

Pathos of (In)Difference: Subject Formations Through the Liberal Imaginary

by

Jasmine Shaeen Liu
B.A., The University of Western Ontario, 2013

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis will undertake a study of contemporary political subjectivity by investigating the manifestations of various *pathea* found in contemporary politics. In examining how political impotence and indifference are cultivated through (neo)liberal subject formation, it argues that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is constituted through the *pathos of distance* found in the gap between the impotent liberal subject and the imaginary, universal ideal subject articulated by liberalism. Through close readings of Wendy Brown's writings, I explore her work and engage with her formulations of contemporary political subjectivity. Specifically, I will analyze the impotent subject constituted by the *pathos of ressentiment*, the vulnerable subject constituted by the *pathos of walling*, and the tolerated subject constituted by the *pathos of difference* in order to trace the relationships between the various *pathea* and the subjectivities that they construct.

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Introduction

Why do people still tolerate being humiliated and enslaved, to such a point, indeed, that they actually want humiliation and slavery not only for others but for themselves?

– Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,
Anti-Oedipus

The fiction of the sovereign individual as conjured by the discourse of liberalism has utterly captured the imagination of contemporary politics. Depicted as a sovereign, autonomous, rational, free, equal, rights-bearing actor with agency, this portrayal of the contemporary liberal subject allows liberal discourse to perpetuate its legitimacy through the narratives of freedom, equality, progress, and universality while simultaneously depoliticizing political subjects into easily quantifiable units of analysis. In actuality, however, the relations between individuals and states is not so easily reduced to such simple, measurable, and comparable units. As the contemporary political theorist, Wendy Brown writes, “As the global economy grows ever more complex and integrated, both the state and the individual are increasingly frustrated in their sovereign intentions by forces beyond their control and often beyond their comprehension as well.”¹

On the one hand, liberal ideology *formally* promotes an idealistic, universal, and omnipresent narrative of freedom and equality, but on the other hand, the quotidian cultural, social, political, and economic realities show an *actual* world filled with social injustices and vast economic inequalities founded upon and exacerbated by the marginalization, subordination, oppression, and exploitation based on gender, race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, and class of those who do not fit the allegedly

¹ Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 10.

“universal” categories of a bourgeois, white, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied male.² As the disjuncture between the ideals and narratives espoused by the liberal structures and institutions that encompass the contemporary subject, and the daily realities of the world she experiences continues to grow, a growing sense of powerlessness persists, and she finds herself in what Brown calls, “an era of profound political disorientation.”³ In turn, these feelings of political impotence and lack of agency affect the formation of political subjectivity. That is to say, how the contemporary subject sees and constitutes herself as a political subject is effected by this pervasive sense of powerlessness.

Moreover, these feelings of inadequacy and political impotence are often manifested as anger, frustration, rage, and *ressentiment*, which consequently shape the processes of subject formation. In this way, the multiplicitous relations of power influence the formation of the subject, particularly how that political subjectivity is manifested, and how the subject subsequently comes to understand herself. Given these ubiquitous forces of subjectification, how then does a contemporary political subject act or – perhaps more accurately in the present tense – struggle to act, in the world today? That is to say, how does she (re)act in light of the total and paralyzing disorientation of the present?

This thesis will undertake a study of contemporary political subjectivity by investigating the manifestations of various *pathos* found in contemporary politics. In examining how political impotence and indifference are cultivated through (neo)liberal subject formation, it argues that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is constituted

² Ibid., 18.

³ Ibid., 3.

through the *pathos of distance* found in the gap between the impotent liberal subject and the imaginary, universal ideal subject articulated by liberalism. Through close readings of Wendy Brown's writings, I explore her work and engage with her formulations of contemporary political subjectivity.

The Question of Indifference

While this project is concerned with indifference in the case of the contemporary political subject, the notion of indifference is not restricted to the context of contemporary politics. The general sentiment I refer to in this thesis as indifference has been characterized in various forms by theorists throughout the history of Western political thought. Expressed at times as indifference, apathy, passivity, and civic disengagement, this is not a novel phenomenon. Although these terms do not form a unitary perspective and are largely derived from and pertain to very different contexts, they do share a similar spirit of a lack of feeling, interest, and concern, often supplemented by a sense of removal or distance. Here, I would like to briefly trace the notion of indifference across a modicum of contexts and literatures that have touched on this general sentiment, particularly those that have influenced the trajectory undertaken in this thesis. In so doing, I hope to draw out some common lines of thought and lay out a general backdrop in order to compare the similarities and differences between how indifference has been construed and how it is manifested in the case of the contemporary neoliberal subject.

The concept of apathy can be traced back to the Ancient Greek *apatheia*, meaning freedom from, or indifference to feelings, passions, and emotions. According to the Stoics, *apatheia* was seen as a virtue wherein one is able to achieve a state of freedom

from passions and indifference towards that which is outside of one's control. As such, it was considered the highest condition of humanity. The roots of *apatheia* can be found in the prefix for "not," *a-*, and the Greek word *pathos*, meaning "passion" and "emotion," but also "pain," "suffering," and "pity." In its contemporary usage, apathy is now often understood as a lack of interest or concern.

