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“Bad Gal” and the “Bad” Refugee: Reading Neoliberal Critique and Refugee Narratives through Cambodian Canadian Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

"Bad Gal" and the "Bad" Refugee: Reading Neoliberal Critique and Refugee Narratives through Cambodian Canadian Hip Hop

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This project examines the intersections of refugee discourses and neoliberal critique through the analysis of the 2013 hip hop music video "Bad Gal" by Cambodian Canadian artist Honey Cocaine. By utilizing the concept of the "bad refugee" as a subjectivity that refuses to reconcile imperialist wars in Southeast Asia, rejects developmental narratives of progress and uplift, and contradicts neoliberal multiculturalism, this project demonstrates how "Bad Gal" is a countersite that reveals neoliberal ruptures. I observe "Bad Gal" for its audiovisual content, use of digital editing techniques, and themes of deviance and blackness, in arguing that it expresses an alternative refugee narrative and temporality, and a refusal of neoliberal subjectivity through the identifications of blackness and hip hop. This project draws from Critical Refugee Studies, cultural studies, and comparative racialization scholars in delineating the processes of gendered racialization for the Cambodian refugee diaspora, and the ways in which cultural productions provide a lens in understanding their relationship to the neoliberal state.

The thesis of Kenneth Wing Lun Chan is approved.

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Introduction

I'm the boss ya'll kissin' me
What you think, I'mma fuckin' make history
I just can't fuck with the industry

- "Love Coca (Love Sosa)," Honey Cocaine[1]

Honey Cocaine (government name Sochitta Sal) burst onto the hip hop scene in 2012 with her remix of Chicago drill rapper Chief Keef's hit single "Love Sosa." With her music video garnering millions of views on YouTube, Honey Cocaine gained the attention of popular rapper Tyga who invited her to accompany him on his major national tour in 2012, and offered a potential co-sign to his label Last Kings. Since then, Honey Cocaine has released numerous mixtapes and EP's, the latest offering being "The Gift Rap" in 2015. Repping (representing) the Jane-Finch community in Toronto, the Cambodian Canadian MC's style has been described as "a voice that's both cute and menacing" and "an artist who has all the skill, creativity, and appeal needed for commercial success yet occupies a non-commercialized space." Her 2013 tape "Thug Love" contains braggadocio, assured confidence and swagger, as one reviewer describes:

> We're not sure who she's mad at or why she's mad but she's talking tough. On her tape, her favorite words to call her naysayers are 'bitch' and 'ho.' She has no problem shouting out how much more incredible she is compared to them on every verse.[2]

[1] Sochitta Sal. "Honey Cocaine – Love Coca." YouTube video, 2:23. Posted by "QueenHoneyC," Dec 12, 2012, accessed June 6, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqhqc07C9xM. Unless indicated otherwise, all lyrics interpreted by the author.

[2] Stovall, Calvin. "Mixtape Review: Honey Cocaine, Thug Love." BET.com. BET Interactive, LLC, April 5, 2013. Web. June 1, 2015.

With "sonic versatility"[3] in both her rhymes and beats, there is speculation that Honey Cocaine has the potential to capture a mainstream audience, signaled by her significant presence on social media (with around 500k Twitter followers). At the same time, her controversial use of the n-word has drawn up a few questions as a potential obstacle against mainstream success. For now, Honey Cocaine remains on the periphery, with a significant fan base and following, but off of mainstream radio charts.

While I will briefly touch on issues of commercial success, this paper looks to shift away from discourse centered on the politics of representation and the marketability of Asian American artists. A desire to read Honey Cocaine's work within these politics of representation and commercial viability is perhaps urged by what Lisa Lowe calls "'cultural nationalist formations" which would situate Asian American culture within "an Asian American cultural nationalist and a U.S. national framework." Certainly, my own beginnings in this project originated from such desires for *the* Asian American rapper. But Lowe redirects and reframes our own nationalist desires and posits that alternative possibilities are suggested through works that emerge "from the perspective of an international history and location…and is antagonistic to the 'modern' in both aesthetic and political senses."[4] In this way, I look to reframe a reading of Honey Cocaine's work from culturally nationalist politics of representations towards a critique that troubles U.S. nationalist narratives of development and multiculturalism. While assessing Honey Cocaine's marketability is not a goal of this paper, I still read for the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, as well as investigating the means of production and distribution of the

[3] Ibid.
[4] Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 34.

YouTube music video. This analysis further complements an understanding and growing body of work on how the contemporary, internet music video can be read as cultural production.

Secondly, existing narratives and work around Asian American participation in hip hop, while invaluable to this paper, continue to propose a framework of what Helen Jun calls "cross-racial dysfunction,"[5] positioning Black and Asian Americans in an oppositional narrative of ethnic conflict. This understanding eludes complex processes of racialization in favor of a deficit view that describes both Black and Asian Americans as being unable to politicize and develop. In addition, an oppositional paradigm ignores the multiplicity of vulnerabilities and oppressions faced in favor of static understandings of anti-Black or anti-Asian racism. In reframing this discourse, I interrogate issues of cultural appropriation or theft through a paradigm of comparative racialization. Rather than limiting the discussion around Honey Cocaine's role in hip hop and use of the n-word that would discipline or punish the Cambodian woman subject, I extend this analysis to reveal the complex positionality of the Cambodian diasporic refugee, as understood by the state as a stateless anomaly, "whose status needs to be brought back into place either by naturalization or repatriation."[6] In short, what does Honey Cocaine's appropriation, performance and use of blackness look to achieve? What does it reveal about the Cambodian diasporic subject?

Admittedly, my own entry into this field began from my complex and contradictory interests in Asian American hip hop, and as a Chinese American student in ethnic studies, my lived realities do not reflect the Cambodian diasporic refugee experience. Still, I hope to be able to reframe these nationalist desires in Asian American hip hop to instead reveal the violence of

[5] Helen Heran Jun, *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 4.
[6] Yen Le Espiritu. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 2.

neoliberalism. As the Cambodian refugee diaspora continues to be both consumed and targeted by neoliberal violences, building a critique of multicultural neoliberalism is necessary to better understand the ways in which neoliberalism both incorporates and disciplines; both selectively protects life and marks others for death.[7] Through this examination of Honey Cocaine and her music video "Bad Gal," I hope to demonstrate alternative possibilities that both reveal neoliberal contradiction and hint at potential resistive spaces.

[7] Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 7.

Chapter One: Situating Honey Cocaine and the "Bad Gal"

Through examining Honey Cocaine's 2013 music video "Bad Gal,"[8] I argue Honey Cocaine's work joins other Cambodian diasporic cultural productions as a countersite against liberal narratives and refugee binaries, as well as a site of neoliberal contradiction. I support these claims through a reading of "Bad Gal" that closely observes these disruptions, with its deviant themes drawing from hip hop and blackness, which in turn enable a move against neoliberal politics of respectability. At the same time, constraints and the reproduction of neoliberalism can be read through acknowledging hip hop's multicultural incorporation. In doing so, I position "Bad Gal" as a space in which we can see alternative, and potentially resistant possibilities for Cambodian diasporic and refugee narratives. I demonstrate the ways in which "Bad Gal" intervenes on the discourses surrounding the Cambodian American or Canadian cultural production through its genre of trap and hip hop music, and in turn its complex relationship with blackness. I propose that "Bad Gal" demonstrates the ways in which we must continue to critically read Asian diasporic cultural productions through a lens of comparative racialization.

The music video as a form provides a layered medium of study through its audiovisual and online visibility. Once utilized by record companies in order to assist with sales, the music video has undergone major shifts as television programing and economics shifted away from music video production, as budgets were slashed and directors moved on with the rise of "post-classical" film. However, with the mainstream popularity of YouTube, and its corporatization

[8] Sochitta Sal. "Honey Cocaine – Bad Gal [Official Video]." YouTube video, 2:47. Posted by "QueenHoneyC," April 2, 2013, accessed June 9, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SppjtSSeNvU.

through Google's 2006 purchase of the company, music videos have found a place as the top-viewed videos on the website.[9] This distribution model under Google allows for official music video releases from record companies, and allows those same companies to flag and remove user uploads without appropriate copyright clearance. This signifies YouTube as the destination and market for music videos, with value predominantly being ascribed via "view counts" rather than record sales. Through this understanding of the YouTube market, I note the ways in which "Bad Gal" is impacted by what Carol Vernallis calls "YouTube aesthetic."[10]

I analyze "Bad Gal" in relation to the figure of the refugee by reading the ways in which Honey Cocaine revokes ideas of a passive, traumatized, dispossessed, and feminized Cambodian refugee in need of protection. I observe the ways in which Honey Cocaine fits the discourse of the "bad refugee"; in need of discipline and punishment. However, I do not intend to place Honey Cocaine on one side of the refugee binary. Through temporality analysis of the music video, the temporality collisions of the pre-modern and modern within "Bad Gal" demonstrates a multi-temporal simultaneity which avoids situating Honey Cocaine in the anachronistic past, yet at the same time, does not assert a position in progressive, liberal modernity. Instead of a narrative of development, "Bad Gal" presents a dizzying temporal contradiction, which resonates with neoliberal critique.

Reading further dimensions of "Bad Gal" locates a disavowal of the politics of respectability and critique against neoliberalism, in situating Honey Cocaine as a deviant gendered racialized figure and refugee. This demonstrates a refusal against liberal and Orientalist narratives, yet is constrained as the capital driven, neoliberal themes of the song (and

[9] Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 182.
[10] Ibid.

more broadly, hip hop) emerge. Neoliberalism and market forces emerge both through the lyrical, business and drug-dealing related content, as well as also manifesting through the production of the commercial music video. While Honey Cocaine might identify with deviance, she still capitulates to neoliberal desires through "Bad Gal," which indicates the constraints for radical possibilities, and intersects with narratives of multicultural incorporation.

While scholarship regarding Asian diaspora and hip hop has predominantly engaged in the politics of authenticity[11] or transnational flows of culture,[12] I shift these discussions to a field of cultural studies that works to reveal neoliberal contradictions and ruptures in national culture. However, this does not mean I intend to ignore the significant ways in which blackness has influenced and is invoked through "Bad Gal." Neither do I intend to minimize conversations around anti-blackness and cultural appropriation. Rather than an oppositional framing pitting blackness and Cambodian-ness against each other in what Helen Jun would call "cross-racial dysfunction,"[13] I instead look to observe how the influence and invocation of blackness allows Honey Cocaine to identify herself against liberal narratives and politics of respectability, to disrupt passive refugee narratives. As a hip hop artist, these negotiations and disruptions of hegemony are contingent on this connection to blackness, whether it be the Caribbean influenced patois in Toronto that are signaled in the title "Bad Gal," the trap-influenced production and delivery of the song itself, or Honey Cocaine's controversial use of the n-word. Understanding this discourse as a relationship as opposed to an ethnic conflict better reveals the vulnerable

[11] Oliver Wang. "Repping and Rapping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC" in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 35-68.
[12] Samy Alim & Alastair Pennycook. *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (London: Routledge, 2008).
[13] Helen Heran Jun. *Race for Citizenship*. (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 4.

positioning of the Cambodian diaspora, and the process of comparative racialization, while not dismissing contentious issues behind appropriation and authenticity.

