent death of one its central characters, Rémy. Through the cultural zeitgeist on the 9/11 attacks, his passing represents the death of the Québec nationalist project on the heels of foreign invasion and the collapse of the *pure laine* family.

This chapter examines the political framing of sexual and racial difference as erosive contaminants to the national project within Arcand's *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*. By assembling critical scholarship on the films with a historiographical and archival materials on Québécois gay liberation and AIDS activism movements, I mobilize homonationalism's framework of queer postcolonialism to reframe existing academic and cultural discourses on the films' intersecting portrayals of race and queerness. The central theme uniting both films rests upon the spectre of national collapse due to the corrosive infiltration of new subjectivities into Québec. Through harnessing this theme of bio-political threat, this chapter traces how paradoxical shifts in nationalist sexual rhetoric signal a pervasive white supremacist fear of political impotency. Troubling Arcand's inclusion of a gay character in his films, I begin by charting the rise of sexual nationalism in Québec, and its impact upon the cultural politics of sexual representation in cinema. By contextualizing Arcand's film career vis-à-vis the rise and decline of the nationalist dream, I outline how Arcand mobilizes a reactionary exploitation of the emergent feminist woman as a neoliberal harbinger of fundamental fissures in Québec society—a paradigm Arcand would later employ to script homosexuality. Next, by deciphering Arcand's heterosexist and homophobic construction of his gay protagonist, I illustrate how his ambivalent (neo)liberal inclusion operates as a symbol of *both* its national progress and its looming destruction. Through the spectre of AIDS in Arcand's films, I trace shifts in the cultural symbolism of homosexuality from a social contagion to a neoliberal capital, how this was enabled by the rise of homonationalism. Contesting the whiteness of this political narrative, I dissect Arcand's mobilization of racialized difference as a symptom of the *pure laine* sexual anxieties that have infiltrated modern Québec nationalism. Through mapping the rhetorical and racialized forms of queerness unveiled by homonationalism, I demonstrate the limited normative parameters of multicultural integration into the Québec body politic by way of neutralizing ontological difference.

The films' reactionary framing of race and queerness as intertwined factors of the ascent and decline of the nation parallels the political rhetoric of homonationalism. Notwithstanding his documented history of nationalist homophobia, by *Les Invasions*, Arcand ultimately transforms Claude from a national threat to the model homonationalist. This is keenly expressed through the effacement of his necropolitical threat (within the spectre of HIV/AIDS) and the promotion of Claude as capital asset symbolizing Québec's (homo)national progress. Meanwhile, this ascent is

made possible on the backs of racialized communities as immigrants now operate as the queer(ed) contagion. By evoking the xenophobic angst of the 1995 Referendum and the events of 9/11, Arcand frames the uneven inclusion of certain immigrants as fetishistic commodities and exclusion of other (namely Black and brown) immigrants as corrosive threats to the *pure laine* national family. Bookended by the spectre of two failed referenda, this chapter engages homonationalism to examine “the historical linkages between various periods of national crisis and the pathologizing of sexuality [and] the inflation of sexual perversions”¹ Through surveying the history of (homo)nationalism in Québec between the 1970s to the turn of the 21st century, I aim to articulate the notion of a national threat of bio-political contagion within Québec nationalism. While homonationalism is usually associated with same-sex marriage legislation of the 21st century, I argue that homonationalism began to crystallize decades earlier in Québec with the nationalist inclusion of homosexuality within the Québec Charter of Human Rights in 1977. The central question of this chapter examines how the nation comes to sanction neutralized forms of queerness through the framing of an exterior/interior threat, and how Arcand unavertedly unveils the historical unfolding of this process through his mobilization of nationalist heteropatriarchal angst. Homonationalism rests upon the notion of an exterior national threat, and while once homosexuality posed a national threat, some forms of white homonormativity have become sanctioned and included within the national body politic for capital and political interests. As the spectre of queer(ed) contagion shifts from the white homosexual to the heterosexual Black or brown immigrant, racialized queerness becomes posited as the national threat; and while certain figures will be more acceptable than others, all must comply with the logics of *pure laine* supremacy. In mobilizing the conceptual framework of homonationalism, this chapter aims to reveal the latent collusions between sanctioned forms homosexuality and racial difference with white nationalist rhetoric in Québec.

2.2. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SEXUAL NATIONALISM

During the two decades between Claude Jutra’s *À tout prendre* (1963) and Denys Arcand’s *Le Déclin de l’empire Américain* (1986), Québec transformed alongside a global diffusion of (neo)liberal models of national and sexual politics. Within a few years after the debut of Jutra’s film, Canada instituted a range of sweeping legislative reforms that signalled the political ambitions of Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism. Such reforms in immigration policy, criminal codes, and language rights sought to position Canada as modern and progressive and through protecting the social interests of the white nation.² The most infamous of these reforms was *The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1968–69*. Amongst many items, this omnibus bill radically shifted sexual politics through its partial decriminalization of abortion, contraceptives, and most aptly, sodomy. While its own intellectuals heralded Québec as more sexually liberated than the

¹Puar. Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007:p. xiii.

² See: Hooper, Tom. "Queering'69: The recriminalization of homosexuality in Canada." *Canadian Historical Review* 100.2 (2019): pp. 257-273.

Protestant (rest of) Canada, local reaction to the bill was quite divided. For many Québec nationalists, this action was yet another political flex from federal and British hegemony, as the omnibus stemmed from The UK's 1967 Sexual Offences Act. This attitude was evidenced by barrage of propaganda indicting Pierre Elliot Trudeau for "encouraging unnatural vice and attempting to make Canada another Sodom."³ While Trudeau famously decreed, "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation," the bill did not protect gays and lesbians from being arrested in bars and other public spaces and being charged with public indecency. This strategic loophole sustained the police harassment of queers, while also affording gay liberationists with a homonationalist framework to infiltrate the Québec body politic by the end of the 1970s. It is within the aftermath of this political milieu that Arcand first locates his character, Claude, one of the earliest leading gay protagonists in mainstream Québec cinema.

Whereas Montréal gays and lesbian organized socially as early as the 1940s, it was not until the early 1970s that a politicized gay identity began to crystalize. Scholars have documented political and linguistic affinities and fragmentations that characterized the various gay (liberation) and lesbian(-feminist) organizations that began in the wake of the Omnibus bill as well as the Stonewall riots across the border.⁴ Within this milieu emerged the earliest gay liberation organization in Québec, the Front de libération homosexuel (FLH), in early 1971 on the heels of the October Crisis.⁵ In compliance with Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) demands during the crisis, major newspapers, radio, and TV stations disseminated its manifesto, in which Pierre Elliott Trudeau was called a *tapette*, a pejorative Québécois term for a homosexual.⁶ Echoing the same sexual anxieties of almost a decade prior, the FLQ mobilized homosexuality as a rhetorical foil to reaffirm a sense of heteropatriarchal nationalism that was destabilized by Trudeau's Omnibus bill. Given that Trudeau was Québécois himself, his allegiance to Ottawa evokes the same fears of federasty expressed by Denys Arcand and his intellectual compatriots.

Notwithstanding the FLQ's homophobia, the FLH firmly aligned itself with the FLQ's nationalist rhetoric as evidenced by the group's name. Defying the threat of harassment, violence, and arrest, members of the FLH even participated in various nationalist demonstrations around the city, which was often received negatively. In what could be best described as a proto-act of homonationalism, Sylvestre (1976) details how he along with gay activists endeavored to associate their movement with Québec independence. On July 1, 1971, in their first public action, members of the FLH joined a large anti-Confederation (nationalist) demonstration at Parc Lafontaine.⁷

³ Pierre Elliot Trudeau was the then Minister of Justice who presented the bill to Parliament. "The Ugliest Smear of All" *Montréal Star*, June 20, 1968.

⁴ See: Demczuk, Irène & Frank W. Remiggi, eds. *Sortir de l'ombre: histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal*. VLB, 1998.

⁵ While his narrative falls outside of the parameters of this chapter, sne the founders the FLH was George Khal, a biracial Québécois of Palestinian origin. See: Warren, Jean-Philippe. "Fondation et production de la revue Mainmise (1970-1978)." *Mémoires du livre/Studies in Book Culture* 4.1 (2012).

⁶ Tapette is often translated as *faggot*, or *pansy* in some cases, and inherently aims to de-masculinize those who are subjected to this term. Pierre Trudeau was referred to as a tapette in the FLQ manifesto. See: "Le manifeste du FLQ," *Journal de Montréal* VII.99, 9 October 1970.

⁷ See: Waters, Paul. "Anti-Canada March Attracts 2,000," *Montréal Gazette*, final ed., 2 July 1971.

Dennis Côté, president of the FLH, addressed the crowd of francophone Québec nationalists, anti-confederationists, leftists and student radicals to pledge the allegiance of the FLH to the cause of Québec independence. During his guerilla speech (the FLH was *not* invited to participate in the demonstration), Côté directly addressed the gay members of the crowd and declared that homosexuals were “tired of being treated like *tapettes*.”⁸ Côté concluded his speech by declaring “vive le cul libre.”⁹ His comments not only re-signified the terms of De Gaulle’s 1967 declaration, “vive le Québec libre,” but more importantly, Côté directly responded to the homophobia of the late 1960s and early 1970s Québec nationalist movement.



Figure 2.2. Dennis Côté, president of the FLH addressing an anti-confederation demonstration (“Premiere Apparition,” *Montréal-Matin*, 2 July 1971)

While such a political union between Québec and gay liberation was initially condemned by René Lévesque, founder and then leader of the Parti Québécois (PQ), this position would radically shift before the end of the 1970s. The day following the demonstration, Lucien Rivard of *La Presse* reflected upon the protest and concluded that the FLH members could not have been genuinely in support of Québec nationalism because “many have argued that homosexuals were more interested to look to Ottawa ... especially following the adoption of the omnibus bill.”¹⁰ This assertion suggested not only that homosexuals in Québec were inherently federalist, but also that homosexuality was not a *Québécois* trait, but rather an English Canadian one. Much of this homophobic antagonism was not simply rooted in heterosexist views of the period, but also resulted from a suspicion shared by many Québec nationalists that homosexuals were incapable of being supportive of the nationalist cause due to the passage of the Omnibus bill in Ottawa, *not* Québec.¹¹ Yet, the presence FLH and a dozen other gay and lesbian organizations that formed

⁸ Ibid., my translation.

⁹ This phrase translates to “Long Live Free Ass.” See: “Premiere Apparition,” *Montréal-Matin*, 2 July 1971.

¹⁰ “Plusieurs ont soutenu que les homosexuels ont plus d’intérêt à regarder vers Ottawa...surtout à la suite de l’adoption du bill omnibus.” See: Rivard, Lucien. “Un 1er juillet paisible dans les rues de Montréal” *La Presse*, July 2, 1971, my translation.

¹¹ Schwartzwald, Robert. “Symbolic’ Homosexuality, ‘False Feminine’, and the Problematics of Identity in Québec,” in *In Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Michael Warner, ed. U-Minnesota Press, 1993: p. 265.

afterwards would shortly come to manifest a distinctly Québécois movement. In step with queers across the border, Montréal gays and lesbians came mobilize between political and social organizations from GAY, McGill University's first gay student union to the political group, l'Association pour les droits des gai(e)s du Québec (ADGQ). Scholars contend that francophone queers often borrowed from the political rhetoric and tactics of the growing sovereignty movement, which was by the 1970s was institutionalized into the national political apparatus.¹² By 1977, many gay liberationists transformed into seasoned lobbyists to battle the loophole left by the Omnibus bill—*partial* decriminalization.

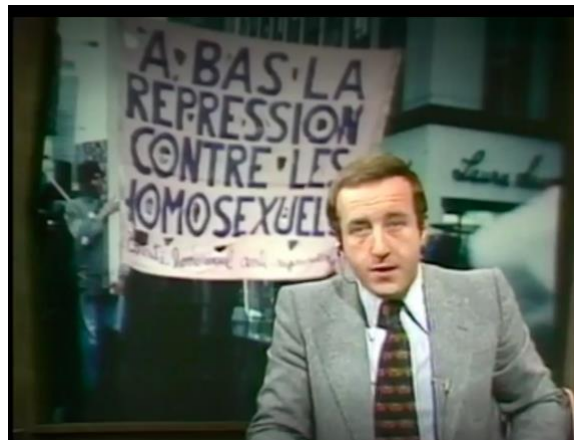


Figure 2.3. Media scrutiny of police violence against homosexuals
(screenshot, Radio Canada)

By the end of the 1970s, queer community resistance to police repression transformed into a type of legislative activism that sought to fully claim the rights and privileges of Québécois citizenship. The Omnibus bill only offered (some) legal protection within the private domain, a loophole which Mayor Drapeau and the Montréal police's morality squad would exploit for their own political interests. In a clean-up campaign reminiscent of the one conducted in preparation for Expo '67, police began to systematically raid lesbian and gay bars, saunas, and similar public sites shortly before the 1976 Olympics. Unlike the earlier raids, gays and lesbians mobilized their politicized identities into collective social action. On 21 October 1977, police arrested almost 150 persons in a raid on Truux and Le Mystique, two gay bars in the former gay east-end village—the largest mass arrest since the October Crisis.¹³ The very next day, over 2,000 people took to the streets in protest, which was met violently by the police as they rode their motorcycles into the crowd while swinging nightsticks. Commonly referred to at the time as *Montréal's Stonewall*, the media reaction to Truux riot signaled a clear shift in cultural attitudes.¹⁴ Such repressive police

¹² See: Gentile, Patrizia. "'À Bas la répression contre les homosexuels!' Résistance et surveillance des gais à Montréal, 1971-1976," in *Histoires de la sexualité au Québec*, Jean-Philippe Warren, ed. VLB, 2013, pp. 110-33 ; Smith, Miriam. 'Nationalisme et politiques des mouvements sociaux : les droits des gais et lesbiennes et l'incidence de la charte canadienne au Québec'. *Politique et Sociétés* 17.3 (1998): pp. 113-40.

¹³ Hays, Matthew. "Raiding History." *The Walrus*, 28 June 2016. <https://thewalrus.ca/raiding-history>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

actions were met publicly with scorn, which created a public relations nightmare for the police and government.

This maelstrom transformed gay activists into homonational lobbyists as they sought to fight police oppression by securing political inclusion into the national body politic. Bureau and Papy (2007) and Tremblay (2015) emphasize how the violence of state repression in Québec bred an institutionalized type of legislative activism as a route to counter-act police oppression. Rather than fighting against the state, the gay liberationists embraced the Québécois feminist tactics of mobilizing the PQ's modernist political paradigm to claim sexual citizenship. Similar to the early homonationalism of the FLH, "nationalism provided francophone feminists with the political vocabulary to analyze their oppression, and many women came to feminism through their involvement with national liberation."¹⁵ While gay liberation and feminist movements often organized separately, such politics often overlapped in their claims for sexual citizenship. This connection would later be exploited by politicians and intellectuals like Denys Arcand as a paradigm to categorize a newly emergent class of sanctioned gays and lesbians.

The Omnibus' legislative decriminalization of homosexual sex provided an initial framework for gays and lesbians to politicize into collective identities, and almost a decade later they would readapt this political framework to secure their human rights as a member of the Québécois national body politic. This articulation of political rights became increasingly central to the gay liberation movement during this period, and their symbolic associations with the FLQ and later the PQ signal the emergence of a distinctly Québécois form of homonationalism. Despite several prior efforts, activists from the ADGQ successfully lobbied the PQ to present Bill 88 to append sexual orientation onto the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms within only two months following the Truxx riot. In the face of public pressure from the media, the PQ yielded to the political demands of an emergent class of homonational activists for full decriminalization and equal protection under the state. The Quebec Charter was originally created only two years prior in 1975 as a fundamental step in modernization and nationalization the Quebec legal system. Stychin describes,

"The PQ government of the time claimed that it envisioned a pluralistic, civic nationalism (as opposed to a narrow and closed ethnic nationalism) in which a multiplicity of 'peoples,' whose rights would be protected through the Quebec Charter, could be incorporated into a new national imaginary, including lesbians and gays. In terms of the way in which sexual orientation was dealt with, Quebec would prove to be (at least) a generation ahead of most of North America."¹⁶

The PQ's inclusion of homosexuality as a protected status in The Charter signalled Québec as one of the most progressive nations internationally, as it was the first in North America to recognize the human rights of gays and lesbians. At the federal level, such protections were instituted almost two decades later in 1992.

¹⁵ LeClerc, Patrice & Lois A. West, "Feminist National Movements in Québec," in *Feminist Nationalism*. Lois A. West, ed. Routledge 1997: p. 220.

¹⁶ Stychin, Carl F. Queer Nations: Nationalism, Sexuality and the Discourse of Rights in Quebec'. *Feminist Legal Studies* 5.1 (1997) : p. 6.

Unlike Puar and many scholars of homonationalism that locate this political phenomenon within the late neoliberalism of the twenty-first century, I avow that homonational forms of sexual pluralism existed far earlier. While homonationalism is usually associated with same-sex marriage legislation, I argue that we can trace the initial crystallization of homonationalism in Québec to the passage of Bill 88 to the QCHR. Broadly, Puar describes homonationalism as “an analytic of queerness and pluralist rights as a neo-imperial metric of modernity and national development.”¹⁷ This version of development is made possible by what she calls a human rights industrial complex that “continues to proliferate Euro-American constructs of identity that privilege legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress.”¹⁸ Echoing Rankin’s (2000) and Warner’s (2002) critiques of Canadian queer nationalism more widely, I contend that the ADGQ’s strategic association with the PQ rests upon the legislative scripting of *pure laine* homosexuality as a paradigm for inclusion into the Québec body politic. In nothing short of a political quid-pro-quo, homonational activists gained recognition as full members of the Québec body politic, while the PQ (along with Québec nationalists) were bestowed with a political token of their national modernity and progress.

As early as the 1981 Referendum, members of the PQ assumed they would garner “the gay vote” on account of their inclusion in The Charter. Yet, as the Referendum failed, some gay activists became targets of homophobic backlash.¹⁹ Sychin (1997) notes “this narrative underscores the “flipside” of liberal legal rights discourse. That is, the relationship between law and social change is far from straightforward, and the gap between rights, equality, and liberation can be vast.”²⁰ As the Omnibus illustrated, legal protection does not automatically manifest into social change. This was brutally evidenced by re-pathologizing of homosexuality in the face of the AIDS Pandemic during the 1980s. Beyond fighting for their political rights, groups of politicized gays and lesbians re-converged to resist state and medical homophobia. It is within this complex political milieu that Arcand locates his gay protagonist, Claude. While much of the film’s plot is largely sans reference to Québécois cultural specificities in an appeal to a more international audience, the political landscape remains omnipresent. At the neoliberal nexus between homonational ascendancy and necropolitical potential, Arcand’s presentation of Claude in *Le Déclin* illustrates the post-Referendum cultural anxieties of homosexual inclusion within the Québécois cultural imagination.

2.3: ARCAND AND THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF QUEBEC CINEMA

While Claude Jutra began his film career almost a decade earlier than Denys Arcand, both directors have been celebrated as pioneers of a modern cinematic sensibility in Québec. As

¹⁷ Puar, Jasbir. “Rethinking Homonationalism.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 45.2 (2013): p. 338.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Schwartzwald, Robert. “Fear of Federasty: Quebec’s Inverted Fictions.” in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text*, Hortense J. Spiller, ed. Routledge, 1991: p 180.

²⁰ Sychin 1997: p. 7.

discussed in Chapter One, Arcand was no stranger to the political significance of sexual representation in cinema. In his 1964 article, Arcand's nationalist suspicion of the homosexual and inter-racial content in Jutra's *À tout prendre* contextualized the interfacing of sexual anxiety and cultural racism and homophobia of the early Quiet Revolution. As Arcand's filmmaking career flourished during the 1970s, sexuality remained a central device in his work; however, unlike Jutra, Arcand's cinema was informed by the very heteropatriarchal nationalism that Jutra was attempting to resist during the 1960s. After joining the NFB in 1963, Arcand first produced a series of short documentaries on Québec culture and heritage. With his documentary on the technocratic exploitation of Québécois textile workers, *On est au coton* (1970), Arcand cut his teeth as a political filmmaker. The documentary was produced during the October Crisis, and NFB officials deemed the film to be too politically incendiary to be released to the public.

While the film circulated underground, this censorship contributed to Arcand's nascent cynicism of the rapidly institutionalized nationalist project. This documentary along with his next two feature films, *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973) and *Gina* (1975) signaled Arcand's explicit use of film as a political tool.²¹ In these fictional films, like *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*, Pierre Veronneau (1995) asserts that "Arcand examines the dregs of Quebec society. It seems that this world fascinates him, as if he sees a deeper metaphor for Quebec itself; a decrepit and decadent country in which he places no hope."²² This was also profoundly true for his earlier works during the 1970s. In both of his early feature films, Arcand solidified his speculative political framing of Québec through re-signifying misogynistic sexual violence as a metaphor for federalist domination. In fact, critics deemed the rape scene in *Gina* to be among the most disturbing moments of 1970s Quebec cinema.²³ This scene was packed with federalist and colonial symbolism exemplified by the Canadian national anthem, followed by 'God Save the Queen,' playing on a television in the background. Loiselle suggests the rape scene "invites a reading that assigns to Arcand some 'separatist' intentions as he links musical symbols of federalism to violation."²⁴ *Gina* later gets her revenge against these historical symbols of federal domination by violently murdering her rapists. Notwithstanding this possible display of nationalist allegiance, *Gina* was a box office flop. Accused of selling out the emergent genre of maple syrup exploitation cinema, Arcand became temporarily blacklisted from the commercial film industry until the 1981 Referendum. Through exploiting the libertine rhetoric of the Sexual Revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s as a political device for his nationalist discontent, Arcand's early features forecast his wanton treatment of sexual difference in *Le Déclin*.

Like much of North America and Western Europe during the 1970s, the Sexual Revolution liberalized the moral and representational parameters of Québec cinema. During this period,

²¹ Loiselle claims that "several scenes reproduce moments from *On est au coton* and Arcand's own brother Gabriel playing the role of the documentary's director, show *Gina* to be clearly a reflexive commentary on the difficult process of making a political film." See: Loiselle, André. *Denys Arcand's Le Déclin de l'empire américain and Les Invasions barbares*. University of Toronto Press, 2008: p. 7.

²² Veronneau, Pierre. "Alone and with others: Denys Arcand's destiny within the Quebec cinematic and cultural context." *Loiselle/McIlroy* (1995): p. 15.

²³ Loiselle 2006: p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

dozens of films with increasing degrees of sexual content were produced in Québec in a sub-genre popularly termed “comédie de fesses.” Marshall notes that such films “crudely expresses [a] combination of nationalism, heterosexism, and profound sexual anxiety.”²⁵ While these films were not as explicit as their Scandinavian inspiration, they nonetheless signaled the growing secularization of Québec society and its cinema industries. Before the box office success of Arcand’s *Le Déclin*, Claude Fournier’s sexy cult classic, *Deux Femmes en or* (1970) was the highest grossing domestic film. Like Arcand and Jutra, Fournier was a forerunner of modern Québec cinema, and his feature films would take on a more populist and comedic model of framing the complexities of sexual liberation. Fournier’s next film, *Les Chats bottés* (1971) is among the first to feature an explicitly queer character, Mômman. While his presentation is nothing short of an assemblage of homophobic clichés, Mômman’s presence in the film is vital as a comedic foil to temper the hypermasculine sexuality of the film’s protagonists. In effect, Mômman’s queerness operates to remind the audience that the film’s heterosexual roommates in fact are *very* straight. While queer Quebec film scholars have reluctantly canonized Arcand’s *Le Déclin* as among the first LGBTQ+ representations in *mainstream* Québec cinema, I contend it is one of the first to portray a *homonormative* subject. During the 1970s, Fournier along with a handful of other directors included queer figures in their films and such figures are just as central to the history of queer representation as are respectable homonormative characters.

As the cultural attitudes shifted alongside the emergence of public and politicized gay movements, queer representation in Québec during the 1970s began to slowly proliferate. Waugh and Garrison (2010) contend these representations “were reaping the whirlwind of the sexual revolution, the counterculture, Quebec laicization and modernization, and Montreal’s hereditary status as Canada’s sin capital all at once. Within Quebec culture, distinct artistic and political discourses around sexual diversity and identities were clamoring for legitimacy, if not authority.”²⁶ In arguably the first mainstream attempt to normalize homosexuality, the final season of the Radio-Canada soap opera, *Le Paradis Terrestre* (1968-1972), featured two gay neighbours holding hands in their building elevator.²⁷ In 1974, two films debuted which represented two very distinct yet intersecting queer landscapes in Montréal: *Il était une fois dans l’est* (dir. André Brassard, 1974) and *Montreal Main* (dir. Frank Vitale, 1974). As mentioned in Chapter One, *Il était une fois* has been widely heralded as a landmark queer Québécois film, whereas *Montreal Main* continues to remain under the cultural radar.

This positioning signals how the framing of Québec LGBTQ+ historiography has been rendered through the normative impulse of homonationalist rhetoric. Whereas *Montreal Main* was

²⁵ Marshall, Bill. *Québec National Cinema*. McGill-Queen’s Press, 2001: p. 119.

²⁶ Waugh, Thomas, & Jason Garrison. *Montreal Main: A Queer Film Classic*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010: p. 29.

²⁷ The fourth season of this teleroman, it focused on an apartment block in Montréal and was censured by Radio-Canada due to its plot representation of homosexuality/homophobia, sex work, and free-love. In this scene, the show attempts to normalize queerness for QC audiences. The show received homophobic backlash and was cancelled shortly thereafter. See: Chanady, T. “Dépasser les stéréotypes et le conformisme : queeriser les représentations LGBTQ* à la télévision de fiction québécoise,” in *Québécois: Le queer dans les productions littéraires, artistiques et médiatiques québécoises*, Boisclair, G. Poirier Girard & P. Landry, eds. Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2020: p. 404.

a low-budget film on queer(ed) anglophone misfits, the misfits in *Il était une fois* encapsulate a distinctly *pure laine* Québécois orientation. An assemblage of plays from Québec's leading (gay) dramaturge, Michel Tremblay, the queer plot of the film rests in the domestic relationship between Hosanna, a drag queen, and her lover, Cuirette. Viviane Namaste (2000) deduces that the transphobic conclusion of the film, in which Hosanna asserts their identity as a *man* to secure her relationship and stave off humiliation, represents the normalizing gay ethos of the period. While the play and film adaptation were evacuated of reference to the emergence of gay liberationist politics, Hosanna nonetheless complied with the movement's cis-ontological mandates of gay identity. In sum, *Il était une fois* presented a proto-homonationalist model that sought to integrate gay identity into the Québec body politic and its cultural imagination. To this effect, the film's selection at the Cannes film festival operated as a token of the modern and progressive nature of Québec and its cinema industry internationally.

While such an international degree of mainstream queer representation in Québec would not surface again until Arcand's *Le Déclin*, queer content flourished within independent film and documentary circuits. From the same anglophone milieu of *Montreal Main* later emerged Allan Moyle's *The Rubber Gun* (1977) and Lois Siegal's *20th Century Chocolate Cake*, two indie films that remain on the margins of the queer Québécois canon. These films chronicle countercultural misfits on the margins of respectable society, while also documenting ephemeral spaces of 1970s queer Montréal. All community produced by queer artists, filmmakers, and punks;²⁸ these three films captured a type of queerness that did not align with the growing homonationalist rhetoric of the late 1970s. Although the films' plotlines were generally evacuated from the political landscape of the period, its *pure laine* cultural nationalism has ostensibly contributed to the historical obscurity of these films from the Québécois queer cultural imagination. Distinguished as Canada's first gay political film, Harry Sutherland's *Truxx* (1978) documented the public and police reaction to Montréal's Stonewall. Michel Audy's *Luc ou la part des choses* (1982) has been heralded by scholars as a forerunner of modern queer cinema in Québec.²⁹ Unlike the former anglophone queer films, Audy's feature spoke directly to the homonationalist interests of the PQ government. While first intended as a pedagogical documentary for the Quebec Ministry of Education's campaign against bullying, the context of *Luc ou la part des choses* elucidates the political aims of the film. Unlike earlier queer films, Audy's film explored the coming of age of a gay teen in Trois-Rivières, a small city in regional Québec. Echoing the mandates of the NFB's *équipe française*, the film presented a non-urban and distinctly *pure laine* framing of sexual difference. Also on Radio-Canada, *Chez Denise* (1979-1982) was the first Quebec television show to feature a gay character in an attempt to change cultural attitudes. The program also included one of the first Black figures on Québec TV, notwithstanding his frequently problematic characterization.³⁰ In effect, *Luc ou la part des choses* and *Chez Denise* signal a crystallizing homonationalist rhetoric in Québec politics

²⁸ Waugh & Garrison, 2010: pp. 70-1

²⁹ Waugh, Thomas. *The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writings on Queer Cinema*. Duke University Press, 2000: p. 137.

³⁰ Patriquin, Martin. 2016. 'Normand Brathwaite and Quebec's Problem with Blackface'. *Maclean's* (10 February 2016). <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/normand-brathwaite-and-quebecs-problem-with-blackface>.

during the early 1980s that sought to sanction a distinctly white francophone paradigm of gay identity.

After almost a decade of cultural obscurity following *Gina*, Arcand's *Le Déclin* catapulted him along with Québec into the global zeitgeist of the late 1980s. During this period, a new sub-genre of films flourished in the US that centered the cultural decline of the baby boomer generation. Hays (2004) contends that "gays and lesbians were notably absent from two other "boomer retreat" sub—genre films, John Sayles's *Return of the Secaucus Seven* (1980) and Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983); a glaring absence, considering the massive influence the gay liberation movement had on this generation"³¹ (43). As such films inspired Arcand's original screenplay for *Le Déclin*, his film would address this notable representational gap through his inclusion of Claude, a gay bourgeois professor. But how did Arcand transform from a homophobic intellectual to a seemingly progressive director? During Arcand's blacklisting from cinema, the Québec nationalism movement of his youth solidified into a state institution with the 1976 election of the PQ. After the defeat of the 1980 Referendum, Arcand became outspokenly cynical of the future of the nationalist project. With *Le confort et l'indifférence* (1981), Arcand re-emerged as a deeply cynical political director. The NFB documentary scorned the neoliberal direction of PQ nationalism and Québec society at large. While directly taking aim at technocrats like his earlier films, *Le confort et l'indifférence* also forecasted the candid nature of his satirical deconstruction of Québécois elites in *Le Déclin*.

In *Le Déclin*, Denys Arcand stages a series of cynical anecdotes on sex and gender relations as a platform to mobilize a commentary on the cultural collapse of post-referendum Québec. The film centers around a close-knit group of affluent middle-aged academics and their poignant discussions on topics ranging from culture and history to food, but most of all, sex. Waugh notes the film was "spiced with enough humour, eroticism, and melodrama to make it marketable, [*Le Déclin*] seems to have perfectly matched the mood of its audience in postreferendum, postmodernist, postfeminist, postpopulist, and neo-Bourassa Quebec."³² While its provocative subject matter seemed to signal a progressive framing of Québec, the film in fact seeks to package such shifts in sexual politics as a harbinger of the socio-cultural erosion of the nationalist project. In effect, Arcand's cynical portrayal of queer and feminist ascendancy operates to re-cement a collapsing heteropatriarchal order. Loiselle (2008) contends "Arcand's early reading of Quebec [in *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973) and *Gina* (1975)] as a decadent and hopeless society bound to vanish, still informs his later films."³³ This biting cynicism present in his earlier features is repackaged in *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* and *Les Invasions barbares*, albeit in verbal form. Whereas Arcand once mobilized misogynistic sexual violence as an allegory for federalist domination, he would admonish feminism as an erosive force in his later films. Arcand's reactionary presentation of feminism in *Le Déclin* oversimplifies the modern (neoliberal) woman as a caricature of heteromasculine power. Arcand's film relies upon this patronizing rhetoric to

³¹ Matthew. "Point of View-Epidemic Amnesia: AIDS Is Curiously Forgotten in Denys Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares*." *Take One: Film & Television in Canada* 13.46: p. 43.

³² Waugh 2000: p. 166.

³³ Loiselle 2006: p 6.

articulate the neoliberal homonationalist threat to the Québécois project that he locates within his first gay character, Claude. As homonational lobbyists modelled feminist political tactics to seek national(ist) recognition, *Le Déclin* spotlights the reactionary heteropatriarchal sexual angst of the early 1980s. In effect, the film debases these concurrent forms of sexual nationalism as intertwined symbols of cultural decline. In the next section, I will outline how Arcand employs his critique of feminist challenges to heterosexual relations as a rhetorical framework to underscore the growing queer threat to national futurity.

2.4. NEOLIBERAL FEMINIST DISCONTENTS

Le Déclin is oriented around the film protagonists' perspectives on modern sexual relations during an intense period of transition within Québécois cultural politics. Robert Schwartzwald claims that the film "brings severe judgment to bear on the fruits, both generational and material, of Québec's rapid process of modernization over the past decades [and] the sexual anxiety embedded in the discourses of Québécois nationalism."³⁴ As a critique of these social shifts, Arcand develops a sardonic narrative that satirizes feminist challenges to traditional cultural values and the national institution of heteropatriarchal masculinity. As the film's intimate circle of professors attempt to orient their sexual attitudes within newly liberalized landscapes of gender equality created by the feminist sexual revolution, Arcand demonstrates how this shifting social paradigm still maintains hegemonic masculinist (and orientalist) scripts as symbols of power and progress. As the female members of the film's intellectual circle assert their sexual and neoliberal agency, Arcand parodies such political progress as a sign of the decadency and social decay of the nationalist dream. In light of such feminist challenges to notions of national masculinity, *Le Déclin* represents a patriarchal ambivalence to shifts in sexual citizenship. At the core of Arcand's attempt to hold on to fantasies of sexual dominance rests his symbolic deployment of the 'masculine woman' as a danger to the nation. Much of the film revolves around the men's inability to accept the new gender dynamics and their deep-rooted rejection of the idea of gender equality. For 1980s men who saw their patriarchal privileges challenged by feminism, women had become too much like men. Within this framework, Arcand reduces feminism to a queer(ed) version of patriarchy in drag in which women emulate men to gain inclusion into a pre-established order of patriarchal power relations.