Focussing on American society, C. Wright Mills, offers a comparatively more disparaging diagnosis of the "prevalence of mass indifference:"⁴

There has, in fact, come about a situation in which many who have lost faith in prevailing loyalties have not acquired new ones, and so pay no attention to politics of any kind. They are not radical, not liberal, not conservative, not reactionary. They are inactionary. They are out of it. If we accept the Greek's definition of the idiot as an altogether private man, then we must conclude that many American citizens are now idiots.⁵

According to Mills, "the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless— with or without psychiatric aid – to solve the troubles this system of lack of system imposes upon him."⁶ Thus, the individual feels trapped by the divide between "personal troubles" and "public issues."⁷ In response, Mills offers his solution: the "sociological imagination." In order to understand subject formation, Mills suggests that one considers both one's own life and biography, as well as the greater social, and historical context, effectively mediating the personal and the political, the private and the public.⁸

Equally, one of the foremost theoreticians of the democratic imagination, Sheldon S. Wolin argues that contemporary politics deliberately cultivates disinterested, apathetic,

⁴ C. Wright Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society," *The British Journal of Sociology* 9 no. 1 (1958): 30, doi: 10.2307/587620.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 10

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

and “apolitical but not alienated” citizens: “[T]he citizen is shrunk to the voter: periodically courted, warned, and confused but otherwise kept at a distance from actual decision-making and allowed to emerge only ephemerally in a cameo appearance according to a script composed by the opinion takers/makers.” In this analysis, contemporary politics has “no need for a conception of the citizen as one who takes active part in politics.”⁹ Rather, in order to function, it needs a citizen “who accepts the necessarily remote relationship between the concerns of the citizen and those of the power-holders, who welcomes being relieved of participatory obligations, and who is fervently patriotic.”¹⁰ Understood in this way, not only does the State interpellate the subject as disinterested and apathetic, but more significantly, produces a subject who desires her own passivity.

While the French social theorist, Jean Baudrillard would largely agree with the State’s need for an apathetic citizenry, arguing that the apathy of the masses is the foundation upon which centralized bureaucratic forms of powers are supported, he goes on to contend that any form of action, reaction, or response on the part of the masses would only serve to reinforce and legitimize the State and its power.¹¹ When both action and passivity have been coopted by the State, and even apathy is imposed on the “silent masses” by power, Baudrillard suggests that the only response left, the most devastating

⁹ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 565.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For Baudrillard, an active and engaged citizenry perpetuates the system and dons legitimacy to the State. That is why, he argues, “Everywhere the masses are encouraged to speak, they are urged to live socially, electorally, organizationally, sexually, in participation, in festival, in free speech, etc.” The system depends on an active mass. “[N]o longer is meaning in short supply, it is produced everywhere, in ever increasing quantities – it is demand which is weakening. And it is the *production of this demand for meaning* which has become crucial for the system.” Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2007), 50, 53.

“revenge” of the masses,¹² “their true, their only practice”¹³ is the silent majority. This silence is not a silence that is not permitted to speak – the State wills for it to speak and participate – but rather, it is a silence that *refuses to be spoken for in its name*. And in this sense, far from being a form of alienation, it is an absolute weapon.”¹⁴ This deliberate indifference, perhaps feasible for a subject in a position of privilege where silence and the refusal to act are possible, is not a possibility for a subject whose daily realities do not allow for silence and for whom resistance may in fact be a means of survival. Yet if silence is not possible, if, that is, it is not possible or politically desirable to turn away from action and choose inaction and indifference instead, then what options are left? Where do we turn for a more emancipatory set of discourses? To explore possible responses to these questions, I turn to the writings of Wendy Brown.

The Works of Wendy Brown

As one of the most influential theorists of contemporary politics, Wendy Brown’s critical and insightful analyses of democracy, freedom, power, modernity, neoliberalism, identity politics, wall-building, tolerance discourse, and political subjectivity have had wide-reaching, interdisciplinary influences particularly in the fields of political theory, women’s studies, sociology, anthropology, and critical legal studies. Her prescient critiques of modern liberal democracies and observations of contemporary politics and political subjectivity diagnose possible lines of resistance and reveal opportunities for intervention.

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2007), 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

For example, in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Brown illustrates how due to political identity's foundation through and sustenance by injury, contemporary politics finds itself in a "paradox in which the first imaginings of freedom are always constrained by and potentially even require the very structure of oppression that freedom emerges to oppose."¹⁵ In *Politics Out of History*, she diagnoses the breakdown of the narratives of liberalism and modernity and the resulting state of anxiety, political disorientation, and political impotence. Consequently, contemporary politics faces a baffling paradox: "We inheritors of the radically disenchanted universe feel a greater political impotence than humans may have ever felt before, even as we occupy a global order more saturated by human power than ever before."¹⁶ In *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Brown presents an insightful critique of liberal universalism through a study of the discourse of tolerance and its role in producing and situating liberal and nonliberal subjects. The implications of this critique raise serious questions about how more emancipatory conditions of subject formation can be made possible, to which Brown suggests that "a more democratic global future involves affirming rather than denying and disavowing liberalism's cultural facets and its imprint by particular cultures."¹⁷ Through an account of the contemporary phenomenon of nation-state wall building, Brown illuminates the fears, tensions, and desires associated with the "sovereign impotence" invoked by globalization and the

¹⁵ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1995), 7.

¹⁶ Brown, *Politics Out of History*, 139.

¹⁷ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 24.

erosion of state sovereignty in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.¹⁸ And in her most recent book, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Brown delivers a devastating critique of neoliberalism and its assault on the political subject, which she argues is the “vanquishing of liberal democracy’s already anemic *homo politicus*, a vanquishing with enormous consequences for democratic institutions, cultures, and imaginaries.”¹⁹ Thus, in studying Brown’s contributions to the literature of political subjectivity, and examining how the contemporary political subject is formed and how these processes of formation affect its very subjectivity, it is possible to come to better understanding of where and how it is possible work through the politics of anger and overcome the perceived sense of political impotence.

Taking Brown’s question, “How do we live in these broken narratives, when nothing has taken their place?”²⁰ further, I ask: where are the cracks and fissures of these fractured and contradictory modern liberal narratives, and how can we resist them and replace them with a more emancipatory set of discourses? Furthermore, as Brown queries, “If desire is no longer inherently emancipatory—that is, if contemporary understandings of subject formation no longer allow us to view desiring subjects as desiring their freedom and well-being (including mere freedom from suffering)—from what source is an emancipatory future to be drawn?”²¹ How does the contemporary subject work through her own political subjectivity, her subject formations, and at very basis of it all, who she is, in order to find the freedom to act in this world?

¹⁸ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 26.

¹⁹ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2015), 35.

