

**The Neo-Revanchist City:**  
**A historical and critical inquiry into the Foreign Buyer's Tax in Vancouver, BC**  
Dionne Co | dionneco.net | @dionnetology

## I. A Tale of Two City Animals

*"We have not captured the Otter. I know people are very curious."*  
(Howard Normann, Director of Parks, City of Vancouver)

On November 23 2018, news media outlets in Vancouver collectively reported on an all-out city effort to catch a river otter, which they've discovered, has eaten at least 7 valuable adult koi from the Dr. Sun Yat-Set Classical Chinese Garden (CBC 2018). At the time of my writing, the otter was reported to have gone into a "rampage" with its 10<sup>th</sup> casualty, provoking banter about whether one was on #TeamOtter or #TeamKoi in this playful saga. This tale of the otter and the koi became fodder for various news outlets in the city, perhaps because of a metaphor begging to be made. The Otter v. Koi debate was reported to reveal a "cultural blindness" at the heart of Vancouver history (The Star 2018). *The Globe and the Mail* similarly reports that the story slowly began morphing into something beyond the superficial narrative. Some interpreted the otter's "remarkable 12-day reign of terror" as an analogue of the tensions over cultural relevance and belongingness in the city. Community advocate Melody Ma has compared the death of the koi directly to the death of Chinatown, a neighbourhood with racially fraught beginnings, now, once again at the mercy of one may argue, a present incarnation of a colonial past - gentrification.

For a seemingly banal encounter between two small animals, it's worth interrogating why it garnered such emotional and active responses from the government<sup>1</sup> and the community. Beyond these figurative musings, race has always implicitly and explicitly informed the discourse of belongingness in Vancouver. Neighbourhoods are particularly useful units of analysis because they reflect specific histories in how certain neighbourhoods were borne out of enforced isolation as a result of second class citizenship. Chinatown, for example, clearly reflects the highly racialized struggles over landscape, houses, zoning, and ideologies of togetherness (Mitchell 2004: 35). "What are we really talking about when we talk about otters and koi?" asks the urban geographer Eugene McCann. "We're talking about ourselves, our neighbourhoods, and our lives in a rapidly changing city" (*The Globe and Mail* 2018). In a survey conducted on August 2018, 90% of Vancouver residents have agreed that the city is in the middle of a housing crisis (Insights West August 2, 2018 – Global News). When asked about what they thought the primary cause of the housing crisis was, 84% of respondents agreed on the reason: "foreign home buyers."

The tensions under this debate reveal a collective discomfort that permeates discussions of race and real estate in the city. Recently sworn in mayor, Kennedy Stewart, has echoed the same sentiments in some of his recent public speaking engagements. In his official two-part platform on housing, Stewart vowed to protect between "one-third and one-half of all new homes from foreign speculation (Stewart 2018). He says, "Uncontrolled foreign capital investment has driven up housing prices in cities all around the world, I'll make sure we're building homes for *local people* and families, not foreign investors." Of course, Stewart's platform also includes many other policies on housing,

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<sup>1</sup> The Director of Parks also said that since being unable to capture the otter, he has contacted the provincial Minister of Environment to help resolve the situation, meaning two levels of government are actively involved in this battle.

but news media is always quick to pick up on certain evocative keywords – *foreign investment, local people* – which eventually seep its way to the collective consciousness and daily conversations in the city. You live in a Vancouver housing crisis for long enough, you notice that housing is as much of a small-talk hot topic as the weather.

The role of news media in shaping ideology and fabricating a collective form of ‘common sense’ is not new. Repeating narratives, deciding which voices to publish are all bureaucratic processes that very well end up informing effects on the real world. More than facts and figures, Katharyne Mitchell notes how perception through representation has always been party to exacerbating existing racism and the racialization of space in Vancouver (2004: 68). She points to the particularly “virulent” way in which the Laurier Reports forged the urban discourse through language like “a growing emerging problem of foreignness in Vancouver housing” 1980s-90s.<sup>2</sup> But eventually, even as news stories played coy and couched their racially charged language with vagueness (“unusual and exotic groups” – *The Globe and Mail*, 1989), the foreignness they referred to always revealed itself to be wealthy Chinese immigrants. It remains the same today, where news media publish headlines such as “Steady push continues for a foreign buyer ban in Vancouver housing” alongside “Race and real estate: How hot Chinese money is making Vancouver unliveable.”<sup>3</sup> Together with these charged headlines, the news media also offers readers an insight into some solution so that the city could breathe from “drowning in Chinese money” (Bloomberg 2018). The government fulfilling its ideological role of protecting law and order for all enforced a solution: a foreign buyer’s tax.