Arcand mobilizes *Le Déclin*'s female protagonists to dis/assemble a spectrum of four *pure laine* female archetypes, who represent the heteropatriarchal sexual anxieties of post-Referendum Québec. Despite the presence of other women in the film, mainly as real or imagined objects of sexual interest, most of them exist non-verbally. Comprising the friendship group are two history professors, Dominique and Diane, as well as an undergraduate history student named Danielle. Rounding out the circle is Rémy's wife, Louise. The former three characters are oriented by varying degrees of feminist ascendancy and are accordingly masculinized as potential danger to the social fabric of the nation. Through these characters, namely Diane and Dominique, Arcand firmly establishes a cultural link between women's empowerment and social disintegration. As the

³⁴ Schwartzwald (1991): p. 175.

antithesis to such precarious subjects, Arcand presents Louise as a vestige of traditional femininity. As the archetypal Outremont housewife, Louise represents the idealized heteronormative standard as the model female citizen—the central pillar of the white nation and its heteropatriarchal cultural values. Despite these achievements, her marriage to Rémy cannot escape the cultural decline, as Arcand employs her looming divorce as an example of how traditional heterosexual relationships as defined by patriarchy are now doomed to fail.

Québécois feminist intellectuals vehemently critiqued the film's female characters as unrealistic avatars of heteropatriarchal angst. Leach (2020) notes "on the one hand, feminist critics deplored what they saw as the misogynistic comedy that supposedly made it popular with uncritical audiences; on the other, the historical framework came under attack for its reiteration of the filmmaker's pessimistic outlook that made social change seem impossible."³⁵ Considering that Arcand speaks from the solipsistic position of the very patriarchy whose decline he is exposing, he cannot help but construct female characters that embody a masculinist gaze on mid-1980s feminism. The feminist novelist, Louky Bersianik (1986), sparked a lively debate in *Le Devoir* when she accused Arcand of having "reproduced all the clichés of sexual politics" and of making a film that "reintroduces sexism from the beginning through to the end"³⁶ Meanwhile, other feminist critics lambasted Arcand for "turn[ing] his female characters into masochistic victims or honourary males."³⁷ Moreover, feminists like Bersianik outrightly admonished the film's hypersexual display of white women's agency, to the extent that she even conflated prostitution with drug use to discredit Danielle's presentation as a student. This air of normative superiority also deeply infiltrated some feminist responses to the film's portrayal of Claude's homosexuality. As Leach concludes, "whatever the merits of Bersianik case, her normative judgements are at least questionable and certainly imply a less complex view of human nature than Arcand's."³⁸ This (neo)liberal feminist attitude towards such non-normative sexual representation unveils an underlying rhetoric of heterosexist respectability within 1980s white mainstream feminism.

The film's patriarchal critique of post-Referendum feminism highlights an anxious breakdown of traditional (heteropatriarchal) cultural values. As the women in his film have become more concerned with duties that extend beyond the household and the national family, Arcand presents powerful women as non-normative and corrosive figures within the national project. With this shift in women's roles, and the decline of the matriarch as the guardian of traditional values, Arcand's film illustrates a solipsistic ambivalence to substantially engaging with the politics of feminism. In effect, he reductively identifies feminism as culpable for the collapse of the national dream. The guiding logic at the core of these cultural values rests in the heteropatriarchal nationalism conceptualized as a first as post-colonial strategy during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, and later, as a symbol of modernity during the Sexual Revolution of the 1970s. Testa notes, "socially, Arcand's characters are members of the *generation lyrique*, who

³⁵ Leach, Jim. *The Films of Denys Arcand*. Rutgers University Press, 2020: p. 93.

³⁶ Godard, Barbara. "The Empire of the Status Quo": To the Second Degree or a Reply to Louky Bersianik." *Tessera* 4 (1 September 1988): p. 49.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Leach 2020, p. 94.

were the first to enjoy the rapid political and social modernization of Québec.”³⁹ As the nationalist dream collapsed with the defeat of the 1980 referendum, traditional heteropatriarchal cultural values also began to give way to neoliberal priorities of individualism, materialism, and cosmopolitanism. This was keenly reflected in similar NFB productions of the period, the same producer as *Le Déclin*. On such politics in Québec cinema, Waugh remarked,

“[they were] throwing away huge budgets on, respectively, ‘sensitive’ documentaries about women and plastic surgery and on idiotic male backlash comedies like *The Masculine Mystique* (1984) and *90 Days* (1985). Or any of the rest of the blinkered male fraternity who were having trouble dealing even with mild liberal feminism in their Town of Mount Royal bungalows and Outremont duplexes, let alone gay liberation and AIDS downtown?”⁴⁰

These films signalled the complexity of post-Referendum cultural polemics, which paradoxically regarded the new sexual politics as a twin symbol of the nation’s ascent and decline. Coupled with social institutionalization of feminist and gay liberation movements, such growth in social agency not only endangered heteropatriarchal cultural values, but also the logic of national collectivism upon which they rest.

At the beginning of *Le Déclin*, Dominique presents to Diane the concept of her new text, *Changing Concepts of Happiness*. Arcand mobilizes the fictional text as the central thesis of the film’s diegesis. In her book, Dominique posits the (neo-liberal) rise in a self-indulgence and hedonism in society as a catalyst for the decline of an empire. While most of the narrative is focused on the US as a paradigm of national decline pursuant to Dominique’s thesis, Arcand deploys his protagonists as exemplary figures of such erosion in Québec. This new neoliberal focus on the individual desires (economic, sexual, or otherwise), provides the launching point for Arcand’s social commentary on socio-sexual relations. While Arcand chronicles the sexual hedonism of his characters during a period of shifting sexual and gender politics, he ultimately conflates the decline of the Québec nation with feminist empowerment. As the male professors initially attempt to avoid Dominique’s book in her absence, Rémy first forecloses the discussion by admonishing the ‘incomplete’ gender analysis of her concept. As they walk to their cottage, Pierre then Rémy comments: “Strange that she barely mentions women. Who’d want to equate feminine power with social decay?” “But women’s rise to power has always been linked to decline. It’s symptomatic.” Arcand’s attempt to shift focus to women’s culpability in social decay reveals his intention to scapegoat feminism as an erosive force to the national project.

Despite widespread participation in the neoliberal economies of hedonistic individualism of the 1980s, Arcand identifies women’s participation as problematic, not men’s. Alongside Québec’s economic shift from a welfare model to free market neoliberalism during this period, the nationalist project’s social emphasis on cultural collectivism was overtaken by cosmopolitan

³⁹ Testa, Bart. “The decline of frivolity and Denys Arcand’s American Empire” in *Canada’s Best Features: Critical essays on 15 Canadian films*. Editions Rodopi, 2002: p. 189.

⁴⁰ Waugh, Thomas. *Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*. McGill-Queen’s Press, 2006: p. 151.

private interests.⁴¹ Rather than recognizing how decadence and self-indulgence have long been accepted as the providence of patriarchy, Arcand understands women's cultural involvement in these practices as another example of women acting like men as a conduit to power. This correlation between female power and social decline stems from Arcand's masculinist anxiety of the collapse in women's traditional roles as the key catalyst for the decline of the Québec nation. Despite that neoliberal cultural values in Quebec have begun to align with feminism during this period, Arcand resists this rearrangement of power in order to bolster a diminishing sense of patriarchal hegemony. While the film clearly demonstrates the upward mobility of women during this period, Arcand is more focused on the decline of patriarchy. In the film this "is expressed symptomatically through an anxious attempt, on the part of heterosexual men, to regain their sense of masculine self by trying to reconstruct, albeit only discursively, an idea of femininity that is believed to have vanished."⁴² Arcand mobilizes a set of female caricatures to highlight his reactionary position that 'real' women have disappeared under the influence of feminism. By way of the construction of his monolithic female characters, Arcand reifies his patriarchal panic of losing privilege and social position to empowered women.

Like Dominique's text, the plot of *Le Déclin* centers on the circle's politicized discourse on their sexual exploits and discontents. During Act 1 of the film, the men and women are presented separately, with the female protagonists exercising at the university gymnasium and the men being domestic in a posh chalet. As the women cultivate their bodies, the men prepare a lavish dinner, while all parties broadly discuss their sexual relations. During Act 2, the circle assembles at their countryside chalet to share an evening of wine, gastronomy, and witty erotic repartee. Testa proclaims, "the professors' preoccupation with personal happiness—with pleasure and gratification and with sex and food—has displaced the political and intellectual concern for the fabric of the social." Arcand mobilizes this elite circle as an analogy of the political intelligentsia of Québec, who have ostensibly surrendered their nationalist consciousness to neoliberal materialism.

The film spotlights shifting modes of power performed by men and women through first act's attempt to invert traditional gender roles. In as the women appear to still be concerned about remaining sexually attractive, the men are also consumed by consumerist beauty standards. This is one of the many looming signs of feminist contagion to heteromascularity. Under the spectre of patriarchy, even the men now complain about their need to be troubled about their appearances and dance moves. Alongside both feminist and neoliberal shifts in the sexual politics, men must now also contend with such emergent shifts to masculinity. While the initial placement of the men and women in the film appears to be a reversal of traditional gender roles, with the men occupying the domestic space historically attributed with femininity, the men are not totally emasculated. Arcand's mise-en-scene of the kitchen operates as less of domestic space, and more of a masculine-oriented restaurant by way the men's preparation of complicated haute cuisine rather than homely

⁴¹ Gattinger, Monica "The 'Neoliberal Turn' in Provincial Cultural Policy and Administration in Québec and Ontario: The Emergence of 'Quasi-Neoliberal' Approaches" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 35.2 (2010): p. 284.

⁴² Loiselle 2008: p. 21.

country fare.⁴³ Arcand also never shows the men engaging in simple domestic tasks such as washing dishes.

But more importantly, Arcand frames the kitchen as a homosocial space in which the men are free to be men without female oversight. With the men and women initially segregated from one another, Arcand uses the discursive dynamics of homosociality to solicit explicit dialogue on the protagonists' sexual adventures. While homosociality is often understood simply as non-sexualized forms of male intimacy, feminists scholars like Bird (1996) contend it is "how men attempt to reproduce their dominant power relations by only uniting with and sharing the same space and privilege with those males"⁴⁴ The men engender a male homosocial environment in which heteropatriarchal norms can be relaxed as shown by the men being amicably intimate in their dancing and touching, even in the presence of their gay colleague, Claude. The heterosexual men nonetheless maintain their masculinity by way their misogynist perspectives on sex and gender relations, rather than resorting to conventional methods of homophobic exclusion.



Figure 2.4. Pierre (left) and Claude (right) feigning orgasm while playing dancing together (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

The women also develop a form of homosociality. Rather than congregating in a private domestic space traditionally allocated to women, the female protagonists transgress convention by engaging in explicit sexual discussions in public. For a film about sex, Arcand scantily presents depictions of sexual intimacy. There are a few post-coital scenes between the heterosexual professors, the most explicit of these range from Pierre's hand job scene at the orientalist massage parlor to Louise feigning orgasm while under a nude man at a swinger's party. Overall, sex in *Le Déclin* exists more at the level of discourse than practice. Arcand deliberately has the women be as risqué as men in their dialogue not necessarily to demonstrate how women have redefined their roles, but rather to illustrate how they have adopted masculine discursive scripts. In his attempt to manifest the contradictions of women's new roles, Arcand first sets the women in a gym. Whereas

⁴³ The men also resist being effeminized by virtue of their elevated class status and the rise of macho celebrity chef culture during the 1980s, which provided a suitable yuppie-era precedent for introducing men into the kitchen without destabilizing masculine cultural values. This was evidenced by food guides like Bruce Feirstein's book, *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* (1982), which satirized new stereotypes of neoliberal masculinity.

⁴⁴ Bird, Sharon R. "Welcome to the Men's club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity". *Gender & Society* 10.2 (1996): p. 122.

the women appear liberated in their sexual attitudes, Arcand destabilizes this notion by illuminating sexual desirability as the rationale behind their exercising. Nonetheless, women actively affirm their corporeal agency in their sexual encounters—especially those with ethnic and racialized men. This importantly operates as a symbol how their proposed sexual ascendancy is predicated upon the racist subjection of racialized others, a core rhetoric that also scripts homonationalism.

This sexual discourse is mobilized through their exaggerated performance of masculinist oppressive scripts of white supremacy. As they share risqué sexual histories in the gym, Loïselle affirms the “women come across as most racist and disingenuous in their ‘amusing’ anecdotes as they ridicule people of other races.”⁴⁵ Whereas all of the professors have participated in the (post)colonial economies of sexual tourism, the women particularly emphasize the racialized difference of their sexual conquests. In kind with their recent feminist sexual liberation, the women perform their now sanctioned settler-colonial erotic supremacy upon the racialized “other”—perhaps even more so than the men. In their playful boasting about their exotic sexual experiences, Dominique and Diane actually belittle Black and brown men to affirm their white superiority. As they jest about Italians and Mexicans being “simple souls” that yell “Mama” upon climax, they invoke racist stereotypes to emasculate their sexual partners.



Figure 2.5. Dominique playing with colonial anxieties of the Black phallus
(screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

The female professors further assert their settler-colonial supremacy as they discuss their sexual escapades with Black men. In an anecdote in which Dominique describes her threesome with “two *petit noirs*” from Martinique, she engages colonial vernacular to infantilize her sexual partners. While she avoids the more racist term (*nègre*), Dominique nonetheless locates her sexual discourse within colonial terms. As her sexual partners claim, “you don’t know Martinique unless you sleep with Martiniquais,” she takes less issue with their sexual essentialism than with their colonized French accent. In spite of Québec’s own history of linguistic colonial marginalization, Dominique deploys her whiteness to disparage the Black men’s creole vernacular. Despite being symbolically masculinized by her colonial discourse, Dominique is clearly cognizant of her

⁴⁵ Loïselle 2006: p. 77.

corporeal power, remarking “Imagine a white woman on her knees in front of two Black men.” Despite playfully evoking colonial anxieties of Black male sexuality, Dominique actually doesn’t relish in being objectified as the submissive white subject. Instead, she is annoyed by their macho demeanour, complaining that “I’m paying and they tell me what to do!” This colonial sexual transaction is pregnant with historical connotations of the slave trade, in which the Martiniquais man are scripted as sexual commodities. In effect, Dominique is less frustrated by their masculinity than with her inability to control her Black subjects. Overall, the women are able to express their (masculine) dominance over men of colour because of their white neoliberal power. Through the women’s discussion of their sexual liaisons in a frank and explicit manner, Arcand presents these female figures as masculinized by their pursuit of social power. Loiselle argues that Arcand criticizes this shift in heterosexual dynamics by representing independent (privileged white) women as ‘men in drag’ through their emulation of traditionally masculine sexual and social scripts.⁴⁶ Arcand underscores female professors’ liberalized sexual attitudes and their devotion to their careers over familial responsibilities as a root cause of the nation’s decline.

Arcand mobilizes the character of Louise to highlight the social precarity of the emancipated woman to the futurity of Québec. Although her own marriage fails at the end of the film, Arcand deploys Louise’s status as a traditional housewife as a patriarchal foil to diminish Dominique’s professional ambition, and by extension, sexual freedom. As Dominique—the chair of the history department—discusses her book with the circle, Louise is her most vocal critic, despite her lack of academic training. Arcand uses Louise to frame Dominique as only successful due to her lack of domestic or filial responsibility. While all the female academics privilege their professional lives (a male-oriented trait), Arcand represents Dominique as impotent due to her lack of maternal obligations. Historically, the family unit has been politically situated as a locus of Québec society and the axiom of nationalist reproduction. Through this figure of the emancipated yet childless woman, Arcand assumes a nihilistic position about the future of the province considering the concurrent decline in patriarchy and the (white) national birth rate.⁴⁷ In *Les Invasions*, Arcand will revisit this angst around reproductive national futurity through a distinctly *pure laine* form of ethnonational racism, which I will also discuss later in this chapter. These particular social and demographic shifts present the material grounding for the central thesis of *Le Déclin* (and its sequel), illustrating Arcand’s white supremacist commentary on Québec.

Diane is the most vocal woman concerning her sexual exploits as well as her discontent with both feminism and patriarchy. As the only professor in the circle without tenure, Diane feels cheated by having to juggle having children and a career. As a clear example of this, Diane’s daughter is the only child we see in the film, as she is witness to the men who exit Diane’s bed. Twenty years later, in *Les Invasions*, Diane is estranged from her daughter, who is now a heroin addict. Contrastingly, Arcand introduces the children of Rémy and Louise (once the model family unit) as successful adults. This comparison illustrates Arcand’s critique of Louise’s unconventional parenting as a both professional and hedonistic single mother. Erica Miller (2015)

⁴⁶ Loiselle 2008: p. 46.

⁴⁷ Marshall 2001: p 265.

notes that within white nationalist projects, single mothers are often queered as threats (like immigrants and racialized subjects) to the social fabric of the national family structure.⁴⁸ In kind, Arcand further renders Diane's sexual agency as abject through her association with Claude in both her queer sexual practices as well as her aversion to heteronormative domesticity—which I will expand upon later in this chapter. As the promiscuous untenured single mother, Arcand constructs Diane as a case study for the perils of feminist challenges to traditional cultural values of family and femininity. She actively affirms her sexual agency, objectifying men's bodies in the gym. By way of her non-normative sexual lifestyle (BDSM), Diane occupies the position of the queered woman, an embodiment of the decadence and self-indulgence that characterizes the decline of the empire. Arcand symbolically mirrors Diane and Claude to mobilize his anti-feminist platform as a cultural paradigm to frame the post-Referendum crisis of heteropatriarchal angst and its mobilization of queerness as a contagious threat to the nation.

2.4: THE LIBERAL LIMITS OF HOMOSEXUAL AGENCY

As discussed previously, Arcand's first reference to homosexuality appears in his film critique of Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre* in 1964, decades prior to *Le Déclin*. In his review, Arcand performs a homophobic reading of Jutra's coming out, and deduces the homosexual content of the film as modernist tool of avant-garde sensationalism. Moreover, Arcand positioned Jutra's film as antithetical to emergent nationalist cultural values which championed a brand of sexual politics that fortified the hegemony of *pure laine* heteropatriarchy. In this critique, Arcand frames homosexuality as a form of arrested subjectivity, a positionality which haunted Québécois masculinity after generations of clientelist emasculation and centuries of Catholic parochial dominance. Scholars have often questioned whether Arcand's portrayal of Claude in *Le Déclin*, his first homosexual character, took inspiration from Claude Jutra. Yet, in what could be described as anti-queer intertextuality, his conservative perspective on Jutra's homosexuality would later infiltrate the construction of Claude in *Le Déclin* almost two decades later. Arcand primarily capitalized upon unconventional sexual practices such as homosexuality (as well as BDSM and partner-swapping) to titillate audiences with risqué content. While the film is largely focused on shifting gender and heterosexual relations, Arcand also obliquely mobilized a social commentary on queerness and the neoliberal social and political inclusion of sexual and racialized minorities.

Following the exceptionalist inclusion of homosexuality into The Québec Charter, some homophobic cultural attitudes on white neoliberal gay subjects began to be framed as archaic during the 1980s. Marshall notes,

“interestingly, the ‘homosexual’ becomes above all a factor of modernity, part of a Quiet Revolution legitimizing national narrative within the discourse of the then minister of justice, Marc-André Bédard: ‘There is no comparable case in the West or in the World of a society that has gone as quickly as Quebec society, and in such

⁴⁸ See: Millar, Erica. “‘Too Many’: Anxious White Nationalism and the Biopolitics of Abortion” *Australian Feminist Studies* 30.83 (2015), 82-98.

an adult way, with so few negative aspects, from a closed, authoritarian, obscurantist society, to a society that is open, daring and well-articulated.’ This demonstrates the fact that there are different kinds of nationalisms and that some can be pluralist and inclusive, but also the way in which the letter of the law, and of this law, can be at odds with the forms in which other versions of nationalism constitute themselves.”⁴⁹

As a bourgeois intellectual, Arcand, and by extension his protagonists, maintain a commitment to the liberal modernity of the nationalist project and its shifting homo/nationalist position. Effectively, Arcand’s inclusion of a gay protagonist functions as a symbolic token of Québécois modernity. Extending beyond the previous margins of cinema, Claude’s presence in *Le déclin* was a landmark in the history of queer representation in Québec. Schwartzwald argues that

“Although [Claude] may appear familiar as a gay icon to American audiences by virtue of his unbridled enthusiasm for cruising, his frank endorsement of sex with multiple partners, and especially because of the cloud of fatal illness that hangs over him, he is precisely for these reasons an unprecedented representation of a gay man in Québec cultural production. For although homosexuality, AIDS, and ‘promiscuity’ have been repeatedly soldered and served up in [Québec], the fact is that contemporary representations of gay men in Québécois novels, television programs, and film, by and large, continue not to employ such figures.”⁵⁰

While far from the banal previous presentation of homosexuality in mainstream cinema, Claude’s construction in *Le Déclin* nonetheless embodies the heterosexist implications of gay inclusion within Québec cultural imagination. Illustrating the tenuous dynamics of liberalizing homosexuality, Arcand’s presentation of Claude results in a complex and sometimes contradictory assemblage of homosexual subjectivity. The development of Claude’s personage ranges from being intermittently homophobic or heterosexist to symbolically (neo)liberal or inadvertently progressive. In *Le Déclin*, Arcand presents “a heterosexual vision of homosexuality;”⁵¹ with Claude framed as an early 1980s gay archetype in terms of his comportment, cosmopolitanism, anti-domesticity, and necropolitical potential.

Despite his intellectual and political consciousness as a professor, Arcand attempts to depoliticize Claude through highlighting his bourgeois preoccupations. While he attempts to chastise the entire circle of elites, Arcand’s heterosexist construction of Claude keenly denotes his nationalist panic. He mobilizes Claude as an axiom of the gay movement’s embrace of neoliberal individualism and retreat from collective political action. But what Arcand fails to recognize within the film is the proliferation of AIDS activism in the wake of governmental and medical inaction to the emergent pandemic. While Arcand does employ AIDS as a political device in the film, it operates as a symbol of social degeneracy of homosexuality—which I will discuss further in the next section. In his presentation of Claude’s gay lifestyle as the height of decadence (his

⁴⁹ Marshall 2001: p. 121.

⁵⁰ Schwartzwald 1991: pp. 181-2.

⁵¹ Marshall 2001: p. 292.

luxury tastes) and self-indulgence (his lack of familial obligations), Arcand positions Claude's sexuality as a key catalyst in the decline of the white nation. In highlighting such oppositional characteristics of homosexuality, Arcand demonstrates how Québécois cultural values are not only in danger from feminist contagion, but also how queerness threatens traditional forms of masculinity.

Like the female archetypes he develops, Arcand utilizes Claude as a paradigm to illustrate how the social inclusion of homosexuality within the nation has also disrupted the heteropatriarchal order of the Québec national project. Arcand implicitly reveals his latent homophobia in his construction of Claude's homosexuality as form of arrested development. As one of the only protagonists that engages with the heterosexual men and women beyond just sexual discourse, Claude is positioned somewhere between masculinity and femininity. Throughout the film, Arcand situates Claude as an interlocutor between the male and female members of his circle. Arcand first demonstrates this in Act 1 of the film, as he aligns Claude with Diane (and to a lesser degree Dominique) in their sexual experiences. Furthermore, Arcand presents us with a rare glimpse of vulnerability, as they all discuss their cruising misadventures and habitually falling victim to pickpockets. We also are presented with other instances of Claude being more emotionally available with other women, rather than the men. Finally, Louise confides in Claude, not the other women, after she learns of her husband's indiscretion. While the film does not entirely emasculate Claude, it certainly demonstrates his ability to transcend gendered parameters. This presents a site of panic for Arcand as Claude's investment in heteropatriarchy is called into question. To this degree, Arcand uses Claude's "arrested sexuality" as a paradigm to pass Claude between masculine and feminine (discursive) spaces.

Through relying upon such cliché tropes, Arcand pathologizes Claude's neoliberal gay sexual identity as contagiously erosive to the social aims of the nationalist project. This capacity to transcend such boundaries poses a further threat to the already collapsing heterosexual order. It "reveals [the] historical constructedness of heterosexuality itself, and how, given the unravelling of tradition, the differences between masculinity and femininity are exposed and similarities reduced."⁵² As a subjective critic of the group's bourgeois heterosexuality, Claude's queer positionality operates to deconstruct the traditional cultural values that Arcand attempts to buttress.

Whereas Claude is positioned as an interlocutor between the heterosexual male and female protagonists, the framing of Claude's homosexuality during Act 1 is governed by the patriarchal logics of male homosociality. Initially Claude is undisguisable from the other straight men by nature of his witty responses to his friends' (hetero)sexual anecdotes. Loisel notes that Claude's "mannerisms and mode of self-expression are slightly camp; he gesticulates, is dramatic in his movements and his dialogue is littered with quips and witty, deprecating banter."⁵³ He concludes, "through his words and actions, it becomes clear that Claude is a gay man."⁵⁴ This reading also signals the heterosexist cultural parameters of Claude's construction and *reception*. Claude is

⁵² Marshall 2001: p. 292.

⁵³ Loisel 2008: p. 43.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

presented as slightly effeminate in his expressions and gesticulations, just as the other men are also occasionally equally dramatic in their movements. Notwithstanding this, Arcand initially presents Claude like ‘one of the guys,’ with the exception that he is clearly running the show in the kitchen. Rémy and Pierre desperately attempt to hold on to a fleeting sense of virility as they objectify their female sexual partners, while Claude and Alain represent a more introspective form of masculinity that has been shaped by the politics of sexual revolution such as gay liberation and feminism. They nonetheless behave similarly, ostensibly to maintain a sense of homosociality. Yet, as the men continue discussing their sexual escapades, it becomes clear that Claude is not juxtaposing them with any of his own. This practice of selective silence provides one of the first indications of Claude’s otherness. Despite the lewd nature of their conversations, Claude’s sexuality is initially silenced by the heteronormative constraints of homosociality. Claude first cloaks his first otherness to engage with the straight locker-room banter of the other men.

Claude’s personage is framed by heterosexist scripts on homosexuality that reinforce the supremacy of Quebecois cultural values. Schwartzwald contends, “the straight men seem anxious to include Claude in the conversation and use him as a willing foil for their derisive descriptions of female anatomy, bodily secretions, and scents.”⁵⁵ While Claude is included in the predominately heterosexual group, his integration relies upon performing heterosexist stereotypes of homosexuality. Following Claude’s fantasy flashback, Rémy and Pierre joke about the presupposed advantages of being gay by deploying essentialist gay clichés ranging from being well-dressed and funny to handsome and cultivated. While Claude engages with his friend’s jokes for the sake of maintaining homosociality, his character is generally presented as stereotypically self-deprecating. Arcand deploys such stereotypes not to deconstruct them, but rather as an attempt to reify Claude’s personage. Claude’s self-deprecating homosocial engagement reflects a tactic of disidentification that may queers have to enact within a heteronormative milieu. Muñoz would suggest that “such a process be understood as disidentificatory in that it is not about assimilation into a heterosexual matrix but instead a partial disavowal of that cultural form that works to restructure it from within.”⁵⁶ Unlike my two other chapters, Arcand provides little latitude for his characters to exist beyond the distinct parameters constructed for them. While *Le Déclin* is evacuated from any explicit discussion of its contemporary gay politics, Claude’s disidentificatory participation in such stereotypes reveal the mainstream cultural perceptions of both hetero and homosexuality that frame Claude’s subjectivity.

After the arrival of Mario, Diane’s sadomasochistic boyfriend, Claude feels comfortable being explicit about his homosexuality. While Claude may be seduced by Mario’s informal working-class comportment, this presentation signals his otherness in the eyes of the other men. In Act 2 of the film, Mario’s carnal desires and crass behaviour totally ostracize him from the group’s bourgeois sexual norms, a topic I will expand upon later in this chapter. This introduction of a figure even more marginal than Claude disrupts the normative parameters of homosociality. It engenders an opportunity for Claude to reveal his homosexual desire with the context of the

⁵⁵ Schwartzwald 1991: p. 182

⁵⁶ Muñoz 1999: p. 46.

other men. As Mario inquires about Diane's whereabouts, Claude gazes fervidly at Mario and casually discloses his cottage's close proximity to Diane's. While Mario walks away, Claude lustfully declares, "hmm, not bad," to which Rémy eagerly replies "your type, eh?" Given the group's familiarity with one another, Rémy is clearly aware of that Claude is gay, yet it is Claude's admission of queer desire that categorically manifests his identity to the audience. In kind, Claude's visual representations of such desires or intimacies throughout the film is constrained within such discursive parameters. While the male professors integrate Claude into their discussion of (hetero)sexual exploits, Arcand homophobically sanitizes Claude's sexual representation. He mobilizes the film's rhetoric of homosociality forestall the manifestation of Claude's fully realized sexual subjectivity. Following Rémy's acknowledgement of Claude's queer desire, Claude laments that Mario reminded him of his passed lover. Rémy's gesture of homosocial inclusion prompts Claude to disclose a sexual anecdote of cruising at Parc Mont-Royal.

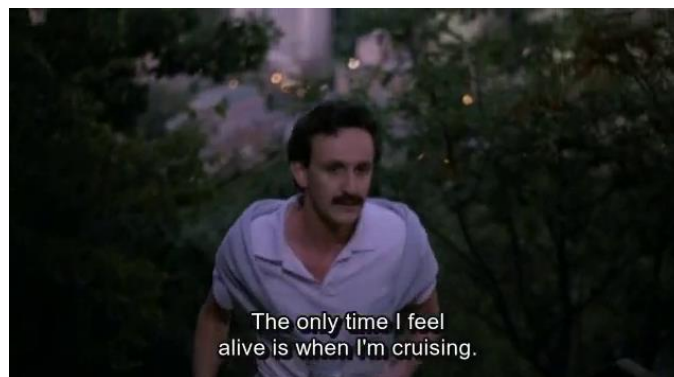


*Figure 2.6. Claude climbing the steps to cruising grounds of the 'Mountain, with downtown Montréal looming in background (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)*

The visualization of Claude's sexual anecdote commences with him ascending the final set of stairs at the summit of Parc Mont-Royal during one summer afternoon. Outfitted as a yuppie jogger, Claude begins cruising under the guise of exercise.⁵⁷ He first encounters a cop on horseback descending from the hiking trails, evoking the history of homophobic surveillance in the park. As Claude starts prowling the trails, he locates a handful of white men leaning casually against trees, all observing him. Considering that that cruising tends to be a monotonous activity (often a game of staring, posturing, and waiting), most experiences are generally unmemorable unless anything distinct occurs. Further illustrating Arcand's heteromasculine gaze, it is unusual for a gay cruising scene to be shot in a way that the camera only focuses on the faces of the men, not their bodies.⁵⁸ While Claude's eyes scan the men, it is the only real interaction he has with them. Claude does not make eye contact with any of the men, but he passes one in close proximity, who subsequently follows Claude to exit off screen. While his joint exit may allude to a hookup,

⁵⁷ This presentation of Claude exercising also reinforces his connection to the women through his neoliberal preoccupation with fitness over political engagement.

⁵⁸ Waugh 2000: p. 168.

it remains unresolved. Although the potential for (homo)sex exists, none actually happens or is discussed.

This significant choice of setting evokes historic associations of the Parc as a panoptic space for indiscriminate queer sexual encounters. One of the first cinematic Québécois portrayals of the ‘the Mountain,’ as a queer(ed) space is found in Jutra’s *À tout prendre*. In a scene in which the protagonist (also named Claude) fanaticises being chased by a Leatherman on a motorcycle, Jutra’s repressed desire to cruise underlies the subtext. Considering Arcand’s homophobic review of the film, the intertextual links between the two scenes is remarkable. Could Arcand have drawn inspiration from Claude Jutra in his development of his gay protagonist? While the intention may be moot, the symbolic connection between the two sequences reinforces the Claude’s anecdote not as memory, but as an unrealized fantasy. As well as echoing the homophobic logic of arrested development, the unrealized visual portrayal of Claude’s desires renders his sexual anecdotes into fantasies. The heterosexual protagonists’ flashbacks are treated as a memory, a glimpse of their (shared) sexual histories. Conversely, Claude’s anecdotal sequence is framed more as form of a fabulation in its absence of sexual intimacy.



Figure 2.7. Arcand’s heterosexist vision of Claude searching for action. A fantasy or memory?
(screenshot, *Le Déclin de l’empire Américain*)

The limitations of Claude’s sexual subjectivity suggest that his presence exists as a performative token of the circle’s progressive attitude and Québec’s shifting cultural values. As Claude discusses his urge to cruise “at 4AM in the saunas of LA or the scariest bars in St Pauli in Hamburg,” such international sexual encounters further associates him with globalization trends that endanger Québec cultural sovereignty from neoliberal to AIDS. While his presentation is sanitized, Arcand has Claude reaffirm his stereotypical association with hypersexuality, as he asserts “The only time I feel alive is when I’m cruising. It’s incredible, I become crazed, electrified!... I can’t help it. Some nights I just have to fuck someone. Anyone. Like an alley cat on the prowl, the urge is overwhelming.” While Claude’s gay sexual ethos is certainly substantiated by gay liberation sexual politics of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is doubtful that Arcand would be privy to such discourse. In kind with North American gay liberation movements, sex was once regarded as an affirmation of identity and difference in response to the Quebecois

hegemonic repression of homosexuality.⁵⁹ Yet, this liberal sexual attitude would rapidly endure a necropolitical shift as the AIDS pandemic instilled a spectre of sexual and cultural fear.

While we occasionally are presented with flashbacks of the other hetero-professors encounters, but we are only presented with this scene of an unsuccessful cruising on Mont-Royal. Considering that Arcand does not afford this treatment to Claude, what is his role as a sexual protagonist in the film? Waugh (1986) notes,

“what is more I found Claude's completely unguarded frankness about his sexuality with his hetero male colleagues as inconceivable as their full unproblematic acceptance of him as peer. On the other hand, his trusting intimacy with the women was truer and very moving. His description of his compulsive cruising on ‘the Mountain’ for example didn't seem exactly right (‘like an alley cat on the prowl’), nor did Arcand's stilted accompanying images.”⁶⁰

The sanitization of Claude's flashback renders his inclusion in the narrative on the level of flat representation as a symbolically castrated male member of the party. In absence of a fully realized sexual persona, Claude's symbolic castration denotes his insidiousness as it pertains to the futurity of the national project. Moreover, in light of the looming AIDS crisis, this is shaped by the spectre of contagion. Like the woman who have been contaminated by feminism, Claude's homosexuality and its necropolitical potential means that he too will not reproduce, symbolizing the looming peril for futurity of the *pure laine* nation. While the men are willing to include Claude as a gay man into their circle, it is as only as a de-virilised member. In order to be normalized as a gay subject within this milieu, Claude must abide by the heteronormative and masculinist directives of patriarchy.