²⁰ Brown, *Politics Out of History*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46

Impotent, Vulnerable, and Tolerated: A Study of Contemporary Political Subjectivity

Having laid out some of the questions undergirding this thesis and established the context for the arguments to be developed later, I will now provide a brief outline and chapter breakdown of what will follow. In order to make my case that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is constituted through the *pathos of distance* found at the core of the liberal imaginary, each chapter will use a different key text of Brown's to study a *pathos* found in contemporary politics and the type of subject formation in which it manifests. Specifically, I will analyze the impotent subject constituted by the *pathos of resentment*, the vulnerable subject constituted by the *pathos of walling*, and the tolerated subject constituted by the *pathos of difference* in order to trace the relationships between the various *patheia* and the subjectivities that they construct.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term *pathos* is useful for thinking through the arguments presented due in part to the centrality of Nietzsche's *pathos of distance*. Simultaneously understood as "passion," "strong feelings," "emotion," "empathy," "suffering," "pity," and "pain," *pathos* connotes an ambiguity, particularly with its undertones of pity and suffering, that does not appear as readily in a study of affect or emotion. In Nietzsche's formulation, the *pathos of distance* is a feeling produced by the distance between the self and the other; more importantly yet, the effects of the *pathos of distance* vary based on the situation and context of the subject. Whereas in the case of the strong, the *pathos of distance* is a productive force, for the weak, the *pathos of distance* is reactionary and debilitating. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I argue that the

pathos of distance is the underlying *pathos*, which in different contexts, is manifested as varying *pathea*. As such, the three contemporary *pathea* I discuss, the *pathos of ressentiment*, *pathos of walling*, and *pathos of distance* all share the ambiguity found in the *pathos of distance*, and consequently, all have the potential to be channelled either productively or reactively.

Chapter 1 builds on the question of freedom and agency through an exploration of *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* and Brown's question, why do we "disdain freedom rather than practice it?"²² This chapter examines the impotent subject, who, pained and overwhelmed with feelings of failure and powerlessness in the midst of the contemporary politics, turns to the *pathos of ressentiment*. Characterized by Nietzsche as an affect of bitterness, hostility, vengefulness, and rancour, *ressentiment* is a reactionary response in which the subject, in experiencing pain, seeks an outward displacement of her suffering onto a "hostile external world." Following Brown, I contend that the contemporary subject is often seemingly motivated by *ressentiment* in reaction to her politicized identity as a paradoxical product of, and reaction to, the terms dictated by liberalism, disciplinary-bureaucratic regimes, and forces of globalization. More specifically, as a reaction to, and contestation of, its marginalization and subordination, politicized identity is, quite ironically, attached to its different exclusions, thus rendering its identity dialectically contingent upon this same structure of exclusion. This reactionary *ressentiment* reinscribes the domination of her politicized identity, thereby reinforcing the subject's individual impotence and powerlessness, as well as substituting her will to action and power with a vengeful desire for punishment.

²² Brown, *States of Injury*, 55.

Applying Brown's understanding of *ressentiment* in a contemporary context, I examine the ways in which the subject's *ressentiment* is in response to her subject formation as it has been constituted by neoliberalism. At this point, however, I move away from Brown and return to Nietzsche in order to make the case that neoliberal subjectivity is formed through the *pathos of distance* between the impotent liberal subject and the imaginary, universal liberal ideal. For Nietzsche, the *pathos of distance* is represented by the gap between slave morality and master morality; as such, it is the springboard from which *ressentiment* emerges. Consequently, I explore the ways in which the *pathos of distance* is a crucial component in the structuring of the relationship between the impotent liberal subject and the universal liberal ideal, focusing in particular on how it is internalized by the subject. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I offer critiques of Brown's prescriptions for subverting the cycle of *ressentiment* by turning to Judith Butler's theorization of "passionate attachments" to political subjection, as well as by reconsidering Nietzsche's formulation of the will in conjunction with the notion of desire.

Largely set against the backdrop of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, Chapter 2 concentrates on *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* to examine the subject rendered vulnerable by waning sovereignty. Caught between the tensions of globalization and the erosion of sovereignty, this subject's fear, feelings of insecurity, and need for order are expressed as anger, violence, and aggression. In particular, Brown observes the tendency for these sentiments to physically manifest in the form of material walls, which I shall call the *pathos of walling*. These walls, however, are performative displays of might that are ineffective as physical blockades, and ultimately, Brown argues, signs of weakness

rather than strength. Tracing the liberal ontology of individual sovereignty through social contract theory and how it is inextricably imbricated with state sovereignty, I consider the effects of the flight of sovereignty on political subjectivity. Despite the inefficacy of wall-building, walls are nonetheless influential managers of the psychic landscape behind human (and non-human) relations and subjectivities. Examining the distinctions that walls create between us and them, inside and outside, friend and enemy, I explore the ways in which the *pathos of walling* suffuses political subjectivities. Moreover, the spectacle of walling generates two important characteristics of sovereignty: awe and fear. Following Hobbes, I delve into the role of fear in establishing the narratives of nation-state and individual sovereignty in “civil society,” arguing that in addition to the proliferation of wall-building, fear is a value-creator responsible for the production, organization, and hierarchization of political subjectivities. As such, there are many similarities between the need to create order and rank found in the *pathos of distance* and the desire for distance that undergirds the *pathos of walling*. In fact, I argue, the *pathos of walling* signals an aggressively reactionary response of subject who, despite the façade of control and security, is in fact rife with vulnerabilities resulting from the loss of sovereignty.

Drawing upon the recent Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, I interrogate the currents of alienation and disenchantment underlying the student-led movement’s demands for democracy and “true universal suffrage.” While Brown considers the desire for walls as a hyperaggressive response to waning sovereignty, in the case of Hong Kong – which has always been subjected to some form of colonialism or neocolonialism, – and the Umbrella Movement, it appears that the protestors’ call for walls emerges out of a

desire for protection from the effects of intense neoliberal rationality and the authoritarian Chinese State. Following the general discourse around the movement and the deep political divisions that rocked Hong Kong during that period, I analyze the unfurling of the Umbrella Movement, and examine how the Chinese State calculatingly employed what Althusser calls the “Ideological State Apparatus” to manage the movement by turning the citizens against themselves in order to shut down the occupations. Furthermore, I investigate the phenomenon of “*gau wu*,” in which the protestors turn to fluid occupations and deterritorialized acts of creative resistance in light of the inefficacy of walling. Finally, in conclusion, I interrogate the ways in which the *pathos of walling* exploits the subject’s fears of insecurity by offering a illusion of sovereignty while in actuality further re-establishing the conditions of her subjectification.