The foreign buyers’ tax was enacted in July 2016 under the jurisdiction of BC Liberal Premier Christy Clark as a way to “solve” the housing crisis. But I argue that the tax functions more as an ideology within the housing crisis story, and not the housing crisis in reality. This is not to say that the tax has had no material effect on prices or succeeding investments – in fact, since the foreign buyers’ tax in 2016, BC real-estate sales to foreign buyers have remained relatively low and stable (Lupick 2018). However, this only adds to the question as to why housing crisis news stories have persisted as if nothing in the economic realm has changed. Houses prices *have* gone down. Foreign investors *have* slowed down. But the housing crisis story endures. The story in Vancouver goes like this. The real hard-working residents of Vancouver want an affordable place to live, but wealthy Chinese immigrants have been coming in droves - shopping for seasonal homes and investment properties, raising the prices so ridiculously high that the rest of “us” can’t simply live. There are usually two figures competing on either side of the debate.

### **Negotiating revanchist city tensions**

The first figure is the “multicultural self” (Mitchell 2004: 88). The multicultural self is the epitome of social liberalism. They seek to “inculcate a sense of tolerance as part of a citizen’s obligation toward national social coherence” (ibid). Stewart’s proclamation falls under this category, where there a defence of place is framed through sameness versus difference (locals vs. foreigners). The multicultural self also appears as an agent of the interventionist state, which supposedly acts as an objective arbiter to ensure that multiculturalism and differences between individuals in a given society are celebrated in a harmonious way (Ibid 89). In their common support of the foreign buyers’ tax, the successive provincial-municipal pairings in BC (i.e. Christy Clark/centre-left Gregor Robertson, NDP John Horgan/Gregor Robertson, John Horgan/ social democrat Kennedy

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Stewart) all represent social liberalism in that they vociferously pledge their political allegiances in the interests of the local community. This would be seamless if not for the visibility of difference resulting from transnational movement. The reality of national borders and geographical differences sets in. Contradictions inherent within social liberalism, disrupting the coherence of this multicultural self within a society that continuously encounters otherness. As a result of this rupture, a second figure of the revanchist emerges in the narrative.

The revanchist figure can be better explained using a contemporary, real life analogue. Journalist Douglas Todd stokes the fire of this narrative, arguing that the foreign buyers' tax has put Canadian sovereignty "on trial" (Todd, *The Province*, 2018). A self-confessed nationalist, Todd laments the death of Canadian sovereignty using the case of Jing Li a, a Chinese citizen and international student who filed a lawsuit against the B.C. Supreme Court on the grounds that the foreign buyers' tax illegally discriminated against her on the basis of national origin. Todd opined, "in this era of globalization and free trade, in which transnational corporations often call for "open borders," it is not fashionable to stand up for national sovereignty. Cultural liberals and even business leaders often characterize the concept as thinly disguised racism." However, integral to the figure of the revanchism is a strange championing of the people they antagonize.

In a separate article on the Vancouver Sun, Todd bemoans how "ethnic Chinese economies in highly diverse Metro Vancouver" have begun to "exclude" people on the basis of race and language. He cites a play called "No Foreigners," created by Chinese-Canadian playwright David Yee, who is of "mixed Chinese and white ancestry." Todd writes, "the play was inspired by [Yee's] experience in a Chinese mall in Richmond with a luxury-bag store salesperson who would not sell him anything, saying: "No foreigners." By which she meant: "No Caucasian (Todd, *The Georgia Straight*, 2018). Similarly, Ken Sim, ex-mayoral candidate in the 2018 Municipal Elections assumed the role of willing mouthpiece for a historically right-wing party, calling himself a "change agent." Sim is also keen to distance himself from his ethnicity, saying, "I didn't want a lot to do with my Chinese heritage. I wanted to be like everyone else" (Lupick 2018). The NPA also endorsed him as a businessman. His whole political platform was shaped through the idea that he was the only candidate with "previous experience in running large organizations" adding that the City of Vancouver is also a large, complex organization "that needs help." (Zimmer 2018). Revanchist figures hold on to people like Sim and Yee, who occupy a positionality wherein they seem to be willing agents in their own assimilation to whiteness.