Considering the explicit nature of the straight flashbacks, the absence of any displays of intimacy in Claude's sequence signals Arcand's (and the period's) heteronormative limits of gay representation. Unlike the other anecdotal flashbacks which document the heterosexual protagonists in various states of sexual intimacy, Claude's flashback is not treated on the same level of the others. While Arcand presents us with explicit flashbacks of the heterosexual protagonists in various states of (post)coital undress, from Pierre's orientalist hand job scene at the massage parlor to Louise feigning orgasm while under a nude man at a swinger's party. While the (hetero)sexual flashbacks are more soft-core than pornographic, the sense of eroticism in Claude's 'sexual' sequence is hegemonically constrained. Ironically in a film about sex, such politics renders the visual manifestation of queer eroticism as obscene. In effect, Arcand's visual sanitization of queer sex and resulting de-sexualization of Claude illustrates a mainstream ambivalence to substantially engage with gay sexual subjectivity. Claude's anecdote exists only at the level of discourse, obfuscated by the dictates of male homosociality and its ambivalent homonationalist inclusion. As a gay man, Claude is expected to embody hypersexuality but only in symbolic terms. The absence of *homosexual* visibility in the film's flashbacks denotes the period's heteropatriarchal resistance to normalizing queer desire. This assemblage of

⁵⁹ See: Weeks, Jeffrey. “Gay Liberation and its Legacies” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism*, David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay, eds. Routledge (2015): pp. 45-58.

⁶⁰ Waugh 2000: p. 168.

hypersexuality and castration in Claude's personage reveals the paradoxical nature of homonationalist integration, which only seeks to manifest homosexuality symbolically as a sign of neoliberal progress.

Despite the sanitization of Claude's flashback, he nonetheless is confined by his association with hypersexuality and neoliberal cosmopolitanism. While Arcand attempts to pin erosive factors to most of the circle, Claude participation in this hedonistic economy is framed as far more precarious. The film juxtaposed Rémy and Claude by way of their purported hypersexuality, as well as their shared dread of monotonous domesticity. Claude affirms his dread of the notion of being at "home by 6pm for a pea soup." Within their homosocial group, this ambivalence to domesticity is one which also appeals to the heterosexual men, namely Rémy, the uber-womanizer. He claims "the main advantage of being gay, of course, is 'the joy of living with someone who doesn't menstruate. Louise turns into a monster 4 or 5 days a month.'" This envious position that the straight men occupy ultimately signals a challenge their own sense of neoliberal masculinity. Schwarzwald argues,

"Under the signifier of decline, the heterosexual men in the kitchen are represented as moving toward Claude, engaging in a rapprochement in which the gender continuum has been tilted and the men sent rolling headlong down it toward him. Not that they want to sleep with each other or with other men; [it is] his ability to desire freely [that] they covet."⁶¹

As Rémy attempts to identify with Claude's excitement in cruising, Arcand forestalls this expression of affinity. Rather, Claude quickly reasserts the precarity associated with queer forms of sexual *flânerie*. As he reveals that a friend was killed in a homophobic attack, it is one of the few moments in which he politicizes his social difference as a gay subject, inherently destabilizing the heterosexist bounds that unite Claude's homosociality with the other men. This statement destabilises the circle's assumption that Claude lives in some hedonistic homo-utopia, made readily available by Québec's progressive politics. While Claude is envied on one hand for his potential sexual promiscuity, the narrative pointedly undercuts this notion by imbuing queerness with a contagious potential for mortality.

2.5: A NATIONAL THREAT OF CONTAGION

As one of the first discussions of AIDS within mainstream Québécois cinema, Arcand's treatment of the emergent pandemic in *Le Déclin* ranges from morally sensationalist to seemingly progressive. Whereas Arcand attempts to frame neoliberal gay men like Claude as dangerously apolitical, the emergence of AIDS recalibrated the parameters for queer activism in the face of renewed homophobic (and racist) surveillance and bio-political control of queer(ed) subjects.⁶² On the anxious heels of the post-Referendum blow to the nationalist dream, the first case of AIDS was

⁶¹ Schwarzwald 1991: p. 182.

⁶² Podmore, Julie. "From contestation to incorporation: LGBT activism and urban politics" in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, Manon Tremblay, ed. UBC Press, 2015: p.254.

reported in 1982. The next year, activists united to form the precursor to AIDS Community Care Montreal, a multi-service organization continues to thrive presently. The passing of the classic Hollywood heartthrob, Rock Hudson, in 1985 signaled one of the first major international representations of the pandemic. Baily claims,

“the coverage of Hudson’s death provided by the Québec press underscores a collective desire to confront HIV/AIDS by symbolically confining the illness to certain marginalized groups of society and reinforcing the binaries of gay and straight. The examples demonstrate how the reporting of the factual developments of the AIDS crisis can be influenced by moral judgement.”

This cultural climate of homo- and serophobia marked by Rock’s passing forms the narrative context of Claude’s fraught association with AIDS in *Le Déclin*.



Figure 2.8. (Québécois) AIDS activists taking centre stage at the 5th International AIDS Conference (Photo: Jacques Grenier, *Le Devoir*, 4 June 1989)

As the film became firmly installed within the Québécois cultural imagination, the pandemic in Montréal would reach the global zeitgeist by way of an American book and an international conference. Firstly, the release of Randy Shilts’ bestselling 1987 book, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* provoked an international association between Québec and the early days of the pandemic. In the book, Shilts articulated a culpability narrative within the figure of Gaëtan Dugas, a Canadian flight attendant who died of AIDS. Through the moniker of *Patient Zero*, the American journalist attempted to spotlight Dugas’ cultural difference as a symbol of his hypersexuality.⁶³ Douglas Crimp called Shilts’ representation of Dugas as “murderously irresponsible scapegoat for his heterosexual colleagues, in order to prove that [Shilts], like them, is horrified by such creatures.”⁶⁴ This air of fear soon erupted into

⁶³ In his book, Shilts frames Dugas through “his soft Québécois accent and his sensual magnetism” and “his voracious sexual appetite” See: Shilts, Randy. *And The Band Played on: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. St. Martin’s Press, 2000: p. 26.

⁶⁴ Crimp, Douglas “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic.” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* 43 MIT Press, (Winter 1987): pp. 239-40.

violence with the 1989 murder of Joe Rose, a young gay activist with AIDS, on a bus in Montréal's east-end. His death became a siren for queer and AIDS activism, as activists assembled political groups such as Réaction SIDA and ACT UP Montreal.⁶⁵ Together along with a wide global contingent of queer/AIDS activists later the same year, they interrupted the opening proceedings of the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal—drawing for the first time an international spotlight on a new brand of queer activism in Québec.

Le Déclin's heterosexist articulation of homosexuality operates as a symbol of Québec's impending collapse. Arcand mobilizes cultural hysteria on AIDS as a rhetorical paradigm articulate the notion of contagion with the decline of the nationalist project. According to Rémy, "without AIDS, homosexuality would be paradise on earth." Despite idealizing Claude's presupposed hypersexuality, the spectre of AIDS has destroyed such heterosexist utopianism, similar to the neoliberal collapse of the national dream itself. The reality of homosexuality's association with masculine corporeality and social contagion signals a clear boundary between Claude and the other heterosexual men, emphasizing the former's potential for mortality. This connotation is further rendered by Claude's association with death by way his ex-boyfriend's motorcycle accident and friend's murder in shower. This necropolitical orientation inherently frames Claude throughout the film. While the audience hardly witnesses any of Claude's sexual exploits, Arcand graphically presents the corporeal and epidemiological consequences of his sexuality by way the introduction of Claude's mystery condition.

Unbeknownst to the circle themselves, Claude's AIDS storyline was first introduced to the audience following an earlier exchange belittling Québec history. Given the contentious status of the Catholic church following the Quiet Revolution, the men ridicule the anachronism of studying parochial history in Québec. As a sign of their disdain, they suggest rolling Monseigneur Bishop Bourget's sermons "very tightly and slowly shove them up [their] ass." In response, Claude simulates bottoming, grimacing to signal how objectionable said sermons are. This brief scene not only evokes Arcand's conflation of homosexuality with parochial pederasty, but it also attempts to secularize the notion of sin. While such sacrilegious humour was now commonplace in Québec, Loiselle suggest that this "brief succession of actions conflates Bourget's sermons, anal sex, and disease, ...play[ing] upon the homophobic link between homosexuality and death in western culture."⁶⁶ More than simply portraying a secular and nationalist disdain for the Church, this symbolic juxtaposition mobilizes the nascent AIDS panic as a metaphor for post-referendum cultural anxieties.

Immediately following this exchange, we are presented with the first indication of Claude's "mystery" illness. After Claude excuses himself from the kitchen, he stops momentarily to brace himself along a low display shelf in a moment of self-contemplation. As Claude enters the washroom and begins to urinate, the toilet bowl is filled with a stream of crimson red blood. The shot immediately cuts to Claude's face, which his filled with expression of dread and worry, but unexpectedly not shock nor surprise. As he wipes away his perspiration, it becomes clear that

⁶⁵ Podmore 2015: p. 256

⁶⁶ Loiselle 2006: p. 41.

Claude is already aware of his possible seropositivity. Beyond simply reaffirming Claude's symbolic castration in associating his hematuria (blood in urine) with menstruation, this event connotes a moral judgment of Claude's homosexual sins. Arcand symbolically reinforces this in his portrayal of Claude's classroom lecture later in the film (such scenes outline the cultural politics of most of the primary characters), Arcand references the necropolitical orientation of Claude's queer characterization. "There are painters of the night like Rembrandt or Georges De La Tour," Claude explains to his class, "but there are few who paint the dawn. Dawn is the hour of death, the hour of sea-grey light. There is Géricault and above all Caravaggio." The allusion to death frames Claude's own health issues as he is shown passing a renaissance style painting of torture (or an orgy?) following his hematuria scene.



Figure 2.9. Claude alarming hematuria juxtaposed by a necro-aesthetic representation of his anguish (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

Placing Arcand's discourse on AIDS within its historical context reveals how he riddles the representation of the crisis with misinformation. While the period's sense of panic and hysteria diluted often public perception of scientific knowledge during this period of the pandemic, Arcand was a well-read intellectual and certainly had a level of awareness of AIDS to include it in the film, albeit through his heterosexist perspective.⁶⁷ Although Arcand attempts to humanize Claude's possible struggle with HIV, the use of a hematuria to signal his illness is misleading, as blood in urine is not a diagnostic symptom of seroconversion. Schwartzwald claims

"[the] theatricalization of homosexuality in the *Déclin*, whether it be in the over-determination of the physical symptoms of an illness (where 'gay blood' is, in and of itself, emblematic of AIDS and death), or even in the impossibly choreographic representation of cruising on Mount Royal, betrays the silencing gesture behind a repressive tolerance that seems willing to admit the depiction of homosexuality as something 'normal.'"⁶⁸

This attitude contours the rampant heterosexist ignorance of the pandemic that underpins Arcand's flippant use of AIDS as a trope. Echoing the sensationalist fallacy of food as a HIV transmission vector, Rémy facetiously asks Claude "you sure you don't have AIDS, with your hands in the dough?!" While Claude is already confounded by his mystery illness introduced a few scenes prior,

⁶⁷ Hays (2004): p. 42.

⁶⁸ Schwartzwald 1991: p 184.

he nonetheless performs to homosociality by diffusing the question with an informed joke, "umm, I don't know. It's 2 to 5 years' incubation. Do you wanna test my saliva?" Despite being secretly panicked, Claude does not necessarily deny that he is seropositive, but rather attempts to present as knowledgeable yet witty by slightly opening his mouth to Rémy. While Arcand clearly posits Rémy's statement as a joke, the cultural angst and public misinformation during this period renders the humour quite moot, especially for queer spectators.

Arcand's presentation of AIDS serves more to provoke moral introspection rather than socially educate. Conversely, as a representative the ascendant Generation X, Alain responds compassionately to Claude by inquiring whether he is fearful of the possibility of AIDS. Considering that Claude is already secretly in the midst of a crisis, he does not engage emotionally. Rather, Claude retorts "It's part of the pleasure. Anyway, disease is a part of sex," in an attempt to deflate the subject and relate to men in heterosexual terms they would understand. In this gesture of homosociality, Claude resorts to identifying vaginas as a source of contagion. This queer expression of misogyny attempts to deflate the AIDS panic through heterosexist discourse, an important nuance which feminist scholars like Bersianik failed to recognize. In fact, she most potently illustrated the homo and serophobic social climate of *Le Déclin*. In response to Claude's misogyny, she does not attack Arcand, but rather the character himself, calling Claude an "AIDS Candidate."⁶⁹ In the debate sparked by Bersianik in *Le Devoir*, Waugh notes that "one reader reputedly even asked what an AIDS patient was doing preparing dinners for others."⁷⁰ While such statements ultimately reinforce Arcand's articulation of AIDS, homosexuality, and cultural decline, Bersianik's liberal feminist homophobia presents an even more insidious framing of AIDS that entirely evacuates the humanity from Claude's epidemiologic characterization. While Claude attempts to frame STIs as a universal occupational hazard of sexuality, Alain remains resolute that "it's not as bad as AIDS." In this context, AIDS is clearly only associated with the precarity of a homosexual lifestyle. Even though the other heterosexual men have at some point contracted an STI, Claude's situation is framed as much direr. While Arcand does not frame Claude exclusively as a hypersexual pariah (as the other professors are also preoccupied by sex), his presentation is distinctly scripted by such misinformed discourse on the pandemic.

As the subject of AIDS emerges within the narrative's larger moral discussions of sex and intimacy, Arcand's treatment of the crisis emerges as provocative yet problematic. Inasmuch as Arcand's mobilization of AIDS is principally symbolic, it also scantily portrays the material consequences of the pandemic. Baily (2016) suggests that Arcand deploys "AIDS as just one part of a much larger landscape of neo-liberal, post-modern disenchantment, obsessed with consumption (sexual or material) and prone to both superficiality and greed. HIV/AIDS is incorporated into a critique of all that is wrong with the era."⁷¹ Similarly, Loiselle suggests that the AIDS discourse "connotes the state of epistemological despair in which this entire generation

⁶⁹ Bersianik, Louky. "L'Empire du statu quo." *Le Devoir* (August 9, 1986): p. C1.

⁷⁰ Waugh 2000: p. 169

⁷¹ Bailey, Andrew Gordon. "The Representations of HIV/AIDS in Québec Cinema, 1986-1996." PhD Diss. University of Leeds, 2016: p. 170.

finds itself.”⁷² The socio-cultural rhetoric on AIDS in the film certainly was timely concerning the recent emergence of the crisis, and it was certainly much more poignant to gay audiences.⁷³

In conflating sexuality and death vis-à-vis his homophobic discourse on AIDS, Arcand ultimately classifies homosexuality as a symptom of societal decline. While the film is focused on social ramifications of the baby boomers’ sexual hedonism, some are deemed more culpable for its national decline than others. Claude’s homosexuality is distinctly framed as a necropolitical marker as of moral degeneracy of the collapsing heteropatriarchal nation. Marshall argues “Claude has to be portrayed as secretly ill in order to counterbalance, not only the “positive” characteristics he embodies, the combination of freedom and empathy, but also the impossibility of heterosexual relationships that the film has relentlessly and devastatingly portrayed.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Waugh (2002) suggests that Arcand has Claude urinate blood in order to “absolve/exculpate the promiscuity of his heterosexual friends.”⁷⁵ In a similar fashion to his critique of feminism, Arcand posits Claude’s homosexuality as a necropolitical foil to temper his criticism of heteropatriarchy and its forms of neoliberal decadence.

Almost twenty years later in *Les Invasions barbares* (2003), Arcand re-stages Claude without any mention of his illness whatsoever. Considering the lacuna of pharmaceutical interventions until over a decade after *Le Déclin*, it is wonderous that he is still alive. This question of whether Claude really was seropositive is historically fraught with inconsistencies. In various interviews following the release of the film, Arcand dispelled the notion that Claude was seropositive.⁷⁶ Despite the international association of Québec with the AIDS crisis by way of the Gaetan Dugas’ posthumous scapegoating, Arcand refuted the local urgency of the AIDS crisis. In fact, he claimed in an interview that “it was not an epidemic like New York City or Los Angeles.”⁷⁷ Conversely, gay critics of the film were quite cognizant of film’s latent AIDS discourse and called out Arcand for his erasure of AIDS in the years between *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*.” One such critic, Matthew Hays proclaimed,

“Applying the basic tenets of what one might vaguely regard as realism, there’s virtually no way this character could possibly still be alive 17 years later. So the lack of even a mention of AIDS or HIV in the sequel seems bizarre. *Les Invasions barbares*, of course, is a film about mortality in general, with specific references to a collapsing health—care system. What better place to make further allusions to AIDS, an epidemic that created a massive medical crisis for minority communities

⁷² Loiselle 2006: p. 57.

⁷³ Bailey suggests that “Claude sheds much light on the experiences and fears of gay men during the AIDS crisis. He is honest about his promiscuity however, in contrast with predominant stereotypes, he is not defined by this fact; he is a warm, friendly, likeable man who has friends, feelings and fears of his own. As such, his portrayal adds depth and nuance to prevalent stereotypes of gay men and their suffering PLWHA counterpart.” See: Baily 2016: p. 170.

⁷⁴ Marshall 2001, p. 292.

⁷⁵ Waugh, Thomas. “Mike Hoolboom and the Second Generation of AIDS films in Canada” in *North of Everything*, William Beard & Jerry White, eds. University of Alberta Press, 2002.

⁷⁶ Hays 2004: p. 42

⁷⁷ Insdorf, Annette. “View from Across the Border: Director Surveys ‘American Empire’” *LA Times* (25 December 1986).

in the West and has effectively crippled much of the developing world? Arcand's sidestepping of the issue appears even more glaring when one takes this into consideration, not to mention his pre-filmmaking career as a historian. Imagine the possibilities this sequel presented in terms of the subject of HIV/AIDS. Perhaps protagonist Remy looked back on his life and pondered his own demise, some flashbacks could have shown us what Claude suffered at the hands of an equally clueless, hemorrhaging hospital system."⁷⁸

In 1993, Arcand admitted Claude's seropositive status in an interview with Hays—over a decade after the film's release.⁷⁹ Yet in an interview with the same journalist after the release of the sequel a decade later, Arcand paradoxically recanted that Claude had AIDS.

There are many plausible reasons for such a redaction. The sequel's erasure of AIDS parallels a homonormative de-radicalization/mainstreaming of the pandemic during this period. Alongside the late-90s introduction of a comprehensive HIV regimen (HAART), emergent mainstream homonormative politics began to distance itself from the marginalizing stigma of AIDS.⁸⁰ Puar contends that "the lexicon of contagion and disease suture the etymological and political links of terrorist infiltration and invasion to queerness and the AIDS [pandemic]"⁸¹ As early as Shilts' 1987 book, even white neoliberal gay men attempted to employ the rhetoric of AIDS to differentiate good gays from bad queers (terrorists in Puar's terms) to parse some degree of moral superiority and social capital—elements central to homonationalism. Accordingly, alongside wider public campaigns to de-essentialize AIDS from homosexuality, the introduction of HAART deeply influenced a normative rebranding of gay representational politics by the turn of the century. As with this, many mainstream queer contemporaries of *Les Invasions* like *Mambo Italiano* (dir. Émile Gaudreault, 2003) and were evacuated entirely from the spectre of the pandemic. Nonetheless, queer films on AIDS flourished in Quebec during the early 1990s. From the comedy, *L'Escorte* (dir. Denis Langlois, 1996) to the documentary, *Médecins de cœur* (dir. Tahani Rached, 1993), AIDS briefly became a central theme in queer cinema and representation in Québec during the 1990s. The NFB documentary, *Quand l'amour est gai* (dir. Laurent Gagliardi, 1994) was ground-breaking for its comprehensive (white) portrait of queerness and AIDS as well as its interspliced nude sequences of gay sex. Although accentuating their difference by confronting a politicized subject like AIDS, such films began to be couched in a homonormative rhetoric that appealed to notions of integrationist universalism. John Greyson's AIDS musical, *Zero Patience* (1993) politically departed through a queer revisionist narrative to finally absolve Dugas of his cultural scapegoating. Notwithstanding these examples, Arcand's erasure of the pandemic from his sequel reveals that AIDS was never the real issue; rather it was a smokescreen for the fear of queer contagion to heteromascularity. Ostensibly, Arcand modernized Claude's

⁷⁸ Hays (2004): p. 43.

⁷⁹ Hay's article in which Arcand contradicts himself was censored by the Toronto Star, who originally commissioned the interview. See: Waugh 2002.

⁸⁰ Duggan, Lisa. "The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism." *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics* 10 (2002): pp. 179-181.

⁸¹ Puar 2007. p. 52.

1980s portrayal in *Les Invasions* to pander to an upward homonormative market and align with the budding homonationalist mandates of respectable representational politics.

In *Les Invasions*, Claude is evacuated from the (necro)politics of AIDS and now framed by neoliberal interests and homonationalist desires. Initially, the absence of any AIDS discourse is quite palpable as the sequel is centered around Rémy impending death and the ideological and material breakdown of the universal healthcare system. Two decades later, as this symbol of national modernity is collapsing under the pressures of healthcare privatization and corrupt unions, Claude conversely is flourishing into a model homonational subject. This sanitization of national contagion vis-à-vis AIDS from his characterization furthers such a modernized respectable representation. He has transformed from an anti-domestic gay into the paragon of homonational privilege. While still is framed as the cosmopolitan homosexual, he is presented as an expat with a cushy academic directorship and a handsome Italian lover. The embodiment of a *federaste*, Claude now works at the Canadian Institute at the University of Rome, a job that he acquired by sleeping with gay foreign affairs officials in Ottawa. Loiselle describes, “Claude casually pops a grape in Pierre’s mouth as he walks around the room entertainingly bragging about the bureaucratic quagmire that allows his institute to dodge funding cutbacks.”⁸² As a symbol of homonationalist infiltration into the state apparatus, Arcand frames Claude and his clandestine governmental connections as equally corrupt as the neoliberal PQ during the 1980 and 1990s.



Figure 2.10. Claude with his Italian lover, Alessandro; a symbol of the domestic homonational (screenshot, *Les Invasions barbares*)

Effectively, Claude has become heterosexualized by the normative mandates of homonationalism in that his social status and capital are now equivalent to (or even better) than his peers. Puar argues that under homonationalism,

“There is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but certainly not most—homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the ‘measures of benevolence’

⁸² Loiselle 2006: p. 124.

that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity. This benevolence toward sexual others is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity.”⁸³

To this degree, as Claude returns from Italy with his domestic partner, his hunger for sex has been replaced by a desire for gourmet fare. Claude now represents the homonormative settling down of gay men into a comfortable role in society – from the easy hookups and AIDS scare of the 1980s to upstanding citizens in stable relationships. Puar contends that “certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist project.”⁸⁴ If Arcand waited until the 20th anniversary of the film, Claude would likely be married to coincide with the passage of same-sex marriage legislation in 2004. No longer is he marginalized as a corrosive figure or the locus of contagion. Rather, as the one original protagonist with a seemingly stable professional and personal life, Claude embraces his role as the complicit homonationalist.

The homonationalist rhetoric of Claude’s ascent from ‘AIDS patient’ to expat elite reflects Arcand’s (and Québec’s) uneasy embrace of the homonormative subject as symbol of national progress. It is important to reiterate that homonationalism is not a diagnostic, and my aim is not to present whether Arcand’s films are homonationalist. Rather, I trace Claude’s trajectory from national threat to commodity, and how this rests upon the manifestation of an exterior danger, namely in the form of queered and/or racialized others. Following the seismic failure of the 1995 Referendum, as people of colour were targeted by xenophobic campaigns, (white) gays began to be furthered welcomed into the national family—a theme I will explore later in this chapter and extensively in Chapter 3. Around this time, Yves Jacques, the actor who played Claude, came out not only in support of the Referendum, but also as gay.⁸⁵ Jacques noted that the positive reception of Claude’s homosexuality and social change of the early 1990s helped embolden him to later come out in time for the sequel, which ostensibly filtered in his re-characterization of almost Claude twenty years later. Since then, *Le Déclin* has been widely celebrated for normalizing the cultural representation and reception of homosexuality during the 1980s, a fundamental step in the path to homonationalism.

2.6: QUEER(ED) CONTAMINATION

The character of Mario is one of Arcand’s most dynamic figures in *Le Déclin*. Although marginal within the film plot, his presence extends into all reaches of the film. Positioned as Diane’s brute sadomasochistic lover, his background is as much a mystery to her as the audience. Despite this, scholars have widely historically scripted Mario as “the apotheosis of genuine Québécois working-

⁸³ Puar 2007: p. xxi.

⁸⁴ Puar 2007: p. 39.

⁸⁵ Loiselle 2006: p. 111.

class masculinity”⁸⁶ and “a Rousseauist man, uncontaminated by civilization's discontents”⁸⁷ On the surface, Mario is posited as a counter-point to the cosmopolitan intellectuals in his disruption of their 1980s neoliberal politesse. From his appearance as a leather-clad biker to his usage of joul rather than the mid-Atlantic standard French of the professors,⁸⁸ Mario represents the growing symbolic and material chasms between the Québécois intelligentsia and the national(ist) proletariat. Pospíšil claims

“Mario intentionally identifies with the place where he lives, its language and culture, the university figures belong to the global culture. They are certainly aware of the specific features of the Quebec identity. At the same time, they regard such notions as historically determined and rather contingent cultural constructs, which for them lack the visceral appeal experienced by ardent nationalists or local patriots [like Mario].”⁸⁹

Mario represents the conflict between nationalist cultural values and contemporary sexual practices. While his heterosexuality may be unconventional, Mario’s rugged and virile comportment stands nonetheless in stark opposition to the neoliberalized male professors. The character of Mario was played by Gabriel Arcand, the director’s brother. Alongside this casting, Arcand’s choice of the name Mario renders the character familiar to local audiences, as the name has historically been quite popular in Québec. Significantly, this name is also commonplace in (racialized) sites of increasing emigration to Québec like Italy and Latin America. This is important considering that scholars have posited Mario as the most emblematic Québécois character in the film, a nationalist symbol of authentic *pure laine* masculinity.

Framed by opposing cultural forces, Arcand mobilizes Mario as a foil to critique the era’s sexual politics and its socio-economic factors. As a brute amongst the elite, Mario is unwilling to conform to the bourgeois respectability politics that the heterosexual professors uncharacteristically attempt to perform in his presence. As he crassly snubs their foreign food and beer, he’s not simply resisting their neoliberalism, he is unwilling to engage in their farce. In *Le Déclin*, Mario operates as a working-class agent provocateur exposing how detached the elites have become from everyday Québécois. Growing tired of their loquaciousness, Mario retorts “You intellectuals only talk about sex. All afternoon they went on about sex. I expected a big orgy. Instead, the big thrill is a fish pie.” While the other members remain gobsmacked, Dominique asks “what do you suggest?” Being a figure who doesn’t seem to mince his words, Mario candidly responds while erotically grabbing Diane’s hair: “When she gets me hard, I fuck her. It’s as simple as that. What do you say? Well, how about it?” Even though he references only Diane while talking about sex, their sadomasochistic relationship already challenges heteronormative

⁸⁶ Harcourt, Peter. “Le Déclin de l’empire Américain The Decline of the American Empire,” in *The Cinema of Canada*, Jerry White, ed. Wallflower Press, 2006: p. 149.

⁸⁷ Dorland, Michael. “Le Déclin de l’empire Américain.” *Cinema Canada* 134 (October 1986): p. 15.

⁸⁸ While Arcand sometimes gives clues to the Québécois context of the film, it is often obfuscated. He uses standard French to appeal to a wider international box office. See: Loiselle 2006: p. 19-20.

⁸⁹ Pospíšil, Tomáš. Representation of the Other in Canadian Film. In *Us-Them-Me: The Search for Identity in Canadian Literature and Film*, Nous-Eux-moi: La quête de l’identité dans la littérature et le cinéma canadiens. Masarykova univerzita, 2009: p. 234.

conventions. Mario's presence and Diane's desire for his hypermasculinity emasculates the other straight men, most of whom would (or have) already have sex with her previously. Despite his non-normative sexual proclivities, Mario's virility resist being marginalized. Unlike Claude whose sexual expression only exists symbolically, Mario refuses to have his sexuality constrained by such discursive limits; he just wants to fuck.



Figure 2.11. Mario's resistance to respectability of the professors' bourgeois sexual politics
(screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

While his surface representation may initially seem one-dimensional, Mario's presence in the film is charged with political potency. During Act 1, Arcand mobilizes Claude's homosexuality to dampen Rémy's hypersexuality into a 'socially acceptable' form of womanizing. Mario's introduction in Act 2 upsets this dynamic by destabilizing the film's initial demarcations of heterosexuality and queerness. Although Rémy's philandering escapes being charged as queer, Mario seems to be able to exist comfortably between both poles. Whereas Mario is constructed as hypermasculine and culturally authentic, this presentation is inverted by his hypersexual subtext. This ultimately suggests that even 'real men' have been effeminized by the new sexual politics of the 1980s. Loiselle contends that "in spite of his 'rugged masculinity,' his tough guy persona is *queered*, as it were, rendered 'unbelievable,' by the fact that he wears mascara."⁹⁰ Effectively, Mario operates as a paradox, an assemblage of sexual contradictions. While Mario's stylization was widely evidenced by rockers and New Wave musicians during the 1980s, Mario was scripted as queer(ed) in the film even before his initial appearance.

Although presented as Diane's lover, she initially intimates Mario's potential sexual interest in men. During Act 1, Diane discloses to Dominique that "He's never made love to me normally; always from behind, like a man." Loiselle suggests "Arcand specifically chooses this formulation – rather than simply saying that Mario enjoys penetrating Diane anally – has the effect of turning Mario and Diane's S&M affair into what is essentially a relationship between two men."⁹¹ This may be too essentialist of a reading to suggest a homosexual relationship, I contend this dynamic highlights Mario's disdain for sexual normativity and cultural respectability rather than his sexual orientation per se. Yet, this stance also further imbues him with an air of danger.

⁹⁰ Loiselle 2006: p. 43.

⁹¹ Ibid: p. 45.

In its close association with AIDS, Leo Bersani (1987) argues “anal sex has come to figure, for heterosexuals, as a destructive self-annihilation”⁹² This necropolitical framing of Mario’s sexuality disrupts any static notion of the uncontaminated *pure laine* man. Mario’s unstable masculinity suggests that the contagion of new sexual politics has become endemic within even the furthest reaches of the nation. This precarious subtext of sexual excess and ambiguity is further accentuated by his numerous exchanges with Claude.



Figure 2.12. Mario (*background*) symbolically projected into Claude's (*foreground*) cruising montage (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

During the various occasions when Mario is present on screen, he is visually and discursively aligned with Claude in a game of seduction. As Mario first appears, Claude is clearly smitten with him, and casually flirts by mentioning his chalet’s proximity to Diane’s. When Claude reveals his desire for Mario to Rémy, he concludes by remarking “It’s asking for trouble.” This scripting reinforces Mario with a sense of erotic precarity, what queer vernacular would term *rough trade*, as his ambiguous sexuality imbues Mario with an element of danger and rebellion. Immediately following this sequence, as Claude concludes re-telling his sexual fantasy, Mario lurks outside in the background as if he also was one of the men cruising on ‘the mountain.’ The juxtaposition intimates Mario’s queerness making it look like he is among the other gay men in on the mountain. Given that Claude has already disclosed to his friends that Mario reminded him of his dead lover, Mario becomes further encrypted within Claude’s fantasy of precarious sex.

Later, when Mario unexpectedly appears at the dinner, he again is visually associated with Claude as they sit side by side at the dining table. The exchange seems innocent, but a queerly coded narrative lingers. As Claude pours Mario an imported beer, they exchange looks, and Mario playfully questions Claude’s taste in beer. Mario asks, “what’s with this beer ... you like this?”; “yea, occasionally” Claude coyly replies. This exchange is charged with queer erotic innuendo sexualizing personal preferences. Although Mario would conceivably choose a Québécois Labatt 50 over an expensive import, he doesn’t seem to judge Claude for his cosmopolitan choice. This also further signals Claude’s classist fetishization of Mario’s brute working-class sexual prowess. Whereas Mario criticizes the heterosexual characters’ bourgeois respectability, he never judges

⁹² Bersani, Leo. "Is the rectum a grave?." *October* 43 (1987): p. 207.

Claude. Coupled with his class status, Mario's unrestrained sexual hunger marginalizes him amongst the group, even more than Claude's homosexuality. Like Arcand's central thesis of national decline, homonationalism also requires a foil to establish a moralistic hierarchy.

Mario's presence in the film seems to operate as a queer counter-point for Claude's neoliberal homosexuality, a bad queer to absolve the ascent of the newly privileged gay. Puar would describe his masculinity as "simultaneously pathologically excessive yet repressive, perverse yet homophobic, virile [...] yet monstrous."⁹³ Yet, Arcand surprisingly (and likely fortuitously) constructs a queer subtext between the two characters that resist such a firm binary opposition. This subtext between Claude and Mario is initially established during Act 1 when the latter enters the house to request a glass of water. As they stand side by side alone in the kitchen, they share a coded moment with one another. Claude sizes him up, while Mario tacitly lets himself be looked at while they briefly exchange words: 'Are you on medication?' asks Claude as Mario swallows a few pills. 'A home remedy. It's real strong.' 'I take multi-vitamins,' adds Claude. 'Must be good for you,' responds Mario. Under the guise of a moot conversation, it is evident that they both are aware something connects them. In context of Claude's mystery illness, their discussion of medication assumes a distinctly necropolitical connotation—is this another allusion to AIDS? In their shared marginality, they seem to both understand and be seduced by each another's queer(ed) difference.

As possibly the queerest yet most archetypally Québécois character in the film, the paradoxical figure of Mario inherently embodies the post-Referendum instability of nationalist identity. Although most work on *Le Déclin* scripts Mario as emblematically Québécois, scholars have in fact disagreed about the cultural significance of his presentation in the film. Whereas Heinz Weinmann (1990) suggests Mario "is a caricature of the Québécois of the past—speaking *joual*, refusing to eat fish, and preferring a local [beer] to an import."⁹⁴ Monica Haïm (1986) and Janis L. Pallister (1995) claim that Mario is an immigrant. Pallister states that "he himself is not and cannot be *homo quebecensis* in the flesh, as are the professors: he is the Other, the immigrant, the stranger. He is not Québécois *pure laine*. Rather he is of some foreign extract, Italian, Latin, Hispano-Italian, as his name, Mario Alvarez, reveals."⁹⁵ Although this reading of Mario is unique to Pallister,⁹⁶ it certainly reflects the racist public rhetoric by which immigrants were framed vis-à-vis the Québec national body politic and the cultural imagination. Pallister's xenophobic description of Mario's difference seems more like a zoological classification than an attempt to hypostasize his origins, and this framework ostensibly mirrors cultural attitudes of the period. Considering Mario's scripting as a hypersexual working-class brute, Pallister's liberal feminist

⁹³ Puar 2007: p. xxv.

⁹⁴ Weinmann, Heinz. *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois: de La petite Aurore à Jésus de Montréal*. l'Hexagone, 1990: p. 148.