Literature Review

I draw from the fields of Critical Refugee Studies, Cambodian American cultural studies, and comparative racialization frameworks to theoretically ground this project. In thinking about the figure of the refugee and "Bad Gal's" connection to Cold War-era American Empire, I look to seminal writings in Critical Refugee Studies, and draw connections to the context of refugee movements towards Canada. I then turn to a review of Cambodian American cultural studies projects in an examination of methods and theoretical framing, to understand on how Cambodian diasporic cultural production has been approached, and what ruptures or contradictions they can reveal. Finally, I complete the review by examining works on the role of blackness in Asian American hip hop, and the theoretical guidance of *Race to Citizenship* (2011) by Helen Jun and Michelle Chang's "Rice and Rap" (2015), to configure a way to address "Bad Gal's" invocation and production of blackness.

Critical Refugee Studies: Historical Amnesia, Dispossession, and Statelessness

Beginning with Critical Refugee Studies, I look to three important texts in the field; Thu Huong Nguyen-Vo's "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?" (2005), Mimi Nguyen's *The Gift of the Refugee: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (2012), and Yen Le Espiritu's *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (2014). In particular, I pay attention to how

these scholars construct refugee discourse against American empire and national culture, as well as enables neoliberal critique.

In "Forking Paths" Nguyen-Vo describes the historical amnesia of Vietnamese Americans as a source of a suppressive Vietnamese government, the removal of Vietnamese subjectivity by the Left, and stripped away in a move to build U.S. Empire, constructing "*universalism by historical amnesia.*"[14] She states that both forms- from Left and Right politics- ultimately "constructed Vietnamese immigrants as needing tutelage in this country."[15] The Left was swept up in a narrative of "liberatory discourse," oversimplifying South Vietnamese forces as "puppets of American imperialism," and further removing their claims for Vietnamese nationhood. In this way, the refugee figure is left stateless and in exile, and a mechanism to promote of American imperialism.

For American empire, Nguyen-Vo explains how historical narratives are consumed by neoliberalism in the construction of "universalism by historical amnesia."[16] She points to the incorporation of minority figures into the state, such as legal scholar Viet Dinh under the Bush administration. Nguyen-Vo explains how Dinh invokes a narrative of the American Dream, as a Vietnamese refugee who enacted upward social mobility into political power, expressing neoliberal values of universality and individual freedom. In this case, the narrative of the American Dream and neoliberal success expressed by a former refugee operates in "remaking the Vietnam War into a just and successful war."[17] This process constructs the Vietnamese refugee as both an ideal neoliberal subject, but also erases the complex histories and agency of

[14] Nguyen-Vo, Thu Huong. "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?" *Amerasia Journal* 31:2 (2005), 165.
[15] Ibid, 161.
[16] Ibid, 165.
[17] Ibid, 166.

Vietnamese Americans. Liberalism, American empire, and neoliberalism converge to remove agency, and construct the need of western uplift- and also looks to "embody success stories of freedom gained"[18] within the figure of the refugee.

Nguyen-Vo finishes her essay emphasizing the necessity for historical context for remembering and understanding trauma. Critiquing psychoanalytic approaches emphasizing melancholia as the reasons behind the inability to mourn, she states that this is method of "forced forgetting":

> We must remember because forgetting deprives us of our humanist agency in relation to our history. The question that remains is *not* how to assimilate the foreign or cure the pathological.[19]

Through this example, Nguyen-Vo suggests that historical contexts and narratives are essential to reconstructing agency and humanism for the refugee, as these acts of historical erasure, amnesia, and appropriation are an "act of cannibalism."[20] It is evident through this analysis that neoliberalism works to construct the refugee as dysfunctional and pathologically traumatized, needing American intervention and domination in order to be given the opportunity to survive, progress, and fulfill the American Dream. Furthermore, the figure of the refugee becomes a tool of historical amnesia itself that upholds American empire.

Similarly addressing refugee discourses, Mimi Nguyen's *The Gift of Freedom* (2012)[21] looks to theorize liberal empire and the figure of the refugee through an analytical lens honing in

[18] Ibid, 167.
[19] Ibid, 169.
[20] Ibid, 172.
[21] Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

on the gift(s) of freedom. Acknowledging common discourse around liberal empire from the left, Nguyen expands on this by proposing that the gift of freedom it not simply a "trick" or "ploy"[22] to justify empire and military expansion, but also engages with economies of indebtness, and the manufacturing and production of freedom:

> "The gift of freedom as a cluster of promises therefore produces *events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth,* far beyond what the gift of freedom claims to do. In this manner, the ethical and moral force of the gift of freedom, as a means of connecting individuals to the world and to each other through a mutual if uneven attachment to freedom as a universal end, can be a medium through which ever more comprehensive forms of power connect these affective intensities to geopolitical interventions."[23]

Through this understanding of the gift as a form of irreconcilable debt, and freedom as continuous production of universalism and violent normativity, Nguyen also looks to the "subjects of freedom." Understanding the refugee the refugee as both objects of "intervention" and "deliverance,"[24] Nguyen's work intersects with critical refugee studies in a way that underlines the "movement from subjection to subjectivity, and the poisonous promise of this movement."[25]

Nguyen's analysis in particular examines narratives of development and temporality. She argues that the narrative of liberal modernity is predicated on making the refugee as "anomalous and anachronistic,"[26] and drawing from Foucault's *Abnormal* (2003), explains the refugee to be

[22] Ibid, 4.
[23] Ibid, 12 (italics in original).
[24] Ibid, 23.
[25] Ibid, 25.
[26] Ibid 43.

"profoundly, painfully, stuck in time."[27] A similar analysis might be seen in Anderson's conceptualization of homogenous, empty time in the production of national, modern culture.[28] Relatedly, Lisa Lowe argues:

> Yet the project of imagining the nation as homogenous requires the orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally 'foreign' origins to the modern American society that 'discovers,' 'welcomes,' and 'domesticates' them."[29]

Liberal modernity and national culture requires refugee time to be positioned as backwards and anachronistic. The refugee, and Southeast Asia is understood as needing assistance (the gift) to reach liberal modernity- faster, progressive, and developmental time. Similar to the way Nguyen-Vo posits that consumed historical narratives mark refugees without agency, this temporal analysis shows how refugees occupy inferior space and time, justifying western intervention and domination.

Nguyen also further contributes to Nguyen-Vo's argument around trauma and psychoanalysis, classifying the use of trauma and psychoanalysis as a tool of liberal modernity, which then engages in a deficit narrative of refugees. Unable to function as rational, neoliberal subjects, Nguyen argues that this narrative strips away their right to property, and resigns them to welfare and state dependency. Similar to how Vietnamese refugees were stripped of statehood through appropriative and simplified histories, the refugee figure is stripped of all possessions:

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[27] Ibid, 55.
[28] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 24.
[29] Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

> …the refugee figure is bereft of property- possessing neither interior faculties for the rational and moral calculation of interest and consequence, nor eternal properties for their 'right' exercise in intercourse with others, including legitimate citizenship, proprietary rights, or simply things ("Clothing, a lot of these people didn't have clothing. Some of them didn't have shoes."). Profoundly dispossessed, from this perspective the refugee has lost *every thing*[30]

This dispossession via trauma configures a deficit narrative of the refugee, which Nguyen also argues leads to the association of criminality. Dispossessed, the refugee exhibits inability to enact neoliberal values of economic rationale, and therefore requires policing and discipline. With the loss of "rational, and thus moral bearings,"[31] the refugee is viewed as a criminal threat. Through this intervention, Nguyen connects these refugee discourses to the technologies of criminalization and deportation, which impact material conditions drastically for the Cambodian diaspora.

Yen Le Espiritu's *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugee* (2014) looks to lay the foundational frameworks for Critical Refugee Studies, and shift from "narratives of American exceptionalism, and immigration, and transnationalism" to instead "crucial issues of war, race, and violence- and of the history and memories that are forged from the thereafter."[32] Citing the crisis model utilized by humanitarian researchers during the wars in Southeast Asia, and representations of successful refuge life post-war, Espiritu demonstrates the ways in which

[30]Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and other Refugee Passages*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59 (italics in original).
[31] Ibid, 59.
[32] Yen Le Espiritu. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 2.

refugees were seen as "a *problem* in need of therapeutic intervention"[33] and "widely publicized objects of U.S. rescue fantasies."[34] This figure of the refugee converges with Nguyen-Vo and Nguyen's work, as a victimized subject stripped of all agency and possessions.

For Espiritu, the refugee is also "an anomaly whose status needs to be brought back into place by either naturalization or repatriation,"[35] connecting them to ideas of exile and statelessness, as a contradiction that exists outside the normalized social order. Espiritu points out that the benevolent savior process is reliant on American empire; through the bases in the Philippines and Guam which were receiving centers, and the militarized life in refugee camps. These examples of militarism overlap with Nguyen-Vo and Nguyen's analyses of the necessary role of American empire, and demonstrate how refugees have always been consumed as subjects of empire, whether it be through appropriated historical narratives, the temporal "gift of freedom," or these examples of imperialist projects. In addition, Espiritu examines the narrative of the "good refugee." Able to assimilate, work hard, and devoid of criminality and deviance, the "good refugee" upholds liberal multiculturalism, and is mobilized to uphold military interventions and American empire.

In working against these refugee discourses, Espiritu instead characterizes the refugee as both a "critical idea but also as a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change." Through this reframing, Espiritu posits that the refugee reveals the contradictions among the "established principles of the nation-state and the idealized goal of inclusion and recognition within it."[36] Similar to how

[33] Ibid, 11 (italics in original).
[34] Ibid, 173.
[35] Ibid, 11.
[36] Ibid, 10.

Lisa Lowe[37] might characterize Asian American cultural production as revealing the fissures in national culture and multiculturalism, the refugee figure points to the faults and limitations of American empire. Secondly, this reframing draws attention to the need to recognize and acknowledge the agency of refugee populations themselves:

> Yet I also argue that critical refugee studies scholars need to do more than critique; we need to be attentive to refugees as 'intentionalized beings' who possess and enact their *own* politics as they emerge out of the ruins of war and its aftermath[38]

Through this text, Espiritu summarizes and theorizes possibilities for Critical Refugee discourse. While the figure of the refugee continues to be seen as an irrational, deficit object in need of saving in order to reach liberal progressive development, I similarly look to configure Honey Cocaine and "Bad Gal" as both a response to these neoliberal refugee narratives, as well reframe this cultural production in a way that reveals these ruptures of liberal multiculturalism and empire.