Similarly, Todd and many other revanchist figures within the housing crisis often contradict traditional conservative ideology. They advocate for greater taxation as long as it were directed towards "them, and not us". In this essay, I argue that the foreign buyers' tax is a solution that exacerbates re-emerging tensions between the multicultural self and the revanchist figure. In more economic terms, the foreign buyers' tax is the state's attempt to appear as an arbiter of tensions between these unbounded foreign investors and the territorialized community. A battle between neoliberal agents, who are now economically ahead but have been historically disenfranchised on the basis of race, and the social liberal attitudes of the so-called "community" whose claims to the city are based on social liberal attitudes such as the right to homeownership, where rights are fixed upon the condition of individual contribution to greater societal good.

This tension springs forth as a challenge to global city conceptualizations. In theory, global cities have two principal actors: nation-states and transnational migrants (Friedmann & Wolff, 1986). However, the immensity of power located between these two actors means that other social

relations orbiting around these two risk abstraction, where they must be rendered material, locational, and visible. Analyzing global cities from the ground up - from the gestures of people, from the headlines of newspapers, from the ruptures in previously accepted assumptions – means that there are smaller, but significant forces at work on the urban scale that inevitably affect the larger world. I echo Neil Smith's challenge to put these powers in context, and to question the common assumption that the power of financial capital is necessarily paramount (Smith 2002). Following this premise leads me to another question I aim to resolve: If financial capital isn't necessarily paramount, how much power does it then have in the face of a long history of institutional racism?

Furthermore, transnational migrants, even as they occupy spaces of the global capitalist elite, are still forced into “the poverty of choice in liberal multiculturalism” (Mitchell 2004: 98-90). As people having to navigate a society wherein their lives were explicitly constrained through policies informed by racist ideology, the emerging transnational class of Chinese millionaire migrants are still subject to non-economic forces within a world largely informed by it. The geographical differences in ideology also shapes the patterns of assimilation in which it still remains largely unilateral (i.e. it is the Chinese who have to adapt, it is the Chinese who are forced to reckon with fragmented family structures – giving rise to the term “astronaut family “ or “satellite family,” and not the other way around).

I also want to contextualize my claims in that this essay hopes to contribute to a more progressive, discursive mode of argumentation where the housing crisis no longer becomes a simple duel between “undeserving wealthy Chinese immigrants vs. the deserving local population” as news media outlets would have people believe. There are those who are more careful about their considerations of the housing crisis, noting the intricate and spatio-temporal ways in which money and global capital flows have come to ultimately shape housing crises in global cities everywhere. Josh Gordon, assistant professor and Kennedy Stewart's co-faculty member at the SFU School of Public Policy, offers a sharp materialist critique of the relationship between foreign ownership and housing affordability in a guest column for the Georgia Straight. However, I disagree with Gordon's conclusion people who disagree with the economic arguments of the housing crisis are “contrarian or have vested interests.” Vested interests are a legitimate reason to disagree with conclusions made on the basis of economics alone. I acknowledge that my own ethnicity as a Chinese person may very well affect a form of “vested interest” in the issue. This is not to say that those who want to recontextualize the issue through historical patterns are reducing the argument to race alone either. This simple binary of money vs. race fuels my desire to investigate the issue with more nuance, and more importantly, to translate this nuanced analysis not only within the ranks of academics, but also to the mainstream public who are continuously publish articles that aim to reinforce dualistic, and not discursive, thinking.

### **Questioning the Power of Financial Capital as Necessarily Paramount**

In conceptualizing the “truly global nature of the world economy”, Friedmann and Wolff (1982: 17) argue that there lies a tenuous relationship between the two principal actors in the global city stage – the transnational capitalists and the nation state. On one hand, transnational capitalists want limitless freedom from state intervention as a way to maximize profit. On the other hand, the state's intervening ability to maintain law and order lies in the capitalists' best interest. At the disjuncture of this tension lies the city, a pawn in the game played between two giants. However, the development of the world since Friedmann and Wolff's pioneering conceptualization has proved

this model a tad too simplistic. (Earlier texts on global city formations echo this relatively straightforward model where cities add just one more example on this later).