⁹⁵ Pallister, Janis L. *The cinema of Québec: masters in their own house*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995: p. 266.

⁹⁶ Arcand's published screenplay of the film documents Pallister and Haïm's claim of Mario's Spanish surname. Notably, he is the only character listed with any surname. However, his ethnic difference and surname is referenced nowhere within the script itself, only the character list. See: Arcand, Denys. *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*. Boréal, 1986: p. 8.

reading of the character reinforces the type of fetishistic exotification of racialized men that the female professors exhibit in the film itself.

Mario Alvarez's latent identity in the film debunks Arcand's swansong for *pure laine* heteropatriarchal nationalism. While Arcand's intention behind Mario's (possibly Latino) background may be unresolved, it is Mario's unwavering scripting by scholars (over the past 30+ years) as emblematically *Québécois de souche* that is most telling. As politically polarized figures, the irony of distinguishing a possible immigrant as an authentic symbol of the nation speaks directly to the sexual anxiety of Québec nationalism. In an unwitting inversion of Claude Jutra's framing of Johanne Harrelle, Arcand also incidentally scripts Mario as passing, but this time as *pure laine* Québécois. While he does not present as a racialized minority like Johanne, Mario's presence in Québec is certainly demographically substantiated by waves of Latin American immigration to Québec during the early 1970s, especially following the US-funded coup in Chile.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding his specific national origins, Mario's covert outsidership stokes the terror of foreign contagion to the future of *pure laine* Québec. This scholarly confusion regarding Mario's background ultimately flattens his 'authenticity' by revealing the white artifice upon which Quebec national identity has been built. Moreover, it makes clear that *pure laine* whiteness is merely symbolic, and its currency is pre-determined by the circumstances in which it operates.⁹⁸ Coupled with his queered scripting, Mario's ethnic difference signals the multicultural and queer horizons in Québec that are already hiding in plain sight.

2.7. NEOCOLONIAL SEXUAL FETISHISM

Since the 1960s, Arcand has illustrated the tense relationship between sexuality and racial difference in Québec. As discussed earlier in this chapter as well as Chapter 1, Arcand penned one of the most scathing reviews of Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre*. Alongside his homophobic takedown of the film narrative and its director, Arcand launched a racist tirade on the film's Black co-star, Johanne Harrelle. While Arcand meekly skirted around directly addressing Harrelle, he reduces her representation to an immature passing fancy. Marshall argues that "Arcand identified national maturity with heterosexual relations with 'one's own,' women of the real, of the 'everyday.' There we find, I think, an unconscious refusal to coincide with one's collective self."⁹⁹ Echoing *pure laine* nationalist propaganda, Arcand stated that if Jutra's film were more insightful, "it would have ended with Johanne's death."¹⁰⁰ Effectively, as a foreign woman (despite her professed Québécois origin), Johanne is expendable as a sexual object. Arcand objectifies Johanne as an exotic conquest and minimizes her sexual agency in the film in a manner that forecasts his future racist and orientalist treatment of racialized women in his later films.

⁹⁷ See: Hazelton, Hugh. "Quebec Hispánico: Themes of Exile and Integration in the Writing of Latin Americas Living in Québec." *Canadian literature* 142-143 (1994): pp. 120-135.

⁹⁸ See: Scott, C. "How French Canadians Became White Folks, or doing Things with Race in Quebec." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39.7 (2015): pp. 1280-1297.

⁹⁹ Marshall 2010: p. 34.

¹⁰⁰ Denys Arcand. "Cinema et sexualité." *Parti pris* no. 9-11 (1964): p. 97.

Within the decades following his racist critique, Arcand repackaged his nationalist sexual anxiety of interracial sexuality into a neocolonial forms of sexual fetishism. Québec diversified during this period after various waves of immigration from Africa, Asia, and Latin America since the 1960s. Despite the presence of women of colour in *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*, either as real persons or imagined objects of sexual interest, most of them exist non-verbally. The films assemble a colourist hierarchy leveraging East Asian and white ethnic woman as fetishized sexual objects while diminishing Black and brown women as either absent or silent threats to the nation. Arcand builds upon a history of orientalist rhetoric in cinema, as his later reference (in *Les Invasions*) to the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Philippe Sollers evidences. Furthermore, *90 Days* (dir. Giles Walker, 1985), a fellow NFB production released the year prior featured an orientalist plotline with a Korean woman being scripted as mail-order bride. Such orientalist rhetoric of sexual objectification effectively infiltrates the male professors' framing of exotic women as sexual commodities.

Le Déclin begins with a close-up shot of a heavily made-up Vietnamese female student in her early 20s listening to Rémy's lecture on demographic historiography. Despite never reappearing, she leaves a lasting impression as a leitmotif of the of the film's orientalist sexual politics. As a token of ambivalent neoliberal demographic shifts in Québec, Arcand (by way of Rémy) responds by reducing her into an exotic sexual object. While evading discussion of Dominique's feminist text, Rémy pivots back to the student as an object his orientalist desire, "Speaking of feminine power...you should see the Vietnamese girl in my class." Framing her as a sexual commodity, Rémy then alludes to a possible sexual transaction, "The problem with Orientals, it's that always they're giving my money to their sick brother. I can't imagine them as ontologically perverse." While Rémy does not suggest that he slept with the student, he nevertheless characterizes her as sexually available to his orientalist patriarchal and economic control. Rémy's inability to imagine the student as "ontologically perverse" is rhetorically grounded in Arcand essentialist framing of exotic women as servile sexual objects focused solely on pleasuring men. Unlike the white protagonists in the film, the Southeast Asian student (like the other woman of colour either mentioned or shown), does not represent a threat to Arcand's heteropatriarchy or the nation itself, as they function only as exoticized objects of imperial desire.



Figure 2.13. An object of Arcand's orientalist fetishism
(screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)



Figure 2.14. Danielle (background) in Yellowface performing as the servile Asian woman with Pierre (foreground) at a massage parlor (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

In spite of the relative absence of racialized women within the film, Arcand manifests his orientalist sexual politics through the lens of a white woman in Yellowface. In one of the most memorable scenes of the films, Pierre is introduced to Danielle, a white sex-worker in a massage parlor costumed as a geisha. In a clear reference to the Vietnamese student, Danielle wears the same makeup. As a white woman privileged with some degree of sexual agency, Danielle's performance of Yellowface capitalizes upon Asian feminine stereotypes to mobilize orientalist fantasies of sexual submission. Susan Koshy (2005) asserts that "prevailing sexual stereotypes generate a representation of Asian women as the 'sexual model minority': ideal in their union of sex appeal with a strong work ethic."¹⁰¹ Sumi K. Cho (1997) suggests this may be motivated by an "antifeminist backlash in men who wish to return to traditional gender roles supposedly exemplified by the demure, obedient Asian woman."¹⁰² In this act of cultural appropriation and sexual fetishization, Arcand indirectly scripts exotic women as servile sexual commodities. Most notably, Black and brown women are absent both visually and discursively within *Le Déclin*. Cho (1997) also emphasizes that this 'sexual model minority' stereotype positions "Asian women as a foil against stereotypes of lazy and politically demanding Black woman and against (white) women endorsing feminist values of independence and autonomy."¹⁰³ Through superimposing sex work with orientalist sexual subjugation, Arcand frames only neutralized exotic women as sexual objects for consumption.

Insomuch as Arcand never actually visualizes any inter-racial sex (beyond Danielle in Yellowface), he romanticizes the men's exotic desires in order absolve the racist and orientalist nature of his sexual discourse. In a later scene as Rémy romanticises the aromas of other exotic women: "The Jewesses' and Arab's fragrance of camphor. The Vietnamese with their scent of orange blossoms. Gets me excited." Loïselle describes his fetishistic taste in women "as a not too

¹⁰¹ Koshy, Susan. *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation*. Stanford University Press, 2004: p. 39.

¹⁰² Cho, Sumi K. 'Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong'. *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 1 (1998-1997): p. 177.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

subtle analogy for the elusiveness of the female lovers they imagine. Not only are the women they fantasize about exotic, but they are also *impossible*.” Homi K. Bhabha (1983) explains “racial fetishism is woven into colonial discourse whose goal is to define the colonized as 'other,' but also as fixed and knowable stereotypes. Racial fetishism involves contradictory belief systems where the 'other' is both demonized and idolized.”¹⁰⁴ This orientalist subjugation of Asian and white ethnic women effectively evacuates their agency, sexual or otherwise, by allowing the white professors to govern the politics of their representation. Effectively, Arcand fetishizes such woman in order to suppress their political potency and defuse them as potential threats to their white nationalist masculinity.

As the only Black character in *Le Déclin*, Mustafa inadvertently upsets this fetishistic colonial dynamic. As their colleague, Mustafa disrupts the ethno-eroticism exhibited by the white professors in their orientalist and colonialist fetishisms. While Mustafa appears only once during the film, he is first referenced by the female professors during a conversation on inter-racial sex. Despite being an exotic subject by way of his Blackness, the female professors refuse to acknowledge Mustafa as sexual object. After Diane affirms that “African Blacks are the best,” Dominique factitiously enquires “Like Mustafa?,” to which Diane quickly retorts, “No! I don’t like men who drool over me.” While Diane delivers a fair point that Mustafa may not be suave, what is more potent here is her relation to her Black colleague. While both Diane and Dominique have engaged in sexual affairs with white faculty, they refute the possibility of sleeping with Mustafa. Whereas Diane does not explicitly mention Mustafa’s Blackness as undesirable, she paradoxically follows her rejection by stating “I don’t know, Black Africans are somehow warmer.”

Why is Mustafa scripted differently in this racist sexual generalization? To better understand such an exception, we need to return to my earlier discussion of Diane and Dominique’s orientalist and colonialist fetishism. Surrounding their discourse on Mustafa, Diane and Dominique engage masculinist sexual scripts to mock and emasculate their ethno-racial sexual conquests. In their racially fetishistic anecdotes, the female professors playfully revel in their white colonial supremacy and economic dominance. As a professor, Mustafa is less of a sexual commodity, upsetting the professor’s classist and colonial sexual dynamic. In effect, Mustafa’s alleged sexual interest in Diane becomes (mis)read a post-colonial Black sexual re-conquest of white women. Such sentiment was already flowing within the Québécois zeitgeist following the release of Dany Laferrière’s infamous novel, *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*, the year before *Le Déclin*. Subtly evoking centuries of colonial fear of Black male sexuality, Diane categorically refuses to be rendered into a sexual object, especially by her racialized professional equal.

In kind with neoliberal socio-economic mandates of Québec during the 1980s, Arcand attempts to diversify his central cast through the tangential inclusion of Mustafa, a visiting Black professor from Burkina Faso. In the figure of a temporary, albeit privileged, francophone migrant, Mustafa exemplifies the post-Referendum globalizing of Québécois multicultural and immigration

¹⁰⁴ Bhabha, Homi K. "The other question...." *Screen* 24.6 (1983): p. 22

policies. In effect, Mustafa's presence in the film strategically capitalizes upon the anti-colonial rhetoric of the Quiet Revolution and its exploitative mobilization of Blackness as a political tool. Framed as an expert on the West African Mossi culture, Mustafa fundamentally serves an imported commodity within the history department of a public institution (Université de Montréal). With Rémy's casual reference to Mustafa's UNESCO funding, Arcand subtly reassures Québécois audiences that their tax dollars have not paid for Mustafa's residency. Whereas such academic accolades certainly do not go unnoticed by the group, they are more invested in deploying Mustafa as a comedic foil to facilitate sexual and racist rhetoric. While professors exhibit their intellect of African geo-politics vis-à-vis Mustafa, they ultimately mobilize this knowledge into racist sexual punchlines on Robert Mugabe and international economic aid programs.

In line with Arcand's inclusion of a gay academic (Claude), the male professors homosocially relate to Mustafa vis-à-vis his (racial) alterity. As the men joke about sending some of their haute cuisine to Mustafa and Robert Mugabe in Ouagadougou, Alain (the younger male grad student) retorts "You're disgusting," disavowing their racist banter. While he represents the voice of the ascendant Generation X and the future of academia, Rémy dismisses Alain by asserting "No one is more dedicated to the Negros. I took Mustafa to a strip joint last Thursday." As a self-professed womanizer, it is hardly surprising that Rémy invited Mustafa to such a traditional homosocial space. But what is more critical here is the term Rémy uses in reference to Mustafa. While the women discuss Mustafa and other Black men in colonial terms, Rémy employs the racist term Negro (*nègre*) in reference to Mustafa. Ultimately, this racist slippage goes unnoticed by the group, as they are more invested in the salacious details of a homosocial outing with a Black man. As Rémy reveals that Mustafa has proven unsuccessful in sleeping with a Canadian after two months of trying, he reflects, "Our co-eds must be losing interest in the third-world!" Rémy may be confused by Mustafa's lack of exotic appeal, but he attempts to ameliorate the matter by taking Mustafa to Boulevard St-Laurent to find a sex worker. As Rémy mentions that "[Mustafa] was feeling so dejected," Claude queerly jests "Don't you mean erected?!" In this instance, Mustafa is reduced by Claude to a Black phallus, a brief signal of his potential for racist fetishization (already subtextually hinted at earlier with Mario). As Rémy negotiates so that Mustafa "wouldn't squander [his] UNESCO funds;" Rémy appeals to the prostitute's pop humanitarianism, "Consider this as your contribution to African relief like singing 'we are the world.'" This witty sexualization of a neoliberal international aid program profoundly exhibits Arcand cynically ambivalent attitude to the globalization that is now commonplace in a borderland space like Boulevard St-Laurent.

This scene is quite complex, and its meaning become clear once the sex worker is revealed to be a transgender woman. As the sex worker agrees to sex with Mustafa, she also advises Rémy that "your negro is in for a big surprise." At this moment, Rémy comes to realize his blunder and politely declines on Mustafa's behalf. Although Rémy forgoes the transaction after realizing the sex worker's trans identity, Arcand exploits the potential interfacing of race and queerness in this scene. Decisively, Rémy does not disclose the reason to Mustafa, as this would illustrate how Rémy's years of womanizing cannot make him immune to 'being tricked' by a trans prostitute. In

lieu of any explanation as to why the transaction failed, Mustafa concludes “She’s racist!”, to which Rémy defends, “She’s not racist, she’s sexist.” While Mustafa attempts to call attention to potential sexual racism, Rémy undercuts the potency of this political assemblage by way of a humorous response. As his sole line in the entire film, it is unfortunate that Mustafa’s concern is dismissed, as the prostitute actually did engage racist vernacular. Like Rémy, the sex worker also referred to Mustafa pejoratively as *nègre*, as she reveals “your negro is in for a big surprise.” Despite the transphobic nature of her filmic presentation and scholarly reception,¹⁰⁵ Arcand accidentally illustrates how even the most queered white subjects can still rest upon racist forms of power.



Figure 2.15. Arcand comically exploiting the political intersections between race and queerness (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

Despite Mustafa’s potential sexual prowess vis-à-vis his mythic Blackness, he nevertheless is scripted as sexually impotent. The female professors don’t find him suave, and even though Rémy mentions that he introduces him to a woman, but we are left unaware of whatever transpired. Arcand forestalls the possibility for imagining that Mustafa would be open to sex with a trans prostitute, assuming that Mustafa cannot be perverse. Early on in the film, Rémy states that he has difficulty imaging Asian women as “ontologically perverse.” While the framing of Black male and Asian female sexuality operates according to distinct yet interfacing cultural discourses, Arcand nevertheless also frames Mustafa outside of any potential for ontological perversity. This logic is informed by colonial and orientalist constructions essentializing racialized immigrants as not modern or progressive. Puar states “immigrant populations [are framed by] deeply entrenched homophobia, which cast [them] as conservative and traditional when it can fuel anti-immigrant discourses.”¹⁰⁶ Effectively, such xenophobic rhetoric scripts such immigrants as queered threats to the nation’s (neo)liberal sexual politics. Through the conceptual framework of homonationalism, sexual representation of the film’s auxiliary racialized/foreign male characters (Mustafa and Mario) is revealed as unavertedly queered.

By virtue of their ontological difference, Mustafa and Claude (and by extension, Mario) represent varying challenges to the normative constructions of Québécois sexual citizenship. Claude’s homosexual representation signals a politics of (neo)liberal pluralism, his whiteness

¹⁰⁵ Whereas most scholars have glossed over the sex worker’s representation, Loiselle conflates drag queens with being transgender, revealing the transphobic nature of her cultural reception. See: Loiselle 2006: p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Puar 2007: p. 29.

sanitizes his alterity to facilitate his social inclusion amongst his colleagues. The culturally mediated reification of Claude's gay sexuality symbolically parallels the narratological treatment of Mustafa's Black sexuality, as both are politically figured as potentially disruptive to the futurity of the *pure laine* nation. In effect, the only culturally sanctioned visual representations of sexuality in *Le Déclin* are those which reaffirm the white heteronormative mandates of Québec nationalism. While Claude's necropolitical orientation first renders him a national threat, over the next two decades will be replaced by one of homonational vitality. While Mustafa's lack of sexual agency in *Le Déclin* seems to mirror Claude's in their shared framing as symbolically both hypersexual and impotent, Claude's centrality not only as a character, but more importantly, as a white homonormative subject will come to neutralize him as a threat in time for the film's sequel. Although, as social minorities, both Claude and Mustafa's sexual representation remains unrealized and un-visualized in *Le Déclin*, this is for distinctly different reasons. While their representation operates according to distinct yet interfacing cultural discourses on race and sexuality, the relative obfuscation of their sexual agency reinforces the supremacy of white nationalist cultural values. Puar contends that "the production of gay and queer[ed] bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate [white] heterosexuality as the norm."¹⁰⁷ Due to his status as a main character as well as his potential seropositivity, Claude's sexuality initially represents a profound threat to the nation's futurity, which will shift as the nation comes to recognize his importance as a capital as well as symbolic commodity. However, as marginal character both in terms of his Blackness and narratological importance, Mustafa immediately represents a more innocuous threat. His temporary residency and inability to hook up renders him a modest hazard. Ultimately, Mustafa's presence primarily operates to reinforce the white professors as sexually liberated. However, Mario's presence undercuts this notion by calling attention to how out of touch the white elite are. The professors, like the white nationalist elite, are effectively incapable of leading a movement for Quebec sovereignty because of their neoliberal decadence, which acutely disconnects them from 'everyday' people like Mario. This cultural chasm will also illustrate Québec's steadfast reluctance to integrate the immigrant into their society. Although Mario and Mustafa are notably absent in *Les Invasions*, racialized immigrants are no longer a modest hazard, but an immediate threat to the futurity of the white nation—which I will discuss further in the next section.

2.8. THE FEAR OF A MULTICULTURAL FUTURE:

Within the almost two decades between *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*, the failure of the nationalist dream radically confronted the normative (racial) constructions of Québécois society. In *Le Déclin*, the cultural representation of characters of colour is undercut overall by their framing as foreign. Confined and defined by their national origin (Burkina Faso and Vietnam), Arcand implicitly excludes these racialized figures from the Québécois (white) body politic. While Mustafa's temporary status is clearly stated, the Vietnamese student in Rémy's lecture could plausibly be

¹⁰⁷ Puar 2007: p. 39.

from among the 60,000 refugees from Indochina that arrived between 1979 to 1980 alone.¹⁰⁸ Would she be considered Québécoise? Ostensibly almost twenty years later in the post-9/11 Québec of Arcand's *Les Invasions*, she might be. Throughout both films, Arcand frames these shifting parameters of national identity in Québec as a dog whistle of its own collapse.

Arcand strategically begins *Le Déclin* with a lecture on racial demographics in history, reifying his *pure laine* critique of Québec's decline. While ogling the young Vietnamese student in his class, Rémy states, "Three things are important in history: the numbers. This means that the Blacks in South Africa are bound to win some day, while North American Blacks will probably never make it." Since the 1960s, Québec nationalists have routinely exploited Black anti-colonialism as a political metaphor for their clientelist subjection. While once nationalists would have projected the kind of racial sovereignty and governance eventually achieved by Black South Africans a decade later, Arcand already presumed that Québec was still on the same track as Black people in the United States. Harcourt concludes that "Rémy's pessimism about North American Blacks parallels the situation of the Québécois; while the face of the Vietnamese student hints at the abundance of non-Europeans who will inevitably soon invade the international marketplace—a hint reinforced by the brief appearance of an African historian that their society is in decline"¹⁰⁹ As immigrants invade Québec, especially with their families, Arcand cynically forecasts the death of *pure laine* nationalist dream.

As the political and economic agendas of the Quiet Revolution became consolidated, the movement's secular orientation alongside the nascent Sexual Revolution initialized a sustained decline in the white national birth rate. While both Rémy and Dominique mention the birth rate, Rémy's (and by extension, Arcand's) deployment of this statistical issue seeks to locate culpability within feminism and immigration as central factors for the decline of the *pure laine* nation. In *Le Déclin*, Arcand mobilizes Louise as a symbol of an endangered national futurity that touted 'family' as an antidote to the decline of the empire. Effectively, Louise finds her marriage and family unit destroyed from within by the end of the film. The notion of 'the family' has long operated as a central organizing tool for nationalism as a locus for identity and the transmission of cultural values. However, as Arcand demonstrates, 'the family' is now in crisis following the neoliberal and feminist restructuring of the nation. Sherry Simon claims that "any attempt to document Québec cinema's portrayal of the family chronologically would reveal that the loss of family values has left Québécois adrift in a modernity characterized by excessive individual freedom and perpetual identity crises."¹¹⁰ Almost two decades after the Rémy and Louise's divorce in *Les Invasions*, Arcand reveals how far 'the family' has collapsed as all the white families are now broken, fragmented, and estranged.

One possible solution to the national family crisis emerges from an unforeseen source, Claude. During Act 2 of *Le Déclin*, as Diane critiques women's precarious professional and

¹⁰⁸ See: Bun, Chan Kwok, & Louis-Jacques Dorais. "Family, identity, and the Vietnamese diaspora: The Quebec experience." *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 13.2 (1998): pp. 285-308.

¹⁰⁹ Harcourt 2006: p. 146.

¹¹⁰ Simon, Sherry. "The Intimate Other: Representations of Cultural Diversity in Quebec Film and Video (1985-1995)." *Contributions to the Study of World Literature* 127 (2004): p. 53.

reproductive labour, Claude unexpectedly replies, “I’ve always wanted a child. Children are an affirmation of life!” While Claude is expected to not participate in the national reproductive economy, he confesses his past aspiration to adopt a Cambodian child. While this scene would seem extraordinary progressive, it is the deployment of a racialized child in this context betrays Claude’s loyalty to the white supremacy of Québec nationalism. For Weinmann, “this rejection of the traditional family, of children, of life itself is the ‘deadliest’ sign of the decline, for the fewer francophone children are born, the closer Québec comes to disappearing.”¹¹¹ Rather than raise a white child to propagate the nation, Claude’s desire to adopt a brown child represents an alliance with multiculturalism—another corrosive force to the *pure laine* nation. Evoking the fear of federasty, Claude’s symbolic solidarity with the racialized ‘other’ further scripts him as a threat to the nation through the fear of coalition. This desire to adopt a racialized child can be understood as Claude’s solidarity with other oppressed peoples, a characteristic that distinguishes himself from the other members of his circle. Claude is the only protagonist that does not actively engage in the orientalist and racist exoticism of racialized bodies executed by the other professors. While the emergence of modern homonationalism would assume orientalist and racist overtones, Claude’s sensibilities are not *explicitly* predicated upon fetishizing the ‘other.’

Claude’s admission briefly destabilizes his anti-domestic characterization and represents a step which would align Claude with an homonationalist impulse for reproductive futurity. By participating within normative structures of the national family, Claude does signal the future of homonationalist politics. However, during the 1980s, his attempts to adopt a Cambodian child were futile, as Claude mentions that social workers disapproved of his sexual orientation. In spite of a desire to adopt, he was ultimately unable to do so due to homophobic bio-political barriers. In response to this, Louise (seemingly as a conservative agent of the state) remains silent, but smirks and nods in agreement with the heterosexist policies of the nation. Whereas Claude inability to adopt a Cambodian child is primarily scripted as a paradigm of governmental homophobia, it also signals the racist dynamics of reproductive futurity. Rather than raise a white child to reproduce the *pure laine* nation, Claude’s desire to adopt a brown child represents an alliance with corrosive forces to Québec nationalism—immigration and multiculturalism.



Figure 2.16. Claude’s (left) surprising admission of his desire for children, while Louise (right) tacitly expresses her disapproval (screenshot, *Le Déclin de l'empire Américain*)

¹¹¹ Weinmann 1990: pp. 166–7.

In the decade after *Le Déclin*, the PQ's second referendum campaign was fundamentally challenged by the spectre of immigration and multiculturalism. This political context is directly referenced in the title, *Les Invasions barbares*. Loiselle asserts that "Quebec's openness towards the 'ethnic other' in the late 1980s did not last very long. By the 1990s 'old stock' Quebecers had started trying to reassert their traditional, ethnocentric values in response to perceived foreign threats to their culture."¹¹² Exemplifying enduring remnants of ethnic separatism, the founder of the Bloc Québécois, Lucien Bouchard, notoriously made several inflammatory remarks about Quebec's low (white) birthrate and increasing immigration rate despite the campaign's alleged focus on civic nationalism. Stychin notes that

"on the night of the 1995 referendum defeat for the sovereigntist forces, then PQ premier Jacques Parizeau publicly blamed immigrants, amongst others, for the result. In the face of adversity, then, the traditional family closes ranks, blaming outsiders for the failure to grasp the mantle of separation."¹¹³

Juxtaposed by the challenges of two failed referenda and an aging white populace (as represented by the professors), Arcand ultimately encapsulates such nationalist anxieties within the erosive figure of the immigrant.

In *Les Invasions*, racialized subjects are now (ambivalently) a permanent segment of the Québécois national fabric. Following the defeat of the second referendum normative constructions of Québécois as *pure laine* destabilized in the face of shifting demographics. Meanwhile, the emergent post-9/11 political rhetoric of began to sanction selective parameters of multicultural inclusion within the national body politic as way to shore up its borders. One of the many ways this operates is by as the neutralization of an interior threat through neoliberal programs of westernization and multicultural control in what Puar describes "a neutralizing of the difference, ironically through the commodification of their purported alterity."¹¹⁴ The potential threat of some figures, namely racialized and ethnic woman, are neutralized through Arcand's (albeit less extreme) brand of sexual fetishism. For example, Arcand presents an Afro-Québécoise woman named Raphaëlle Metellus taking over Rémy's American history course after his early retirement; however, this is undercut by Louise's accusations of a sexual affair between the two. Raphaëlle is no longer primarily defined by their foreignness, but by her ability to assimilate and be a productive labourer supporting white economic interests. Consequently, the conditions of social inclusion and cultural representation of racialized subjectivity in *Les Invasions* remain forestalled by white heteronormative mandates of Québec nationalism.

While neutralized racialized figures are presented as productive members of Québécois civil society, Arcand nonetheless posits other racialized immigrant communities as a barbaric threat to the nation. Bilge argues that with the post-9/11 resurgence of secular nationalism in Québec, communities racialized as Muslim were scripted as a threat to modernity and civil society. While this tension would erupt a few years after the release of *Les Invasions* within the Reasonable

¹¹² Loiselle 2006: p. 92.

¹¹³ Stychin 1997: p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Puar 2007: p. 202.

Accommodation Crisis, the political climate was already palpable within the film. Bilge writes, “immigration debates g[ave] rise to a new brand of rhetorics of oppression in which women’s rights and gay rights are construed as core civilisational values of Western nations, while migrants are depicted as threatening them”¹¹⁵ With the media backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the film, Arcand exploits the cultural hysteria of the period to stoke white nationalist fears of multicultural invasion.

This racialized rhetoric of invasion and terrorism is a fundamental component of the white supremacist project that lies at the heart of both modern Québec nationalism and homonationalism. Puar argues “at this historical juncture, the invocation of the terrorist as a queer, nonnational, perversely racialized other has become part of the normative script.”¹¹⁶ In *Les Invasions*, when Rémy enters palliative care at an overcrowded and underfunded public hospital, one of his many roommates is a middle-aged South Asian man. Notwithstanding decades of state secularism, Arcand comically portrays a Catholic nurse/nun mistakenly offering communion to the South Asian man, who declines in English by asserting that he is in fact Hindu. While he is not Muslim, his religious specificity is moot, because his South Asian difference is nonetheless enveloped as the “Muslim other.”¹¹⁷ While on the surface, this seems to illustrate the shifting racial demographics of 21st century Québec society; however, this man’s presence ultimately operates as a symbol of invasion. Stoking similar fears once expressed through the queered figure of Mario, the Hindu patient represents a bio-political disruption to white hegemony. Although may initially appear respectably neutralized, he in fact signifies a larger threat. Unlike the other patients (excluding Rémy), the Hindu man is usually shown with his mother, father, and extended family. While Hindu family seems quite neutral, their presence evokes the white nationalist terror of racialized immigrants with non-western family structures and rampant fecundity.¹¹⁸ Further illustrating the decline of the *pure laine* family, Arcand tactfully frames the collective nature of the Hindu patient and his racialized family not as sentimental anecdote, but as a warning of things to come.



Figure 2.17. The divisive multicultural future of Québec
(screenshot, *Les Invasions barbares*)

¹¹⁵ Bilge, Sirma. "Mapping Québécois sexual nationalism in times of ‘crisis of reasonable accommodations.’" *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33.3 (2012): p. 305.

¹¹⁶ Puar 2007: p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹⁸ Bilge (2012): p. 309

Despite such xenophobia, Arcand curiously concludes *Les Invasions* on a hopeful note regarding immigration and the future of Québec, albeit within firmly western (white) parameters. One of the final shots of *Les Invasions* portrays a silent Louise listening to two teenage Asian girls playing a sonata by Diabelli on the piano, while a younger girl sits next to her. This scene directly references the ending of *Le Déclin* in which Louise and Danielle play the piano together, symbolizing the passage of cultural knowledge to future female generations, a key tenant of Québec nationalism.¹¹⁹ Underlining this scene in particular is the classical music that Louise teaches to her Asian students, a symbol of the process of western integration (and neutralization) which immigrants are expected to adopt to be included within the national body politic. However, Arcand clearly designates certain parameters to such inclusion. As Réal La Rochelle observes, “the fact that the two girls, plus a younger child sitting next to Louise, are Asian implies that the future of Quebec, after the barbarians have withdrawn, will belong to them.”¹²⁰ Moreover, “the fact that the youngest girl is played by Arcand’s own adopted daughter, Ming Xia, to whom the film is dedicated, supports this argument.”¹²¹ While the Black and brown women of *Les Invasions* like Raphaëlle are now also considered a neutralized state commodity, Arcand makes a brief concession sentimentally unveiling how some immigrants like his Asian daughter can also be welcomed into the white national family. Maybe Arcand would finally consider the Vietnamese student from *Le Déclin* to also be Québécoise? Nonetheless, any inclusion is predicated upon being neutralized as a normative and western(ized) subject. Within the twenty years between *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions*, Arcand reveals how such sanctioned racial figures can certainly align with nationalist mandates of reproductive futurity, but only through the vectors of white supremacy.

CONCLUSION: HOMONATIONAL FRONTIERS

Through satirizing the tense social trajectories of Québec at the turn of the century, Arcand’s *Le Déclin de l’empire américain* and *Les Invasions barbares* expose the white heteropatriarchal bio-politics underpinning the neoliberal remapping of Québec nationalism. While originally intended as a cynical critique of such politics, Arcand’s films fortuitously reveal an anxious sense of failing *pure laine* supremacy that lies at the heart of the modern national project. Once celebrated locally and internationally as a symbol of Québec’s modernization and its cinema industry’s ascent, *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions* ironically forecast the imminent collapse of the nation. By positing political and economic progress alongside socio-cultural decline, Arcand’s films articulate neoliberal forms of progress as a contagious threat to the future of the nation. This central theme unites both films by spotlighting the spectre of national collapse under the pressure of the corrosive infiltration of new subjectivities into Québec, namely in the form of queer(ed), feminist, and racialized threats. Through harnessing this theme of bio-political danger, this chapter traces how paradoxical shifts in Québec nationalist and later homonationalist rhetoric signal a pervasive white supremacist fear of political impotency.

¹¹⁹ See: Gould, Karen. "Setting words free: feminist writing in Quebec." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6.4 (1981): 617-642.

¹²⁰ Rochelle, Réal La. *Denys Arcand*. Presses de l’Université Laval, 2014: p. 42.

¹²¹ Loiselle 2006: p. 143

Le Déclin mobilizes the film's bourgeois characters as neoliberal symbols of the nation's decay. Although Arcand locates culpability throughout, he particularly scapegoats the film's feminist and queer figures. The film's centering of *pure laine* heteropatriarchal angst by way of feminist liberation details the underlying political conditions of Arcand's scripting of homosexual inclusion in the film. Despite being later celebrated for normalizing of gay (white) subjectivity, *Le Déclin* manifests the complex and paradoxical transformations of homosexuality as a symbol of the nation at the turn of the century. Re-packaging his nationalist homophobia of the 1960s through an ambivalently (neo)liberal lens, Arcand's anti-feminist critique operates as a paradigm to antagonise a growing homonational contingency during the 1980s. Through outlining the convergence of historical conditions that articulated gay liberation with sexual nationalism between the 1970s to the turn of the 21st century, this chapter positions *Le Déclin* (and *Les Invasions*) as one of the earliest mainstream cinematic engagements with the complex politics of Québec homonationalism.

This chapter also charts the historical bonds between the post-Referendum crisis and the nationalist pathologizing of sexual (and racialized) difference by surveying the films shifting bio-politics. Throughout the course of the roughly twenty years between both films, (*pure laine*) homosexuality shifts between being a symbol of national progress and/or its looming destruction. Upon the PQ's exceptionalist inclusion of homosexuality within the Québec Charter, homonationalism became one of many sites for the expression of a new neoliberal nationalist mythos based on inclusion, openness, and a modernist discourse of progress. While the homonational subject became enfolded into a political rhetoric of national progress, it later came to be re-pathologized under the spectre of AIDS as a national threat of queer contagion. Despite *Le Déclin*'s seemingly inclusive expression of homosexuality within the national body politic, the film ultimately betrays such liberal sentiment under the homophobic weight of *pure laine* bio-politics. Like the rapid (neo)liberal modernization of Québec, Arcand frames the ascent of homonationalism as a signal of the nation's collapse. Simply put, Arcand contends that homosexuals like Claude (just as the Québec national project itself) must now pay for the fruits of their success, in that the AIDS pandemic symbolizes the fraught achievements of gay liberation. Effectively, the film unveils the nationalist project's strategic mobilization of homosexuality as a political device, crystallized through Arcand's use of AIDS as a metaphor for nationalist panic over the looming spectre of globalization.