Using *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Chapter 3 makes a case for the *pathos of difference* through a critique of the discourse of tolerance. Focussing on the tolerated subject, this chapter questions the crowning of tolerance as a significant achievement of liberalism. Heralded alongside freedom, equality, and justice, as a fundamental principle of a pluralistic liberal democracy, tolerance is framed as a peaceful and nonpartisan response to resolving cultural, ethnical, racial, social, and sexual differences. To the contrary, I argue that far from being neutral, the discourse of tolerance is in fact inexorably violent, particularly when considering its effects on the production and situation of the tolerated subject. A brief sketch of the historical and etymological roots of tolerance reveals its meaning as the begrudging acceptance of a contemptible, disdainful, and aversive entity, yet strangely enough, it is celebrated as a virtue and harbinger of peace. This interpretation of tolerance is, I

contend, a specifically liberal interpretation that has benefited from the ideological hegemony of liberalism. Invoked as a supplement to liberal equality in order to maintain the façade of universality, which ironically, its very existence brings into disrepute, tolerance manages the inevitability of difference. Thus understood, not only is tolerance not neutral, but it is in fact loaded with power; that is to say, the discourse of tolerance is a form of governmentality used to manage differences by reinforcing and normalizing the hegemonic liberal order and its values. Consequently, I consider the ways in which the discourse of tolerance is employed to subordinate, marginalize, and regulate differences by essentializing and naturalizing the differences as identity. Furthermore, I interrogate the ways in which this act of depoliticization, in addition to erasing differences and inequalities, also serves to veil the relations of power in the relationship between the tolerator and the tolerated, thereby effecting the tolerated subject's feelings of inferiority. Turning to the writings of Frantz Fanon and Yellowknives Dene political theorist, Glen Coulthard, I examine how the discourse of tolerance is used to justify the imperial and colonial pursuits of liberalism, focussing in particular on the Canadian context, and argue that the violence of this type of subject formation inevitable in the same way that the violence of liberalism is inevitable. To conclude, I suggest that given its foundation on difference, tolerance is not and cannot be, a matter of indifference. The tolerated subject is replete with the *pathos of difference* and while liberalism may attempt to conceal it, the violence and *pathea* that suffuse tolerance, and consequently liberal subject formation, are inescapable.

Chapter 1: *Pathos of Ressentiment*

Persistent ambiguity serves a positive function in the system. It provides a useful tension between hope and despair so that the objects of racism oscillate between believing that the system can respond and despairing of its ever eradicating the problems. The result is, from the view of Superpower, an occasional militancy (a civil rights movement) that can be appeased by minor concessions and, predictably, will relapse into passivity, then into disenchantment, and taunted by an equality that remains always out of reach, end in rioting – and another official study. Political action, when it does not fail altogether, seems capable only of achieving expedients that fall woefully short of dealing with deeply embedded injustices. Action becomes another victim of racism.”

– Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*

A Recovery of Freedom

The persistent question driving *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* is a question of freedom in which Brown asks, why does the contemporary political subject “disdain freedom rather than practice it?”²³ The theme underlying the broad range of topics in this collection of essays, which explores academic hostility to postmodernism; wounded attachments to an identity founded in *ressentiment*; a critique of Catherine MacKinnon’s theory of antipornography, the problematic resurgence of rights discourse, the inherently gendered nature of the paradoxes sustaining the liberalism, and the implications of the role of the state in feminist politics, is the pursuit of freedom. This pursuit of freedom is manifested in Brown’s writing as a concern with what she perceives as the dilution of freedom in contemporary politics through a question that animates these essays: “Can something of a persistent desire for human freedom be discerned even in the

²³ Ibid.

twisted projects of this aim, even in its failure to realize itself, its failure to have the courage, or the knowledge, of its own requisites?”²⁴

For Brown, contemporary politics too often depoliticizes and ahistoricizes freedom by treating it as a concept, thereby abstracting its historical and local characters, and presenting it instead as a fixed and attainable state. However, this conception of freedom is a limited, increasingly economically motivated, liberal formulation of freedom, which forecloses possibilities for radical democratic political projects. Moreover, this narrow conception of freedom has disorienting effects for emancipatory politics, which “problematically mirror[s] the mechanisms and configurations of power of which they are an effect and which they purport to oppose.”²⁵ Thus, Brown seeks to liberate ‘freedom’ from liberal appropriation, and in turn, the “disorientation,” “ambivalence,” and “anxiety” associated with political freedom. Reconceptualizing freedom as relational, contextual, a struggle, a process, and a practice that is continually negotiated and renegotiated, Brown argues that freedom is a responsibility. Brown writes:

Against the liberal presumption that freedom transpires where power leaves off, I want to insist that freedom neither overcomes nor eludes power; rather, it requires for its sustenance that we take the full measure of power’s range and appearances – the powers that situate, constrain, and produce subjects as well as the will to power entailed in practicing freedom. Here again, freedom emerges as that which is never achieved; instead, it is a permanent struggle against what will otherwise be done to and for us.²⁶

Ironically, when freedom is understood as a responsibility, particularly in the face of a contemporary politics, rather than liberating, the burden accompanying this responsibility

²⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

contributes to unprecedented levels of political disorientation and appears “overwhelming and hopelessly unrealizable.”²⁷ As Brown describes:

History has become so fully secularized: there is nobody here but us – no “structures,” no supervening agent, no cosmic force, no telos upon which we may count for assistance in realizing our aims or to which we may assign blame for failing to do so. Yet they are hopelessly unrealizable for an apparently opposite reason: the powers and histories by which the social, political, and economic world are knit together are so intricately globalized that it is difficult for defeatism not to pre-empt the desire to act. Moreover, bereft of the notion that history “progresses,” or even that humans learn from history’s most nightmarish episodes, we suffer a contemporary “disenchantment of the world” more vivid than Weber let alone Marx ever imagined. This is not so much nihilism – the oxymoronic belief in meaninglessness – as barely masked despair about the meanings and events that humans *have* generated.²⁸

Lost amidst the crumbling foundations of modernity, panicking at the incoherence of the present narratives, and disoriented by the inability to envision a future, the contemporary subject shoulders the responsibility of her times with despair, disenchantment, and hopelessness. Overwhelmed by responsibility, yet often despairing, hopeless, and impotent, the contemporary subject has no one else to cast the blame on.