Two decades following this argument, Manuel Castells (2002: 151) begs to disagree, writing that “Whatever is left of political legitimacy, which is not much, is left mainly at the local level.” He argues that the rise of the network society has fundamentally transformed all dimensions of social life (Castells 2002). This network society encompasses not only the ways in which people are able to interact digitally – uninhibited by spatial and temporal limitations in virtual arenas such as the Internet – but also the speed in which cities have expedited the physical migration of bodies. Human migration is not only impacted through speed, but also through newly evolving patterns of directions. The Global Commission on International Migration reported that “the old paradigm of permanent migrant settlement is giving way to temporary and circular migration” (2005:31). As a result, a transnational social field then begins to emerge, where “migrants, through their life ways and daily practices, reconfigure space so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation-states’ (Basch et al 1994:28 DL). In this regard, Friedmann and Wolff’s conceptualization of the “transnational capitalist” demands more specificity in the face of rapid social, political, economic, and spatial changes on a global scale. Who exactly is this transnational capitalist, where did they come from, where are they going, what are they going to do when they get there, and finally, what do they bring with them, and what do they leave?

According to David Ley (2010), the transnational capitalist is the enterprising millionaire migrant, one he repeatedly refers to as the “self sufficient citizen.” Ley refers to this figure as the Homo economicus (Ley 2010:7), echoing John Stuart Mill’s 19<sup>th</sup> century claim that there exists this figure whose concerns are “solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end” (Mill 1836:97 On the Definition of Political Economy). This new supposed race of more evolved Homo sapiens began mobilizing after neoliberalism had significantly reset national and international policy regimes since the 1980s (Ibid: 6). In this configuration, transnational capitalists become alluring because they ask very little while of the state while giving a lot back. Recruiting new citizens who are self-sufficient means that the state is able to reinforce the freedom of the market instead of the freedom of those who are in need of social spending. Immigration policy became one key avenue in which the Canadian state actively facilitated this new wave of millionaire migrants.

### **The Business Immigration Program: state-facilitated transnational migration**

The Business Immigration Programme was initially enacted as a way to “promote, encourage, and facilitate the immigration of experience business persons who can contribute to Canada’s economic growth by applying risk capital and business acumen to Canadian business ventures that create jobs for Canadians (Immigration Act, Statutes of Canada 1976-77:52). In leading up to the creation of this act, key political moments contributed to the way in which the Canadian government actively but covertly selected who their intended applicants to the program were. The Major economic and political restructurings throughout the history of industrialized nations – the Keynesianism of the 50s-60s, the deindustrialization of the 70s-80s, and the neoliberalism regime of Thatcher and Reagan which has permeated until today are all contextual factors here (Aalbers 2008; Walks & Clifford 2015; Walks 2014 ). As a policy borne out of neoliberalism, the Business Immigration Programme was able to successfully enforce a weakening of national borders and a strengthening of market disciplines and values (Harvey 2005). Vancouver’s geographic and historical position as a port city in the Pacific Rim meant that there were geographically-specific articulations occurring) with other countries within the region as well. (Douglass 1998; Mitchell 2004).

The Pacific Rim articulation between Vancouver and Hong Kong began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Chinese labourers were imported to expedite and “cut costs” to build parts of the Canadian Pacific Railway in BC. Katharyne Mitchell refers to this articulation as a “globally oriented gentrification” so that the city can be rescaled a “key node in the global economy, a crucial urban gateway to the booming economies of the Pacific Rim” (Mitchell 2004: 43). This prioritization of economic benefit makes it so that It’s not surprising that Prime Minister John A. Macdonald soothed the public outcry against Chinese labourers through an economic rationale. He says, “It is simply a question of alternatives: either you must have this labour or you can’t have the railway” (Berton 1971: 250). As a result, Chinese people were seen as necessary evils, undesirable and disease-carrying bodies that Canadians had to endure in the name of national progress (Anderson 1991). As we will see, Macdonald’s reasoning stands as a template for politicians to come. The framing of Chinese labour as a bitter pill that Candians needed to somehow swallow on in the name of national interest is a deeply ideological tool that reinforces the way in which state is relatively spared from the tensions happening in the community.