This project also requires drawing the connections between the space of Canada and Critical Refugee Studies. Beginning with the early refugee policies during and shortly after the Vietnam War, Canada played a significant role in the wars in Southeast Asia. Canada pledged political support to the US, as well as material support in the forms of aid, "peacekeeping" troops, and volunteer cross-border enlisters.[39] Reflecting Espiritu's analysis, this played into

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[37] Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.
[38] Ibid, 10 (italics in original).
[39] Victor Levant. *Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1986).

Canada's role as a western savior, as media coverage portrayed harsh refugee camp conditions in Thailand and engaged in "sympathy for refugee plight."[40]

The majority of Cambodian refugees entered Canada after 1979, and received official refugee designation under UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). At the same time, Canada provided strict selection criteria that were aimed at receiving skilled and assimilable refugees. For the most part, Cambodian refugees were racially positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, as they were assumed to have rural backgrounds and little formal education in contrast to Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese populations, who were seen as upwardly mobile and able to easily adjust. In reaction to these selective criteria, many Cambodian refugees entered Canada under private sponsorships, many from humanitarian Christian and church organizations.[41] In this way, Cambodian refugees entering Canada have been racialized as the worst of the worst; more vulnerable to mental trauma due to the Khmer Rouge, and unassimilable unlike their well-educated Chinese Vietnamese counterparts.

The Refugee & Cultural Studies: Possibilities in Cambodian American Critique

I now turn to investigate the ways Cambodian diasporic cultural productions have been studied, and what key themes emerge from these projects. I look closely to Cathy Schlund-Vials' *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* (2012), and Y-Dang Troeung's "Iterations of War and its Literary Counterforces: Vaddey Ratner's *In the Shadow of the Banyan* and Kosal Khiev's *Why I Write*" (2015).

[40] Janet McLellan. *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.
[41] Ibid, 32.

In *War, Genocide, and Justice* (2012), Schlund-Vials observes how historical narratives have been appropriated by neoliberalism by both the Cambodian and US state. This method of selective remembrance and historical amnesia is termed by Schlund-Vials as the Cambodian Syndrome:

> Situated adjacent to Cambodian memory politics, these strategic deployments, paradoxical conflations, and syncretic collapses of two distinct U.S. foreign-policy moments constitute what I term the Cambodian syndrome: a transnational set of amnesiac politics revealed through hegemonic modes of public policy and memory…Built on the deliberately incomplete acknowledgement that the genocide was somehow linked to the Vietnam Conflict, the Cambodian Syndrome in part encompasses the paradoxical nonadmission of U.S. culpability before, during and after the Democratic Kampuchean era.[42]

Similar to the analysis provided by Critical Refugee studies, the Cambodian Syndrome also looks to support American empire as a benevolent savior, and removes the agency of Cambodian refugees as simply victims of the violences in the Khmer Rouge of the past. This in turn absolves the US for its role in destabilizing Southeast Asia through war and political maneuvers, as well as the Cambodian state's responsibility in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, with the key example being the lack of prosecution against Khmer Rouge officials that presided over these historical violences. This narrative proposes a certain type of state-mediated trauma, which posits Cambodian refugees as dysfunctional, leading to policies around criminalization and removal with repatriation agreements. Finally, this discourse supports American empire with

[42] Cathy Schlund-Vials. *War, Justice, and Genocide: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 13.

justification for military intervention, in orientalist ideology where Asia is a space of brutal death in need of discipline and freedom.

With the "cannibalization" of these historical narratives, Schlund-Vials proposes Cambodian American cultural productions are "alternative sites for justice, healing, and reclamation."[43] As Lisa Lowe outlines Asian American critique in *Immigrant Acts*, Schlund-Vials delineates what she terms Cambodian American critique. Through observing these ruptures and contradictions stemming from Cambodian American subjectivity and hegemonic post-cold war politics, Schlund-Vials argues that these contradictions

> …render intelligible the transnational registers of a particular Cambodian American critique, signifying in the process the book's concommitment examination of how Khmer American cultural producers- through genocide remembrance, juridical activism, and refugee experience- simultaneously imagine both the country of origin and settlement.[44]

While situated within Cambodian American historical narratives and contexts such as the Khmer Rouge genocide, this framework connects back to Espiritu's conceptualization of the refugee for the Vietnamese diaspora, which similarly reveals the ruptures and contradictions of American empire.

Y-Dang Troeung's "Iterations of War and its Literary Counterforces" (2015) also demonstrates a similar framework, through honing in on two Cambodian American cultural productions: literary novel *In the Shadow of the Banyan* (2010) by Vaddey Ratner, and the spoken word poetry video *Why I Write* (2012) by Studio Revolt and Kosal Khiev. Troeung

[43] Ibid, 17.
[44] Ibid, 22.

explains that for the most part, Cambodian American literature has "employed the autobiographical testimonial form" and has been narrowly focused on Pol Pot's regime and Khmer Rouge violence. Mostly written within the context of war crime tribunals, these narratives may inevitably confirm "narratives of the 'gift of freedom' that designate Cambodia as the sole source of human rights abuses and the United States as the granter of freedom."[45] Connecting back to *War, Memory, and Justice*, this discourse also addresses the Cambodian Syndrome that would place these narratives within a paradigm that supports American empire and ignores past and current imperialisms.

Troeung emphasizes the possibilities for resistance, first identifying *In the Shadow of the Banyan* as subverting norms in Cambodian American literature. She argues that Ratner's use of "mythic time" ("the spatial-temporal frame of classical Khmer myths, legends, and folk-lore that access centuries of Cambodia's rich oral history and literary traditions")[46] which disrupts the Khmer Rouge's notions of cyclical time, as well as intervening on narratives of genocide and "annihilating violence of the past."[47] Next, Troeung addresses *Why I Write*, postulating that Khiev, a Cambodian American who was incarcerated and then deported, "must navigate this binary of innocence and victimization in his poetry and everyday performance of self." This analysis identifies Khiev's agency in negotiating between binaries of the good and bad refugee, and temporally acts as "an attempt through art and aesthetics to escape from the enduring wartime temporality inhabited by the refugee." Drawing attention to the way Khiev expresses his anger towards deportation, and how Khiev implores the viewer to think about the larger

[45] Y-Dang Troeung. "Iterations of War and Literary Counterforces: Vaddey Ratner's In the Shadow of the Banyan and Kosal Khiev's Why I Write." *MELUS: The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 40:2 (2015), 15.
[46] Ibid, 5.
[47] Ibid, 9.

history of Cambodia, Troeung argues that the performance makes viewers grapple with his Cambodian American refugee subjectivity. Overall, Troeung's work shows the possibilities that exist for cultural productions in "disrupt[ing] hegemonic narratives"[48] and to "call attention to human rights violations on both sides of the Pacific."[49] Through this literary and temporal analysis, Troeung provides tools that capture analysis outside the realm of memory work.

Both Schlund-Vials and Troeung develop important interventions in the field of Critical Refugee studies, in demonstrating the possibilities that exist for cultural productions, providing methods of analysis, and outlining the context for the Cambodian diasporic refugee population. Their analysis relate back to my earlier review of Critical Refugee Studies, in critiquing the discourses shown by Nguyen-Vo, Nguyen, and Espiritu, with the analysis of consumed historical narratives, temporality and anachronistic time, and the reframing of refugee discourse.

Hip Hop, Cultural Studies, and Comparative Racialization

With these directions of Critical Refugee studies and Cambodian American cultural studies developed, I now turn to grappling with discourses and frameworks that guide my analysis on the invocation and role of blackness for Honey Cocaine and her music video "Bad Gal." Hotly contested debates around cultural appropriation, authenticity, and even minstrelsy continue within the contentious spaces of hip hop. I briefly review these arguments, delving into Oliver Wang's seminal article, "Repping and Rapping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC." While these issues of appropriation and authenticity are important, I look to two works that propose alternative possibilities for these debates outside of ethnic conflict; Helen

[48] Ibid, 14.
[49] Ibid 15.

Jun's *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (2012), and Michelle Chang's "Rice and Rap: Hip Hop Music, Black/Asian American Racialization, and the Role of U.S. Multicultural Neoliberal State" (2015).

Wang's "Repping and Rapping Asian"[50] follows Asian American rappers from the 90s to the early 2000s, focusing in the ways Asian American MC's have "dealt with their racial difference through self-conscious deployment of racial and ethnic signifiers in their lyrics, videos, and press materials."[51] Wang argues that Asian Americans fall outside of the racial authenticity that exists within hip hop, and are forced to negotiate issues around rejection and unmarketability. While Wang aims to problematize the model of cultural authenticity, he does not necessarily call for the detachment of hip hop from its Afro-diasporic roots, and cautions against the commodification of hip hop free of historical or cultural contexts. In conceptualizing these tense back-and-forth motions, Wang understands hip hop as "contested terrain that is inextricably linked to long-standing tensions between Asian Americans and African Americans." Still, Wang concludes that the power of hip hop remains in its appeal as cultural identity, as "one may not trump ethnic or racial allegiances but at least provides an alternative."[52]

Wang cautiously negotiates against racial and cultural essentialism of hip hop. This negotiation, while important to the growing field around Asian and Asian American participation in hip hop, conceptualizes Asian American participation in hip hop as an ethnic conflict. Especially considering Honey Cocaine's controversial use of the n-word, these paradigms would situate Honey Cocaine as an invasive confrontation against blackness. While I am not intending to excuse anti-blackness, I argue that this positioning of the Cambodian women within hip hop

[50] Oliver Wang. "Rapping and Repping Asian" in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 35-68.
[51] Ibid, 38.
[52] Ibid, 61.

must be situated within broader discussions of racial formations, Critical Refugee studies, and intersectional analysis, in order to avoid simplified notions of ethnic conflict and nationalist, cultural authenticity.

An alternative approach to hip hop study might be Cathy Schlund-Vials' examination of Cambodian American hip hop artist praCh. Rather than engaging with discourses around authenticity, Schlund-Vials points to the possibilities of hip hop as a space for this memory work, historicizing its origins out of "civil rights and people color movements" which then "affords Cambodian American artists…persuasive vocabulary of resistance and revision."[53] In her analysis of Cambodian American hip hop artist praCh, Schlund-Vials explains how the site of hip hop becomes a space of cultural hybridity, with 1990s Los Angeles hip hop being a major influence on praCh, and the utilization of Khmer instruments and vocals, producing his own Cambodian American subjectivity. These efforts result in Cambodian American cultural production that "tirelessly marries genocide history, refugee struggle, and- perhaps most important- survivor witnessing."[54] This theorization of hip hop signals it as a space for possibility and alternative remembrance. Focus on memory work has been key for studies on Cambodian diasporic music, with Joshua Chambers-Letson's article on the Cambodian American-led band Dengue Fever.[55] However, as I later examine Honey Cocaine's music video "Bad Gal," different critiques around neoliberalism and progressive temporality provide alternative methods when memory work is sometimes illegible.