Through the spectre of AIDS in Arcand's films, this chapter traces shifts in the cultural symbolism of homosexuality from a social contagion to a neoliberal capital. While once positioned as a necropolitical threat in *Le Déclin*; by *Les Invasions*, Arcand posits Claude as a symbol of Québec's concession to homonationalism and globalization. First politicized by the vernacular of human rights, and later neutralized and mainstreamed by neoliberalism, homosexuality has operated a symbolic benchmark for the normative conditions of statecraft in Québec. The discursive shifts in Arcand's films mirror the cultural mainstreaming of political advancements of distinctly *pure laine* forms of gay subjectivity and representation over the course of the late twentieth century. With the film's sequel, homosexuality is not only normalized, but also fully

neutralized of its political menace through the homo/nationalist mobilization of the spectre of a larger looming threat to the *pure laine* national family—immigration.

Although the forces of neoliberal sexual pluralism once undermined the heteropatriarchal family as the foundational basis of the *pure laine* nation during the 1980s, Arcand racializes this threat by the turn of the century. By *Les Invasions*, the white family has all but collapsed under the weight of neoliberal individualism and decadence, the multicultural family now haunts the future of the nation. Shifting from his positing of the ascent of the homosexual as a signal of national decline, this chapter demonstrates how the bio-political neutralization of the homonational rests upon the queered racialization of national threat. In sum, Arcand's films expose how this logic of national progress ultimately operates as a smokescreen for white supremacy. While some racialized female threats become neutralized through racist and orientalist forms of fetishism, Arcand reveals how some racialized threats are too queer to be integrated. In *Le Déclin*, Mario operates as one of these social contagions through his destabilization of *pure laine* expressions of masculinity and sexuality, acting as a queer foil to Claude's emergent homonormativity. Moreover, Mario's latent ethnic difference signals an insidious fear of immigrants passing as Québécois. Despite his absence from the film's sequel, this nationalist anxiety is re-filtered through a post 9/11 zeitgeist of global invasion.

The representation of racialized figures in *Le Déclin* and *Les Invasions* serve not as a gesture towards diversity, but as a calculated signal of the dubious frontiers for Québec nationalism. Through mapping the rhetorical and racialized forms of queerness unveiled by homonationalism, this chapter demonstrates the limited normative parameters of multicultural integration into the Québec body politic by way of neutralizing ontological difference—a concept central to my analysis of multicultural performances of homonationalism in the next chapter. Whereas Arcand affords for the neoliberal integration of neutralized immigrants as economic and sexual commodities, few of these figures are welcomed into the national body politic. Specifically, Arcand posits East and Southeast Asian female immigrants as model minorities, first through their sexual availability and later through acclimation to western culture. Conversely, Arcand portrayal the Hindu patient and his family signals a white nationalist dog whistle of terrorist invasion and demographic conquest—a theme I will also revisit in the next chapter. As Rémy's passing symbolizes the death of *pure laine* Québec, the Hindu family's presence evokes white nationalist fears for the future of Québec. Through mobilizing the conceptual framework of homonationalism, this chapter reveals latent collusions between sanctioned forms homosexuality and racial difference within white nationalist rhetoric. Like Québec nationalism, homonationalism rests upon pathologizing a national threat. While homosexuality once symbolized as national threat, some forms of white homonormativity have been sanctioned and included within the Québec body politic for capital and political interests. Central to this political arrangement is the centering of racialized forms of queerness as a social contagion to be neutralized through logics of *pure laine* supremacy. While Arcand's vision for Québec may be bleak, it is one which decidedly conceits to its homonational horizons.

CHAPTER 3:

COMING OUT AS QUEER OF COLOUR IN QUÉBEC



*Figure 3.1. A joyful Aashish (left) on his boyfriend (right), Michel's motorcycle passing by a Canadian flag in Montréal's Old Port, signalling the homonational rhetoric of the film (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)*

3.1. INTRODUCTION: DIASPORIC DILEMMAS

Queers of colour have long existed within the cultural and industrial margins of Québec cinema in spite of their limited representation. Hunt Hoe's *Seducing Maarya* (2000) serves as one of the first feature-length films to portray the (multi)cultural struggles of a queer person of colour in Québec. Whereas previous films have depicted such a figure in passing, Hoe's film is among the first to focus on the intersectional dynamics of racialized gay subjectivity. *Seducing Maarya* explores the social and sexual dynamics of a South-Asian immigrant family in late 1990s post-Referendum Montréal. As such, a symbolic and melodramatic tension between diasporic tradition and western modernity frames the central narrative of the film. The tense political currents of Québec nationalism during this period are both subtly reflected *and* potently overstated throughout *Seducing Maarya*. From the neoliberal rise of homonormativity to the ambivalent introduction of Québec's own version of multiculturalism, these political currents infiltrate the film's portrayal of racial and sexual difference. Although Hoe attempts to sidestep political engagement to maximise commercial interest, *Seducing Maarya* nonetheless provides critical insight into the complex homonational dynamics of coming out as queer of colour in Québec at the turn of the century.

Seducing Maarya centres on the unconventional sexual dynamics of an otherwise seemingly traditional Indian diasporic family, the Chatterjees. The sensational narrative mobilizes Aashish's cultural struggles with filial piety as a gay multicultural subject to challenge conventional heteronormative narratives of racialized immigrant families. The film focuses on the shifting relations amongst the Chatterjee family following the passing of their family matriarch, Sangeeta. After her death, her widow, Vijay, turns to tradition and begins arranging a wife for their westernized son, Aashish, in order to propagate the family household. Shortly after Vijay invites a beguiling recent émigré named Maarya to work and board at his restaurant, he decides to arrange a marriage between Maarya and his son. He does this without consulting either of the pair. Aashish is initially ambivalent about the engagement, as he is covertly in an interracial same-sex relationship with his white bandmate/boyfriend, Michel. This tension between traditional union and queer desires will ultimately engender a familial rupture. This ensuing tension between cultural tradition and western modernity in the serves as

the medium for the film's melodramatic exploration of the Chatterjee family's racial and sexual subjectivity. As his recently arrived wife and later queered counterpart, Maarya serves as the lynchpin in the film's orchestration of a homonationalist condemnation of non-western racialized (hetero)sexuality. Following their marriage, Aashish must retreat deeper into the closet with his white boyfriend, Michel. Shortly after, Aashish discovers that Maarya is also harbouring her own queer(ed) secret of her affair with his father. Aashish is forced to reconcile the double life he has been living between his traditional diasporic family with his 'modern' same-sex interracial relationship.

This chapter examines the complex expansion of homonationalism to (queer) people of colour in *Seducing Maarya*. Unlike the films I have discussed in previous chapters, this film has been almost lost to historical obscurity. In effect, there is little work published on the film or its director, Hunt Hoe. This chapter seeks to address the film's erasure from the LGBTQ+ canon and wider cultural imagination by spotlighting its inadvertent yet enigmatic reflection of Québec during the late 1990s. I begin by assembling critical scholarship on relevant films in Québec and internationally with historiographical materials on neoliberal gay activism and multicultural conflicts to contextualize the film. Returning to Puar's (2007) concept alongside the postcolonial queer critique of Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) and Gayatri Gopinath (2005), I then trace how Aashish's narrative of ascendancy as a homonormative multicultural subject symbolically aligns him with homonationalist mandates.

Homonationalism operates through mobilizing orientalist tropes of racialized sexuality to sanction and normalize the representation of westernized LGBTQ+ subjects through the systematic marginalization of diasporic and racialized queer(ed) subjects. Next in this chapter, I detail the dynamic and often paradoxical relationships to cultural tradition and western modernity. I expose this false dialectic to challenge the mainstream scripting of diasporic families like the Chatterjees. Through this framework, I outline how these tensions between tradition and modernity underline Aashish's queer diasporic struggles, and how he ultimately locates a sense of freedom through an investment in white homonormativity. The central theme of this chapter rests in Maarya's positioning as an antagonistic force against the budding homonormativity of Aashish. Rather than allowing Aashish to be queer on his own terms, this articulation rests upon the orientalist framing of racialized communities and diasporic tradition as inherently homophobic—a force that Aashish must escape to embrace his queerness. In turn, I trace how Maarya signifies the threat of foreign and racialized forms of heterosexuality to closeted queer diasporic subjects. This assemblage posits Maarya as a cautionary symbol of the precarity of adherence to non-western cultural traditions. Through this homonationalist rhetoric, the film exploits Maarya as a pawn for the deployment of Aashish's progressive narrative of sexual and racial citizenship. In effect, Aashish's characterization in the film is configured through the strategic collusion of homonationalist and multicultural mechanisms of integration. Aashish's eventual creation of a modern (and westernized) family dynamic in the film comes to reflect the success of the Québécois homonational project.

3.2. GAY CINEMA & THE RISE OF HOMONORMATIVITY

Hunt Hoe's independent film, *Seducing Maarya* is arguably the first Québécois production to centre its narrative on a racialized gay protagonist. While some earlier films such as *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (dir. Jacques W. Benoît, 1989) intimated a homoerotic/queer subtext with a racialized character¹, very few films endeavoured to contextualize homosexuality in Québec outside of white terms. Although reference to its geo-political landscape is minimised in *Seducing Maarya*, the shifting material and discursive conditions of post-1995 Referendum Québec nonetheless infiltrate the film's presentation of race and queerness during this tense period.

Despite its historical significance as (one of) the first racialized LGBTQ+ films in Québec, little has been written on *Seducing Maarya*. A local indie production with minimal distribution, Hoe's film was screened by almost 1,000 spectators during its commercial release.² While the film has been referenced by a few scholars, none of these texts critically discuss the film beyond its mere existence as a historical citation.³ Although the film garnered some praise at various international film festivals, it has fallen into cultural obscurity. The scarcity of scholarly memory on the film stems not only from its industrial limits, but more critically reflects the *pure laine* parameters of Québécois LGBTQ+ representation.⁴ *Seducing Maarya* was among a wave of films geared at mainstreaming normative gay identities to a wider international audience. Marshall (2001) describes that

“In the 1990s, following legal changes, the representation of gay men in Quebec cinema partly followed North American and Western European evolutions in culture but also industry practice, with the construction of an international gay audience through film festivals and other forms of marketing. A certain cinema emerged which articulated a gay identity in an exportable way in which the specificities of the Quebec context could be downplayed either by audiences or film-makers.”⁵

In similar form to Arcand's attempted cultural effacement of Québec from *Le Déclin*, gay cinema during the 1990s followed a similar political trajectory of geo-political sanitization to galvanize broader spectatorship. Also, like Arcand's film, *Seducing Maarya* cannot escape the cultural currents in which it was created. As such, universalist homonormative rhetoric permeates Hoe's construction of Aashish's multicultural gay subjectivity in his film. As an indie English-language production evacuated from a hegemonic francophone Québec context, *Seducing Maarya* inadvertently also signals a looming threat of the neoliberal invasion of multiculturalism.

¹ Hayes, Jarrod. "From Voodoo Queens to Drag Queens: Dany Laferrière's Queer Montreal-French American, Black Atlantic City." *Quebec Studies* 61 (2016): p. 126.

² Films du Québec. 'Seducing Maarya – Film de Hunt Hoe'. Accessed 3 February 2021. <https://www.filmisquebec.com/films/seducing-maryaa-hunt-hoe/>.

³ See: Waugh 2006; Bullock, Marcus Paul, & Peter Yoonsuk Paik. *Aftermaths: Exile, Migration, and Diaspora Reconsidered*. Rutgers University Press, 2009; and Desai, Jigna. *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*. Routledge, 2004.

⁴ See: Labelle, Alexie. 'Intersectional Praxis from within and without: Challenging Whiteness in Québec's LGBTQ Movement', in *Intersectionality in Feminist and Queer Movements*, Elizabeth Evans & Eléonore Lépinard, eds. Routledge, 2019: pp. 201-218; Roy, Olivier. 'The Colour of Gayness: Representations of Queers of Colour in Québec's Gay Media'. *Sexualities* 15. 2 (2012): pp. 175–90.

⁵ Marshall, Bill. *Québec National Cinema*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2001: p. 124.

Hunt Hoe's obscure cinema career reflects industrial and social shifts in Québec during the late-twentieth century. In step with many other independent directors of the 1980s and 1990s, Hoe's work is indebted to a democratization in film production introduced by new video technologies.⁶ Moreover, Hoe's career reflects an embryonic queer diasporic community in Montréal, evidenced by the work of fellow filmmakers, Atif Siqqidi (*Exotic Erotic*, 1999) and Eisha Marjara (*The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, 1994). Like these filmmakers, Hoe's work collectively examines the cultural impacts of immigration and multiculturalism in diasporic communities. Hoe began his career as a director during the 1990s after completing his film training at Concordia University. Working from his own experiences as a Chinese-Malaysian immigrant in Canada, his works explore the cultural tensions experienced by racialized immigrants as they attempt to adapt to (the whiteness of) Québec. Hoe's first film, *Deaf & Mute* (1986) depicts the housing discrimination experienced by racialized immigrants. His later feature, *Foreign Ghosts* (1998) assembles three migration narratives of racialized women in Montréal. Much like his third film, *Seducing Maarya*, this earlier film manifests racial difference through the use of cultural clichés and melodramatic tropes—a playful yet orientalist assemblage that I will revisit later in this chapter. Whereas the Québec setting in *Foreign Ghosts* is unmistakable, this political context is less apparent in *Seducing Maarya*. In this film, Hoe rearticulates his multicultural focus by mobilizing neoliberal homonormative politics rising during the 1990s.

In the absence of any mainstream Québécois precedent in cinema, the cultural tenor of *Seducing Maarya* is most indebted to earlier international feature films, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1986) and *The Wedding Banquet* (dir. Ang Lee, 1993). Both of these films have been widely acclaimed and studied for their pioneering depictions of postcolonial interracial same-sex relationships. Moreover, these films signal nascent articulations of multiculturalism with homonormativity in an attempt to mainstream the cultural inclusion of the neoliberal gay diasporic subject.

Unlike the overt politicization of 1980s racial and sexual politics in *Comment faire l'amour*, Hoe's film reflects a sanitization of difference endemic to emergent neoliberal forms of homonormative representation—an important dynamic that I will elucidate later in this chapter. Benoît's landmark film captured white heteropatriarchal anxieties of interracial desire through its candid satirization of diasporic Black male (hetero)sexuality in Québec. Ironically, while interracial sex once posed a threat to the *pure laine* nation in *Comment faire l'amour*, 'diverse' forms of hetero- (and later, homo-) normativity will become sanctioned through an alignment with whiteness by way of interracial relationality.⁷ While this integrationist mandates were critiqued in a wider Canadian context in the early video work of Richard Fung, *Chinese Characters* (1986) and *Orientations* (1986), this queer of colour discourse did not permeate mainstream Québec productions until far after the turn of the century. In Québec, one early signal of this critique emerged from the experimental director, Atif Siddiqi. Most known for *Solo* (2003), an NFB-funded autoethnography on their queer South-Asian diasporic

⁶ MacKenzie, Scott, and Professor Scott MacKenzie. *Screening Québec: Québécois Moving Images, National Identity, and the Public Sphere*. Manchester University Press, 2004: p. 148.

⁷ Wong, Alan. "Who Is Asian?: Representing a Panethnic Continent in Community Activism." *Counterpoints* 367 (2012): p. 379.

struggles in Québec, Siddiqi's early video art piece, *Exotic Erotic* explores the colonial frameworks behind his queer desire for white masculinity.

There are some earlier glimpses of queers of colour in mainstream Québec cinema. Among one of the first examples emerges from Claude Fournier's mainstream sex comedy, *J'en suis!* (1997). This film featured a straight man pretending to be gay in order to keep his job, satirizing the economic privilege and legal protection ushered by Québec homonationalism. As the film's protagonist visits a boutique in Montréal's gay village to update his wardrobe, he is primarily assisted by a Black salesperson. In this brief scene, such an overt yet deeply clichéd articulation of a Black queer figure within a commercializing neoliberal gay marketplace unintentionally operates as one of the earliest representations of homosexuality outside of white terms in a mainstream Québécois production. Furthermore, the film normalizes the Black salesperson as part and parcel of the nascent diversity of gay Montréal, not as a foreign element as earlier films depicted racialized difference. It also begins to destabilise what Olivier Roy (2012) observes as a "constant visual reiteration of gayness as whiteness in Québec media."⁸



Figure 3.2. Early Black queer representations in Québec cinema
(screenshots left to right, *J'en suis!* and *Lip Gloss*)

However, Fournier's film was certainly not the first portrayal of such Afro-Québécois queerness. Lois Siegel's indie doc on the Montréal drag scene, *Lip Gloss* (1989), featured an earlier (possibly one of the first) dynamic and unmediated presentation of self-identified queer Blackness in its interview with Jean-Pierre Fortin aka Black Emmanuelle Summers. Jean-Pierre discusses his Afro-Québécois origins, which like Johanne Harrelle (of Jutra's *À tout prendre*), his childhood was marked by racist state surveillance and control within the foster care system. More critically, he discloses the distinctly complex factors of racism and homophobia that racialized queers must negotiate to come out.

Similar to its international predecessors, *Seducing Maarya* mobilizes the political rhetoric of coming out to sanction the cultural integration of the neoliberal multicultural gay subject. Whereas *Seducing Maarya* was the first Québec film to portray coming out within a diasporic family, Émile Gaudreault's *Mambo Italiano* (2003) has wrongly been historically distinguished for this achievement. Both films operate through the cultural tropes of the "coming-out" genre popularized during the 1990s, which was generally preoccupied with positive and often de-politicized representations. Both films depict its protagonist coming out

⁸ Roy (2012): p. 185.

to his diasporic family through his adoption of a mainstream model of homonormativity; however multicultural integration in Gaudreault's film sanctions only non-*pure laine* forms of whiteness. While both films attempt to downplay its geo-political context (and notably evacuate any reference to HIV/AIDS), *Seducing Maarya* cannot escape the cultural currents in which it was created, which infiltrate Hoe's representation of racialized queerness.

3.3. SHIFTING DISCOURSES OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Québec was marked by a series of political shifts during the 1990s following the legislative failures of Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism in the decade prior. Central to this was the assertion of Québec as a 'distinct society,' and such rhetoric would govern new bio-political parameters of national inclusion. During this period, Québec was given the latitude to preside over many of its immigration protocols. Québec would mobilize Canadian and American politics of 1990s 'melting pot' multiculturalism as an omen to promote a distinctly *pure laine* form of interculturalism.⁹ There is a wide body of scholarship examining distinctions between interculturalism and multiculturalism.¹⁰ The key distinction lies in the centering of *pure laine* supremacy in its neoliberal management of racial difference. Gada Mahrouse (2010) notes that "interculturalism involves a degree of assimilation of immigrant and minority groups in order to preserve and maintain Québécois identity and culture."¹¹ While operating only as a de facto policy, intercultural integration is predicated upon the adoption of white nationalist values, traditions, and bio-politics, very much like multiculturalism. In principle, both multiculturalism and interculturalism operate through white neoliberal governmentality to manage the racial diversity.¹² While multiculturalism mobilizes western values to measure integration, interculturalism is candid about its intent to maintain a white francophone hegemony. In turn, I'll employ multiculturalism henceforth as a term to describe white hegemonic forms racial diversity management through bio-political neutralization.

Québec's version of multiculturalism operates alongside two longstanding ethno-linguistic poles of bio-political relations, *francophone* and *anglophone*. This would later be accompanied by a new pole of non-*pure laine* difference, *allophone*. Despite their primary use of English, the diasporic family in *Seducing Maarya* would firmly be considered *allophone*, and this distinction is important. Whereas such terms functions officially as linguistic categories, *allophone* operates as a marker of racialized otherness to be neutralized through multiculturalism.¹³ This distinct matrix centres whiteness within ethno-linguistic poles of *francophone* and *anglophone* heritage. More significantly, Québécois multiculturalism

⁹ Agbobli, Christian. "'My corner store is Vietnamese,' or stereotypes to the rescue of intercultural communication in Quebec." *Questions de communication* 33.1 (2018): pp. 169-186.

¹⁰ See: Blad, Cory, and Philippe Couton. "The rise of an intercultural nation: immigration, diversity and nationhood in Quebec." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35.4 (2009): 645-667; Bouchard, Gérard. *Interculturalism: A View from Quebec*. University of Toronto Press, 2015; Haque, Eve. *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2012.

¹¹ Mahrouse, Gada. "'Reasonable accommodation' in Québec: the limits of participation and dialogue." *Race & Class* 52.1 (2010): pp. 85-96.

¹² Fethi Mansouri & Tariq Modood (2021) The complementarity of multiculturalism and interculturalism: theory backed by Australian evidence, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44:16, 1-20

¹³ Jiwani, Yasmin, et al. "Language as a Technology of Power" in *The Charter. Bill 101 and English-Speaking Quebec*, Lorraine O'Donnell et al., eds. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2021: p. 249.

conflates settled communities of colour spanning back several generations with newly arrived racialized immigrants into a bio-political container called ‘cultural communities.’ While this paradigm was intended to signal a more inclusive approach, it symbolically frames all racialized subjects as outsiders needing to be controlled by white nationalism. These shifting bio-politics contextualize the neoliberal racial representation of the diasporic family in Hoe’s *Seducing Maarya*.

During the 1995 Referendum, fractures in Québécois multiculturalism surfaced as ‘cultural communities’ became the target of xenophobic and racist scapegoating. Returning to my discussion in Chapter 2, scholars have documented the how the failure of the second Referendum further unveiled the racist underpinnings of Québec nationalism.¹⁴ Maryse Potvin (2010) describes, “The spectre of the ‘referendum crisis’ and the fear that integrating immigrants or meeting their demands for accommodation would cause the francophone Quebecers to disappear as a people seemed to foster a return to conservative nationalism”¹⁵ The then Québec premier and PQ leader, Jacques Parizeau infamously blamed “ethnic votes (and money)” for their party’s defeat, scapegoating non-white ‘cultural communities’ for the final collapse of the national dream. This racist wave was already present in public discourse, as illustrated by the *pure laine* fear of a rising non-white birth rate in the NFB documentary, *Disparaître* (dir. Jean-François Mercier, 1989). Parizeau’s remarks also signal looming anti-Black and Muslim sentiment during the Referendum, evidenced by concurrent secular debates over the veil in 1995. These cultural currents underlie the late-1990s multicultural rhetoric of *Seducing Maarya*. Coupled with global angst of the 9/11 attacks, such tensions would later erupt again into The Reasonable Accommodation Crisis of 2007-2008, which mobilized secular western values as a white nationalist smokescreen to promote an orientalist response to Muslim ‘cultural communities.’¹⁶ These two national crises encapsulated *pure laine* anxieties within the corrosive threat of ‘cultural communities’ This multicultural paradigm evacuates ontological difference by conflating both immigrants and long settled communities of colour, a political association that would come to later be reaffirmed by homonational activists.

Growing concerns over police inaction to a series of homophobic assaults and murders in late 1980s and early 1990s sparked a new generation of homonational activism. While this period was deeply marked by AIDS activism and queer rebellion, it was also present to a crystallizing LGBTQ+ human rights ethos to political organizing.¹⁷ Although gay and lesbian activism diversified during this time with the inception of ethno-cultural collectives like Gay and Lesbian Asians of Montréal and the Latin American Gay and Lesbian Association of Montréal, early 1990s gay politics were widely characterized by neoliberalization of normative

¹⁴ Salée, Daniel. “Quebec Sovereignty and the Challenge of Linguistic and Ethnocultural Minorities: Identity, Difference and the Politics of Ressentiment” in *Contemporary Quebec: Selected Readings and Commentaries*, Michael D. Behiels & Matthew Hayday, eds. McGill-Queen’s Press, 2011: pp. 472-495.

¹⁵ Potvin Maryse. “Interethnic relations and racism in Quebec” in *Quebec questions. Quebec studies for the 21st century*, Christopher Kirkey et al., eds Oxford University Press. 2010: pp. 267–286.

¹⁶ Bilge, Sirma. “Mapping Québécois Sexual Nationalism in Times of ‘Crisis of Reasonable Accommodations’.” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33.3 (2012): p. 304.

¹⁷ Podmore, Julie. “From contestation to incorporation: LGBT activism and urban politics in Montréal” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, Manon Tremblay, ed. UBS Press, 2015: p. 203.

forms of (western/white) homosexuality.¹⁸ In Québec, this would crystallize through legal affirmations of homonormative inclusion with(in) the PQ's nationalist apparatus, the Québec Charter of Rights. As such, newly formed homonational groups like Lesbians and Gays Against Violence called upon Québec's Human Rights Commission to launch an inquiry. The following 1994 tribunal reasserted Québec's commitment to addressing the following issues: access to health services, community-police relations, and the application of the law inscribed within the 1977 Québec Charter of Rights prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.¹⁹ This would not be the first time the Human Rights Commission met to discuss such inconsistency between policy and practice. In 1983, the Commission met to address racism against Haitian taxi drivers, and while their claims were recognized, little to no structural change occurred.²⁰ Conversely, the Commission's 1994 judgement was instituted into new policies aimed at the national inclusion of gays and lesbians. This disparity is keenly illustrated in Sytchin's description of the Referendum the next year:

“Recent Quebec history has highlighted how, particularly in times of crisis, nationalism deploys the ethnic model. But while immigrant voters may have been placed outside the family of Quebec, the lesbian and gay communities are given greater space within the national family.”²¹

As Arcand would illuminate with his homonationalist embrace of Claude within the national family a few years later, the xenophobic fallout of the 1995 Referendum unveiled the uneven parameters of national inclusion. While white gays and lesbians were now designated as political assets to Québec nationalism, racialized communities remained subject to suspicion. The political tensions surrounding the Referendum illustrate the homonationalist crystallization of the racialized Other as a threat to gay ascendancy within the national body politic.



*Figure 3.3. The Latin American Gay and Lesbian Association at 1993 Montréal Pride
(photo: Michel Bazinet, Collection des Archives gaies du Québec)*

¹⁸ See: Wong, Alan. “Between Rage and Love”: Disidentifications Among Racialized, Ethnicized, and Colonized Allosexual Activists in Montreal. PhD Diss. Concordia University, 2013; Labelle, Alexie. “Intersectionality, White Privilege, and Citizenship Regimes: Explaining LGBTQ people of colour collective engagement trajectories in Toronto and Montreal.” PhD Diss. Université de Montréal, 2021.

¹⁹ Labelle 2021: p. 25.

²⁰ Mills, Sean. *A Place in the Sun: Haiti, Haitians, and the Remaking of Quebec*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2016. p. 192.

²¹ Sytchin, Carl F. “Queer nations: Nationalism, sexuality and the discourse of rights in Quebec.” *Feminist Legal Studies* 5.1 (1997): p. 24.

Puar (2007) and Morgensen (2012) outline how multiculturalism operates as a foundational paradigm to the neoliberal sexual pluralism ensured by homonationalism. In his reflection of the Referendum, Sychin suggested that “lesbian, gay, and queer cultures might prove useful to the reconceiving of national identities in the conditions of multiculturalism.”²² This association between homosexuality and multiculturalism did not sit well with many homonational gays, as Schwartzwald (1991) notes that “lesbians and gays at times have been encouraged to characterise themselves as ‘cultural communities’, and it would not be surprising, given their construction [as other], if they are reluctant to do so.”²³ Such apprehension stems from the fear of ontological sanitization inherent to ‘cultural communities,’ and is ultimately grounded in a white anxiety of being conflated with the racial Other. Moreover, Puar notes that “the paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives about the greater homophobia of immigrant communities and communities of color,” an anxious trope that characterizes the cultural attitudes backgrounding *Seducing Maarya*.²⁴

While there was some attempt before the 1995 Referendum to attract ‘ethnic votes,’ the PQ explicitly sought gay votes by reasserting that “Quebec still has the best track record on gay rights on the continent.”²⁵ However, here lies a paradox at the centre of this chapter; what happened to gay ethnic voters? Sychin contends that

“Gays may be constituted as ethnically homogeneous and separatist supporting (francophone, ethnic Québécois) which makes them politically acceptable. They thereby can be constructed (and construct themselves) as on the ‘inside’ (even if somewhat on the fringes). In the process, those lesbians and gays from ‘cultural communities’ may well be erased from the dominant constructions of sexuality.”²⁶

As the first Québec feature film to explore queerness in a ‘cultural community,’ *Seducing Maarya* spotlights the bio-political connection between whiteness and homonormativity. Despite the film attempts to avoid politicization, this history of homonationalism and multiculturalism pervades its neoliberal scripting of the (queer) diasporic family.

3.4. MAINSTREAM TROPES OF TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

Seducing Maarya illuminates the social tensions produced by the interfacing of diasporic tradition and western modernity within the multicultural family. Within this paradigm lies a false dialectic in which the west is posited as modern while the rest becomes traditional. This dialectic has historically been mobilized by settler-colonial and orientalist forces to script non-white subjects and their familial structures. The pursuit of modernity of has also been historically central to the nationalist construction of Québec since the 1960s. In *Seducing Maarya*, Hoe attempts to disrupt conventional heteronormative diasporic narratives through

²² Sychin (1997): p. 32.

²³ Schwartzwald, Robert. "'Symbolic' Homosexuality, 'False Feminine', and the Problematics of Identity in Quebec", in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Michael Warner, ed., University of Minnesota Press, 1993: p. 265.

²⁴ Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007: p.51.

²⁵ Hays, Matthew. "My Own Private Partition." *Montreal Mirror* (March 21-28, 1996): p. 12.

²⁶ Sychin (1997): p. 24.

his neoliberal introduction of racialized queerness. However, the film rests upon similar orientalist tropes of cultural clichés and sensationalist melodrama, which reproduce a false dialectic of tradition vs. modernity. Gopinath (2005) asserts that “this tradition/modernity binary allows the film to be rendered intelligible to a mainstream audience, in that such a narrative has come to define mainstream representations of South Asian immigrant existence.”²⁷ Through the film’s promotion of multicultural and homonational rhetorics of integration, diasporic traditions and cultural difference become rendered as elements of the past in need of modern intervention.



Figure 3.4. Tradition in Montréal: Vijay and Aashish (left) and Maarya (right) (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)



Figure 3.5. Maarya on the banks of the Ganges (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

The place of “tradition” within the South-Asian family is established within the early scenes of the film. Hoe characterizes the Chatterjee family attachments to tradition by contextualizing their cultural practices within post-1995 Referendum Montréal. The plot begins with a father and son (Vijay and Aashish) lamenting their deceased family matriarch on the southern (suburban) bank of the Saint Lawrence River. On a grey autumn day, the father and son stand silently on the shore. Aashish hands an urn to Vijay, who begins to scatter his wife’s ashes into the water. In lieu of a western model of cemetery, the family employs the Saint Lawrence River as their family resting place in line with their cultural customs. The juxtaposition between the Saint Lawrence River and the Ganges as spiritual places for the Chatterjee family reappears throughout the film. After Maarya joins the family, she starts visiting Sangeeta’s resting place to pray, much like she is also depicted at the holy river in Calcutta. The introductory sequence of the film opens with Maarya stylized in a sari and bendi engaging in a traditional Hindu ritual on the embankment of a large river, despite her later explicit scripting as Muslim. By substituting the Saint Lawrence for the Ganges, Hoe

²⁷ Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2005: p. 95.

geopolitically establishes the traditional nature and cultural difference of this immigrant family in Montreal.

Tradition is also expressed in the family, particularly in the patriarchal role of Vijay. His pursuit to sustain his cultural traditions is first dramatized in his restaurant, Delhi. From the bilingual French and English Open/Close Sign with image of an Indian demi-god to the ambient Indian music, Vijay emphasizes the “authentic” nature of his restaurant. Priding himself on serving traditional family dishes to a mainly white clientele, Vijay claims his restaurant serves “the best Vindaloo in town,” as it is his late-wife’s recipe. In the film, virtually all the restaurant patrons are white with the exception of an Asian couple (played by Hoe and his then girlfriend), who take a photo with Maarya and Aashish.²⁸ This act reinforces the notion of the Delhi restaurant as an exotic cultural spectacle, evoking centuries of imperialist culinary tourism.²⁹ The patrons are not only frequenting the Delhi to consume its traditional fare, but to also consume the family’s cultural difference. The restaurant is set on rue Duluth in the gentrifying Plateau-Mont-Royal neighbourhood during the late 1990s, and also serves as the family home on the second floor. Locating the restaurant in the Plateau, rather than the South-Asian enclaves of Parc-Extension or Côte-des-Neiges, is important. This setting suggests Vijay’s attempt to cater to a white populace through the commodification of his cultural and culinary traditionalism. Throughout the film, this neoliberal practice of commercializing cultural tradition and difference becomes framed as a prerequisite for integration, in what Miriam Hansen (1991) has called the “marketplace of multicultural pluralism.”³⁰ Through commodifying their cultural difference through the vectors of multicultural capital, the Chatterjee family is becomes initially neutralized as partly westernized. Should Delhi Restaurant have been set in a in a predominately South-Asian neighbourhood, Vijay would not have been able to capitalize upon his cultural difference in the same fashion. In the Plateau, Vijay is able to position his restaurant as an expression of his cultural tradition in a manner that would be sanctioned in a mainly white milieu.



Figure 3.6. Symbols of the multicultural marketplace
(screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

In his position as traditional patriarch, Vijay is charged with maintaining his family and their cultural customs. Following the death of his wife, Vijay assumes the responsibility of ensuring that his family remains intact. Much like the heteropatriarchal nationalist rhetoric of

²⁸ In his subsequent film, *Who is Albert Woo?* (2003), Hunt Hoe mentions his cameo with his then girlfriend in *Seducing Maarya*.

²⁹ Narayan, Uma. "Eating cultures: Incorporation, identity and Indian food." *Social Identities* 1.1 (1995): pp. 63-86.

³⁰ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. UMinnesota Press, 1999: p. 147.

Québec before the 1980s, Vijay positions the family unit as the repository of ancestral tradition and practice. To preserve this order, Vijay decides to arrange a marriage between his son and Maarya. Vijay does this in order to maintain a diasporic sense of order and cultural consistency, as own his marriage to Sangeeta was also arranged. This impulse illustrates how diasporas, as Gopinath argues, are often rendered “through the tropes of home, family, and community that are invariably organized around heteronormative, patriarchal authority”³¹ Upon meeting Maarya at a florist shop, Vijay is first struck by her ability to speak Bengali, which his son does not. After she impresses him by improving upon his wife’s coveted Vindaloo recipe, Vijay immediately offers Maarya a job and eventually a place in his family. While Vijay is more attuned to western customs due to his overseas British education, he nonetheless maintains a traditional cultural structure in his household. Whereas Vijay appears tolerant of Aashish’s westernized cultural orientation, he remains steadfast about his son’s traditional filial obligation to marry and procreate. This symbolically extends also onto his views on sexuality, which ostensibly propels Aashish to remain homosocially closeted about his queerness. Although Vijay never engages homophobic rhetoric in the film, his views on sexuality are initially only heteronormative.