Nietzsche and *Ressentiment*

These overwhelming feelings of powerlessness and failure in light of the unstable conditions of “late modernity” pave the way for a “politics of *ressentiment*” in which the subject interprets her powerlessness and failure as suffering. As Friedrich Nietzsche explains: “I suffer: someone must be to blame for it’ – thus thinks every sickly sheep. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, tells him: ‘Quite so, my sheep! someone must be to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 25-6.

blame for it: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame for it – *you alone are to blame for yourself*” – This is brazen and false enough: but one thing at least is achieved by it, the direction of *ressentiment* is *altered*.²⁹ It is through this Nietzschean concept of *ressentiment*³⁰ that Brown develops her analysis of the conditions and formations of contemporary political subjectivity.

Nietzsche describes *ressentiment* as a “poisonous,” “festering,” “hostile,” “rancorous,” “vengeful” affect formed through suffering: “For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering – in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy... This alone, I surmise, constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to *deadens pain by means of affects*.”³¹ *Ressentiment*, therefore, is characterized by the necessary outward displacement of one’s own suffering; as such, *ressentiment* is founded in, through, and most importantly, *as a reaction to*, a “hostile external world.”³² Suffering from the disorientation of her own powerlessness and impotence, and constantly in search of someone to blame, the subject seeks to displace her pain and suffering onto an agent she moralizes to be guilty. In displacing her own suffering upon a

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 128.

³⁰ The use of the French word, “*ressentiment*” is a very deliberate use of the term and denotes the Nietzschean characterization of this affect, drawing a clear distinction between *ressentiment* and resentment. Nietzsche scholar and translator, Walter Kaufmann, explains this reasoning behind the deliberate use and preservation of the French term: “the German language lacks any close equivalent to the French term. That alone would be sufficient excuse for Nietzsche, though perhaps not for a translator, who could use ‘resentment’.” In maintaining the French word, Kaufmann’s translation offers greater semantic freedom to *ressentiment*’s characterization in Nietzschean terms. See: *Ibid.*, 5-10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

³² *Ibid.*, 36-7

guilty agent, the subject is making a moral judgement in conceiving the guilty agent as “the evil enemy,’ *the Evil One*,” and in contrast, herself as the “good one.”

Through this *ressentiment*-fuelled, reactionary conception of morality, the subject thereby gives birth to values – values particular to what Nietzsche calls “slave morality.” According to Nietzsche, slave morality along with its accompanying values has become the dominant form of morality: “*The slave revolt in morality*: that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it – has been victorious.”³³ While there is a multiplicity of possible moralities, the morality that has come to dominate and impose itself upon politics is a morality that refuses to acknowledge any other morality outside of its own schema; thus slave morality forecloses the possibility of escape and change beyond its own morals. Nietzsche writes: “But this morality resists such a ‘possibility,’ such an ‘ought’ with all its power: it says stubbornly and inexorably, ‘I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality.’”³⁴ Despite the opportunities posed by other moralities, the openness to their pursuit has been foreclosed by the dominant slave morality. In contrast to slave morality, Nietzsche juxtaposes master morality, which he characterizes as the morality of the strong, powerful, proud, and noble who view themselves as “good.” From their own goodness, those of master morality subsequently create the value “bad” to distinguish between themselves and that which is contemptible, weak, not noble, and distinct from what they had first determined as “good.”³⁵

³³ Ibid., 34.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 116. Although Nietzsche is referring to herd animal morality in this passage, he employs the terms ‘slave morality’ and ‘herd animal morality’ interchangeably throughout his works to refer to the same concept.

³⁵ Nietzsche distinguishes between two basic types of morality: master morality and slave morality, stressing that these are not mutually exclusive, nor are they the only two types of moralities. Based on his analysis,

The *Pathos of Distance*

Out of the contradistinction between the noble, powerful, and strong and the common, simple, and weak, rises the *pathos of distance*, the notion that the strong, by virtue of their strength, has the right to dominate, rule, create values, and rank themselves higher than the weak.³⁶ Whereas for master morality, the concept of “good” is created out of himself, and the concept of “bad” follows, for slave morality, the concept of “good” in her own image comes subsequent to that external stimulus, which it first deems “evil.” As a result of their own weakness and impotence in comparison to the noble, the weak grow resentful and hateful; and in an act of vengeance against the strong, they invert the noble’s valuation of the strong as good, deeming the strong, powerful, and noble as evil.

For Nietzsche, the inferiority complex of the weak results in a self-hatred so overwhelming that she blames her own pain, hurt, and suffering on what she perceives to be a “hostile external world,” by projecting her hatred, violence, anger, hostility, and bitterness outwards in an act of *ressentiment*. Where the noble independently creates the concept of good in her own image out of pride, the slave of *ressentiment* can only create the concept of good in reaction to something external to herself. The values created by *ressentiment* stem from the inversion of the values propagated by the *pathos of distance*, and the reversal of the role of the good. Despite the origin of the slave revolt in morality lying in the subject of *ressentiment*’s self-hatred arising from her own weakness and

these two basic moralities are the most prevalent, but in fact, it is possible for master and slave morality to occur as a mixture, concurrently, contemporaneously, or side-by-side. Nietzsche stresses the necessary possibilities for other moralities to avoid falling into the modern trappings of “faith in opposite values”,³⁵ and reducing a multiplicity of possible moralities into a binary opposition between master morality and slave morality. See: *Ibid.*, 23, 204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 204.

impotence, one of the key motivating external factors, and the very order she reacts in response to and against, is a hierarchical order imposed upon her by the *pathos of distance*. While her own weakness and impotence may have been the origin for her slave morality, her creative resurgence and the revolt in morality are propelled by an order and system in which she finds herself.