[53] Cathy Schlund-Vials. *War, Justice, and Genocide: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 24.
[54] Ibid, 179.
[55] Joshua Chambers-Letson. "No, I Can't Forget": Performance and Memory in Dengue Fever's Cambodian America." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23:3 (2011), 259-287.

Helen Jun's *Race for Citizenship* (2012) provides further theoretical frameworks useful in achieving access to Honey Cocaine's subjectivity, while also navigating her possible complicity in anti-blackness. Within this text, Jun proposes an analytic that would both recognize a relational understanding between Asian and black Americans to avoid conceptualizations of ethnic conflict which feed into deficit views of "cross-racial dysfunction." Through this reframing process, Jun argues that approaching comparative racialization in this manner reveals the "institutional and historical determinants"[56] to how both groups are racialized in relation to each other, eliding the vulnerabilities and material conditions of both subjectivities. This analytic works through Jun's reading practice, which rather than searching for "critical worth" in evaluating cultural productions, instead looks to read for contradiction "it attempts to manage or reconcile."[57]

In moving towards this method of study, Jun's text connects back to Critical Refugee studies as well as Cambodian American cultural studies in searching for moments of contradiction with national culture, American empire, or neoliberal historical narratives. Through these connections, Jun provides tools to also address the role of blackness in "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine. As opposed to a framework that would mark Honey Cocaine as an invasive, binary conflict, this method of comparative racialization allows for a better understanding of Cambodian diasporic subjectivity, as well as the complex positioning of blackness in relation.

An example of a project utilizing comparative racialization in theorizing hip hop is Michelle Chang's "Rice and Rap" (2015). Through an investigation of South LA gangsta rap

[56] Helen Heran Jun. *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 4.
[57] Ibid, 5.

and "progressive" rap through black and Asian American artists, Chang looks to avoid questions around authenticity and oppositional ethnic conflict, to situate a lens onto the state, through a frame of neoliberal multiculturalism. Chang argues that through hip hop's continued commercialization of gangsta rap, blackness was simultaneously and continuously racialized as criminal, deviant, and a threat to security. In conjunction, Asian Americans were racialized through model minority discourse, which in turn "dismissed the state's violences against largely Black communities, constructed and re-produced Asianness and Blackness as polar opposites, and reinforced white hegemony in the process."[58] Chang concludes that neoliberal multiculturalism continues to manufacture and racialize Black and Asian Americans oppositionally through these examples of the production of popular culture.

"Rice and Rap" demonstrates the benefit of utilizing comparative racialization as a tool to reframe what are seen as contested sites of conflict, in uncovering systemic processes of racialization that observes how power is mobilized through neoliberal multiculturalism. Jun and Chang lay out possibilities for the study of Honey Cocaine and "Bad Gal" which would work in conjunction with the theoretical frameworks of Critical Refugee Studies, and assist in the delineations of neoliberal contradiction, ruptures of American empire, and the realization of a Cambodian American subjectivity.

[58] Michelle Mihwa Chang. "Rice and Rap: Hip Hop Music, Black/Asian American Racialization, and the Role of the U.S. Multicultural Neoliberal State" Master's Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015. Retrieved from Electronic Thesis and Dissertations UCLA, Asian American Studies 0100UCLA.

Theoretical Concepts & Framework

Through these works, I conceptualize the critical term of the "bad" refugee. If the "good" refugee has been mobilized to uphold American empire and exceptionalism, willingly and easily participating within neoliberal multiculturalism, then the "bad" refugee mobilizes against it through rejecting politics of respectability by identifying with deviance. A refusal of neoliberal subjectivity, the "bad" refugee is targeted by the state for disciplining or removal through technologies of criminalization or deportation. Similar to how the refugee is read as a critical idea that "illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change,"[59] reading the "bad" refugee performs a similar critique through demonstrating the contradictions of neoliberal narratives of upward mobility and minority success. If Nguyen-Vo points to how neoliberal narratives have mobilized Vietnamese refugee success in a move to justify their military intervention and "gift of freedom," then the "bad" refugee enables the visible failures of the neoliberal state. That is not to say that the "bad" refugee provides radical resistance against the state, as neoliberalism still targets and pathologizes the "bad" refugee as being lazy, traumatized, or incapable to function rationally. Yet the alternative imaginaries of the "bad" refugee demonstrate a form of possibility, even if their narratives are consumed by the state, or even if they reproduce neoliberal multiculturalism as well.

Schlund-Vials argues that Cambodian American critique is distinguished from Asian American critique through "its direct and tireless engagement with genocide, human rights, and civil rights. To that end, Cambodian American memory work begins with and converges on the

[59] Yen Le Espiritu. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and the Militarized Refugee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 11.

realities of large-scale human loss, forced relocation, and involuntary resettlement."[60] In relation to the figure of the "bad" refugee, I complicate Cambodian American critique by also addressing the neoliberal politics of respectability. As the Southeast Asian refugee diaspora continues to be targeted, disciplined, and assessed through a neoliberal lens that would render them deviant, utilizing the "bad" refugee as a paradigm reveals how neoliberalism works with American empire and multiculturalism to "normalize" the refugee narrative.

Methodology

I look to emulate a genre of literary and cultural work centered within Critical Refugee Studies. Drawing from this field, I situate Honey Cocaine and the music video "Bad Gal" within this discourse of refugee narratives, America liberal empire, and neoliberal critique. In addition, I intervene on the field through an analysis of the invocations and markers of blackness within "Bad Gal" in order to critically develop the beginnings of a relational analysis. I briefly investigate and position "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine's music career within genres and subgenres of hip hop.

The reading practice of "Bad Gal" looks to analyze both visual and sonic aspects, in paying close attention to visual imagery, musical production, and lyrics. I read for visual semiotics such as set backgrounds, aesthetic themes, jewelry, clothing, and the ways in which Honey Cocaine's body gestures, motions, and raps. In analyzing dimensions of sound, I examine both the musical production and thematic tones of "Bad Gal," as well as interpreting lyrical content and lyrical delivery. Overall, this varied and layered analysis of "Bad Gal" looks closely

[60] Cathy Schlund-Vials. *War, Justice, and Genocide: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 25.

for refugee representations, neoliberal narratives, invocations of blackness, Cambodian diasporic agency, and discourses of deviance with regards to politics of respectability. While this analysis opens by thinking about how Honey Cocaine's performance resists and challenges the passive figure of the refugee, neoliberal subjectivity, and the politics of respectability, the larger intent is to read "Bad Gal" as a countersite that reveals rupture in American empire and neoliberal contradiction.

Observing the role of editing and camera techniques also elides further details when considering the figure of Honey Cocaine and temporal critique. Reading these rough jump cuts and shifts as a temporal disruption, this filmic method provides possibilities to understand "Bad Gal" as revealing ruptures of progressive, linear time. Drawing from Mimi Nguyen's *The Gift of the Refugee* (2012), the refugee is situated within a pre-modern and anachronistic time, dispossessed of liberal modernity. In reading "Bad Gal's" temporality, the relocation and reconfiguration of the Cambodian refugee around liberal, progressive time becomes visible.

Although an investigation of hip hop discourse and culture is not the main focus of this project, I note and acknowledge the genealogy of Honey Cocaine's hip hop career. Within this discussion, I point to Honey Cocaine's influences and the broader genre of trap-style hip hop that "Bad Gal" emerges from, as well as the factors which facilitated her career breakthrough in 2012. The importance of identifying hip hop genre assists this project's analysis of blackness and deviance within Honey Cocaine's "Bad Gal." At the same time, I resist frameworks of cultural authenticity and ownership, and instead look to the role and the implications blackness plays in "Bad Gal."

While the "Bad Gal" music video works as the main object of analysis, I also supplement and contextualize Honey Cocaine's life and career through online and video interviews, music

review articles, and brief snippets from her discography and "skits," which are short monologue tracks. These additional materials assist in demonstrating how Honey Cocaine's music has been received by the industry, as well as show how her narrative as a Cambodian Canadian MC has been written through mainstream music websites. Secondly, the interview materials and "skits" provide an opportunity to read and analyze Honey Cocaine's own voice and agency within this project. Although these materials may only demonstrate a glimpse into artistic perspective and intent, they allow for a closer reading in how Honey Cocaine views and configures her performance of deviance.

Finally, while this project seeks to locate "Bad Gal" through a discourse of Critical Refugee Studies, it also attempts to adequately position this cultural production within the spatial contexts of Toronto and Canada. Understanding Honey Cocaine through these contexts helps to delineate the complexities of the refugee diaspora, and also realize transnational formations within Toronto. I examine texts around Cambodian Canadians with a particular focus on the site of Toronto in order to historically contextualize "Bad Gal" and better understand the convergence of influences within the music video. At the same time, texts around Canada's refugee population also reveal the specific neoliberal and disciplining technologies utilized, which may function somewhat differently from the U.S. context.

Chapter Two: "Play the Game with No Problems"

Released on April 2nd, 2013, "Bad Gal" was the second of six music videos made from Honey Cocaine's project "Thug Love." The most popular video of the six (as well as the second most popular video on her YouTube channel), "Bad Gal" has four million views (as of February 2016), demonstrating Honey Cocaine's considerable popularity. With a prompt running time of three minutes, the video features disruptive and sharply edited visuals, aggressive trap and gangsta rap styled lyrics, and displays Honey Cocaine as the deviant, cool, "bad gal." Reflecting Jamaican-influenced Toronto slang, "Bad Gal" is a hybrid Cambodian Canadian construction that both is influenced and invokes Blackness through its namesake and medium of the hip hop music video. In this chapter, I briefly highlight and recap the audiovisuals of the music video, and then follow with an analysis of neoliberal critique.

"Bad Gal" itself features only two scenes, and was most likely completed within two different shoots, perhaps indicating the music video's limited budget, but also reflects the state of music videos in its current "post-classical" phase. While established stars like Beyoncé continue to produce incredibly well-made and epic music videos, featuring hundreds of different scenes, shoots, costumes, and choreography, the modern music video uploaded to YouTube reflects what Carol Vernallis calls "YouTube aesthetics," which consists of repetition, reification, and simultaneity. Through the use of advanced editing software and special effects, as well as its aggressive and fast-paced audio, "Bad Gal" represents a modern music video maximizing its limited amount of footage in order to create a dynamic sense through the aesthetics of repetition, reification, and simultaneity. In framing my analysis, I focus on several key moments in "Bad Gal," beginning with its opening.