Chinatown became a physical and symbolic enclave upon which Chinese immigrants were able to find some stability and community, no matter that it remained a form of spatial confinement based on racist definitions (Mitchell 2004: 246n18). As David Ley aptly concluded after a brief stroll along the False Creek seawall, an area in Vancouver in which majority is now owned by Hong Kong real estate tycoon Li-Ka Shing, it is hard to imagine that just within a short walking distance in a time not so long ago, Chinese people in the city were contained just within a “claustrophobic space of a few blocks” (Ley 2010:17). As Chinese people continued to live and work in Vancouver, their tempestuous road towards civic enfranchisement was long but eventual. In 1947, the government decided to grant the Chinese the right to vote. In 1957, Douglas Jung was elected as the first visibly minority politician to the House of Commons under the Progressive Conservatives. In 1967, immigration laws were “officially” stripped off their explicit racist conditions and allowed Chinese people to enter the country under the same criteria as any nationality.

To the advantage of Metro Vancouver and the rest of British Columbia, there was a sly acknowledgement of opportunity found within all these pre-existing historical, economic, and geographical connections. The Canadian state went on a concerted effort to reverse the violent history through a carefully crafted image of a benevolent neighbour across the Pacific Ocean. Conducting multiple trade missions and a concerted effort to “court” wealthy Hong Kong investors and businesspeople allowed them to successfully “lay siege” in the country and have an upper hand against other national “suitors” (Mitchell 2004: 56). For example, Mike Harcourt’s “Economic Mission” to Hong Kong had these clear place-making objectives:

1. To establish Vancouver’s commitment to fostering two-way trade and investment, as well as a full range of linkages and relationships with the Asian Pacific Rim.
2. To promote a broader awareness of business and investment opportunities in Vancouver and its regional hinterland; and to explore the possibilities of private investment and joint ventures in the Asian Pacific Rim.
3. To assist in the marketing of Vancouver’s specialized services and ‘invisible exports’ – financial services, business, trade and professional services and tourism  
(City of Vancouver 1985: 2.)

Created in 1978, redesigned in 1984, and extended in 1986, the Business Immigration Program (BIP) came at a time when boom-and-bust economies were seeking to ameliorate losses

resulting in the collapse of welfare states (Ibid: 57). One relatively simple answer was to recruit new citizens who could possibly fix the economy through new business technologies. After the mass disillusionment in manufacturing and industrialization, the nation-state took it as an opportunity for “new beginnings,” to try something *different* this time. The program allowed two kinds of businesspeople – investors and entrepreneurs. The first requires just money (but more), and the second stream requires more business savvy (and also money). The BIP operated on the premise that new self-sufficient citizens would boost the economy through job creation or through investment, signaling a new form of citizenship based primarily on economic power. But beyond this economic logic, the program was successful also because of simultaneous political upheavals at the time. The height of the BIP’s popularity, for example, also coincided with the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984. It became a massive political and economic opportunity for advanced economies to take advantage of a collective fear within Hong Kong Chinese people in having their sovereignty handed over to Mainland China (Mitchell 2004; Ley 2010). The nation-states started vying for Hong Kong businessmen to come and invest in exchange for the promise of citizenship and an enhanced way of life (Ley 2010). However British Columbia had an upper hand. Canadian politicians started conducting trade missions to Hong Kong, spreading the gospel of the Business Immigration Programme and the promise of an enhanced way of life as a citizen.

### **From economic to cultural exchange**

“There has been growing agreement in recent years that Vancouver has the potential to become one of the few emerging “global cities.” These are strategically situated urban areas endowed with favorable location, natural amenities, good climate and stage of development. They are capable of becoming interchange places with an economic base of management, communication and cultural exchange.

*False Creek: A Preliminary Report*

(September 1973, City of Vancouver, Planning Department).