Unlike the rest of his family, Aashish is more aligned with western cultural scripts than his traditional Indian customs. Born in late 1970s Toronto and raised in post-Referendum Montréal, Aashish’s cultural subjectivity lies between the poles of diasporic family tradition and white neoliberal modernity. From the initial outset of the film, Hoe contextualizes Aashish as a well-integrated multicultural subject. By day, he is a dutiful second-generation immigrant son, and by evening, an aspiring Indie Rock musician. Gopinath would claim that the film “presents a familiar immigrant narrative of cultural conflicts and generational divides between ‘traditional’ parents and their assimilated offspring.”³² Despite working in his family’s Indian restaurant for the better part of his life, Aashish demonstrates his affinity for western cultural practices. Much unlike his father and arranged fiancé, Aashish is unable to speak Bengali, his ancestral language. In stark contrast to his family, Aashish is often depicted eating Indian food with cutlery rather than manually. Furthermore, most of his friends are white, with the exception of a scattering of (also seemingly assimilated) South Asian friends.

Aashish is nonetheless obliged to engage with elements of his traditional Indian background. In a similar vein as his father, Aashish capitalizes upon his racialized cultural difference in his musical career. Along with naming his majority white band *The Mango Chutneys*, Aashish even hybridizes his cultural identities by producing Alternative music with an infusion of Indian sonic inflection. Coupled with this public commodification of his diasporic identity, Aashish must also contend with the private manifestation of his traditional cultural demands. An early example of this is captured in the third scene of the film. After arriving to Delhi restaurant on the back of his bandmate/boyfriend Michel’s motorcycle, Aashish is shown removing his leather jacket and baseball cap while fastening a bowtie in the entry vestibule of the family restaurant. Whereas this scene signifies the routine disarticulation of his public/private life, it further extends into his romantic life, which remains a well-guarded

³¹ Gopinath 2005: p.83.

³² Ibid: p.95.

secret from his family. This act of disrobing his trendy urban treads symbolizes Aashish's obfuscation of his queerness.

For many queer diasporic subjects, this liberal public/private divide hegemonically maps upon the orientalist dualism of modernity and tradition respectively. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan (2001) argue that this assemblage induces a public performance of western modernity to facilitate social integration, while affording for private maintenance of non-western cultural tradition.³³ Symbolically, this assemblage renders Aashish transfixed in a bind between tradition and modernity. The concealment of Aashish's sexual difference is rooted in the film's orientalist framing of diasporic sexualities as inherently heteronormative, which is further manifested through his family's marriage customs.

Despite his engagement, Aashish is depicted as being more interested in his homosocial friendships with his white bandmates than settling down. Puar notes that, "those caught in the interstices, queers of color, presumably engage with white mainstream queer folks, politics, social spaces, erotic entanglements, and community events with vastly greater ease than they do in their respective religious or racial communities, families."³⁴ Early on, Aashish declares to Maarya that his music will take priority over their marriage. Later, the family will discover that his music has partly been a pretense for his intimate relationship with his bandmate/boyfriend, Michel. Despite his queer desire and western sensibility, he is unable to reject his cultural traditions forthright and agrees to the arranged marriage.

Whereas Vijay is posited as the conservator of tradition, Maarya is the embodiment of tradition. Unlike her father-in-law, Maarya is framed as conspicuously foreign, which will later come to sensationalize her a threat to the neoliberal hegemony of multiculturalism and homonationalism. Rather than engage with material or symbolic elements of Canadian culture, Maarya prefers to abide by her Indian cultural practices. This performative cultural difference is also illustrated through Maarya's dining habits. During a dinner with Vijay at an Italian restaurant, Hunt depicts Maarya struggling with her food in an amusing manner. Evidently this is the first time she has been introduced to this cuisine, and subsequently she is portrayed foregoing cutlery in favor of her right hand. While this consumption method is common in an Indian context, this depiction of her eating spaghetti with her fingers infantilizes Maarya in order to further characterize her lack of western cultural integration.

Maarya's vestimentary practices serve as a performative leitmotif of her attachment to tradition over western modernity. Throughout the majority of the film, she is shown wearing a sari, and sometimes a veil. Considering concurrent debates about secularism and the veil, Maarya's attire evokes white nationalist fears of Muslim female sexuality, which Hoe particularly overstates throughout the film. While Maarya is occasionally depicted wearing western-style clothing, her public presentation is notably marked by her traditional Indian clothing. This is especially demonstrated while she works at the family restaurant, which further reinforces its cultural 'authenticity' for commercial interests. One major exception to her vestimentary practices occurs later in the film. Shortly after their wedding, Maarya is shown in lingerie in front of her husband and father-in-law at a sex shop. Although this moment is

³³ Cruz-Malavé, Arnaldo & Martin F. Manalansan, eds. *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. NYU Press, 2002: p. 6.

³⁴ Puar 2007: p. 45.

ultimately ephemeral, it reinforces the film's positioning of Maarya as a threat in her subversion of traditional notions of feminine modesty—which I will expand upon later in this chapter. However, after she joins the Chatterjee family, she is generally presented in traditional attire.

Despite migrating to Canada to escape religious precarity in her native country, Maarya continues to lament India. When Maarya moves in, Aashish asks her if it is for the papers or something else. She replies that she is “searching for order.” In fact, this desire for stability aims to re-create her cultural traditions in Canada by joining the Chatterjee family. As Gopinath would describe, Maarya “mobilize[s] and harness[es] diasporic longing for authenticity and ‘tradition’ and convert[s] this longing into material linkages between the diaspora and (home) nation.”³⁵ Guided by heteronormative and diasporic pressures of traditional domesticity, Maarya resigns herself to becoming a servile and dutiful wife. Although in Canada for over a year for her studies, she nonetheless avoids making much of an attempt to culturally integrate. This becomes framed generally as an abstention from western modernity, which will later emblematically unravel through the traditional institution of marriage.

Maarya and Aashish's wedding ceremony and reception embody the family's complex diasporic relationship to tradition. The film employs both Hindu and secular Canadian marital customs as cultural tropes to symbolize the family's multicultural dynamics. Symbolizing their contrasting cultural orientations, Maarya and Aashish have a traditional Indian marriage ceremony and a western-style reception party. The family is first shown together on a stage engaging in a Hindu ceremony at a local temple, the only setting in the film populated exclusively by South-Asians. This is the only time the family is contextualized within a larger diasporic community. This isolation may be incidental; however, it reinforces the need for Vijay to reinforce his culture through marriage. Community usually operates as an important cultural pillar in diasporas, and this erasure speaks to ontological neutralization central to Québécois mandates for western assimilation.³⁶



Figure 3.7. Modern Multicultural Traditions: Hindu wedding party (left) and western-style reception (right) (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

Contrastingly, the following reception party at Delhi restaurant is mixed, but mainly white. Like the restaurant itself, Vijay organizes an event that also caters to a white milieu by inviting them to consume this spectacle of Indian tradition. As such, Vijay joyfully calls for the couple to kiss, an act that is more in line with western practices and its respective pressures of consummation. Symbolically, Vijay accommodates his guests' western expectations of public affection. As an expression of his westernization, Aashish is portrayed carrying Maarya

³⁵ Gopinath 2005: p.22.

³⁶ See: Mugabo, Délice. “On Rocks and Hard Places: A Reflection on Anti-Blackness in Organizing Against Islamophobia” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2. 2 (2016): pp. 159-183. Pakistanti, South Asian QC

over the threshold, a superstitious convention of European origin. Hoe stages such an assemblage of marital tropes to illustrate (most of) the family's commitment to multiculturalism.

The cultural pressures of kinship illustrated by Aashish and Maarya's arranged marriage later come to manifest the film's central tension between diasporic heteronormative tradition and western sexual liberalism. At the beginning of the wedding reception, Vijay gifts his son with a bouquet of flowers while exclaiming, "Son, make your wife happy. I give you: 'Freedom without Choice!'" Vijay initially encounters this phrase during his first exchange with Maarya at a local florist. As he purchases flowers for his late wife, Maarya shares the oblique name of the bouquet she assembled: "Freedom without Choice." While they both initially laugh at the unusual name, this phrase comes to serve as an important leitmotif of the paradoxical neoliberal nature of multiculturalism and homonationalism. A core doctrine of post-war liberalism, the concept of "freedom of choice" has served as a key organizing mythos for modern sexual politics.³⁷ Moreover, the concept has operated geopolitically to position the west as a space of freedom and individual rights.³⁸ The film's powerful inversion of this concept speaks directly to the pressures of western integration that diasporic subjects must confront to secure a place within the national body politic. Concurrently, it also symbolizes the traditional pressures of heteronormativity within the (neo)liberal West proffered by diasporic family and community frameworks, which the film will come to resist through its promotion of homonational liberation.

Despite his depiction as westernized, Aashish's sexual agency remains regulated by diasporic filial obligations. While he is at liberty to pursue most of his individual desires, Aashish is presented as culturally guilty into believing that he has no choice when it comes to customary expectations to marry and procreate. Later in the film, Vijay uses his position as family patriarch to mobilize this cultural guilt of filial piety to ensure the reproductive futurity of his family. Like Aashish, Vijay is also a diasporic subject who spent his formative years in the west; however, he has steadfastly maintained his culture through community and marital connections. His arrangement of his son's marriage to Maarya reflect how "diasporic women's bodies [form] the border and boundaries of communal identities"³⁹ In light of the Chatterjee's social isolation from local South Asian diasporic communities, her addition to the family operationalizes the reproduction of culture and identity. Overall, Vijay articulates the family as primary ontological base for both cultural subjectivity and genealogical sustainability.

Deploying diasporic mandates of reproduction, Vijay emphasizes his son's pivotal role in maintaining their heteronormative customs in spite of his individual desires. Whereas his public persona is framed by western cultural scripts, Aashish actually maintains two separate private lives. On one end, Aashish slowly acclimates to his arranged marriage; while on the other, he is devoted to his same-sex relationship. Eventually, as a queer multicultural subject,

³⁷ Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Harvard University Press, 2000: p. 7; D'Emilio, John. "Making and unmaking minorities: The tensions between gay politics and history." *NYU Review of Law & Social Change* 14 (1986): p. 915.

³⁸ Puar 2007: p. xx; Warner 2000, p. 11.

³⁹ Gopinath 2005: p.24.

Aashish's expression of his sexual difference will require adopting western homonormative scripts in spite of his cultural specificity. These paradoxical circumstances illustrate the significance of the 'freedom without choice' leitmotif, as they reveal that diasporic subjects have only an illusion of choice between pre-determined options of socio-cultural and biopolitical subjectivity. This dynamic transfixes multicultural queers in an artificial bind between diasporic culture and western modernity. In turn, 'freedom without choice' articulates the personal sacrifices to neoliberalism that Aashish must make in order to ultimately reconcile his sexual identity.

3.5. HOMONORMATIVE MANDATES

Upon learning of his arranged engagement to Maarya, Aashish is confronted with a cultural dilemma between his traditional heteronormative obligations and his 'modern' queer desires. Within the first twenty minutes of the film, Aashish is depicted as a westernized diasporic subject reticent about his traditional filial demands. Initially, there is no explicit expression of his queerness until the night of his wedding later on. In his second scene with Michael towards the beginning of the film, Aashish reveals the news of his upcoming nuptials. Surprised by the news, Michel responds, "I don't know how you do it. I thought you were like me." Considering that the audience at this point in the film is not completely aware of their homosexual relationship, the gravity of this statement becomes far more evident as the film progresses. In this response, it initially appears that Michel is directly referencing the presumed westernized orientation of Aashish. Later, we will also come to understand that Michel was more intently saying "I thought you were [*gay*] like me," alluding their shared queerness.



*Figure 3.8. Aashish (left) disclosing his arranged engagement to Michel (right), with downtown Montréal in the background (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)*

In contrast to the pressures of heteronormative tradition placed upon Aashish, Michel symbolizes the privileges of whiteness in western models of homosexuality. After Aashish further affirms his cultural obligations, Michel counters, "*I thought I knew you.*" Initially the comment appears to be critical of Aashish's decision to marry a stranger, plausibly intimating "I knew you [*to not be traditional*]..." However, as their romantic relationship is revealed, the significance of this statement becomes far more erotically potent. As sexual partners, Michel is speaking more intimately from a position of white privilege about his bewilderment over Aashish's decision to further conceal their relationship from his family. The central tension for Aashish lies between his filial obligations and his interracial gay romance, framed through

“familiar tropes and signifiers of [western] homosexuality—such as the coming-out narrative and its attendant markers of secrecy and disclosure”⁴⁰ The initial representation of Aashish posits him as integrated into a white host society and its cultural scripts. Yet, the cultural dilemma of his queerness unveils his fraught interfacing of his sexual and racial difference, and this ultimately destabilizes Aashish’s delicate balance between tradition and modernity.

Aashish’s multicultural integration also allows Michel to interpolate his boyfriend’s homosexuality within a western paradigm. Conceivably, Michel was also intimating “I thought you were [*western/modern/white*] like me.” The strategic employment of an interracial gay relationship in the film functions to position Michel as the western modern foil to Aashish’s unstable diasporic sexuality. This scene illustrates “how the queer racialized body becomes a historical archive, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other.”⁴¹ Considering the ubiquitous postcolonial background of the film, the film frames Aashish’s queerness as initially as a white/western threat to his traditional family structure by way of his underlying homophobic guilt. This characterization of Aashish represents a common postcolonial trope of the tension between the individual (subject) and the collective (family) as sites of sexual identification. As Gopinath (2005) describes, the diasporic multicultural subject is reified through postcolonial and heteronormative rhetoric, which render the tradition and family as the central site of identification. In effect, Aashish must contend with material consequences of the reproductive contract of filial piety. Hoe comes to frame this as a barrier to realizing his own sexual subjectivity.

Over the course of the film, Aashish is pressured to disentangle himself from the bounds of his traditional family demands in favor of western scripts of identification. This is reflected in the scene with Michael and Aashish described earlier. Affirming his cultural difference and expected filial piety to Michel, Aashish retorts “You don’t understand. My father is drowning. He’s my only family and I love him. It’s the only thing I could do. Just a little sacrifice. I want to please him like my mother did. Besides it’s the tradition.” This obligation of personal sacrifice to sustain the diasporic family is also reaffirmed through the ‘freedom without choice’ leitmotif in the film. While Aashish can symbolically enjoy the public liberties and rights as a western subject, his range of personal choice and agency remain governed by diasporic cultural customs as well as western multicultural scripts.⁴² Fundamentally, the notion of ‘freedom without choice’ in the film represents the ontological challenges that Aashish, like many other queer diasporic subjects in Canada must face, in their daily negotiations between family tradition and western modernity.⁴³

This cultural assemblage mandates that such subjects must often mitigate their public lives in order to conform to their traditional familial standards of compulsory heterosexuality, while investing themselves to the white national project. Yet, as an amalgamation of Canadian multiculturalism and queerness, Aashish upsets such conventional narratives of diasporic heteronormativity. Reaffirming post-colonial associations of homosexuality as a western orientation, Aashish’s sexuality is realized through the systemic collusion of whiteness and

⁴⁰ Gopinath 2005: p.27.

⁴¹ Gopinath 2005: p.16.

⁴² Patton, Cindy, & Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds. *Queer Diasporas*. Duke University Press, 2000: p. 7.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 175-77.

modernity. In effect, Aashish's racial difference is at risk of being whitewashed by this assemblage of western sexual pluralism and multicultural integration.

After a failed consummation, Maarya notices Aashish's extended absence from their apartment. She locates Michel's address on a business card and travels to his loft. Initially Aashish's and Michel's rapport appears platonic until Maarya discovers them also in an intimate embrace later that same night. There, she catches them both in bed, while Aashish cradles and caresses the 90s-boy-band blonde hair of his slumbering boyfriend. The newlyweds both remain silent while staring intensely into each other's eyes from across the room. Despite having his queerness exposed to his wife, Aashish hardly reacts to her unexpected presence and remains defiantly in his position and doesn't seem to care about hiding from his wife. When Maarya becomes aware of them, she remains mum and becomes complicit with upkeeping his heterosexual façade, as she has her own queer secrets to keep. The film will come to later use her queerness as a foil to sanction Aashish's homonormativity through the orientalist rhetoric of homonationalism.

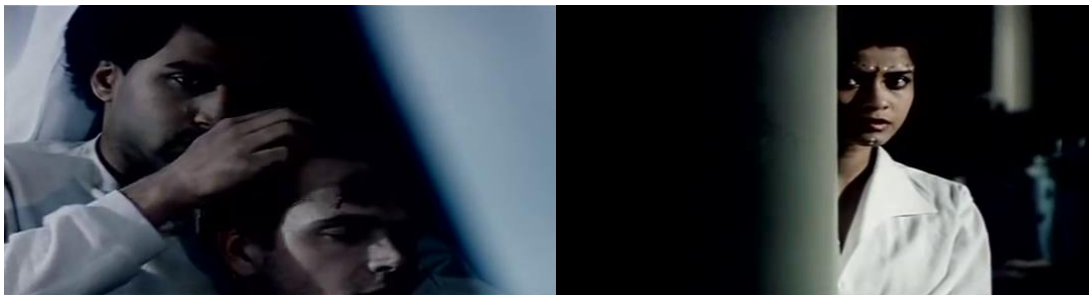


Figure 3.9. Maarya's (right) discovery of her husband's queer affair with Michel (left) (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

Not bound by diasporic obligations, Michel eventually tires of playing second fiddle to his boyfriend's wife. As Aashish and Maarya become closer, Michel decides to break up the band due to lack of interest and money, but realistically wants to call off the professional pretences of their homosocial ruse. One afternoon at Michel's loft, the pair argue about the status of their relationship.

Aashish: "Why call it off?"

Michel: "I didn't know what I wanted: the music or you. Now I know, and I don't give a shit anymore."

Aashish: You want me to tell my family about us?! Do you want my father to accept us? Do you want to kill him?

Aashish: "Come on, Michel. My family is turning upside down. My father is drowning. All you think of is yourself. So much for that sacrifice you promised me..."

Michel: "Are we family? What sacrifice have you made?"

Aashish: "It's the only thing I could do. You've gotta have faith."

This exchange illustrates the intense familial guilt and cultural shame that Aashish is subjected to by way of normative paradigms of sexuality. More importantly, it highlights how the project of queer liberalism will beguile Aashish into assuming western scripts of sexual identification. Puar (2007) contends that queer multicultural subjects systematically face a dilemma of

ontological conformity to become legible subjects in order to be guaranteed sexual citizenship under the regime of homonationalist rights.

Unlike his Indo-Canadian boyfriend, Michel seems to have the freedom and agency to make decisions outside of family demands. Michel enjoys the neoliberal luxury of individualism in a manner rendered possible by whiteness and homonationalism. While Michel is provided no backstory it is ultimately moot as his role in the film symbolically functions as a white homonormative foil to Aashish's diasporic sexuality. Interestingly, despite his common Québécois name, Michel is clearly anglophone. Nonetheless, he reflects the nascent privileges of viability ensured by Québec homonationalism. Such a positionality affords Michel with the privilege to be 'out,' and this then becomes the standard for queerness in the film. In effect, Aashish is not so much calling Michel egotistical; rather he is addressing his ability to be a neoliberal individual when it comes to matters of cultural and family tradition. As his partner, Aashish expects Michel to comply with the same selfless sacrifices that he endures under the diasporic neoliberal regime of 'freedom without choice.' For him, family is not just a means of self-identification, but also an intense form of belonging which grounds his cultural displacement as a diasporic subject. Whereas this arrangement certainly does not have to deny Aashish's queerness, the film delegitimizes this approach as it does not reaffirm a western and white homonormative model.

Despite his initial resistance to invest in neoliberal sexual paradigms, Aashish later tentatively capitulates to no longer concealing his same-sex relationship. Later in the same scene in which Michel confesses his desire to come out, he is shown beginning to slide open a large garage door in his loft's former loading dock. With a forlorn expression, Michel exclaims "I just love you" while stepping closer to the steep edge of the doorway. Momentarily alluding that he may jump, he instead begins tossing the tapes of their recordings outside. Although shocked, Aashish enthusiastically begins to join him in disposing of their music and symbolically giving to Michel's ultimatum to drop the homosocial façade to their relationship. Despite being able initially able to cloak his relationship with Michel under the cover of homosociality, Aashish's white boyfriend eventually deploys the homonormative rhetoric of visibility and public recognition to reaffirm their bond.

As the homonormative counterpart to Aashish, Michel primarily operates from the vantage of a white saviour complex, best affirmed by his decision to liberate his boyfriend from the cultural confines of diasporic sexual repression. The film reflects, as Puar might argue,

"Racist and imperialist queer politics, which are complicit in Western self-representations as 'sexually enlightened and modern' vis-à-vis the 'sexually repressed' and 'unemancipated' Other, feed[ing] into paternalistic rescue narratives where the 'white queer is trying to save the brown queer from the brown homophobic' (a la Spivak)."⁴⁴

Whereas Aashish is depicted as restrained by his culture and traditional family structure, Michel represents the promise of personal emancipation through accepting modern, (neo)liberal models of sexual identification. By such homonationalist rhetoric, the film aligns whiteness with sexual progress and citizenship while framing racialized diasporic sexualities as inherently heteronormative, homophobic, and sexually repressive. The film resists this

⁴⁴ Puar 2007: p. 5.

association through Aashish's ascent to homonormativity, which invariably centres "white gay male subjectivity, while simultaneously fixing the queer, non-white racialized, and/or immigrant subject as insufficiently politicized."⁴⁵ In earnest, Aashish spends most of the film attempting to carve out some satellite space for his queer attachments; in good faith that somehow there will be a resolution. Nevertheless, Michel succumbs to the homonormative pressure to publicly confess and affirm their relationship and sexuality by coming out.

There are also other ways to be queer, which the film thoroughly overlooks. Hoe entirely forecloses the possibility that Aashish can be queer while remaining 'closeted.' In fact, both Puar (2007) and Gopinath (2005) assert that the notion of 'the closet' is a colonial construction stemming from the Christian mandate of confession. Ultimately, Michel's homonationalist rhetoric diminishes the cultural challenges Aashish faces and forces him to affirm queerness on Michel's white terms. As Aashish is cofounded by the pressures of diasporic heteronormativity and homonationalism, he must decide to abide by the latter to articulate himself into a model homonormative multicultural subject through his interracial relationship. Puar notes that "interracial gay unions are also propped up as a modality central to discourses of diversity and multiculturalism—in addition to evidencing the dissipation or even the absence of white gay racism."⁴⁶ Eventually, Aashish's sexual proximity to whiteness and its homonational rhetoric compels him to confront his sexual difference.



Figure 3.10. Michel passionately forcing Aashish (left) to come out to his father, Vijay (right) (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

Eventually, Aashish is forced by Michel to come out to his family. Later that evening following Michel's ultimatum, he arrives without notice to the family restaurant while Aashish is mitigating a tense and unexpected family dinner with Maarya's estranged brother. Aashish runs outside and pleads to Michel, "Come on! Don't do this to me. What do you want me to do?" In response, Michel quickly grabs Aashish and pushes him onto his motorcycle to lean in for a passionate kiss. As the tense discussion inside devolves into chaos, Vijay glances outside and witnesses his son submitting to Michel's lusty embrace. Although the pair have alluded to their homonormative intention to officially acknowledge their queer relationship, Aashish is impeded by Michel from first confronting his particular family dynamics. In fact, Michel emotionally manipulates and physically forces Aashish to come out and render his queerness to be publicly visible to his family. Effectively, Michel acts as an agent of white homonationalist rhetoric through espousing coming out and ontological legibility as a compulsory and prerequisite step to mobilizing agency and sexual citizenship. Although Michel's coercion of Aashish to come out is ultimately justified, the film explicitly posits

⁴⁵ Gopinath 2005: p.26.

⁴⁶ Puar 2007: p. 161.

Maarya as the destructive force. Aashish's arranged marriage to Maarya operates as an impetus to his coming out, but not an innocuous one. Rather, Maarya represents a larger threat of queer racialized terror to western neoliberal values.

3.6. DIASPORIC THREATS TO MODERNITY

Whereas the film primarily revolves around Aashish's struggles, its homonationalist narrative posits Maarya as a foil to delegitimize diasporic (hetero)sexual customs. Although Maarya publicly reinforces western depictions of the South-Asian family, her clandestine sexual relations with Vijay challenge diasporic heteronormativity. Weeks after her wedding, Maarya begins a sexual affair with her father-in-law, Vijay. While this melodramatic entanglement is illicit, it does not immediately read as incestuous given their lack of blood relation. Nevertheless, the pair remains mum about their relationship due to its perceived impropriety. Following the later sudden appearance of Maarya's brother, Zakir, her sexuality becomes queered as even more unorthodox. During their tense reunion, it becomes clear that Maarya is harbouring a deeper secret about her self-exile from India as the brother and sister fall into an intimate embrace. This discovery of her fraternal sexual relationship in turn comes to queer Maarya and her affair with Vijay as incestuous. As this type of affair appears to be a pattern with Maarya, she is the one who is ultimately held culpable, rather than Vijay or the pair together. Though heterosexual, such non-normative practices fall outside of both traditional and modern cultural sanctions of sexuality.

As the only members of the family born in outside of Canada, Vijay and Maarya maintain a closer relationship to their Indian culture and traditions, and it becomes one of the bases of their connection. Shortly following her wedding to Aashish, Vijay overhears Maarya playing music in her flat above the restaurant. As he joins her for chai, they become more familiar by discussing the poetic works of Javed Akhtar and the postcolonial geopolitics of Ghazal, a traditional form of Indian lyrical music. This shared love for Indian classical music, film and food galvanizes their later incestuous entanglement. In a subsequent scene, Maarya and Vijay are depicted as feeling out of place with the alternative music at Aashish's band performance, which is mainly populated by a young white grunge crowd. Sharing a knowing look, Vijay gestures with his head to leave and they depart early to watch a Bollywood film together. In the light of the silver screen, Vijay tenderly glimpses Maarya smiling and nodding her head to the music. She returns this affectionate glance. This symbolic association between their shared culture and budding desire comes to further essentialize Maarya specifically as a foreign disruptive force in the otherwise modern lives of the Chatterjee family.

Both Vijay and Maarya are depicted as haunted by the traumas of religious fundamentalism in India, and this brings them closer together. While Hoe generally cloaks political reference to Québec in his film, Maarya and Vijay's personal experiences of supremacist violence are firmly anchored in post-colonial histories of British imperialism. During an intimate exchange with Maarya, Vijay discloses that he fled India for the UK during the 1947 Partition after his uncle was assassinated by nationalist militants. He admits finding irony in seeking freedom with the same imperial power that once denied him. This narrative, associating violence with India and tradition, is troubled somewhat by the revelation that Vijay, after migrating to Toronto in the 1970s, was subjected to violence by white supremacists. Vijay

tearfully shares his memory of an Indian friend being pushed onto the subway tracks, reflecting an actual series of racist events that occurred in Toronto during 1977.⁴⁷ This brief mention poignantly “captures both the local and global dimensions of South Asian racialization and migration, while consistently linking prior histories of colonialism to the present-day realities of racism.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, this experience of violence is temporary, as Vijay and his family were able to find refuge in Québec. This migration runs counter the normative path of Anglophones after the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976. Given Toronto’s standing as a former British imperial city, this racist violence conceivably may have triggered Vijay’s traumatic memories of post-colonial violence in India. In turn, his move to Montréal could have plausibly been motivated by a desire to further escape the haunting legacies of the British Empire.



Figure 3.11. News report of a series of violent racist attacks against South-Asians in Toronto (source: *Toronto Star*, 8 January 1977)

These experiences of violence function as another representation of tradition and backwardness in the film. Similarly, Maarya fled India to escape from the chaos and disorder of their former life, in a search for order in western liberal modernity. As a Muslim, Maarya has flashbacks of the Islamophobic violence she experienced as a child. She painfully recalls her parents being beheaded for hiding Sikhs in their home following the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi. With the resurgence of fundamentalism in India over a decade later, she immigrated to Canada under the pretense of pursuing a Political Science degree despite already possessing one in English. In turn, both Vijay and Maarya conceptualize the west as a space of freedom from the repressive political constraints of postcolonial India. Although Vijay definitely refuses to return to India, Maarya hungers to return to her homeland. Significantly, the film offers little indication of a rapidly modernizing India during the late 1990s, which allows the film to rest upon western, often orientalist, monoliths of post-colonial India. Pragmatically, Maarya agrees to marry Aashish in order to remain in Canada; however, she undertakes this decision in order to re-establish a semblance of tradition and order to re-create

⁴⁷ While most of the film is generally absent of historical references, this is related to an actual series of white supremacist attacks on South-Asians in Toronto in 1977. See: “Micro-Histories: The 1977 Racist Attacks. Accessed: 12 April 2022. <http://www.myseumoftoronto.com/programming/1977-racist-attacks>.

⁴⁸ Gopinath 2005: p.86.

a sense of home in Canada. Such actions reaffirm her otherness, as they become coded as threateningly anti-neoliberal.

Importantly, Maarya's characterization is rhetorically configured through an undercurrent of Islamophobia. During his first conversation with Maarya, Vijay assumes she is Pakistani and Muslim due to her Arabic name. His tone, however, becomes more familiar upon learning she is also of Indo-Bengali ancestry, as this accordingly deemphasizes her religious difference to him. Shortly after Vijay arranges his son's engagement to Maarya, he visits Sangeeta's resting place on the river to update her on the upcoming addition to the family. Speaking into the ether, Vijay tells his late wife that "Maarya is such a wonderful girl, and from Calcutta too, however a Muslim. But Babu is not Hindu, and he's part of the family." Rather than recognizing the religious specificity of Maarya or Babu (a long-time server at Delhi Restaurant), Vijay dismisses and effectively sanitizes their Muslim-ness by way of their shared ethnic heritage. In fact, in what would be best described as a peculiar cultural discrepancy on the part of the director, Maarya symbolically coverts to Hinduism through a traditional wedding ceremony without any prior discussion whatsoever. Rather than integrating vestimentary or ritualistic customs of Indo-Muslim marital practices, Maarya is symbolically portrayed as Hindu to the local Indian diasporic community in attendance.



Figure 3.12. A young Maarya escaping the fires of an Islamophobic attack in 1980s Calcutta (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

While Vijay claims to oppose political ruptures between the Hindu and Muslim communities, he nonetheless implicitly demonstrates a reliance upon Hindu hegemony. Known as *Hindutva*, Hindu supremacy aims to configure the modern state of India through the systemic marginalization of Muslims (as well as other religions and lower castes) from the body politic.⁴⁹ It represents also how "the literal erasure of Muslims from the space of the (Hindu) nation coincides with the symbolic effacement of queered subjects from a "home" space nostalgically reimagined from the vantage point of the diaspora."⁵⁰ While only discursive, Vijay's actions illustrate the film's overall underlying neoliberal anti-Muslim bias. This orientalist rhetoric essentializes Maarya as a problematic Other incapable of western cultural integration—central to the project of homonationalism. Her adherence to tradition becomes framed as a key factor in the family's resulting misfortunes. Moreover, the film ultimately

⁴⁹ See: Deshmukh, Jayanth. "Terrorizing Muslims: communal violence and emergence of Hindutva in India." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41.2 (2021): pp. 317-336.

⁵⁰ Gopinath 2005: p.32.

positions Maarya as culpable for the incestuous affair due to her salacious history, effectively rendering her sexuality as too queer to be integrated.

Shortly after Vijay notices the marital disconnect between Aashish and Maarya, the entire family is shown on series of outings around Montréal. During one such outing, they all pass by a sex shop and Aashish playfully gestures that they should enter. Without hesitation, Maarya opens the door to the shock of both Vijay and Aashish. Next, Maarya is shown trying on a variety of sexy outfits. In this disruption to her normative attire, Maarya also reveals her ability to sexually transgress tradition in her own terms. After the shop, father and son are shown looking at Poloroids of Maarya in lingerie while she attempts to rollerblade in the background. As Vijay catches himself commenting too much on her beauty, he suddenly notices Maarya fall and rushes to her aid. This scenario begs the question of whether Maarya was attempting to seduce not only her husband, but also his father. Disrupting her initially servile presentation, this scene begins to manifest Maarya's unconventional attitude to sexuality. Shortly after this scene, Maarya begins her affair with Vijay. The film's orientalist narrative will come to manifest this disruptive affair as signal of her status as a sexual terrorist.



Figure 3.13. Maarya (left) posing in lingerie for a few snapshots, later viewed by Aashish and Vijay (right) in a park (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

Upon returning to newlywed's flat for dinner and after a cozy evening at the Bollywood cinema, the erotic tension between Maarya and Vijay is evident. Resisting a final bite of Maarya's home-cooking, Vijay sighs "I must resist the temptation," intimating his restraint over his nascent sexual desire for his daughter-in-law. While dining the pair discuss their troublesome relationships to 'Mother India.' They become more vulnerable with each other as they confide about their experiences with political and religious fundamentalism in India. Whilst laughing at Vijay's joke comparing love and political disorder with an irresistible spicy curry, as they are both potentially detrimental, they begin to tenderly leaning onto one another. As Vijay suddenly begins to cry, Maarya lovingly places her hand on his face to wipe his tears. He looks into her eyes and moves her hand away. After a brief moment of hesitation, Maarya kisses Vijay as a non-diegetic Indian female voice begins to sing in the background. As the pair fall onto the floor in a lustful embrace, the food tray is knocked over and Maarya passionately covers Vijay's back with her curry. Maarya and Vijay's racialized cultural subjectivity acutely marks this sexual interaction. Their common attachment to Indian tradition and culture establishes an emotional intimacy that ultimately manifests in an unconventional affair. This racial essentialization of their incestuous relationship through the pair's cultural alterity frames their affair as a rejection of modernity and western sexual orthodoxy.



Figure 3.14. Aashish's discovery (left) of Maarya's illicit affair with her father-in-law, Vijay (right) (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

A few days before his involuntary coming out, Aashish discovers his father and wife undressed and embracing post-coitally in his own bed. After his discovery of Maarya's sexual transgression with his father/her father-in-law, the orientalist tone of the film amplifies. Aashish flees to a very unsympathetic Michel to vent about Maarya and his father's affair despite being his lover. After smashing an electric guitar in anger, Aashish screams, "Fucking bitch! I knew she was on to something! She is out to destroy a lonely old man. My father, my family! She is just trying to take advantage." With a sarcastic smirk, his boyfriend glibly responds, "Grab his balls then his dough." Michel, a white settler, has been not only dubious of his boyfriend's diasporic family obligations but is also particularly suspicious of Maarya's pretenses for being in Canada.