Figure 1 Opening shot of "Bad Gal"

Music Video Time: Orientalist and Anachronistic Temporality:

The video opens first through the sounds of ominous chimes and bells. The opening shot are heated coals lying on the foil of a hookah pipe, with Honey Cocaine out of focus in the background. The camera fades into a profile shot, as Honey Cocaine slowly exhales the thick hookah smoke (see fig. 1), with a titled wooden parasol held by her head. This shot fades into a different scene, this time outdoors, as Honey Cocaine stands through the sun-roof of an SUV. Cutting to Honey Cocaine riding in the vehicle, we can see her stylish purple headscarf and black jacket. Suddenly the clap beat kicks in, and the bells stutter in a rapid, sped up staccato, and the camera abruptly switches back and forth perspectives in the same scene. "B-b-b-bad gal doah!" opens Honey Cocaine, as the claps now switch back to the first scene in the room with the

hookah. This time we see a medium shot, showing Honey Cocaine wearing a feminine, pale colored dress, featuring a simple floral pattern. More claps rapidly hit, and the camera once again abruptly cuts between a larger frame and Honey Cocaine's face. We catch a glimpse of a young Buddhist monk, slices of watermelon hanging off the hookah, and finally end on Honey Cocaine facing and blowing smoke onto the camera. A singing, moaning vocal sample is heard as the beat and bells provide brief respite. Then, the beat starts again with a low bass hit, signaling the start of the first verse, and cutting back to the scene outside in the SUV.

The opening of the video establishes the two main scenes featured throughout the entire three minutes. The first scene in the video explicitly invokes Asian, Cambodian, and Orientalist imagery (see fig. 2). Smoking a hookah pipe, while propping a wooden parasol on her shoulder, these objects resonate with Orientalist notions of an exoticized effeminate figure, and portray the scene as one of leisure and luxurious consumption. The dress Honey Cocaine wears is fitting and effeminate, featuring a simple floral pattern. In the same opening few seconds, we're given a glimpse at a young man, a Buddhist monk, sitting in the background signifying Cambodian-ness. An important religious practice observed in community studies of refugee populations, Buddhism acts as a marker of Cambodian identity,[61] but within the context of the music video, also acts as another religious Oriental object. On its own, the visuals provide simple, Orientalist imagery that exudes foreign-ness and fits within an Orientalist space and time.

[61] Janet McLellan. *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 85.



Figure 2 The "orientalized" scene

Meanwhile, as the camera cuts away from what I termed the “Orientalist” scene, Honey Cocaine is now seen riding in a SUV, wearing denim jeans, a stylish black jacket, gold chain around her neck. With symbols more familiar to the contemporary hip hop audience, in particular the gold chain and SUV as signifiers of modern luxuries and expensive consumption, this scene might be read as a modern reflection of the first “Orientalized” scene featuring the hookah. The hookah pipe, while also a key image for leisure and consumption, is contrasted by the SUV, which is similarly a symbol of leisure and excess, but also requires much more capital (and implied hard work) to purchase. The SUV also implies movement and freedom, whereas in the “Orientalized” scene Honey Cocaine is stuck within one space. In addition, it is notable that the song’s first verse kicks off through this “modern” scene, establishing “Bad Gal” as a hip hop/rap song:

Yo, play the game with no problems,
The whole fam' slang, I came from the bottom
Always in my thang, now I got 'em
They asked me for trouble I just aimed and I shot 'em, uh

With both of these scenes established in the opening seconds of the music video, one reading of the opening might be that Honey Cocaine engages in a form of auto-exotification, commodifying her Cambodian womanhood in order to capitulate to hip hop's market and audiences, perhaps similar to Chinese American rapper Jin's first major music video "Learn Chinese,"[62] featuring sexualized Asian American women within the space of the Chinese restaurant.[63] While this is certainly a valid analysis around market forces, Honey Cocaine as a contradictory "Bad Gal" does not capitulate to sexualized desires from the audience. Instead, I argue that by observing these two scenes in conjunction with each other as they establish an alternative temporality that demonstrates an intervention "Bad Gal" is making against agency-less refugee narratives and liberal progressive notions of time.

[62] Jin Au-Yeung. "Jin Learn Chinese (HQ)." YouTube video, 4:38. Posted by "xokito2007," Sept 11, 2009, accessed May 1, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMOZRk74QrY.
[63] Kwon (2004) also writes about autoexoticizing of Asian American women in the import car scene. See Soo Ah Kwon. "Autoexoticizing: Asian American Youth and the Import Car Scene." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7:1 (2004), 1-26.

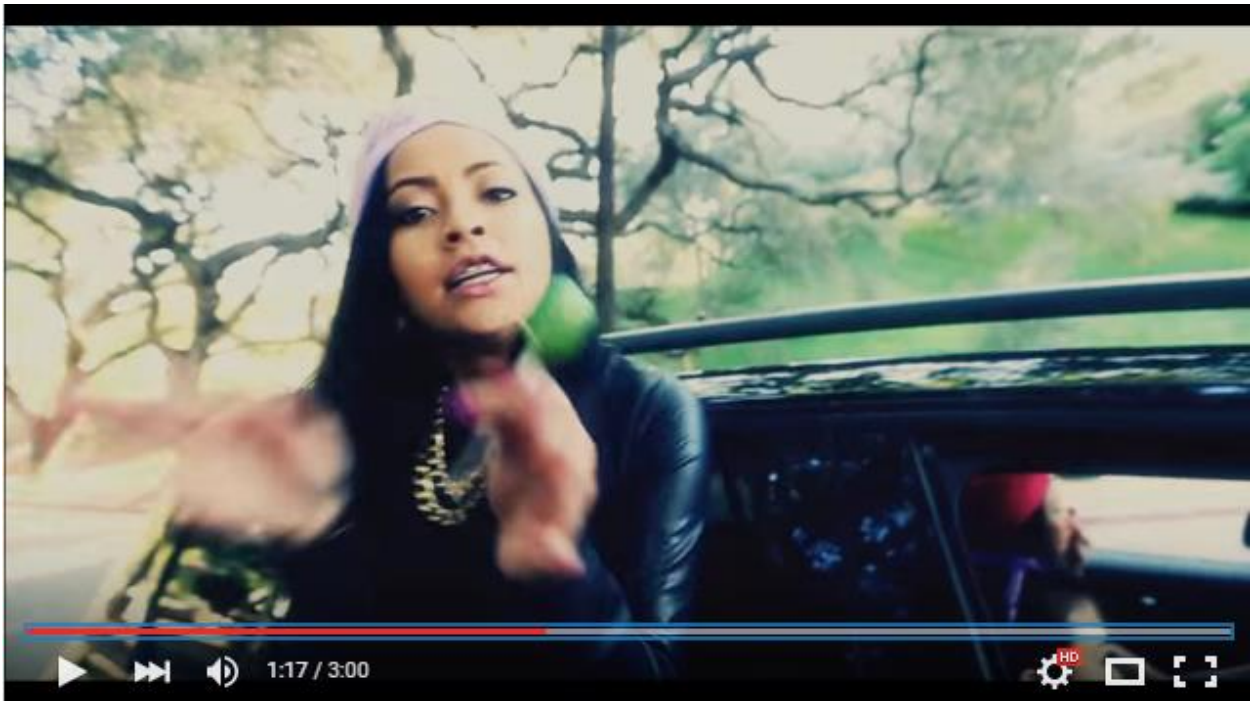


Figure 3 The "modern" scene

As Nguyen mentions in *The Gift of Freedom*, refugees are perceived as occupying an anachronistic, frozen temporal space.[64] In particular, the monk, a religious symbol, invokes a pre-modern, non-secular temporality, similar to Benedict Anderson's observation of modern, homogenous empty time emerging alongside secularism.[65] In addition, smoking the hookah invokes leisurely forms of consumption, rather than rational capitalist development. Also consider the scene's produced gendered racialization as the exotic and effeminate Asian body. In this way, Orientalist narratives and religious symbols enact an anachronistic, backwards temporality, situated in the past, but also in a dysfunctional time that contradicts the liberal modernity of the "modern" scene, with its SUV and hip hop signifiers.

[64] Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 55.
[65] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 24.

However, "Bad Gal" does not present a linear narrative with the two scenes; there is not unidirectional flashback or flash forward in time. In contrast, the sharp editing cuts between the two scenes, which functionally serve as a way to create a visually percussive effect, with scene's switching on beat cues and different stanzas to add a sense of movement and dynamism. Overall, this editing technique disrupts a linear narrative that would construct "Bad Gal" as moving towards development or towards dysfunction. Also, considering that Honey Cocaine continues her aggressive, animated in the "Orientalized" scene ruptures an anachronistic temporality that would romanticize submissive Asian women; modern hip hop technology and performance provide contradiction and distraction. Rather than a straightforward reproduction of Orientalist narratives, "Bad Gal" deploys these images in a way that disrupts and challenges singular, national culture, and enacts a space for Asian America critique.

As a form of neoliberal critique, "Bad Gal" suggests an alternative narrative to both Orientalist temporalities, but also liberal modernity. Through the fast paced editing, cuts, and visual effects, the video creates a back and forth motion that refuses to settle into linear progression. As Troeung notes in the analysis of the novel *In the Shadow of the Banyan*, a form of "mythic time" is utilized to move the narrative away from a progressive narrative ultimately ending with survival and freedom.[66] Similarly, "Bad Gal's" obnoxious and disrupting approach makes a linear narrative of liberal development impossible. The editing and form of the music video allows for this back-and-forth motion and contradiction, which is further complicated as hip hop and blackness also provide another dimension of contradiction. "Bad Gal" works

[66] Y-Dang Troeung. "Iterations of War and Literary Counterforces: Vaddey Ratner's In the Shadow of the Banyan and Kosal Khiev's Why I Write." *MELUS: The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 40:2 (2015), 2.

against a developmental narrative through this temporal simultaneity which continuously contradicts, disrupts, and clashes.

Refusal of the Good Refugee: "I do it like a g"

With this refusal of a liberal, developmental narrative comes a refusal of what Espiritu and other Critical Refugee Studies scholars call the "good refugee." Understood as passive victims of war, violence, and trauma from their home countries, "good" refugee discourse points to U.S. (or in this case, Canada) as the western savior. Along with the aforementioned Orientalized and anachronistic temporality, refugees are viewed as painfully stuck in the past. As Espiritu explains, state-sanctioned policies pointed to assimilation as the solution to the "refugee problem," encouraging model minority formations and cultural essentialism to overcome the lack of economic resources.[67] This "good refugee" figure demonstrates the ability to assimilate, work hard, and in turn upholds liberal multiculturalism and American empire. "Bad Gal" explicitly challenges these narratives of the passive, victimized refugee, as well as the model minority and assimilating "good refugee." Rather, "Bad Gal" allows Honey Cocaine to enact agency, and push counter-narratives that align her with deviance, criminality, and blackness. The significance is highlighted considering that Cambodian Canadian refugees were considered more dysfunctional, backwards, and vulnerable as opposed to their Indo-Chinese or Vietnamese counterparts.[68]

[67] Yen Le Espiritu. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 94
[68] Janet McLellan. *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.