Eventually it was clear that mere economic justifications to tolerate visible differences was not sufficient to pacify racism and exclusionary tactics from the community. The city also needed a quick, easy financial way to gain back or at least stabilize the economy after the global recession of 1980. “In an attempt to stimulate the economy by diversifying away from resources and by initiating megaprojects, the BC Social Credit Provincial Government went on a massive “land-buying spree” for redevelopment (Mitchell 2004: 46). 176 acres of land originally owned by the Canadian Pacific Railroad transformed from an “Industrial” zone to a “Comprehensive District-1” zone, a geographic reflection of the social and economic transformations to come. It was up to the state to find a buyer.

The Social Credit Party stepped into power at a time when the province had to reckon with the deleterious effects of the 1980s recession. They were forced to create some sort of solution to the short-term economic concerns of the people. Their election also signaled a disruption in the harmony of social liberal governance in Vancouver, where in a conservative provincial Social Credit party lay in between the social-democratic municipal government (under NDP mayor Mike Harcourt) and liberal federal government (still under Pierre Trudeau). As a result, the Socreds went on a land-buying spree in an attempt to address the plummeting economy through the initiation of “legislative mega-projects” – one of which was Expo 86.

It is important to note here that the election of the BC Social Credit Party (Socreds) was a response to the disenchantment against the “mosaic multiculturalism” spearheaded by Prime

Minister Pierre Trudeau. Between 1960 to 1980, Vancouver experienced a harmonious governance structure wherein the municipal, provincial, and federal parties all worked in agreement with socially liberal policies. State intervention through social housing, for example, was a method of governance based on the idea that everyone has a supposed right to a “delightful and humane living environment” (Ley 2010, Mitchell 2004). However, the 1980 global crisis left British Columbia in disarray. The slow death of BC’s resource-based economy led to a massive spike in unemployment and caused the poverty line in BC to grow by 73 percent (Anderson and Wachtel 13). One of the most visceral effects of the recession was the displacement and disempowerment of poor, working-class, and even middle class residents of the city (Mitchell 2004:42-43). As single-resident occupancy (SRO) hotels and social housing units were demolished by the bulk, development applications that belonged to Chinese investors began propping up. This palimpsest (Graham 2013; Mattern 2013) signified a simplistic narrative to the local community – that investors from Hong Kong are imperiously evicting the rightful residents of the city. This perception of an urban racial invention also stemmed from aforementioned history of institutional racism in the city.

As a part of their agenda to lure foreign investment in Vancouver, the Socreds had to be active in pronouncing more Pacific Rim articulations. Expo ’86 was an ideal, and eventually, material manifestation of that articulation, upon which the narrative of globalization could continue to operate, and it operated in a very effective way. The big reveal of the Skytrain was also used as an on-the-nose metaphor for “connecting the world,” furthering the neoliberal myth of the level playing field (Mitchell 2004: 44). Several trade missions and partnership projects between Vancouver and Hong Kong were conducted around this time. A significant one was Festival ’91, themed “Hong Kong: Friends Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” which was meant to foster good relations between Hong Kong and Canada (Ibid 52).

Riding on the success of Expo 86, the Socreds won another election under new premier William Vander Zalm, an unconventional politician (McCarthy 1983:3) who, much like other major political figures at the beginning of the 90s, willingly provoked revanchist city tensions in cities around the world. (Neil Smith 1995). The 1990s was the era of the revanchist city (Smith 1996:43). The revanchist city originated in the last three decades of nineteenth century France. The original revanchists, under the leadership of Paul Deroulede, rallied behind their banner under “The True France”, which was “the France of good honest men who believed in simple virtues of honour, family, the army, and the Republic” (Rutkoff 1981:23). Despite this appeal to traditional family values, this was a political movement motivated by vengeance and violent reaction (The word *revanche*, after all, translates directly to revenge).. The revanchists built their movement out of a “right-wing populist nationalism” (Smith 1996: 43) that claimed to retake the country with whatever means necessary. Neil Smith accurately invokes George H.W. Bush as a spectre of the original revanchists. In an attempt to address the “crystallized effects of a decade of deregulation, privatization and emerging cuts in welfare and social service budgets” (Fitch 1993) combined with the “visceral reaction in the public discourse against the liberalism of the post-1960s period” (Smith 1996:42), Bush promised the public in an infamous speech in Illinois, “a kinder, gentler nation” (Bush 1988). He says, “When I talk about a kinder and gentler nation, I mean it. [...] I want to safeguard our national heritage for future generations, to admire, and enjoy. I am committed. I am a sportsman, an outdoors man. I am committed to a clean, sound environment, and we all feel that way. And there’s one other thing; let me tell you something, I did serve in combat and I will never forget these P.O.W.’s and M.I.A.’s who may still be missing in some foreign soil. I’m here tonight to ask for your support. I believe in the supp” (Ibid).