Despite being a second-generation racialized immigrant, Aashish's status as an integrated multicultural citizen has ostensibly predisposed him to some white nationalist bias regarding non-western immigration. Reflecting a Canadian version of the colonial and sexist 'green-card marriage' trope," Aashish asks Maarya if she is "in it for the papers" after she moves in at the beginning of the film. Once he discovers her affair, Aashish revisits this trope to rationalize Maarya's actions. Incapable of imagining that Maarya has an emotional or erotic connection with his father, Aashish jumps to the assumption that her only intent is permanent residency and financial gain. Both Aashish and Michel's framing of the female diasporic figure makes clear the ways in which "even ostensibly progressive, gay male articulations of diaspora run the risk of stabilizing hierarchies."⁵¹ Effectively, Aashish is unable recognize his own complicity to elements of Orientalism, conceivably blinded by the capital allure of homonational and multicultural ascendancy. By way of her racialization as "oriental other," Maarya's taboo sexual practices become imbricated as part and parcel of her cultural identity. In turn, this assemblage of her Muslim-ness and sexual deviance comes to script her as a terrorist set on destroying the western multicultural family.

Alongside mobilizing Maarya to condemn the filial pressures of diasporic heterosexuality, Hoe also manifests her racialization as a sexual terrorist. In her concept of homonationalism, Puar (2007) details how the neoliberal proliferation of orientalist and Islamophobic discourse has systematically worked in the service of ascending white homonormative subjects to the national body politic. The film's homonationalist critique of Maarya's sexual practices symbolically articulates her perverse and non-normative sexuality with modern notions of the terrorist. Puar argues that "queerness is always already installed in the project of naming the terrorist, [as] the terrorist does not appear as such without the

⁵¹ Gopinath 2005: p.19.

concurrent entrance of perversion [and] deviance.”⁵² While the term sexual terrorism has historically denoted misogynist and militaristic violence against women, its meaning expanded along with late 1990s neoliberal shifts in multicultural and homonational biopolitics.⁵³ This new assemblage of the terrorist came to also connote “‘nation’s internal terrors around race, gender, and sexuality.”⁵⁴ In the film, it is Maarya’s queered transgressions of these nationalist bio-political scripts that renders Maarya as a sexual terrorist. As such, the film interfaces Maarya’s Muslim-ness and unorthodox sexuality as a terrorist technology used to advance her own interests while also invoking chaos through her affairs.

Whereas the film briefly addresses the traumas of religious fundamentalism, it nonetheless relies upon Islamophobic tropes to demonize Maarya’s sexuality. Despite her childhood trauma of sectarian terrorism by Hindu fundamentalists, the narrative is hardly sympathetic to Maarya. Left orphaned by such violence, Maarya was effectively raised by her brother, Zakir. Upon her betrothal to Aashish, the Chatterjee family begins to inquire about her brother’s absence. While Maarya provides a satisfactory explanation, she is overall unforthcoming about Zakir and her family history in general. Shortly after Aashish and Maarya come to an unspoken pact regarding their secret affairs, a mysterious South-Asian man suddenly arrives to dine at Delhi Restaurant. As Aashish attends to his guest, Maarya walks by and catches his glance. Immediately filled with a look of dread, she faints and is carried off by Aashish to bed.

Following Aashish’s departure to Michel’s loft, Maarya opens her apartment door to the unknown man. It immediately becomes apparent that she is quite familiar with him as they begin a tense discussion about the pretenses behind his unexpected visit. Devolving into an argument, the pair begin to slap each other while shouting “what do you want?” in what could best be described as light sadomasochistic foreplay as they begin to kiss and embrace sensually. The film then cuts to a memory of Maarya as a young girl in a niqab being saved by a young man from the fires of an Islamophobic attack. This flashback finally contextualizes their relationship, revealing that the unknown man is in fact her brother, Zakir. Next, Maarya and Zakir are shown undressed in bed playfully reminiscing about their past and tearfully vowing to never again leave each other. This symbolic entanglement of Maarya’s (and Zakir’s) Muslim identity with their incestuous sexual practices comes to frame them both as hyper-sexed abject figures. Both siblings represent “what M. Jacqui Alexander terms an ‘insurgent sexuality,’ which works within and against hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic.”⁵⁵ This rendering comes to further denote the perverse marginality of the incestuous Muslim siblings, as they both disrupt the hegemony of hetero and homonormativity as well as white and Hindu nationalism.

As chaos ensues following the arrival of Zakir, the film capitalizes upon Islamophobic tropes to melodramatically sensationalize the siblings as terrorists bent on destroying the modern family. Following their erotic family reunion, Aashish catches Zakir suspiciously searching for his sock under the bed. Suddenly, Vijay also walks in, and Maarya reluctantly

⁵² Puar 2007: p. xxxii.

⁵³ See: Tayyen, Sana. “From Orientalist Sexual Object to Burkini Terrorist Threat: Muslim Women through Evolving Lens.” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4 (2017): pp. 101–114.

⁵⁴ Munoz 1999: p. 108.

⁵⁵ Gopinath 2005: p.36.

introduces Zakir to her new family. As the ever-gracious paternal host, Vijay invites them all to share a meal downstairs at the restaurant to celebrate. During an uncomfortable conversation commanded by Zakir, he randomly remarks that he thinks of Aashish as a brother. This statement shocks Aashish by its queer undertones, further emphasizing Zakir's (and his sister's) hyper-sexual deviance. Considering Aashish's knowledge of Zakir's incest with Maarya, Hoe presents a homoerotic subtext of sexual provocation that further queers Zakir as a sexual terrorist. He symbolizes what Puar would call "terrorist masculinity: failed and perverse, [and] metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body—homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness..."⁵⁶ Upon declaring his immediate return to India, he abruptly asks if the family would convert to Islam should he remain in Canada. As he begins to chastise Vijay as a coward for fleeing violence in India, Aashish confronts Zakir about his hypocritical Muslim fundamentalism and illicit relationship with Maarya. Smugly, Zakir then pulls out switchblade to eat a dessert on the table, which is clearly meant as a threat. Pleading for Maarya to return home with him, Zakir refuses the family's pleas to put away his weapon. Vijay then demands that his son call the police. However, Zakir yells "No!" and points the blade at Aashish, while shouting to Maarya "looks like your vindaloo also works on these fellows...", suggesting that this is not the first time Maarya been embroiled in such an illicit affair.

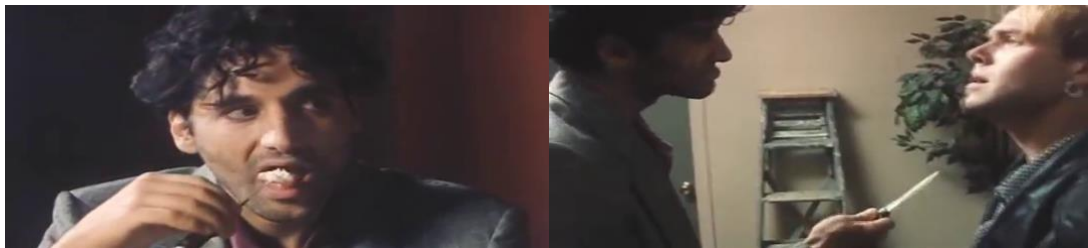


Figure 3.15. Zakir as the Muslim (sexual) terrorist
(screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)

Attempting to break the tension, Maarya melodramatically confesses that she is pregnant. After Zakir learns that the unborn child is Vijay's, a fight ensues with Zakir attacking both father and son, with Michel returning to their defense soon after. Maarya steps in front of Zakir's switchblade, and cries "This is why I left!," implying that her self-exile was caused by Zakir's proclivity to violence. Ashamed by the family turbulence she has created, the film ends with a pregnant Maarya on the banks on the Ganges with Zakir looming in the distance. Could this disclosure of her illegitimate pregnancy be Maarya's version of coming out? The film's progressive rhetoric would not sanction such a radical approach. On one hand, this seemingly abrupt return confirms her presence as the malignant force on the Chatterjees in the wake of Aashish's coming out and family reconciliation—a threat not only to the Chatterjees but also to Québec/Canada at large. Alternatively, it is imperative to reassert that it was *Maarya's* decision to return to India. While the film's homonationalist narrative attempts to disparage this decision as a symptom of her foreign deviance, it in fact is an example of her actualization of personal agency as a future mother.

The orientalist and sexist framing of Maarya's sexuality serves as engine for the film's homonationalist rhetoric. It works to exploit Maarya's characterization to engender a cautionary

⁵⁶ Puar 2007: p. 24.

tale of racialized sexual deviance. The film operates according to “colonial constructions of “Third World” sexualities as anterior, pre-modern, and in need of Western political development—constructions that are recirculated by contemporary gay politics.”⁵⁷ Throughout the film, Hoe others Maarya (and by extension, Zakir) as foreign and anti-modern, first culturally and later through her sexual unorthodoxy. Whereas Zakir is framed as dangerous mainly through his nationalist fundamentalism and violence, the film depicts Maarya’s sexuality and corporeality as her weapons of choice. Unlike Aashish’s homonormative presentation, Hoe posits Maarya as the queer character in the film because of her inability to be assimilated (like her husband). The film suggests that Maarya’s mobilizes her sexuality as a tool to advance her personal interests, and while this is hardly taboo, it is framed as such. The confluence of homonational notions of foreign threat and sexual deviance come to decree Maarya (and her brother) as too queer for neoliberal liberation.

3.7. THE (DIS)CONTENTS OF COMING OUT

Aashish and Maarya’s negotiation of the pressures of sexual normativity and their transgression of diasporic tradition take center stage in Hunt Hoe’s *Seducing Maarya*. Through his melodramatic lens on the unconventional sexual dynamics of a South-Asian immigrant family in late 90’s Montreal, Hoe disrupts the traditional heteronormative narrative routinely associated with racialized diasporic communities. Whereas *Seducing Maarya* does address these topics, it is through Aashish’s homonormative ascent that the traditional diasporic narrative is modernized. Conversely, by way of Maarya’s subversion of such tropes that the film also reveals a deeper truth about relationship between tradition and modernity.



*Figure 3.16. Maarya (left) and Aashish (right) anxious about their heteronormative expectations (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)*

Through their dissimilar yet intersecting performances of cultural and sexual identity, Aashish and Maarya work both with and against this dialectic. Whereas Aashish rejects heteronormative tradition and capitalizes upon his cultural tradition, this ultimately renders through his multicultural and homonational proximity to whiteness. Similarly, Maarya’s queerness both re-affirms and challenges orientalist notions of tradition and modernity by being taboo to be accepted within either dialectical pole. Conversely, Aashish’s queerness is framed as one that can be integrated only by conforming to white homonationalist standards of

⁵⁷ Gopinath 2005: p.27.

identification. These tensions reflect how, as Puar puts it, “connectivities that generate gay disciplinary subjects while concurrently constituting queerness as the optic through which perverse populations are called into nominalization for control.”⁵⁸ This final section will explore the cultural and political implications of the film’s complex interfacing *and* opposing of Maarya and Aashish as queer(ed) racialized subjects.

In response to the family turmoil engendered by diasporic heteronormative pressures, the film posits Aashish’s coming out as a panacea for the integration of LGBTQ+ multicultural subjects. Upon the discovery of Maarya’s pregnancy and incestuous affair with her father-in-law and brother, she returns to India. Following her departure, the film’s conclusion opens with a shot of the restaurant’s re-branded name, *New Delhi*. This update reflects not only the modernization of the restaurant’s menu, but also that of the Chatterjee family. Next, Michel is presented preparing naan pizza in the kitchen, the former domestic domain of the family matriarchs. Aashish then enters the kitchen to beckon Michel to the dining room, where they are subsequently depicted performing for the restaurant’s patrons. As Vijay proudly introduces them, Aashish is shown playing his electric guitar while Michel has given up his rock-and-roll drum set for a traditional-style clay gourd drum. This Indo-Canadian commercial assemblage is made possible by Aashish’s proximity to whiteness, which comes to neutralize his cultural difference through its multicultural commodification. This process reflects how “the “ascendancy of whiteness” incorporates the multiplication of appropriate multicultural ethnic bodies complicit with this ascendancy. Part of the trappings of this exceptional citizen is the careful management of difference: of difference within sameness, and of difference containing sameness.”⁵⁹ Along with the new cultural fusion menu items and the east-meets-west musical aesthetics of the in-house band, these hybridized symbols of integration capitalize cultural difference to appeal to whiteness.



Figure 3.17. Marketing the homonormative debut of the modern multicultural family (screenshot, Seducing Maarya)

⁵⁸ Puar 2007: p. 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

Such a culmination of events demonstrates the homonationalist rhetoric by which the film operates. This film's progressive narrative is ultimately realised through Aashish's coming out to his family and his embodiment of a homonormative model of queerness. In effect, Vijay's embracing of his homonormative son and modern family also signals his final integration into Canadian multicultural society. Puar asserts that

“The figure of the homonormative ethnic is crucial for the appearance of diversity in homonormative communities (arriving as the difference of culture rather than as the simulacra of capital) and tolerance in ethnic and racialized immigrant communities (marked as an entrance of alternative lifestyle rather than through the commonalities of capital).”⁶⁰

The film's trajectory of Aashish's multicultural integration strategically articulates his diasporic culture with western scripts of queerness to ultimately position him as a model minority. This is rendered through deploying the homonationalist rhetoric of coming out as a modern and liberal model of visibility and identification.

Through highlighting Aashish's need to forgo traditional and “regressive” forms of racialized sexuality, *Seducing Maarya* reveals how homonationalism aims to indoctrinate diasporic queers to embrace white paradigms of homonormativity. During most of the film, Aashish conceals his same-sex relationship from his family due to the cultural shame he experiences. For Aashish, the western model of homonormative identification does not align with his diasporic heteronormative demands for filial piety. However, this reluctance to claim his sexuality eventually is challenged by his white boyfriend, who enjoys the privilege of not negotiating such heteronormative cultural obligations. This process reflects how for queers of colour, as Puar explains, “the liberal coming-out telos functions as the barometer of acceptance. By implication, a critique of homophobia within one's home community is deemed more pressing and should take precedence over a critique of racism within mainstream queer communities.”⁶¹ After Aashish is coerced by the pressures of homonormativity into coming out to his father, the family reconciles, and Michel joins them in Maarya's place. In effect, the film deploys homonationalist rhetoric to privilege gay visibility politics as a panacea for Aashish and his family. While such homonationalist rhetoric may challenge the hegemony of heteronormativity, it ultimately centres and affirms a white homonormative subjectivity.

Aashish's queer diasporic representation in the film is fraught with complex and often contradictory associations to whiteness. The framing of his sexual trajectory as a westernized diasporic subject is hegemonically oriented by an investment in whiteness within the film's homonormative paradigm.⁶² By way of his inter-racial relationship with Michel, Aashish becomes conditioned to desire a homonormative ethos. This assemblage posits Aashish's dismissal of diasporic sexuality and his eventual coming out as a signal of his homonational ascendancy as a racialized gay model minority. I return to my discussion of Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification from Chapter 1 to illuminate the political dynamics of this seemingly paradoxical practice of identification. In short, disidentification describes a

⁶⁰ Ibid: p.57.

⁶¹ Ibid: p. 45. Also see: Walcott, Rinaldo. *Queer Returns: Essays on Multiculturalism, Diaspora, and Black Studies*. Insomniac Press, 2016: pp. 154.

⁶² Walcott 206, p. 11; Dunning, Stefanie K. *Queer in Black and White: Interraciality, Same Sex Desire, and Contemporary African American Culture*. Indiana University Press, 2009: p. 46.

symbolic and material practice in which marginalized subjects resist the pressures of white heteronormativity through performative expressions of complicity. Muñoz argues “Disidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of colour need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere.”⁶³ By engendering a hybridized identity fusing his queerness and tradition as evidenced by his new Indo-Canadian fusion duo, this act could plausibly be understood as a disidentificatory strategy for survival. In harnessing facets of his cultural heritage as a spectacle for white consumption, Aashish exploits the logics of multicultural integration and pluralism by capitalizing upon the neoliberal and progressive aspects of homonationalism. Aashish certainly engages some elements of disidentificatory tactics as a survival strategy against the tyranny of diasporic heteronormativity. However, he is overall more invested in a white assimilationist project of homonormativity rather than concurrent transgressive paradigms of queer (of colour).⁶⁴ Working through, rather than against, the whiteness of homonormativity, Aashish’s personage reveals the uneasy collusions queers of colour must often make in order to develop agency in a homonationalist regime.

For many queers of colour, erotic attachments to whiteness can strategically operate as disidentification from neoliberal mandates for homonational and multicultural integration. Through disidentification, we can come to a better “understanding of queerness as a biopolitical project, one that both parallels and intersects with that of multiculturalism, the ascendancy of whiteness, and may collude with or collapse into liberationist paradigms.”⁶⁵ In much of western culture and media, the trope of inter-racial relationships has often deployed as assimilationist tool to neutralize the cultural difference and political potency of the racialized subject.⁶⁶ It is primarily through his same-sex relationship with Michel that Aashish comes to construct his queerness. Muñoz elucidates how many queers of colour tentatively find agency through performative associations with whiteness via sexual relationships with white partners.

“The ‘snow period’ corresponds to the assimilationist option that minoritarian subjects often choose. Although sanctioned and encouraged by the dominant culture, the ‘snow period’ is not a viable option for people of colour. More often than not, for the person of colour, snow melts in the hands of the subject who attempts to acquire privilege through associations (be they erotic, emotional, or both) with whites.”⁶⁷

While the psychoanalytical dynamics of Aashish’s attachment to whiteness are beyond the bounds of this chapter, it is plausible to deduce that his characterization parallels such a “snow

⁶³ Muñoz 1999: p. 5.

⁶⁴ While multicultural LGBT organizing during this period began to flourish during the 1990s, there is little work on queer of colour participation in radical queer politics, as exemplified by the Sex Garage protests and Pervers/cité, a queer community response to the neoliberalization of Montréal’s Pride. See: Laprade, Bruno. “Le parallèle structurel entre la situation des jeunes LGBT et celle des organismes les desservant: quelques constats pour l’intervention.” *Service social* 59.1 (2013): pp. 95-103.

⁶⁵ Puar 2007: p. 51.

⁶⁶ Steinbugler, Amy C. “Visibility as privilege and danger: Heterosexual and same-sex interracial intimacy in the 21st century.” *Sexualities* 8.4 (2005): p. 427.

⁶⁷ In a 1995 interview, Vaginal Davis called the “snow period” when “some cheap white boyfriend” could make one’s life perfect, permitting the queen of colour to feel like “some treasured thing” who hopes for “the privileges that white people get—validation through association.” See: Muñoz 1999, p. 110.

period.” In fact, it is Aashish’s attempt to gain privilege and validation through white association that parallels the homonationalist mandate for queers of colour to adopt white homonormative scripts of identification. Through his interracial relationship with a white gay man, Aashish can adopt such scripts vis-à-vis his coming out and public affirmation of a homonormative of queerness. This practice reveals the white supremacist foundations of homonationalist forms western LGBTQ+ identification in the film. The absence of any representation of other racialized gay counterparts in the film further underlines how whiteness is always already present but often unseen, unacknowledged, and unexamined, even when performed by a sexual minority group.

This centering of whiteness in LGBTQ+ identification limits the representational possibilities for Aashish as a queer person of colour. The film frames Aashish’s disavowal of his cultural heritage and its filial demands of reproductive futurity as a signal of his ascendancy as a model racialized sexual minority. Such homonationalist rhetoric rarely takes stock of how “queers of colour experience the same problems in that as white [homo]normativity is as much a site of antagonism as is heteronormativity.”⁶⁸ Aashish’s diasporic family and cultural heritage are scripted as the sites of an internalized queer shame that restricts him from publicly declaring his queerness. This homonationalist mandate for hegemonic legibility rests upon racist and orientalist articulations of homophobia as an essential element of racialized diasporic communities. However, as Nikita Dhawan (2016) argues, “the representation of (diasporic) queers of color as simply ‘victims’ masks their location on the privileged side of transnationality and entails a disavowal of the messy complicity of postcolonial diasporic subjects in neocolonial structures⁶⁹” By highlighting Aashish’s coming out and his family’s embrace of his queerness, the film suggests an attempt to distinguish them from such non-integrated (*i.e.*, homophobic) communities of colour. The film does not script Aashish (and his father’s) disidentification with such a racist stereotype as a resistance against orientalist rhetoric per se; rather it functions more of a pragmatic alignment with white neoliberal logics of sexual and racial citizenship. Mainstream narratives of coming out hegemonically privilege a white subjectivity, which neglects the importance of culture, family and heritage as sites of identification and belonging.

For many racialized and diasporic queers, coming out is a far more nuanced process than a single moment of disclosure. With roots in 1970s gay liberationist politics, coming out acts as tool of cultural and political visibility, however it is one which has been hegemonically scripted by whiteness.⁷⁰ Puar (2007) outlines how the process of coming out forms a core tenant of homonationalism by securing socio-political legibility as normative subject. It mandates that subjects publicly affirm a homonormative orientation required for the privileges of sexual citizenship. The film’s reliance upon this discourse for Aashish reveals the limited possibilities for many queer and diasporic subjects in navigating the false dialectic of tradition vs. modernity. Overall, the film disregards that for those who cannot lose a familial bond or shared

⁶⁸ Ibid: p. 23.

⁶⁹ Dhawan, Nikita. “Homonationalism and State-Phobia: The Postcolonial Predicament of Queering Modernities,” in *Queering Paradigms V: Queering Narratives of Modernity*, M. Viteri and Manuela Lavinas, eds. Peter Lang Publishing, 2016: pp. 51–68.

⁷⁰ Butler, Catherine et al. “The colour of queer,” in *Counselling ideologies*, Lyndsay Moon, ed. Routledge , 2010: pp. 105-112.

cultural heritage, coming out is not a road to freedom.⁷¹ Disidentifying with the coming out narrative does not imply complicity with homophobia, rather it accounts for the difficult negotiations queers of colour must make as intersectional subjects.

The film's juxtaposition of Aashish's closeted sexuality in contrast to Michel's homonormative politics of visibility reveals the power of whiteness in homonationalism. Homonationalism promotes coming out as a normative step in a linear trajectory towards liberation.⁷² However, this is not a universal experience as exemplified by queer diasporic people negotiating the supposed divides between modern sexuality and family traditions. In order to become a legible subject along the lines of homonationalist standards of sexuality, the film dictates that Aashish must locate his queerness through a white guy. The film's diasporic coming out narrative maintains that refusal or failure to disclose one's sexual identity will result in isolation and shame. Moreover, it insists that while coming out may raise fears of loss or rejection, it nonetheless remains a vital step for (multi)cultural integration. In essence, coming out unavertedly operates as the truest form of "freedom without choice" in the film.

Conversely, Muñoz (1999) and Manalansan (2003) assert that there are certainly other ways of being queer that resist such white homonormative models. How would the film's homonational narrative be impacted if Aashish had fallen in love with another queer South-Asian? Gopinath (2005) would claim that "this queer transformation of the diasporic 'home' constitutes a remarkably powerful challenge to dominant ideologies of community and nation in ways that may very well escape intelligibility within a logic of visibility and 'coming out.'"⁷³ As such, the decision to *not* come out operates a more overt act of disidentification, but one that becomes delegitimized by homonational mandates for visibility. Strategically, Aashish's relationship with a white person comes to indoctrinate him within a western model of sexual identification. Whereas a queer relationship with another racialized or diasporic subject would conceivably destabilize the inherent whiteness central to homonationalist rhetoric of sexual legibility. Simply put, Aashish doesn't have to come out in order to be queer. He doesn't have to comply with the ontological dilemma posed by white LGBTQ+ scripts of visibility; yet must do so if he is to seek public recognition acceptance under a homonationalist regime.

3.8. TERRORIST DISIDENTIFICATIONS

The film posits both Aashish and Maarya as queer(ed) figures by virtue of their secret non-heteronormative sexual practices. They both must remain discrete about their sexual encounters as they fall outside of the parameters of traditional heteronormative sexuality. Through positing a homonormative model of identification as the logical path to salvation for Aashish and his family, the film frames Michel as the white homonormative template for Aashish's homonationalist integration, it inversely admonishes Maarya as a model of an un-integrable queer(ed) subject. Whereas Maarya's incestuous and intergenerational affairs are heterosexual, they are too deviant to be sanctioned as respectable. However, as the family becomes

⁷¹ Manalansan IV, Martin F. "Homophobia at New York's gay central," in *Homophobias: Lust and Loathing Across Time and Space*, David A. B. Murray, ed. Duke University Press, 2009: pp. 37-39.

⁷² Berg, Laurie, and Jenni Millbank. "Constructing the personal narratives of lesbian, gay and bisexual asylum claimants." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22.2 (2009): pp. 195-223.

⁷³ Gopinath 2005: p. 33.

confronted with the truth of Maarya and Aashish's affairs, the modern sexual politics of homonationalism come to script only Aashish's homosexuality as socially acceptable. Alternatively, Maarya's queerness is far too radical and perverse to be associated with homonationalist imperatives to come out.

Unlike Maarya, Aashish symbolizes the exceptional and progressive nature of Québec/Canada. By marking the culmination of his integration vis-à-vis coming out, the film evidently posits Aashish (and eventually his father) as a token of the modern multicultural citizen. The film's portrayal of his westernization and embracing of homonormative domesticity reflects how "sexual exceptionalism from purportedly progressive spaces have surfaced through constructions of "other" women, especially via the composite of the "third world woman."⁷⁴ Furthermore, it reveals how

"gay male racialized subjectivity in the diaspora is often constructed at the expense of women of color. Eng concludes, a queer diasporic project may not necessarily be progressive or constitute a challenge to "local and global status quos," but may in fact be antifeminist and fully at the service of corporate capitalism"⁷⁵

This homonational assemblage is firmly rooted in bourgeois respectability politics, which often functions as a concession to white supremacist standards of social mobility. Aashish's homonormative ascent in the film is mobilized through such neoliberal collusions of gay respectability politics and sexual normativity.

Maarya's characterization as sexual terrorist operates as a perverse foil to sanction Aashish's neoliberal rise to homonationalism. While Aashish is intended to be the main character in the film, the film determinedly pits the assemblage of Maarya, the queered migrant, as the counter-figure to Aashish, the gay Indo-Canadian model minority. Puar would suggest "there is something more insidious going on here...that may reveal the contiguous undercurrents of conservative homonormative ideologies and queer liberalism."⁷⁶ Whereas Aashish's queer narrative is portrayed as a transformative love story, Maarya's relationships are depicted as purely lecherous. This contrasting homonational framing of Maarya's queer(ed) desires reveals the sexist and orientalist logics by which she is characterized.

This assemblage is constructed through *Seducing Maarya's* mobilization of the homonormative discourse of the good vs. bad queer. Muñoz argues that "in this schema, the first mode is understood as 'identification,' where a 'Good Subject' chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms."⁷⁷ Alternatively, Munoz claims "'Bad Subjects' resist and attempt to reject the dominant ideology and proceed to rebel and turn against this symbolic system."⁷⁸ This neoliberal recalibration of Rubin's hierarchical valuation of sex acts now sanctions Aashish's homosexuality as it abides by white homonationalist standards. On the other hand, Maarya incestuous behaviour stands outside of acceptable parameters. Yet, it is imperative to note that such sexual (and racial) politics were nascent to the period of the film's production and context. Merely one generation prior, Aashish would

⁷⁴ Puar 2007: p. 5.

⁷⁵ Gopinath 2005: p.92.

⁷⁶ Puar 2007: p. 48.

⁷⁷ Muñoz 1999: p. 11

⁷⁸ Ibid.

also be considered a sexual deviant like Maarya; however, “the terms of degeneracy have shifted such that homosexuality is no longer a priori excluded from nationalist formations.”⁷⁹ Aashish’s characterization in the film is only enabled through the advent of homonationalist legislation and cultural change alongside post-Referendum recalibrations of multicultural discourse in Québec. Unlike her husband’s progressive narrative arc, Maarya’s sexuality is depicted as too perverse to be reconciled by homonormative politics. Whereas both husband and wife are consumed by their clandestine non-heteronormative affairs, Aashish’s eventual declaration of his queerness and conforming of white homonormativity absolves him from cultural stigma. Conversely, Maarya’s transgressive sexuality renders her as too taboo to be sanctioned by respectable forms of sexual pluralism.

At the conclusion of the film, Maarya’s return to India with Zakir symbolizes her rejection of neoliberal western norms. Despite being a main character, Maarya seems to have little agency in her decisions, and is principally deployed as a pawn in the film to advance an emergent homonationalist rhetoric. While in time Aashish will overcome his queer shame through publicly embracing homonormative visibility, Maarya is offered no latitude to advocate on her behalf. Unlike Maarya’s discovery of her husband’s queer affair, the film’s progressive narrative does not afford for her incestuous entanglement to be reconciled. Maarya’s unconventional affairs with Vijay and Zakir are both with men who perform a paternal role in her life. While this suggests that her desires resolve around patriarchal power, her attachment to these figures is far more nuanced. It is the shared experience of trauma that forms the basis of her incestuous affairs. In fact, Vijay and Maarya commence their affair after he become emotional discussing the systemic violence he endured in India and Toronto. While there certainly may be an element of paternalism in her sexual desires, it does not mean that Maarya necessarily absolves her sexual agency in the face of patriarchal control. In fact, Maarya’s sexual affairs present an alternative queering of the traditional notion of family belonging. Through her acts of disidentification in the film, I conclude by discussing how Maarya subversively fights for liberation from a neoliberal pluralist regime of ‘freedom without choice.’



*Figure 3.18. Maarya’s radical pattern of paternalistic affairs as a survival strategy (screenshot, *Seducing Maarya*)*

Noteably, unlike the other characters in the film, Maarya is rarely afforded with instances of internal dialogue. These poignant moments provide a deeper dimension to Maarya, often through glimpses into her troubled past. Midway through the film, Maarya grows visibly

⁷⁹ Puar 2007: p.31.

discontent with life as a traditional housewife following the discovery of her affair with Vijay. Soon after, she returns to her late mother-in-law's resting place on the shore of the Saint Lawrence River to voice her concerns. Speaking into the ether, Maarya professes that "Living in the slums without friends or relatives, you grow up hard and fast. Living in the darkness, we lost faith in traditions. And it's this darkness I understand; that I am attracted to. I feel it's freedom without choice." When questioned by the Chatterjees as to why she immigrated to Canada, Maarya always responds she was trying to "escape from disorder." Over time, family comes to accept her abstract rationale. Through her internal monologues, which the family is not privy to, it becomes clear that "disorder" signifies more than just the fundamentalist violence she experienced. In losing her sense of traditions as an orphan, Maarya also developed an incestuous relationship with her brother, Zakir. It is this non-normative affair that has caused the disorder she attempts to flee. Yet, Maarya cannot escape from her own dark desires. In her attempt to redefine tradition in the west, Maarya eventually falls into a similar pattern of incestuous paternalism with Vijay. This transgression comes to queer Maarya as a foreign agent of disorder through her non-normative sexuality.

Like Johanne Harrelle in Chapter 1, this chapter aims to reconcile Maarya's abject representation. In effect, I will mobilize Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification to read against her orientalist characterization. In Maarya's failed attempts to confirm to heteronormative cultural traditions with Aashish, she ultimately cannot escape her own queer(ed) desires. In the film, Maarya is framed as a sexual terrorist for the domestic turmoil she catalyses through her illicit desires. Maarya's resistance to multicultural demands for westernization is scripted as a signal of her precarious sexuality. Symbolically, her defiance of such protocols renders Maarya a danger to the racial and sexual pluralism of the modern Québec national project. By complying to homonationalist mandates of sexual legibility, Aashish represents the success of such neoliberal constructions of diversity. Troubling this logic, I contend that Maarya's ambivalence to sexual and multicultural conformity functions as a disidentification with such hegemonic structures. Muñoz notes,

"Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within."⁸⁰

Rather than comply with normative models of sexual identification and practice, Maarya subverts mainstream notions of heterosexuality. For Maarya, her acts of disidentification are first actualized in managing her traumas of Islamophobic violence. The film's narrative is hardly sympathetic to Maarya's struggles as a diasporic woman of colour. In her relationship with Zakir, Maarya is able to locate emotional and financial stability as an orphan. As an adult, she engages her agency to leave him due to his proclivity for violence and criminal activity. Unable to recreate a sense of tradition with Aashish, she ultimately comes to engender a subversive engagement with tradition through her relationship with Vijay. In both instances,

⁸⁰ Muñoz 1999: p. 11.

Maarya exploits heteropatriarchal sexual dynamics albeit with unconventionally familiar partners. Overall, Maarya's paternalistic relationships function as a form of survival by disidentifying with cultural taboos of sexualizing familial relations. Whereas the depiction of her Maarya initiating the affairs frame her as a sexual terrorist in the film, I assert this can also be read as a rejection of the patriarchal control that has defined her.

Alternatively, I assert that Maarya is both villainized and victimized by such homo/nationalist collusions between homonormative rhetoric and heteropatriarchal power. Gopinath asserts that,

“the illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative female subject within patriarchal and heterosexual configurations of both nation and diaspora, may begin to challenge the dominance of such configurations...revealing the mechanisms by which [this] positionality is rendered impossible strikes at the very foundation of these ideological structures.”⁸¹

While Maarya's sexuality is melodramatically overstated to the point of impossibility, its exaggeration renders the homonational and colonial conditions of her scripting visible. It is through these hegemonic frameworks that Maarya is ultimately robbed of any sense of agency. By the end of the film, Maarya's attempts to redefine tradition become overshadowed by her affairs. Whereas her transgression both Indian and Western cultural and sexual customs may function subliminally as an affirmation of her personal agency, the film stonewalls her as corrosive to the homonationalist project. Her acts of disidentification with normative tropes of tradition and modernity positions Maarya's character as illegible to any neoliberal intervention. As such, her sexual agency becomes forestalled due to the perverse scripting of her desires. Decisively, Maarya's role is reduced to a sexist and orientalist pawn of homonationalist efforts to advance a (white) normative sexual hegemony.

Despite the film's negative representation of Maarya, her character nonetheless subversively engenders new forms of agency and resistance. Returning to her scene in a sex shop, I avow that this moment betrays her characterization as entirely defiant to modernity by revealing Maarya's occasional engagement with western sexual attire. While the scene it attempts to reaffirm Maarya as a sexual terrorist in her subversion of traditional notions of feminine modesty, I argue that a deeper meaning lies beneath. In playing with vestimentary aspects of western sexual liberalism, Maarya disidentifies with both white orientalist and Indian heteropatriarchal standards of female sexuality. Whereas the film frames her transgression of hegemonic notions of sexual and racial identity as dangerous, she arguably finds some liberation in the margins. In her attempt to re-create a sense of tradition and belonging, Maarya perverts multicultural narratives of heteronormativity. Following the melodramatic disclosure of her pregnancy, Maarya departs and hopefully finds the freedom to choose what kind of family she wishes to create. While her return to India with Zakir is symbolically admonished in the film narrative, this decision represents her disidentification with normative concepts of family. Through this queering of family, Maarya is ultimately able to redefine her own parameters of modernity and tradition.