In understanding the ways Honey Cocaine's gendered racialization within "Bad Gal" refuses discourses of the refugee, I look to the song's bridge:

> Don't test me, I might bring the fire out
> Go ahead and dare, me and my ninjas finna wild out
> If I like it, I'mma buy it out
> Do it like g, bitch go ahead and dry it out
> Fuck all the small talk in there,
> 8, 9 Asians when I walk in there

In this bridge, Honey Cocaine is in a position of power, verbalizing threats to anyone who would antagonize her ("don't test me, I might bring the fire out") while she and her "ninjas" will respond violently to any offense. Invoking the slang "g" to signify her gangsta status of power and leadership, Honey Cocaine proceeds to go on the attack, with "Fuck all the small talk in there" and then in the chorus:

> Lil' nigga you ain't shit, you ain't with what I'm with
> And your ass ain't sitting with me
> Lil' nigga I'm the choice, all my chips gonna do it
> Just watch bitch I do it like a g,
> I do it like a g, I'm a bad gal doah

Berating her enemies and competition, Honey Cocaine affirms her status as the cool and powerful gangsta ("I'm the choice"). As opposed to Orientalist refugee discourses that would position the Cambodian refugee diaspora as effeminate victims in need of saving, "Bad Gal" strategically reacts by displaying aggressiveness and threats of violence as a way of enacting

agency. During the bridge and chorus of the music video, Honey Cocaine's body continues to dance, rap, and gesture throughout the music video, the only constant figure as the backgrounds shift and rapidly cut. Along with the occasional middle finger and gun firing motions, Honey Cocaine intervenes as a refugee subject that refuses to be saved. At the same time, this enactment of agency is not necessarily a masculinizing one, as Honey Cocaine retains a feminine aesthetic, carrying these markers such as the dress and parasol, or the bright pink lipstick. Instead, the "Bad Gal" persona performed by Honey Cocaine rescribes her Cambodian womanhood with agency and power over her own sexuality. In the hip hop traditions of artists such as Eve, Lil' Kim, and Nicki Minaj, this formation is similar to discourses of the "bad bitch": tough, sexy, and not somebody to mess with.

"Bad refugee" discourses have also been positioned in opposition to the model minority, with one interesting marker of the deviant refugee being hip hop. As Loan Dao points out, these Southeast Asian youth were understood as "delinquents, marked by hip hop style and culture, and unassimilable into 'an immigrant community or in the larger society."[69] While Honey Cocaine and "Bad Gal" are identified as belonging to this delinquent group, it also provides a subversion. Considering the displays of wealth (jewelry, the SUV, and a well-produced music video) and emphasis on hustling in the studio for a significant income. In the second verse, Honey Cocaine mentions:

> Okay, love ain't better than money
> In the studio, drinking lemon and honey
> Appetite green, presidents in my tummy

[69] Loan Dao. "Refugee Representations: Southeast Asian American Youth, Hip Hop, and Immigrant Rights." *Amerasia Journal* 40:2 (2014), 100.

The first line demonstrates a common theme of gangsta rap; the ruthless pursuit of profits, no matter the costs. Meanwhile "drinking lemon and honey" acts both as a pun for Honey Cocaine's rap moniker, but also invokes the "richness" of honey. Finally, the last line works as a metaphor to show Honey Cocaine's desire for money ("appetite green"), but also displays that she has already accrued great wealth ("presidents in my tummy"). With this verse, Honey Cocaine implies that those outside the model minority paradigm can still achieve the significant gains through hip hop. While "Bad Gal" may reinforce these associations of delinquency and deviance with Southeast Asian diasporic youth, Honey Cocaine still associates hip hop with hard work and riches. This move looks to enact agency for criminalized Southeast Asian youth, seen within refugee discourses as apathetic, lazy, and incapable of development.

This subversion and contradiction connects to how the refugee is understood through a deficit narrative. I return to Mimi Nguyen's argument around how the refugee is unable to function within liberal modernity, and in a way, dispossessed:

> …the refugee figure is bereft of property- possessing neither interior faculties for the rational and moral calculation of interest and consequence, nor eternal properties for their 'right' exercise in intercourse with others, including legitimate citizenship, proprietary rights, or simply things ("Clothing, a lot of these people didn't have clothing. Some of them didn't have shoes."). Profoundly dispossessed, from this perspective the refugee has lost *every thing.*[70]

[70] Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59 (italics in original).

Throughout “Bad Gal,” Honey Cocaine demonstrates a strategy to gain possessions, be self-sufficient, and exhibits, rational economic thought. Visually, these possessions are displayed materially, with Honey Cocaine’s stylish clothing, numerous pieces of jewelry, and the SUV, contradicting the figure of the dispossessed and poor refugee, but also demonstrating how the dispossessed must acquire material gains through criminalized economies.

Meanwhile, Honey Cocaine’s lyrics in “Bad Gal” reflect classic themes in hip hop, such as invocation of drug dealing, gun violence, and ruthless competition. Firstly, the invocation of drug dealing comes into play in the first verse with “the whole fam slanged” and “play the game with no problems.” This use of drug dealing as potential metaphor can be used to imply hard work, or what is colloquially known as the hustle. This working class background and grind emerges in the first verse as Honey Cocaine mentions “bitch I came from the bottom.” In this case, drug dealing related lyrics allow Honey Cocaine to establish her background as a working class hustler. These drug dealing related lyrics also allow Honey Cocaine to demonstrate her penchant for gun violence. We see these in lines such as “I just aimed then I shot em” in the first verse, and then prominently in the second verse with “Shooting toes off, give your ass a trim” as well as “Put another one in your spine.” The themes of drug dealing within gangsta and trap hip hop exist to also demonstrate how one is able to protect their turf, business, and posse against their economic competition. These lyrical themes emerge to resist and reconfigure refugee discourses of passive, victimized, and the inability to rationally function. In this way, “Bad Gal” and Honey Cocaine disrupt discourses of the easily assimilable “good refugee” as well as denying narratives of dehumanization and dysfunction among the “bad refugee.”

Refusing Neoliberal Subjectivity: Deviance, Criminality, and the Role of Blackness

Lisa Lowe conceptualizes the Asian immigrant as "at odds with cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation– emerges in a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation."[71] As opposed to national hegemonic projects that point to "American culture as the key site for the resolution of inequalities and stratifications" and proposes ethic differences through multiculturalism, cultural productions like the "Bad Gal" music video are contradictions that "displace the fictions of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development."[72] So far this paper has demonstrated the ways in which "Bad Gal" maneuvers against liberal modernity and refugee discourses. I further argue that through the concept of the "bad refugee," that the music video also maneuvers against neoliberalism, and in particular the neoliberal subjectivity of the "good refugee." Through this analysis within the context of critical refugee studies, "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine disrupt the reconciliations of the US and Canada's wars in Southeast Asia. Her refusal to assimilate, become the "good refugee," and alignment with blackness demonstrate an opposition to the model minority and therefore an opposition to a neoliberal subjectivity. While Asian Americans might be understood as the "ideal neoliberal subject,"[73] Honey Cocaine and "Bad Gal" reveal an alternative possibility of deviance.

[71] Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press. 1996), 6.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Helen Heran Jun, *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 132.

In turn, Nguyen-Vo argues that the figure of the refugee, when consumed by neoliberal narratives "in an act of cannibalism,"[74] becomes a tool of historical amnesia itself that upholds American empire. Through constructions of the good refugee, narratives of neoliberal success engage with and justify the expansion of empire and the erasure of violences. As an oppositional construction, Honey Cocaine, and more broadly, members of the Cambodian diaspora refute this neoliberal narrative, and exist to demonstrate the failures of the wars in Southeast Asia, and the continued failures of resettlement. As this deviant subjectivity refuses and is unable to conform to neoliberal forces, institutions of the state attempt to punish and discipline these subjects through technologies of criminalization and deportation.

A key example of this deviant subjectivity lies in the visual aesthetic worn by Honey Cocaine and her companions during the "modern," SUV scene. Invoking a sort of youthful playfulness, and perhaps girlishness, there are the pink painted nails and lips, the colorful lollipops that are held and waved around, and notably Honey Cocaine's shiny braces; juvenile markers that appear to contradict the image of a rugged gangsta rapper (see fig. 4). In this way, Honey Cocaine is further positioned away and in opposition to the ideal neoliberal subject. Juvenile, immature, and childish, these aspects intersect with the deviant gestures of gun-slinging and middle fingers to show that not only is Honey Cocaine criminal, but she also refuses to "grow up," mature, and submit to neoliberal forces. Honey Cocaine's style and aesthetic is stuck within her stubborn youth, unable to attain liberal, progressive time. Along with the aggressive, vulgar lyrical content, "Bad Gal's" refusal of neoliberal subjectivity indicates a rejection of heteronormative politics of respectability. This type of gendered racialization reveals an

[74] Thu Huong Nguyen-Vo. "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?" *Amerasia Journal* 31:2 (2005), 172.

unreconciled contradiction; a figure that is youthful and girlish but violent and vulgar, refusing to grow up but engaging within mature discourses of criminality.

Without a male companion to establish and affirm hip hop's heteronormative politics, this subjectivity of the "bad refugee" demonstrates how "Bad Gal" also proposes alternative kinship relations. Throughout the song, Honey Cocaine makes references to her posse, either through terms such as "fam" ("the whole fam' slanged"), "niggas" ("all my niggas boss, they don't kiss these hoes"), "ninjas" ("me and my ninjas finna wild out"). Visibly in the music video, Honey Cocaine is seen with two other Asian women, both of whom share similar make-up and style. As a posse of "bad gals," the music video proposes a kinship between Asian women who are able to fight for themselves as well as take down competitors and rivals. In a type of queer domesticity, Cambodian womanhood is configured as performing labor, and engaging in crime and violence. Overall, these kinship relations perform another type of rejection of the neoliberal, nuclear family.



Figure 4 Lipsticks, lollipops, and "bad gals"

Of course, this refusal of neoliberal subjectivity and politics of respectability is linked to the presence of Blackness within "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine. Blackness is key to identifying with deviance, disrupting refugee narratives and reconciliation, and refusing neoliberal incorporation. Blackness is invoked throughout the entire music video through the genre of gangsta rap; while I agree with scholars that hip hop itself is a hybrid form of art and technology, there is no denying its origins and contexts of the urban black space, especially considering the ways blackness is marketed and manipulated by music companies. Blackness is more explicitly expressed through Honey Cocaine's use of "nigga." Seen in the hook ("Lil nigga you ain't shit" and "Lil nigga I'm the choice") or in the first verse ("all my niggas boss they don't kiss these hoes.") In this case, "niggas" is used both to identify Honey Cocaine's posse (who in the music video, consist of two other Asian women), as well as to identify enemies and competitors. Blackness is also produced in the chorus, as Honey Cocaine raps: "I do it like g, da bad gyal

doah." Her inflection and accent represents Toronto slang inspired Jamaican patois, demonstrating that blackness is not just an influence on the themes and lyrics of the song, but the deliver and intonations she performs.