There is something about the politics of revanchism and this explicit attempt at finding commonality with “the people.” The good honest men of Deroulede, the hard working Americans of Bush. However, revanchists tend to oversee the fact that the social ills they rally against are often the result of shrewd government maneuverings. In Vancouver, the revanchist movement found cause for their anger ((Mitchell 2004: 42) in seeing the city become privatized, rezoned, and marketed to offshore developers in Hong Kong while not considering the ways in which the nation-state, who claims to act in their best interest, has caused what they are now rallying against. According to Katharyne Mitchell, Vander Zalm’s election was a direct result of Expo 86’s success. I add to her claim by citing the fact that Vander Zalm actually lost three previous attempts at municipal and provincial elections as he campaigned under the Liberals (McCarthy 1983). Under the Social Credit party, Vander Zalm proved successful. His first maneuver was a “sweeping privatization campaign” that included the entirety of the Expo land (Mitchell 2004: 47). The political opportunity presented itself in that Vander Zalm grossly undersold state-owned land to private developers who were willing to cooperate. Vander Zalm, with significant assistance from Minister of Economic Development Grace McCarthy, facilitated the sale to Li-Ka Shing as a “necessary risk” to put Vancouver on the international real estate market, a beautiful, livable place to park your money in.

Eventually, the influx of Asian capital materialized through massive redevelopment and densification projects in the city. The liberalization of immigration programs also meant that it was not only money that started appearing, but people. Advances in air travel and technology also made it so that the early 1990s saw an unprecedented number of immigrants from Asia, predominantly from Hong Kong, many of whom felt themselves living precarious lives as a result of the handover’s uncertain future (Ley 2010). The arrival of people meant that these global city formations were being *felt* on the human scale, and the feelings are often antagonistic. What emerges then is a crisis of social meanings wherein political conservatives are on the side of diversity and multiculturalism, whereas social liberals, arguing for their right to homeownership and the right to the city, begin find themselves in a xenophobic position in the face of this new form of transnational neoliberalism. How then can this tension be reconciled, if a foreign buyers’ tax is not enough?

### **Racialization is always a historical geography. (Audrey Kobayashi, 2014)**

If one were to consider the full weight of the historical racism against the Chinese, it would not be so simple to equate them as calculating agents in collusion with the state (Ley 2010: 67-97). Coming back to Castells’ imperative of writing from the grounded, material effects unfolding within cities, considering migration in terms of cultural assimilation, for example demonstrates an element of power that economic logic cannot capture alone. The Business Immigration Program, for example, while primarily based on an economic exchange, also resulted in a “sequence of geographical decisions in the intersection of economics, politics, and education” (Ibid 79). Families from Hong Kong are not only forced to assimilate into Canadian culture but are also forced into forms of emotional and reproductive labour that their white transnational capitalist counterparts are largely exempt from. Immigration status is also not straightforward as a regular market transaction. It demands that applicants, no matter how wealthy, go through a “probationary” period where they must prove to the state they can fulfill their role as wards of the economy (90). Even if the immigrants were millionaires, there is an anxiety attached to the condition of precarity (Ley 2010: 90). To respond to Ley’s theoretical question, “when do empirically justifiable generalizations become racist categorizations?” I say that they do when one ceases to historicize social conditions

away from the actors who have exercised agency along the way. In this case, Castells is right that political legitimacy *is* still found within local levels of governance. One can see the chronology of events that led to a new reemergence of revanchist city tensions in Vancouver, but now with even greater technologies in an increasingly globalized network society. Climate immigrations and future economic and political upheavals are projected to increase migration in advanced economies. It would be futile to simply side with the revanchists and stop the seemingly inevitable. Instead, it would be better to look to history and see where spaces of resolution can be made within the multiple challenges of globalization.

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