⁸¹ Gopinath 2005: p.31.

3.9. CONCLUSION: HOMONATIONAL CHALLENGES

Seducing Maarya is a landmark in the history of Québec cinema as one of the first portrayals of a non-white queer figure in the main role of a feature film. As such, the film represents a vital artifact of the Indian diaspora in post-Referendum Montréal. While the melodramatic tenor of the film often overstates critical elements of narrative, it indubitably reflects its contemporary sexual and racial politics. While the reception may have been limited, the film nonetheless documents an important moment in post-Referendum Montréal when the politics of multiculturalism and homonationalism began to consolidate. As one of the first presentations of inter-racial same sex desire in Québec cinema, the film performs as a nationalist signal of modernity and progress through the integration of (certain) multicultural sexual minorities. Whereas the dramaturgy of the film seems generally evacuated from much of its material context, it offers a palpable reflection of the challenges experienced by many diasporic queers of colour in Canada.

The symbolic tension between cultural tradition and western modernity frames the political content of the film. *Seducing Maarya*'s progressive narrative ultimately mandates coming out as the singular (neo)liberal model of legibility and identification for the queer diasporic subject. This requires Aashish to rearticulate his connection to his family and cultural traditions by conforming to white settler standards of homonormativity. This representation dismisses tradition as an important element in the lives of queer people of colour, which Aashish is pushed to distance himself from. Although he symbolically reconciles these poles through the multicultural hybridization of his musical and culinary traditions, this process is ultimately facilitated by his commodifiable proximity to whiteness. *Seducing Maarya* illustrates how the stripping of political context can be central to the sanitization of racial difference in homonormative cultural representation. In particular, this process occurs through neutralizing the political potency of the racialized gay vis-à-vis their performance of white homonormativity. Such a collusion of multicultural and homonationalist logics of integration in the film come to frame Aashish's ontological journey as neoliberal a form of cultural ascendancy, at the cost of Maarya's own agency. Aashish's rejection of tradition acts as a symbol of progress associated with western modernity and sexual pluralism, aligning the film's narrative with post-referendum attempts to position Québec as a modern and progressive nation. Although framed as an act of self-liberation, his coming out in fact is one of the many pressures he faces to conform to multicultural and homonationalist scripts of identification. Yet, Maarya's own attempts to redefine tradition in the west become coded as radically transgressive and unsanctionable.

Maarya and Aashish's intersecting yet opposing queer narratives in the film reveals the precarious conditions for homonationalist sexual citizenship. As neoliberal forms of pluralism, both multiculturalism and homonationalism rests upon the systematic exploitation of false dialectics within identity politics. The film establishes a colonial and adversarial relationship between cultural tradition and modernity through the queer(ed) figures of Aashish and Maarya. Through the symbolic association of modernity with multicultural and homonationalist integration, the film ultimately polarizes Maarya and Aashish in the interests of neoliberal ontological legibility. Yet, such false dialectics also become destabilized in the film through the queering of Maarya's illicit form of paternalistic heterosexuality. Such a paradox illustrates the instability of such neoliberal pluralist dichotomies for marginalized subjects such as

Maarya and Aashish. This instability is further amplified by historical shifts in Québécois and Canadian rhetoric on sexual and racial politics. As mentioned previously, only a generation prior to the making of the film, Aashish's homosexuality would have also relegated him to the same category of sexual deviant that Maarya occupies within the film. In fact, it is through Aashish's association with white homonormativity that affords him the privilege to occupy the moral high ground vis-à-vis Maarya's racialized queerness. Furthermore, given that Maarya's representation falls outside of both white or Hindu nationalism and its sexual norms, the film rests upon her status as an illegible other to render her as a danger for the project of homonationalism.

Conversely, the representation of Maarya's non-normative sexuality challenges the neoliberal frameworks of sexual and racial pluralism. Rather than comply with neoliberal mandates for ontological legibility, Maarya's performance of her identity resist such parameters. Symbolically, her characterization functions as a subversive paradigm for the advancement of a political rhetoric that centers white-settler homonormative subjectivity at the cost of her own agency. By inverting this representation through Muñoz's concept of disidentification, such didactic notions of subversive acts become spaces for personal liberation. As central leitmotif for the film, the notion of "freedom without choice" denotes the neoliberal forms of agency are only achieved by adopting western scripts of identification through cultural integration. Yet, Maarya endeavours to rearticulate her relationship to cultural tradition and western liberalism, but on her own terms. Rather than reconfiguring the expression of her Indian heritage along the lines of white western standards of integration like Aashish, Maarya works at engendering what Muñoz would call a disidentificatory performance. Muñoz's concept refers to subversive tactics deployed by marginalized subjects to navigate normative frameworks of identity. This strategy of resistance and survival works both within and outside such frameworks by subversively exploiting racial and sexual tropes. In the film, Maarya does this by leveraging her cultural background above that of her host society, while also embracing the perceived liberalism of the west. Yet, this transgressive performance comes to render Maarya as a threat to the progressive project of homonationalism.

Seducing Maarya details the insidious ways in which homonationalism functions as a barometer of progress from the traditional to the modern to control the emergent narratives of queer of colour cultural representation. The film's homonationalist narrative mobilizes the figure of Aashish as a signal of the progressive nature of this pluralist inclusion. This symbolic ascendancy of an LGBTQ+ multicultural subject to national body politic is configured through deploying homonormative respectability politics to demonize Maarya's sexual characterization. Although Aashish and Maarya's actions reflect strategies of disidentification upon deeper examination, the film's homonationalist and melodramatic rhetoric generally sidesteps such nuance. Muñoz's concept of disidentification acknowledges that some queers of colour need to follow a conformist path for survival but coming out is certainly not the path to salvation for all. A coming to terms with one's claimed essence does not by itself produce social acceptance, especially when mitigated through one's racial difference. Whereas the film's homonationalist agenda is rendered through the orientalist vilification of Maarya's foreignness and non-normative sexuality, her character also disrupts such rhetoric. While Aashish finds salvation through strategic collusions with white homonormativity, Maarya's disidentificatory performance of self exposes the liberatory possibilities for queers of colour to take us past

normative forms of identification and inclusion. As such, the film illustrates how the pressures of whiteness and normativity began converging in homonationalism to neutralize the cultural representation of the queer(ed) racialized subjects.

CONCLUSION:

DISTINCT DIFFERENCES



Figure c.1. A Québécois homonational embrace in Xavier Dolan's first film, *J'ai tué ma mère* (2010) (screenshot)

c.1. SUMMARY

Tracing the shifting representational politics in late twentieth- century Québec and its cinema, this dissertation disrupts a neoliberal narrative of LGBTQ+ tolerance, progress, and inclusion mobilized through homonationalism. It presents alternative trajectories for the historical (and contemporary) understanding of the distinct yet common intertwining of race, queerness, and homo/nationalism in Québec. While this exceptionalist narrative of inclusion is largely associated with 21st century homonational advancements such as same-sex marriage, it in fact has roots far extending to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. This dissertation pivots this narrative by re-framing our queer past to trace the historical interfacing of sexual, racial, and homo/national politics that would come to give rise our present cultural imagination as heralded presently by the work of Xavier Dolan. Given a plethora of recent scholarship on the director, this dissertation resists further in-depth discussion of his work to refocus on the (proto-) homonational conditions and queer cultural forebearers that pioneered his ascent to the (inter)national mainstream. As a celebrated vox populi for a new generation of queer nationalism in Québec, his works have come to overshadow more recent queer works by local racialized directors such as Eisha Marjara (*Venus*, 2017) and Adib Alkhalidey (*Mon ami Walid*, 2019) in the present-day cultural imagination. Importantly, Dolan's films diffuse a distinctly white narrative of difference within a modern and progressive Québec. This dissertation evidences how this hegemonic (re)production of white homo/normative subjects as mainstream(ed) figures in Québécois homo/national imaginary is predicated upon depoliticizing, sanitizing, and rendering of queer(ed) racialized bodies to the margins.

Overall, this dissertation charts the socio-cultural and political-economic dynamics involved in the development of (racialized) queer representation and visibility since the 1960s. I examine its representational use as a vehicle to advance first, a white-settler proto-homonationalism nationalism, and later, a (homo)nationalist project for normative LGBTQ+ accommodation. In this historical and cultural extension of Jasbir Puar's (2007) concept to Québec, I challenge Québec's progressive rhetoric of LGBTQ+ subjectivity and representation

from the marginal to mainstream. In turn, I unveil the symbolic and material conditions that have rendered queer(ed) racialized subjects as absent, silent, and tokenized within the national cultural imagination and how this is a productive aim of homonationalism. By re-contouring homonationalism through QOC critique, this dissertation begins by historically and culturally framing how settler-whiteness and sexual normativity has been mobilized by both LGBTQ+ and nationalist projects to center a white queer subject as a universal leitmotif for social difference and cultural accommodation. Through this framework, I articulate how such cultural representations ignore and/or tokenize queer of colour subjects to reaffirm a homonationalist narrative of modernity, progress, and national exceptionalism. Through first analyzing the history of sexual and racial politics as a context to my survey of films, I investigate how whiteness, racialization, and sexuality has been represented. I focus on the material and symbolic elements of these films' narration and visualization of the sexual and racial alterity of queer(ed) and racialized characters. In effect, I trace how these cultural productions position a white (queer) subject as an instrument to legitimize a normative and white-settler (neo)liberal political agenda. The next section of this conclusion outlines the trajectories of these (proto)homonational assemblages in Québec cinema during the late-twentieth century.

c.2. CHAPTER REVIEW



*Figure c.2. Queer Intertextuality in the 1960s: A promotional poster for *À tout prendre* (1963) on the apartment wall of the film's gay protagonist in Jean-Claude Lord's *Délivrez-nous du mal* (1969) (screenshot)*

c.2a. CHAPTER 1: *Black Bodies & Queer Desires of a White Nation*

Chapter One traces the shifting racial, sexual, and national(ist) politics during the rise of the Quiet Revolution through Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre* (1963). Whereas Jutra has been celebrated as pioneer a modern approach to cinema, he also pioneered a distinct queer Québécois cultural sensibility that would later come to influence filmmakers spanning from Denys Arcand to Xavier Dolan. Inventive in its transgressive form and narrative, *À tout prendre* challenged cultural taboos of adultery, abortion, homosexuality, and interracial sexuality. The film featured the first interracial bed scene in North American film history as well as the first allusion to coming out in Québec cinema amidst vacillating forms of mid-century Black and queer discrimination. Subverting standard distinctions between fiction and memory, the film

re-articulates a former love affair between Jutra and a one of the first Afro-Québécoise model and actress, Johanne Harrelle. Through the material and symbolic meanings of their interracial relationship, I first begin outlining the shifting cultural and cinematic conditions backgrounding the ubiquitous *pure laine* heteropatriarchal nationalism as expressed by the film's production and reception. As an anxious sense of reactionary post-colonial whiteness and heterovirility became central to the nationalist biopolitics, it sought to both efface and exploit queerness and Blackness in very distinct yet familiar ways.

By deciphering Jutra's homoerotic subtext and his portrayal (and use) of Johanne's Haitian exoticism in the film, this chapter details how Jutra challenged Québécois sexual orthodoxy and moral taboos ranging from interracial sex to homosexuality during the early Quiet Revolution. As such, a climate of compulsory ethno-heterocentrism narrates Claude's clumsy quest to be 'straight' as he attempts to portray the modern urban(e) nationalist man. It is though this engagement with Johanne's racial otherness (and her personal confession of *passing* as Haitian) that Claude comes to confront his deep-seeded queerness. This presentation of queerness operates in several manners, most significantly, positioning the figure of the homosexual as a specter of *both* national failure and liberation. Moreover, Claude/Jutra's deploys Johanne's complex racial otherness as a paradigm for articulating his own queer desires and struggles I demonstrate how the film supplants Claude's homoerotic desire onto the erotic exoticism of Johanne's Blackness to frame Otherness as a political device for white homonationalist liberation. While it would be ahistorical to use this term to describe Claude/Jutra, I propose an extension of this concept as *proto-homonationalism* as a transhistorical method of tracing nascent signals of (homo)sexual and racial rhetoric that seek to engage national(ist) articulations of sexual normativity and citizenship. Following similar lines of racialized and queer metaphorization, as the nationalist cause, Blackness has also operated as a foil for the white colonial myth that engendered a modern Quebecois sexual subjectivity. In parallel political assemblages such as *negre blanc*, *homocolonialism*, and *federasty*, nationalists often mobilized racist and (homo)exotifying notions of virile Black anti-colonial masculinity as a framework to resist their own sense of emasculation.

Like Claude's heteronormative passing, Johanne also constructs a false performance as an exotic Haitian to access social and cultural capital. Johanne's transgression of white heteropatriarchal norms and fears (interracial adultery and abortion) queers Johanne as just as much as Claude, but as a Black threat to the nation. I begin by first framing how like queerness Blackness also posed a necropolitical threat to the white supremacy of Québec nationalism. Intertwining with this nationalist rhetoric was the use of these vectors of alterity as a foil for a colonial myth that legitimized anti-clientelist white nationalism in Québec. While Jutra does portray Johanne's Blackness partly as a device for his own queerness, his complex scripting of Johanne as Afro-Québécois ultimately disrupts monolithic notions of Blackness as foreign by providing texture to Johanne's racialized representation. Turning to her archive, I mobilize José Esteban Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification to illuminate Johanne's tactical representation of her Blackness as a survival strategy. In effect, I dissect how her performance disidentifies with nationalist cultural mandates by subverting her positioning as *both* an exotic tool of and erosive threat to white francophone supremacy and it's emergent homonationalist conditions.



Figure c.3. Mario gives the finger to the professors' neoliberal yuppie snobbery in Denys Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) (screenshot)

c.2c. CHAPTER 2: Post-Referendum Threats to the Pure Laine Nation

Chapter Two traces post-Referendum second-wave feminist and gay liberationist challenges to Québec's sexual politics in Denys Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and *Les invasions barbares* (2003). Whereas the two films primarily focus upon complex heterosexual relations, Arcand's cynical discussion of sexual and racial politics frames a new neoliberal trajectory for the heteropatriarchal nationalist anxiety of political emasculation. In effect, Arcand mocks feminism as a version of patriarchy in drag in which women emulate heteromascularity to gain inclusion into a pre-established order of patriarchal power relations. This is particularly manifested in women's discussion of their sexual liaisons in a frank and explicit manner, which often colonially fetishize Black masculinity. Meanwhile, the male professor's sense of sexual prowess rests upon an orientalist exotification of Asian female subservience, the women's distinct sexual racism mirrors the men. This pattern of mobilizing sexual agency and citizenship through racist objectification and marginalization parallels the logistical conditions of homonationalism.

Like Arcand himself, his bourgeois protagonists clumsily align themselves with liberal modernity and its shifting position on homosexuality. While there were a few filmic representations of homosexual subjectivity predating *Le déclin*, Arcand's was one of the first major mainstream films to include a homonormative protagonist (Claude) within the central cast. Described by Marshall (2001) as a "a heterosexual vision of homosexuality," Arcand's film reveals how upon heterosexist homosociality operated as an initial precursor to homonationalist forms of social and cultural integration. Yet, Claude is only eligible for this treatment by way of his bourgeois gay respectability. This is posited through mobilizing Mario as a queered foil vis-à-vis his class status and sadomasochistic desires. In effect, Arcand's inclusion of Claude symbolizes a (homo)nationalist token of the professors' liberal and progressive attitude as well as Québec's modernity and shifting cultural attitudes. However, this tactical inclusion operates more as a political symbol than an affirmative gesture. This is especially affirmed through the sanitized presentations of his homosexual desires and intimacies, as compared to his heterosexual counterparts. In line with the feminist archetypes he develops, Arcand utilizes Claude to illustrate how the social inclusion of homosexuality within the nation has also disrupted the heteropatriarchal order of the Québec national project.

In his presentation of Claude's gay lifestyle as the height of decadence and self-indulgence, Claude's sexuality is positioned as a key catalyst for the neoliberal decline of the white nation. While Claude is envied on one hand for his potential sexual promiscuity, the narrative undercuts this notion by imbuing queerness with the potential for mortality vis-à-vis the AIDS pandemic. Despite his fledgling homonational inclusion amongst the heterosexual professors, Claude continues to represent a threat to the futurity of the *pure laine* nation by way of his possible seropositivity and respective incapacity to reproduce. Yet almost two decades later in *Les Invasions*, Claude is evacuated from the (necro)politics of AIDS, he is now resolutely framed by emergent homonormative interests and homonationalist desires.

Homonationalism in Québec crystallized over the course of the two decades separating *Le déclin de l'empire américain* and *Les invasions barbares*. During this period, racial biopolitics also vacillated alongside the neoliberal privileging of white homonormativity. Considering the general lack of racialized main characters in Arcand's films, racial difference is mobilized in a very limited manner as either a sexual commodity or national threat. Whereas in *Le déclin*, racialized subjects are primarily objectified through colonial and orientalist modes of sexual fetishization; by *Les invasions*, they are framed as national threats by way of their cliché-ridden fecundity and cultural values. This shifting paradigm is also reflected through the trajectory of homonationalism, as LGBTQ+ political interests began to mobilize sexual agency and citizenship through racist campaigns. These were substantiated by Québec nationalism's promotion of essentialized notions of Black and brown homophobia and heterosexism. This is uniquely captured in *Le déclin*, in which Mustafa, one of the only Black characters with any background, is essentialized by Rémy as *only* heterosexual during their brief interaction with a trans female sex worker. What if Mustafa was queer? Unfortunately, Arcand and his strange engagement with homonationalism fails to "imagine [him] as ontologically perverse." While Claude does not become embroiled in such racist discourse, his homonormative subjectivity and homonational privilege is certainly indebted to such bio-politics. In effect, the only culturally sanctioned representations of sexuality in Arcand's films are those which continue to reaffirm normative *pure laine* mandates of Québec nationalism.



Figure c.4. A cheeky salesperson; one of the first mainstream Québécois representations of an explicitly queer Black person in Claude Fournier's *J'en suis!* (1997) (screenshot)

c.2c. CHAPTER 3: *Coming Out as Queer of Colour in Québec*

Chapter Three traces the interfacing of inter/multiculturalism and homonationalism in Hunt Hoe's *Seducing Maarya* (2000), the first film to centre on racialized queer subjectivity in Québec cinema. Lost to the archival margins, the industrial context and racialized content of the film has undoubtedly attributed to its omission from the queer imagination in Québec as there has been no substantial work on the film (or its director) before this chapter. The film examines the cultural legacies of post-colonialism within the household and (secret) sexual dynamics of a diasporic South-Asian family in the Plateau Mont-Royal during the turn of the twentieth century. Through this family and its patriarch's planning of a marriage arrangement between Aashish and Maarya, the film sensationalizes their complex and often contradicting relationship to the false colonial dialectic between modernity and tradition. While the film attempts to challenge western narratives of the racialized diasporic family as arrested by their cultural customs, Hoe ultimately appeases to emergent homonationalist and multicultural rhetoric. This symbolic tension between cultural tradition and western modernity frames the melodramatic political milieu of the film, as expressed by the framing of coming out as a modern vehicle for liberation. Through the symbolic association of modernity with multicultural and homonationalist integration, the film ultimately polarizes Maarya and Aashish in the interests of maintaining neoliberal ontological legibility.

Upon his arranged marriage to Maarya, Aashish is confronted with a cultural dilemma between his traditional heteronormative obligations and his 'western' queer desires. The narrative melodramatically mobilizes these cultural struggles as a queer multicultural subject to disrupt mainstream narratives of racialized immigrant families. Importantly, this rearticulation of multicultural (queer) diaspora is methodically constructed by a proximity to whiteness. This is encapsulated in Aashish's secret boyfriend, Michel, who acts as an agent of homonormativity espousing coming out as a compulsory and prerequisite step to mobilizing agency and sexual citizenship. The film's trope of an interracial gay relationship functions as an apparatus for LGBTQ+ self-recognition through coming out. Inadvertently, this frames the diasporic/racialized family as a threat to homonationalism. Yet, Hoe curtails this narrative vis-à-vis Vijay's embracing of his queer son. This signals their ascendancy a modern family through their final integration into Québécois interculturalism and its neoliberal scripts of commodified accommodation. Ultimately, this film rests upon *the family*, a long-standing leitmotif of the Quebec nation—one which has shifted with racial and sexual pluralism, while maintaining a normative *pure laine* supremacy. In his coming out as queer of colour in Québec, Aashish is framed as a model minority through his homonationalist integrating into the host society and its cultural scripts. While coming out may now be seen as old fashioned for some, it steadfastly remains a symbol of progress and development for western nations—and operates as a prerequisite step to enjoying the privileges of homonationalism, for some more than others.

Like other (neo)liberal forms of identification and governmentality, homonationalism *queers* non-normative and non-western racial and sexual difference to reaffirm white homonormativity. In the film, Aashish is framed according to two foils through this relationship to Michel and Maarya respectively: white homonormativity and foreign perverse heterosexuality. Aashish's proximity to white homonormativity affords him the privilege to occupy the moral high ground vis-à-vis Maarya's racialized queerness as expressed by the essentialization of her incestuous sexuality as part and parcel of her cultural embodiment. This

is best captured by Aashish's denouncement of Maarya's immigration as fraudulent, revealing his predisposition to white supremacist bias as an integrated multicultural citizen. While Maarya's characterization in the film is secondary to Aashish, she nonetheless demonstrates the power of disidentification in manifesting agency through tactical subversion. In effect, Maarya's positioning as a queer(ed) sexual terrorist inversely engenders a foil to critique the colonial and neoliberal conditions of Aashish's journey to embrace homonationalism. Puar's concept articulates how imperial campaigns *queer* non-western racialized subjects through the rhetoric of terrorism, which Aashish engages once he discovers her unorthodox (hetero)sexuality with his father. While Michel and the homonationalist rhetoric of coming out promises a sense of personal liberation for Aashish, Maarya is keenly aware of the costs of such white-settler liberal pluralism. In fact, Maarya's maxim of "freedom without choice" aptly describes the neoliberal scripting of coming out as a colonial method of classification. In turn, the film also distinctly articulates the personal sacrifices that Aashish must make reconcile his sexual identity which are often obfuscated by the homonationalist agenda to come out. This offers a poignant reflection of the challenges experienced by many queers of colour in Québec. In the next section, I detail some of the main lessons we can draw through my extension of homonationalism and QOC critique to Québec within these films.

c.3. REPRESENTATION & RESISTANCE IN HOMONATIONAL QUÉBEC

c.3a. HOMONATIONALISM

This dissertation adapts Puar's concept of homonationalism as a cultural and historical materialist QOC framework that charts the interfacing conditions and collusions of racial, sexual, and nationalist politics in Québec queer cinema. I mobilize existing work on the fields of history, film studies, cultural studies, and human geography to outline my disciplinary and theoretical contributions to the overall discourse on homonationalism. I expand upon this literature by proposing a complementary historical framework to trace the cultural and bio-political conditions that later gave rise to homonationalism at the turn of the twentieth century in what I term *proto-homonationalism*. One of the central contributions of this dissertation is to trace homonationalism back in time, to examine cultural practices, and to bring Québec into the existing discussion of Canadian homonationalism. This fresh approach frames the symbolic and material conditions that engender homonationalism by historicizing the curious entanglements of sexual and racial bio-politics that mainstream normative forms of LGBTQ+ cultural representation in Québec.

Mobilizing queer Québécois cinema as a cultural archive, I disrupt a neoliberal narrative of inclusive progress, modernity, and exceptionalism by way of a QOC critique of (proto)homonationalism in three late-twentieth century case studies. Critical Québec scholars have outlined examples of how *pure laine* nationalism has exploited racial and sexual alterity as a foil for their own clientelist subjection and fears of political emasculation since the Quiet Revolution. Reframing their work through proto-homonationalism within the milieu of Claude Jutra's *À tout prendre*, I demonstrate political potency of Blackness and queerness to evoke reactionary forms of sexual nationalism through distinct and tactical queer articulations with Québec anti-colonial cultural and intellectual discourse. Upon its release in 1963, Jutra's trailblazing presentation of interracial sexuality, homosexuality, and Afro-Québécoise

subjectivity was already disruptive to the emergent *pure laine* heteropatriarchal narrative of Québec modernity. Over a half a century later it remains one of the most complex intersectional critiques of nationalist anxieties of racial and sexual difference in Québec cinema history. While Jutra's film may seem progressive in its confrontation of sexual and racial taboos, it ultimately demonstrates how homonationalist logic of progress is often betrayed by a white saviour complex. This best is expressed by Jutra's deployment of Johanne/Harrelle's exotic Haitian passing as a proto-homonationalist foil to confront his implicit queerness and modern white anti-colonial subjectivity.

Insofar as *À tout prendre* signals the emergence of proto-homonational paradigms, Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (1986) and its sequel, *Les Invasions barbares* (2003) detail the rise and crystallization of homonationalism in Québec. Building upon Schwartzwald (1991) and Stychin's (1997) early queer scholarship alongside contemporary work on historical and political conditions of homonationalism, I chart neoliberal shifts in gay accommodation, subjectivity, and representation in the first two works of Arcand's most celebrated film series. As the with (neo)liberalization of the Sexual Revolution and second-wave feminism in the late 1970s, Québec nationalism began distinct collusions with a politicized (white) gay elite to manifest itself as an inclusive, progressive, and modern nation. Yet, as the AIDS pandemic took hold in the 1980s, the rise of homonationalism was transfixated between conflicting narratives framing homosexuality concurrently as a symbol of progress *and* a necropolitical threat to the nation. In Arcand's two films, Claude operates a signpost of such homonational trajectories, first a politicized yet bourgeois gay with a mystery illness, and later mainstreamed and depoliticized by his neoliberal respectability. Despite Claude's reluctance to engage with most of the racist discourse of his fellow heterosexual characters, he nonetheless benefits from the campaigns of xenophobic othering and exclusion rendered by homonationalism. Ultimately, the film's privileging of racist fetishistic conditions of heteronormativity reveals how (white) gay subjects can unwittingly become agents of homonational campaigns of colonial othering. In turn, this also unveils how homonormativity itself reproduces similar racist logics, which become keenly expressed when LGBTQ+ rights are articulated with national interests, invoking what is now known as homonationalism.

Hoe's *Seducing Maarya* (2000) frames the period of the 1990s between Arcand's two films, detailing how the crystallization of homonationalism in Québec was conditioned by post-Referendum engagements with inter/multiculturalism. Advancing Stychin's (1997) pioneering work on Québec sexual nationalism through Muñoz and Gayatri Gopinath (2005), I trace how the film reveals the ontological mandates of homonationalism on queers of colour in Québec at the turn of the century. Hoe's progressive queer narrative of racialized diasporic families reveals how his deployment of a liberal campaign of inclusion in fact reaffirms a white colonial and homonormative hegemony. Through Aashish's narrative of homonational liberation, I demonstrate how neo-liberal multicultural rhetoric also levies white nationalist interests through notions of tolerance, diversity, and respectable visibility. This is best expressed by the white homonormative pressure to come out actualized by Aashish's customary interracial relationship, in which Michel operates as an agent of homonationalist rhetoric. By highlighting the racial discontents of this distinct yet common assemblage, I expose how coming out operates as a fundamental condition for engaging (neo)liberal models of sexual subjectivity and agency. This process demands that queers of colour rearticulate their connection to family

and cultural traditions by conforming to white settler standards of homonormativity. Like the nationalist metaphorization of queerness and Blackness during the Quiet Revolution, homonationalism operates vis-à-vis a queer foil as a barometer of sexual and multicultural normativity.

Munoz's concept of disidentification elucidates the subtle and overt transgressions of white heteronormativity by queer(ed) and racialized characters in Québec cinema. Insofar as Michel performs as white homonormative foil for Aashish's nascent brown queerness, Maarya acts as a queer(ed) foil to support Aashish's LGBTQ+ ascendancy. It is through the cultural framing of queer(ed) racialized women like Johanne and Maarya that homonationalism's underlying liberal campaigns of racist, colonial, xenophobic, orientalist, and Islamophobic control and exclusion are unmasked. Through tracing complex racial and sexual politics back in time while focusing on cultural dynamics, this dissertation advances our understanding of the long and pervasive history of homonationalism in Québec. This dissertation mobilizes queerness as a schema not just for cis-gender homosexuality, but also for those who fall outside of white-settler heteronormativity. This framework articulates race and sexuality within nationalism to demonstrate how racialized heterosexual subjects can be rendered queer(ed), sometimes even more so than LGBTQ+ subjects. By complicating the contemporary and historical narrative of Québécois LGBTQ+ exceptionalism, I advance an understanding of how queers of colour have both transgressed *and* complied with such normative frameworks to engender new modes of identification that seek to neither resist nor assimilate to homonationalist representational mandates.

5.3b. QUEER OF COLOUR CRITIQUE

Through highlighting the representational absence and presence of queers of colour in Québécois cinema, I historicize how the mobilization a progressive rhetoric of LGBTQ+ tolerance obfuscates a violent history of sexual and racial subjugation. I harness a queer of colour (QOC) reading of homonationalism to demonstrate and destabilize how this deployment of representation operates as a model for claiming cultural citizenship and political agency. This type of cultural representation has mobilized tropes of queerness and racialized alongside homonationalist notions of progressive queer visibility to promote the advancement of white normative queer subjects through the marginalization of queer(red) racialized subjects. By outlining the mandates of this sort of representation, I detail how queer of colour representation is scripted by white-settler and normative logics of citizenship. In deconstructing their representation through QOC intersectionality, I outline how these subjects have negotiated the pressures of hegemonic forms of subjectivity. The most critical element of WOC feminist intersectional analysis is that it renders visible the socio-legal erasure of multiply-oppressed subjects (such as queers of colour), while also making present their constitutive absence from representational identity politics. This focus on the symbolic nature of race obscures its material consequences, and QOC critique's use of WOC intersectionality frames the historicity of race as both a material and symbolic formation. In effect, I evidence how the representational absence of queers of colour from the Québécois national imaginary is just as politically potent as their strategic presence in the form of tokens of a homonationalist politics of accommodation.

Through my analysis of homonational trajectories in three case studies, I re-frame our understanding of the cultural representations of queer(ed) racialized subjectivity to illuminate the colonial and neoliberal conditions of sexual and racial citizenship. This dissertation deploys a QOC analysis of cultural representation and political agency to question our current understanding of queers of color within a homonationalist cultural imagination. Through Muñoz's concept of disidentification, I provide a detailed examination of the (often tactical) performances of racial and sexual subjectivity within and beyond my three case studies. As a strategic survival tactic, disidentification outlines the factors involved in queer of colour contingencies with mainstream politics of representation. Much of the work on homonationalism offers few options for queer of colour political resistance or agency. Within my historicization of Québécois homonationalism, queer of colour engagement with representational mandates must often simultaneously resist the inherent optics of complacency. This is done through distinct identity performances that subvert the cultural and political pressures of white heteronormativity. In articulating how queer(ed) and racialized Québécois subjects have historically transgressed such (homo)nationalist constraints, I outline how to envision alternative frames for interpreting unconventional and subversive forms of cultural and political resistance.

Disidentification operates as a form of strategic infiltration into mainstream public culture. I mobilize Muñoz's concept to re-frame our understanding of how queers of colors maneuver the violence of normative tropes and mandates of identification and representation. Resisting the normative binary of identification/counter-identification, disidentification operates as a third stance to dominant ideologies of representation that both refuses to fully conform or fully resist. This praxis exposes how shifts in cultural and political politics materialize the constructed ontological performances of queer racialized subjects. In effect, I frame how queers of colour capitalizes upon the homonationalist rhetoric of normative sexual citizenship and neo-liberal political and cultural inclusion. By capitalizing upon their marginal positionality constructed both inside *and* outside of the mainstream, many queers of colour strategically mimic neoliberal 'authentic' representations of difference. In effect, transgressive performances of queer(ed) and racialized subjectivity can both subvert and comply with homonationalist representational mandates to claim cultural and political agency. Using Muñoz's concept, this dissertation provides a paradigm for understanding ambivalent queer of colour complicities with Québécois imperialist logics of sexuality and racialization as a tactical strategy for claiming cultural citizenship. This tactical praxis of disidentification can engender alternative models for understating the subtle dynamics of power and resistance within homonationalist regimes.

c.4. THE HOMONATIONAL PRESENT



Figure c.5. Freedom without choice: Coming out as queer of colour in Chloé Robichaud's webseries, Féminin/Féminin, 2014-2016 (screenshot, Radio Canada)

This dissertation examines the distinct intertwining of race, queerness, and homo/nationalism in Québec cinema during the late twentieth-century. It aims to trace the material and symbolic conditions that have promoted the cultural absence and emblematic presence of queers of colour in the Québécois cultural imagination. At the core of this dissertation lies this (neo)liberal queer of colour paradox, which Maarya aptly encapsulated in her maxim, “freedom without choice.” Overall, the dissertation challenges the notion of visibility and representation as a universal strategy for queers of colour to claim political agency and cultural citizenship. I argue that such (neo)liberal practices of national progress and inclusion can precariously render queer people of colour as absent, silent, or tokenized. I challenge a mainstream narrative of coming out as a linear path to liberation by drawing attention to inherent whiteness of this hegemonic practice. This seeks to open space for other kinds of racialized subjects, other forms of sexual and political agency, which have the power to disrupt mainstream conceptions of Dolan's films and recognition as a beacon of social progress.

During the past two decades, homonationalism in Québec has solidified alongside a steady proliferation of queer media (e.g., film, TV, webseries, etc.). From the mainstream hit film, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2005), to the recent Radio-Canada webseries, *Féminin/Féminin* (dir. Chloé Robichaud, 2014-2016), most queer Québécois works continue to be organized around a homonational coming out plotline. To counter this, Black and racialized queer organizations such as *Massimadi*, Montréal's Black LGBTQ+ film and arts festival, illustrate alternative forms of representation that have the potential to challenge homonationalist identity politics. This dissertation revisits our queer past to elucidate longstanding issues that continue to haunt queer of colour communities in Québec. While coming out may now be seen as old-fashioned for newer queer generations, it steadfastly remains promoted as a path to liberation for queers of colour *and* a symbol of progress and development for western nations. Effectively, it acts as a prerequisite step to enjoying the privileges of homonationalism, for some more than others. This dissertation aims to further a dialogue on the pressures of representational visibility that queer people of colour face, and how they can disidentify with such neoliberal logics of diversity to claim new forms of agency outside of a Québécois regime of homonationalism.

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