While Honey Cocaine now splits her time as a transnational artist between Los Angeles and Toronto, this representation of diasporic blackness is the main signifier of Toronto within the music video. Historically, Montreal and Toronto were the two main urban centers of resettlement, with Cambodian Canadians still concentrated in the two cities today. Secondary relocations to Toronto in particular were due to a desire to be closer to family members, employment opportunities and Cambodian cultural associations and activities. These narratives are present in Honey Cocaine and her family, as she expresses how she spoke "a little French" in Montreal, before moving to Toronto and learning English through her babysitter's viewings of popular BET show "106 & Park":

> Shout outs to her, by the way. She'd just make me hot dogs and rice while my parents were at work and I'd just be like [smacking lips together]…cool! Y'know? And that's how I learned.[75]

Movement towards urban Toronto were often in low-income housing projects, such as the Jane-Finch community in which Cambodians shared spaces with African refugees and "established Caribbean Canadians,"[76] in proximity to blackness. While historical narratives within urban, shared Asian and black spaces have focused on fraught relationships and ethnic conflict, I would like to highlight this idea of shared space, and potentially similar material

[75] "Honey Cocaine Talks 'Like A Drug,' Touring with Tyga." YouTube video, 7:56. Posted by "Hot New Hip Hop," Dec 4, 2014, accessed Jan 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNFkqMR-ZBk
[76] Janet McLellan. *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 43.

conditions for Cambodian and black diasporic groups within urban Toronto. Another detail worth noting is that blackness within Toronto is both fluid and transnational, with an African diaspora rather than a singular, nationalist understanding. As Honey Cocaine mentions, these black influences can often be seen in Torontonian slang and patois:

> Growing up, no matter if you were black, white, Asian, Indian…like, whatever you were…the slang was just really Caribbean-based, so we would say things like *wah gwan*, which means like 'wassup,' you know it's really Jamaican. Um, the *boi dem* is the police [laughs]. I don't know, it's just really weird out there you just gotta listen to my music and the words that you don't know? That's probably what we say in Toronto.[77]

In understanding the ways a Torontonian-influenced diasporic blackness is utilized and produced through "Bad Gal," these racial formations arise in conjunction with a rejection of neoliberal subjectivity and identification with criminality and deviance.

Understanding blackness potentially as a form of performance for Honey Cocaine reveals further the desirability of blackness, and the role it plays. Within the context of blackface minstrelsy, blackness was representative of "cross-racial desires," contradictory feelings of both fascination and anxiety. Eric Lott explains that blackface minstrelsy reflected and produced constructions of blackness, and continued to enforce racial boundaries.[78] For the contexts of "Bad Gal" in 2013, and the Cambodian diasporic refugee, there is a clear context in which forms of blackness are desirable; a method of disrupting Orientalist narratives and a refusal of

[77] "Honey Cocaine Talks 'Like A Drug,' Touring with Tyga." YouTube video, 7:56. Posted by "Hot New Hip Hop," Dec 4, 2014, accessed Jan 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNFkqMR-ZBk
[78] Eric Lott. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.

neoliberal incorporation. In her examination of John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), Helen Jun explains how black masculinity provides "alternative models of racialized masculinity to those embodied in the Japanese American community."[79] Within the contexts of neoliberal multiculturalism, "Bad Gal" also constructs and produces forms of blackness through Honey Cocaine's performance. In contrast to blackface minstrelsy during the Civil War and Reconstruction, which reinforced racial boundaries, "Bad Gal" instead moves to include undesirable refugees as another form of blackness.

This consideration of a type of blackface performance, or at least the implicit desirability for blackness might be seen Honey Cocaine's namesake. In taking on the moniker of Honey Cocaine, a metaphor to emphasize the sweet, addictive, yet criminally tinged aspects of her persona and music, can be understood as an adoption of the gangsta hip hop tradition of the drug dealing-related namesake.[80] For Sochitta Sal to select the moniker Honey Cocaine both reveals the forces of the hip hop market, but also reveals a development of the hip hop persona. In contrast with Cambodian American rapper praCh, whose moniker derives from his full name Prach Ly, Honey Cocaine as a persona appears to be more developed, and some would speculate perhaps more exaggerated and over-the-top. Utilizing the Honey Cocaine persona may allow Sochitta Sal to negotiate from passive refugee discourses and neoliberal subjectivity, but is reliant on this invocation and performance of blackness.

Yet if this invocation of blackness leads to this reproduction of incorporated neoliberalism, how might we read "Bad Gal" as similarly to the state in positioning neoliberalism against blackness? Similar to how Nguyen-Vo analyses the way Vietnamese

[79] Helen Heran Jun, *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 73.
[80] See: 50 Cent, Rick Ross, Snow Tha Product

refugees have been mobilized in justification for American empire through the Iraq War, how might the neoliberal state mobilize Honey Cocaine's Cambodian body (or the object of "Bad Gal") to continuously justify the criminalization, incarceration, and marking for death of "deviant" black bodies? Even with the maneuvering against "good" refugee discourse, politics of respectability, and American empire, neoliberal forces dictate that these maneuvers are contingent on the further violence against blackness. If a deviant Cambodian subjectivity is dependent on blackness, neoliberalism works to discipline and punishes these refugee populations marked with deviant, criminal, blackness. This conversation leads to my analysis around the neoliberal contradictions, incorporations, and limitations of "Bad Gal."

Neoliberal Contradictions, Blackness & Market Incorporations: "I came from the bottom"

Although these negotiations performed by "Bad Gal" allow for dual refusals against the figure of the refugee and neoliberal subjectivity, they do not necessarily offer radical or resistant possibilities against the neoliberal state. To revisit the opening stanza of the song:

> Yo, play the game with no problems
> The whole fam' slang, bitch I came from the bottom

For this verse, an emphasis on hard work and overcoming obstacles is invoked, as Honey Cocaine indicates a working class background with her "fam'" all working hard. The second verse also indicates striving for profits:

> Okay, love ain't better than honey

In the studio drinking lemon and honey
Appetite green, presidents in my tummy

It is important to note that these lyrics also allowed Honey Cocaine to push back against refugee discourses which emphasize victimhood, a lack of agency, and an inability to act rationally. Yet at the same time, these lyrics also engage with a reproduction of neoliberal discourses. Earlier in the verse, Honey Cocaine mentions:

Ah, can't stop the ambition ho
All my niggas boss, I don't kiss these hoes,
All these cats pussy, you fishy ho
Fuck you dirty bitches, what you trippin' for?

In this verse, Honey Cocaine's "ambition" could be read as her competitive drive to succeed, which also inevitably involves the targeting of her rivals ("Fuck you dirty bitches"). From the sheer materialism of the music video, in particular the "modern" scene with the SUV, to the lyrical mention of the prized Jordan sneaker ("Jays ain't even out but I got me a pair"), the song demonstrates Honey Cocaine's ability to hustle and exhibit rational, economic thought, even with limited resources or the inability to access legal means to do so. And of course, the role of the "Bad Gal" music video as commodity on the new market platform of YouTube cannot be understated as well.

It is also notable who the lyrics target in "Bad Gal." While most gangsta rap songs by male artists would target other men (typically with the masculinized term "niggas") Honey Cocaine also targets women, through use of "hoes" (All these cats pussy, you fishy ho") and "bitches (Fuck you dirty bitches, what you trippin' for?). While some artists like Ice Cube have

argued that these derogatory terms are used to insult and emasculate men, Honey Cocaine's targeting of women is clear in the second verse: "Bitch you ain't a queen, only in your mind." Through attacking the self-identification of "queen" which has been understood as the respectable, powerful figure in contrast to "bitch," it is clear that Honey Cocaine is also aware of who her perceived competition is within the music industry; other women MC's. Throughout interviews on YouTube this is increasingly visible, with Honey Cocaine often asked about other women MC's, and one YouTube clip in which Honey Cocaine recalls being challenged:

> So I come outside the bus, and some bitch tells me she's gonna replace me in Last Kings [Tyga's label]. But she wasn't really rapping, she was very much screaming.

Interestingly, this challenger intended to take on Tyga at first- but as Tyga explains: "Yo she comes up and start tryna battle with me so I'm like…Honey Cocaine!"[81]

Tyga calling on Honey Cocaine to fight his battles highlights gendered neoliberal violences that are inevitably reproduced within "Bad Gal." Even as Honey Cocaine looks to establish her own Cambodian womanhood, she does so through neoliberal competition, bragging and talking about her hustle and material gains, while insulting and dehumanizing her female competition. At the same time, this process is a negotiation, as in one interview Honey Cocaine speaks about her collaboration with Mexican American women rapper Snow Tha Product, and explains some of the tensions that arise between women hip hop artists:

[81] "Honey Cocaine Freestyle Battling a Salty Female Who Stepped Up To Tyga." YouTube video, 2:52. Posted by "SkullGizzy," Oct 20, 2011, accessed Jan 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtCMSpwvIH4.

> Whenever I see female artists, I feel like there's this tension. This intimidation, like no matter who's bigger than who, it's just…we don't wanna go up to each other. But, Snow kinda broke that! Snow went right up to me, she's like 'Yo, I'm Snow Tha Product.' And I'm like I know you, I've been listening to you since I was like 14! I used to look up to her, I used to respect her- I mean I still do…it was like the last minute, the last song that I did for 'Like a Drug.' And I hit her up and I'm like 'I need you on this.' And she sent me a verse in like a day. And I was like this is dope that we're making this connection, because it makes it OK for every other female to work with each other.[82]

Through this quote, Honey Cocaine hints at both the tensions and collaborative possibilities for women hip hop artists. Still, even with her continuous work and support of other women artists like Snow Tha Product, DJ Carisma, and Angel Haze, "Bad Gal" still demonstrates a reproduction of gendered neoliberal discipline and competition.

Finally, the stakes and implications around the invocation and production of blackness that function for "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine to make these refusals and negotiations indicate another constraint of neoliberalism. Read through the lens of the neoliberal state, the "bad refugee" is seen in need of discipline and punishment in order to achieve normative, rational values. In acknowledging the presence of blackness produced by the "bad refugee," I argue that the neoliberal state understands deviant Cambodian racialization as contaminated and marked by the criminal and racialized fear of blackness.

In his investigation of Cambodian refugee populations in what he terms the spaces of the "hyperghetto" within New York City, Eric Tang coins the term "refugee exceptionalism," in which refugee populations and their descendants are seen as needing rescue once again- this time

[82] "Honey Cocaine Talks 'Like A Drug,' Touring with Tyga." YouTube video, 7:56. Posted by "Hot New Hip Hop," Dec 4, 2014, accessed Jan 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNFkqMR-ZBk.

from deviant black and brown spaces.[83] A sort of refugee exceptionalism is also demonstrated within the multiracial spaces of urban Toronto, with historical narratives of conflicts between the new Cambodian refugees and the more established Caribbean Canadian immigrants, as well as African refugees. These contentious spaces are also criminalized; with one text noting the increased police harassment, and the growing racialized fear of "Asian gangs." Helen Jun's analysis of the documentary film *AKA Don Bonus* (1995) also provides discourses of what she terms "Asian uplift," in which the documentary's refugee protagonists are able to succeed and progress through their physical movement away from a space of the deviant black neighborhood.[84] These examples emphasize the neoliberal logics which encourage a move away from blackness, racializing black spaces as dysfunctional and destructive. "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine's neoliberal refusal emphasizes this as well, and is read by the neoliberal state as a case of blackness' contamination of the refugee.