With the *pathos of distance*, the *ressentiment*-filled subject's will and liberty are subjected to external forces and structures implemented by the master morality, a morality with a contradictory perspective from her own, and as such, she is not free. Thus, for Nietzsche, "the longing for *freedom*, the instinct for happiness and the subtleties of the feeling of freedom belong just as necessarily to slave morality."³⁷ The desire for freedom rests with the weak, the subject of *ressentiment*, the subject filled with hatred of herself due to her inability to escape her impotence despite how much she wills it.

While in the noble master, the will to power has the potential to lead to self-overcoming and towards the status of the *Übermensch*; with slave morality, the instinct for freedom is internalized.³⁸ Nietzsche writes, "This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent – we have seen it already – this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings."³⁹ Slave morality suppresses the instinct for freedom (or the will to power) into guilt and bad conscience by redirecting the vengeful *ressentiment* inwards and reminding the subject of her weakness and impotence, thereby perpetuating the cycle of bitterness, hostility, and anger.

³⁷ Ibid., 207-8.

³⁸ Nietzsche uses his concept of the "will to power" interchangeably with the "instinct for freedom." See: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 87.

³⁹ Ibid., 87.

Although the *ressentiment* of the weak largely arises out of self-hatred, the subjection of the will and freedom of the subject to the higher-ranked ruling caste of the nobles, and the subsequent effects of the *pathos of distance* upon her subjectivity remains unexamined by both Nietzsche and Brown. In fact, despite borrowing heavily from Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* and acknowledging that slave morality is derived from the moment when *ressentiment* becomes creative, Brown's analysis seems to ignore any treatment of master morality in her conception of *ressentiment*. Moreover, in omitting master morality, Brown consequently neglects to address the *pathos of distance*, a crucial concept for Nietzsche, and one that could have provided greater depth to her analysis of the modern subject formed by *ressentiment*. In failing to address one of the key aspects of, and motivating factors behind the construction of *ressentiment*, and leaving a significant feature of subject formation unexplored, Brown's analysis of contemporary subjectivity is remiss.

While the elitist, aristocratic, and individualistic associations that often accompany Nietzsche's concept of master morality may deter many thinkers from addressing this concept, I would like to suggest an alternative reading of Nietzsche's master-slave morality dynamic later in this chapter. Focusing on the relationship between master morality and slave morality, I posit that it is through a *pathos of distance*, in the gap between the impotent liberal subject and the unattainable ideal universal liberal subject, that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is formed. This reading of Nietzsche, I believe, would allow for the treatment, and consequently clarify the pertinence of the *pathos of distance* in the formation of contemporary subjectivity without succumbing to

an aristocratic and undemocratic reading of Nietzsche. First, however, I will address Brown's reading of *ressentiment* in the construction of the contemporary subject.

Brown and *Ressentiment*

As I have already noted, according to Nietzsche, the slave revolt in morality has been victorious, triumphantly reigning for over two thousand years. Similarly for Brown, a *pathos of ressentiment* has thoroughly penetrated contemporary (neo)liberal subjectivity; that is to say, contemporary politics in the West is manifested as a politics of *ressentiment*.

For Brown, contemporary political subjectivity in the North American political context manifests itself in the form of a politicized identity simultaneously constituted by and in reaction to “the political terms of liberalism, disciplinary-bureaucratic regimes, certain forces of global capitalism, and the demographic flows of postcoloniality.”⁴⁰ Jointly constituted as a contestation against and in reaction to its marginalization and subjugation, politicized identity is attached to its differences and exclusion. As such, the contemporary subject's identity is inherently and paradoxically contingent upon its subjectification through its marginalization and exclusion. Inherent in this process of subjectification, lies the *pathos of ressentiment*, which continually reinscribes the subject's politicized identity as a reaction to her domination, marginalization, and subjectification, serving as a constant reminder of her impotence, hopelessness, and powerlessness. According to Nietzsche: “The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures

⁴⁰ Brown, *States of Injury*, 54.

that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge.”⁴¹ In this scenario, the contemporary subject is no longer able to act, only react; overwhelmed with vengeance and a desire to punish, she has lost her will to action, will to power, and instinct for freedom, and as such, all of her actions are necessarily *reactions*. As a result, “the modern subject does not simply cease to desire freedom as is the case with Foucault’s disciplinary subject, but much more problematically, loathes freedom.”⁴² Unable to respond to the responsibilities associated with freedom, Brown argues that the contemporary neoliberal subject forsakes the will to liberty and empowerment in favour of the reproach, rancour, and recrimination of power and action.

Brown brilliantly captures the contemporary subject with this characterization: “Starkly accountable yet dramatically impotent, the late modern liberal subject quite literally seethes with *ressentiment*.”⁴³ Formed by its differences, contemporary political subjectivity is founded through pain and suffering, in injury. Thus, the contemporary neoliberal subject, partly created by these differences, consequently internalizes these very differences as her identity. On the one hand, she is rancorous, resentful, full of rage, and angry over the pain and suffering she has undergone as a result of her marginalization; she seeks vengeance for her subjectification and the pain she feels. At the same time, she is constituted by her marginalization and subjugation; she simultaneously feels hatred towards her domination and clings desperately to the pain and suffering, wounds and injuries that her domination brings. Furthermore, impotent and

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 36.

⁴² Brown, *States of Injury*, 64.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 69.

powerless in addressing her pain, suffering, and injuries, unable to erase the differences that constitute her subjectivity and unable to turn back time; the subject is trapped in the cycle of *ressentiment*. Unable to will the past, powerless against time, and incapable of effecting changes upon the past, the subject “cannot break time and time’s covetousness, that is the will’s loneliest melancholy... This... is what *revenge* is: the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was’.”⁴⁴ This notion of time and its role in the foreclosure of politicized identity is crucial for Brown’s understanding of political subjectivity: “This past cannot be redeemed *unless* the identity ceases to be invested in it, and it cannot cease to be invested in it without giving up its identity as such.”⁴⁵ This aporia, this vicious cycle of rancour, recrimination, hatred, and vengeance, Brown characterizes as the *ressentiment* of the contemporary subject.

In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, augments or ‘alters the direction of the suffering’ entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site of blame for it... In locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past – a past of injury, a past of hurt will – ... [p]oliticized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claim for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics.⁴⁶

Whereas for Nietzsche, slave morality and *ressentiment* have been underpinning the ontology of the Western human condition and underlying subject formation and the very being of the human since well before the advent of liberalism, in Brown’s adaptation, she construes *ressentiment* as fundamental to the liberal subject, particularly the

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kauffmann (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1976), 251.

⁴⁵ Brown, *States of Injury*, 73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

contemporary neoliberal subject.⁴⁷ As such, Brown's cogent analysis of the contemporary subject's *ressentiment* as a condition of liberal subjectivity incited by the constitutive paradoxes of liberalism is crucial to the understanding of contemporary subject formation.

Formation of the Liberal Subject

Fundamental to liberalism is the idea that liberal subjects are autonomous, self-governing, rational, and individual beings imbued with rights, the freedom to act upon their desires, and equally subjected to the same laws. At the foundation of liberalism, social contract theory intimates that the liberal subject is created through socialization; in giving up his uninhibited freedoms in the State of Nature where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" to the sovereign in exchange for security, and joining together as equal subjects in civil society, the liberal individual becomes socialized.⁴⁸ As such, "[l]iberal individuals are conceived as bundles of power, as origins of power, rather than as effects of power; socialized, rather than as socially constructed; divided by reason (objectivity) and passion (subjectivity), rather than as interpellated or subjected by discourses of 'truth.'"⁴⁹ The liberal subject is thus portrayed as a socialized individual – who holds a fixed and complete identity as a result of his socialization – with unbounded agency, freedom, and power, rendered equal to other individuals under the law. This understanding of socialization suggests that one's social positioning is akin to one's

⁴⁷ Brown acknowledges Nietzsche's claim that the "slave revolt in morality" and *ressentiment* have existed and been "victorious" since long before liberalism. Yet for the purposes of her analysis, she applies *ressentiment* to the study of the *pathos* of the contemporary neoliberal subject. See: *Ibid.*, 66-7.

⁴⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84.

⁴⁹ Brown, *States of Injury*, 145.

subject position, implying that the liberal individual is positioned and created by power. However, this image of the liberal subject is necessarily deceptive, misleading, and illusory due to the tensions between the two fundamental liberal promises of individual liberty and social equality. In order to maintain this illusion and carry out the precarious balancing act between the individual and the collective, freedom and equality, liberal equality “guarantees only that all individuals will be treated *as if* they were sovereign and isolated individuals. Liberal equality guarantees that the state will regard us all as equally abstracted from the social powers constituting our existence, *equally decontextualized from the unequal conditions of our lives.*”⁵⁰ In order to reconcile two of its fundamental yet otherwise irreconcilable tenets, liberalism necessarily decontextualizes the liberal individual from her cultural, social, political, historical, and economic milieu. Dehistoricized, and decontextualized, the liberal individual is thereby rendered a depoliticized subject.

In order to extend the promise of equality, liberalism juridically erases all differences among individuals through the normalization of difference and denaturalization of social relations in the name of equality.⁵¹ Despite the liberal formulation of identity, however, one’s subjectivity cannot be abstracted from one’s differences, and liberalism’s attempt at alienating and abstracting political subjects as equal and without differences serves to depoliticize the liberal subject. Nevertheless, the subject is and can only be constituted by her differences; she is inextricably and inseparably linked to her differences, which form her subjectivity. As a result,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 110, second emphasis added.

⁵¹ Brown notes that the opposite of liberal equality is not inequality, but difference. In order to solve inequality, therefore, liberalism must first rid itself of the “problem” of difference. See: Ibid., 153-4.

liberalism's erasure of her differences and what Brown calls the "re-de-politicizing" of her subjectivity by way of disciplinary powers and normalizing practices, rather than offering freedom and equality, resubjugates the subject.⁵²

Here, Brown adopts from Marx's analysis of liberalism:

[Liberalism]...grant[s] freedom, equality, and representation to abstract rather than concrete subjects. The substitution of abstract political subjects for actual ones not only forfeits the project of emancipation but resubjugates us precisely by emancipating substitutes for us – by emancipating our abstracted representatives in the state and naming this process 'freedom.' The subject is thus *ideally emancipated* through its anointing as an abstract person, a formally free and equal human being, and is *practically resubordinated* through this idealist disavowal of the material constituents of personhood, which constrain and contain our freedom.⁵³

The discourse of freedom in liberalist terms offers no more than the illusion of freedom while in actuality resubjugating the subject by further and more deeply re-entrenching her differences and exacerbating her marginalization and subordination. Indeed, "[i]t is their situatedness within power, their production by power, and liberal discourse's denial of this situatedness and production that cast the liberal subject into failure."⁵⁴ The liberal deception essentializes the subject's differences as part of her "nature"; in its refusal to acknowledge these differences, the subject is led to believe that her failures, impotence, subordination, and marginalization are of her own making. Thus, the subject's "injury is thereby rendered intentional and individual."⁵⁵ Forced to be accountable in the face of circumstances, her own identity, history, and subject formation against which she finds

⁵² Ibid., 59.

⁵³ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

herself unable to control, affect, or change, the subject seethes with *ressentiment*.