Somewhat paradoxically however, is the incorporation and marketing of blackness itself. As Michelle Mihwa Chang aptly summarizes, the rise of gangsta rap also coincided with the commercialization of hip hop, and the increased targeting of multiracial, suburban markets.[85] In this way, while neoliberal state apparatuses might look to punish and discipline blackness, they also manipulate and utilize blackness for profits and capital gains. Additionally, for Honey Cocaine to utilize the hip hop music video, a commodity on the marketplace of YouTube, implies an inevitable commercialization of blackness as well. While the identification with

[83] Eric Tang. *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).
[84] Helen Heran Jun. *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 146.
[85] Michelle Mihwa Chang. "Rice and Rap: Hip Hop Music, Black/Asian American Racialization, and the Role of the U.S. Multicultural Neoliberal State" Master's Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015. Retrieved from Electronic Thesis and Dissertations UCLA, Asian American Studies 0100UCLA.

blackness indicates a refusal of neoliberal subjectivity for Honey Cocaine, it contradictorily looks to engage with neoliberal market practices through its entrance in the hip hop market. While Honey Cocaine isn't Sony Music or Roc-a-Fella Records, her commercial impact is significant considering her high view counts, following forces of the broader hip hop markets.

While "Bad Gal" might problematize normative, neoliberal narratives and politics of respectability, we see a capitalist focus within the music video. As the lyrical analysis reveals, Honey Cocaine exhibits traits of economic liberalism; the desire for capital and ruthless competition, where she shoots down and denigrates her (economic) rivals. These themes, commonly seen throughout gangsta hip hop, indicates a form of neoliberal incorporation. Additionally, Honey Cocaine's music videos and YouTube views as commodity cannot be ignored as well. In this case, it is evident how neoliberal incorporation has consumed hip hop, blackness, and Honey Cocaine, as they all reproduce neoliberal narratives, albeit against the grain of the politics of respectability.

Conclusion: "Everybody has a Story"

Through this project's analysis of the music video "Bad Gal" and hip hop artist Honey Cocaine, the contentious negotiations against refugee discourses and neoliberalism are observed as contradictory and fractured. With the paradigm of the "bad refugee," it is clear how this Cambodian Canadian cultural production works to subvert the passive and good refugee in ways to reject liberal multiculturalism, the reconciliation of state violences and wars in Southeast Asia, and neoliberal subjectivity. Similar to how Critical Refugee Studies reads the refugee figure in order to reveal state violence and American empire, the bad refugee emphasizes the neoliberal ruptures that demonstrate the failures of resettlement and neoliberal modes of governance. Through the "Bad Gal" music video's audiovisual interventions, there is a rejection of both the helpless refugee subjectivity and neoliberal discourse, perhaps hinting at alternative spaces and politic.

Within the context of Critical Refugee Studies, "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine intervenes in a way to further consider neoliberal violences, but also makes visible the agency demonstrated by the Cambodian refugee diaspora in refusing narratives of the "good" or helpless refugee. In this way, I hope that my project works towards a goal outlined by Yen Le Espiritu in keeping attentive to "refugees as 'intentionalized beings' who possess and enact their *own* politics as they emerge out of the ruins of war and its aftermath."[86] In drawing the relationships between "Bad Gal" and blackness, I further demonstrate how this agency is sometimes contingent on the identification and performance of blackness. Meanwhile, within the broader narratives of Cambodian American cultural studies, this "Bad Gal" and Honey Cocaine calls to attention

[86] Yen Le Espiritu. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugee* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 2.

America's role in the wars in Southeast Asia, and its failed resettlements. While, this project has not necessarily engaged with memory work and the narrative of the Khmer Rouge genocide, I believe that "Bad Gal" tells a narrative of the refugee experience, in still grappling with the haunting, trauma, and silences that emerge from this historical context. As Honey Cocaine says in a short interlude on her mixtape titled "Heartbreak (Skit)":

> Everybody has a story, everybody has a struggle. You know personally for me, I don't really like to talk about it. My parents come from Cambodia, they were in the Killing Fields which was a big genocide that happened in Cambodia, and they escaped to Thailand, and they made it to Canada. And that's when me and my brothers were…you know…I see the struggle my parents have gone through. My family, we were never really wealthy. You know people really don't see that, they don't know that shit can either make you or break you and I found a way on, just way to be strong and independent.[87]

Perhaps for Honey Cocaine, the hip hop music video becomes a way to express the refugee experience despite her aversion to discussing trauma and historical violences. While "Bad Gal" may not offer the same, legible methods of remembering as other cultural productions, it still functions as a way for Sochitta Sal to enact her own agency as a post-refugee subject.

Yet through acknowledging the genre and music video's limitations, Honey Cocaine still exists as an incorporated neoliberal subject. "Bad Gal" inevitably reproduces neoliberal violence of gendered racialized competition and punishment. Furthermore, observing the comparative racialization and the role that blackness plays for "Bad Gal" and the bad refugee reveals the

[87] Honey Cocaine. "Thug Love." 2013, Digital.

neoliberal logics still legible through this disrespectful production. The bad refugee, through its identification and reproduction of blackness, is read by the neoliberal state as needing to further punish blackness, and rescue these refugees trapped in these irrational spaces. The implications of these findings demonstrate the way neoliberalism still manages to discipline, incorporate, its subjects, even if gendered racialized deviance provides opportunities for negotiation. Further emphasized are that these deviant spaces still reproduce neoliberalism, albeit in a different, less respectful manner. If anything, this analysis encourages and hints at a radical alterity that may exist beyond- or with deviance.

For the contentious space of hip hop, this paper demonstrates a reading practice of Asian American hip hop that does not capitulate to divisive discourses of ethnic conflict or authenticity. Instead, this project, alongside the fields of Critical Refugee Studies and cultural studies calls to attention the importance of what Helen Jun calls reading for contradiction:

> We can read culture not merely to identify ideological shortcomings (or conversely, signs of resistance) but to understand that irrespective of intention and impulse, every text can be read for the inevitable contradictions it attempts to manage or reconcile.[88]

In this way, this project hopes to encourage a reading of cultural productions, specifically within the areas of music, ethnomusicology, and the ever-growing emerging scene of Asian American hip hop, for its neoliberal contradictions, rather than for the tempting discourses of representation and counter cultural resistance. For Honey Cocaine, with her use of the n-word, vulgarity, and rejection of respectability politics may not pose a significant or intriguing study with the flawed

[88] Helen Heran Jun, *Race to Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 4.

criteria of assessing representation or critical and resistive worth. Focusing on these narratives within Asian American hip hop lead to inevitable discussions of an Afro-Asian ethnic conflict, and elide the complex processes of gendered racialization and the material stakes and consequences within the neoliberal state. Rather than looking for the ways that Cambodian-ness clashed with blackness, this paper looked for ways that blackness is informed, adopted, and performed through the Cambodian refugee experience.

While examining "Bad Gal" for radical possibilities may lead to inevitable contradictions and limitations, I hope that the insight gained through this understanding of the bad refugee as well as the reading practices continues to build on important work in Critical Refugee Studies. These analytical strategies, as demonstrated through this project, allow for a stronger understanding on how the neoliberal state continues to affirm select groups as normative, and simultaneously engage in violent forms of discipline, punishment, and regulation. In particular, this analysis of gendered racialization of a Cambodian Canadian hip hop artist looks to provide insight on the complex processes and differentiated racialization undergone by the Cambodian refugee diaspora, and in particular, those who are deemed deviant or criminal. Of course, this discourse of the bad refugee is inextricably linked to the good refugee; as the good refugee is affirmed and celebrated, the bad refugee is targeted for punishment and marked for death.

Within this current moment, the stakes of the Cambodian refugee diaspora continues to be imperative with the neoliberal technologies of criminalization and deportation are utilized by both Canadian and US governments. As the refugee is seen as unable to perform rational thought and in turn provide capital value, the inability to provide value requires disciplining or removal as potential solutions to recuperate value.[89] Within the American context, deportation

[89] Mimi Thi Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59.

continues to be a pressing issue for Cambodian Americans, with narratives of deportees covered by recent documentary films,[90] mainstream news press,[91] and community organizing.[92] The current repatriation agreement between the US and Cambodia allows for the revocation of green card status for criminalized Cambodian refugees, that results in deportation to Cambodia.

While the struggle to bring attention to Cambodian American deportation and amend the current repatriation agreement continue stateside, narratives of Cambodian deportation in Canada are not as highlighted. However, this does not mean that the Canadian state does not utilize the deportation as a neoliberal technology. Canada continues to justify deportation of refugee populations through criminality, in particular targeting "deviant" non-white men.[93] Several high profile cases include Vietnamese Canadians,[94] perhaps mirroring the U.S.'s own repatriation of recent Vietnamese immigrants and green card holders. It has been noted that as American and Vietnam's trade and international relations continue to "normalize," repatriation agreements have developed in making Vietnamese migrants who arrived after 1995 vulnerable to deportation justified by criminality.[95]

While I hope that "Bad Gal and the Bad Refugee" has achieved these interventions, critique and questions arise in this conclusion. What possibilities and spaces exist for the Cambodian refugee diaspora in order to perform neoliberal critique that are not subject to the

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[90] *Cambodian Son*. Directed by Masahiro Sugano. Studio Revolt. 2015.
[91] Maria Hinojosa. America by the Numbers with Maria Hinajosa: Pass or Fail in Cambodia Town. Online. Directed by Leslie Asako Gladsjo. PBS. 2014.
[92] "Not Home for the Holidays." Event by Khmer Girls in Action (KGA). Dec 2015.
[93] Wendy Chan. "Crime, Deportation, and the Regulation of Immigrants in Canada." *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 44 (2005): 153-180.
[94] "Accused gangster's saga ends with deportation." CBC News, Mar 2, 2010, accessed April 1, 2016. http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/accused-gangster-s-saga-ends-with-deportation-1.940716.
[95] Susan Carroll. "Vietnam deal eases deportation of convicted immigrants." The Houston Chron. Feb 3, 2008, accessed April 1, 2016. http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Vietnam-deal-eases-deportation-of-convicted-1789433.php.

racialization of a deviant, criminal blackness? And secondly, how can we better understand these complex processes of Cambodian, black, or Asian American gendered racialization as it intersects with various multiracial spaces and consider the notable differences between locales such as Long Beach, Toronto, and New York? Finally, what is to be said about the relationship and neoliberal logics between the good and bad refugee? These questions indicate further necessary steps for this project in developing critical knowledges and methodologies within Asian American cultural productions and hip hop.

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