Moreover, the liberal political culture of individual liberty and rights:

[P]roduces not mere individualism but anxious, defended, self-absorbed, and alienated Hobbesian subjects who are driven to accumulate, diffident toward others, obligated to none, made impossibly accountable for themselves, and subjected by the very powers their sovereignty is supposed to claim. ‘Egoism’ also connotes the discursive depoliticization of this production: an order of sovereign, self-made, and privatized subjects who subjectively experience their own powerlessness as their own failure vis-à-vis other sovereign subjects.”⁵⁶

The trope of liberalism and social contract theories claim that the liberal individual must give up some of his freedom in exchange for security, and in a Rousseauian tradition, must suffer in order to be emancipated and have rights. The liberal subject, however, is not a sovereign, autonomous, privatized individual and thus, when this trope plays out, it results in a liberal subject entrapped in her impotence and responsibility, unable to act, only capable of reacting out of rancour and recrimination. Brown explains:

“[I]dentity structured by this ethos becomes deeply invested in its own impotence, even while it seeks to assuage the pain of its powerlessness through its vengeful moralizing, through its wide distribution of suffering, through its reproach of power as such. Politicized identity, premised on exclusion and fueled by the humiliation and suffering imposed by its historically structured impotence in the context of a discourse of sovereign individuals, is as likely to seek generalized political paralysis, to feast on generalized political impotence, as it is to seek its own or collective liberation through empowerment. Indeed, it is more likely to punish and reproach...than to find venues of self-affirming action.”⁵⁷

Constructions of Neoliberal Subjectivity

⁵⁶ Ibid., 113-4.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70-1

While the paradoxes and fundamental concepts discussed thus far have largely been in reference to classical liberalism, these same forces and paradoxes persist in contemporary neoliberalism. Although a very loose term, the understanding of which is continually shifting, neoliberalism is generally accepted as advocating for free trade, privatization, deregulation, reductions in government spending, austerity, and to be guided by *laissez-faire* economic liberalism. Marked by the political and economic policies and thinking of Thatcher, Reagan, and Mulroney, neoliberalism emerged in the 1970's as the repudiation of Keynesian welfare state economics.⁵⁸ However, it is not merely a set of policies or even an ideology, but rather, as Brown argues, a “reprogramming of liberalism” born from liberal governmentality.⁵⁹ The turn to neoliberalism, which involves “extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action,” engendered the economization of all spheres, including those that had heretofore not been considered economic spheres or activities, such as family, religion, military, healthcare, sports, the university, non-profits, art, museums, education, relationships, and charities.⁶⁰ As such, neoliberalism replaces the political with the economic, to which Brown notes, “We are everywhere *homo oeconomicus* and only *homo oeconomicus*.”⁶¹ While classic liberalism was never free of economic and capitalist rationalities, it did provide space between economy and polity, protecting its citizens from the complete saturation of the social and

⁵⁸ For Brown's most comprehensive account of neoliberalism, see: Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2015); other histories of neoliberalism include: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Henry A. Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy* (New York: Paradigm, 2004).

⁵⁹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 59.

⁶⁰ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

⁶¹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.

the political by economic valuations and calculations, and the submission of all values to efficacy and profitability.⁶²

Furthermore, when neoliberal political rationality is applied in the form of governmentality, it has significant implications for contemporary subject formation.

Brown writes:

Neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’ – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behaviour by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences. But in doing so, it carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions no matter how severe the constraints on this action... Correspondingly, a ‘mismanaged life,’ the neoliberal appellation for failure to navigate impediments to prosperity, becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers and at the same time reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency.⁶³

In reducing all spheres to market solutions, privatizing political problems, and individualizing social issues, neoliberalism depoliticizes by removing the power relations that construct the individual from the equation and placing the full extent of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the individual.⁶⁴ In so doing, the depoliticizing

⁶² Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

⁶⁴ “This conversion of socially, economically, and politically produced problems into consumer items depoliticizes capitalism itself. Moreover, as neoliberal rationality devolves both political problems and solutions from public to private, it further dissipates political or public life: the project of navigating the social becomes entirely one of discerning, affording, and procuring a personal solution to every socially produced problem. This is depoliticization on an unprecedented level: the economy is tailored to it, citizenship is organized by it, the media are dominated by it, and the political rationality of neoliberalism frames and endorses it. See: Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory* 34 no. 6 (2006): 704, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452506>.

conditions of neoliberalism have exacerbated and augmented the impotence, powerlessness, and accountability of contemporary political subjectivity, resulting in an unprecedented *pathos of resentment*.

As previously discussed, *resentiment* is inextricably linked to slave morality, and in turn, slave morality requires a “hostile external world” and an enemy at whom it directs its rancour and recrimination. Although not necessarily, slave morality most often finds its opposition in master morality, thus rendering the dynamic between the slave and master crucial in the formation of slave morality and the study of subject construction. According to Nietzsche, the slave creates an image of herself – that is to say, her subjectivity is formed – in reaction to the master.⁶⁵ In perceiving the master’s strength, power, and nobility as superior to that of her own, the slave’s inferiority complex is activated. Intolerably weak, powerless, and impotent in comparison to the image of the master, she grows resentful of both her own impotence, which becomes internalized as her identity, and her inability to escape this identity. The bitterness, anger, and hostility ensuing from this dynamic is then directed outwards at the master, “the enemy”, the “Evil One.” In this sense, the slave’s subjectivity is created in response to, and in reaction to the hostile external world, the enemy, the master. It is necessarily through this relationship, the *pathos of distance*, that the slave’s subjectivity is constituted and subsequently foreclosed and looped into a vicious cycle. That is to say, fuelled by the neoliberal construction of her subjectivity, and caught between the politicized identity she experiences through her marginalization and subjectification, and the generic, abstract,

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 39.

universal ideal of the liberal individual, the contemporary neoliberal subject is formed through a *pathos of distance*.

Pathos of Distance and Difference

Given the significant role of the *pathos of distance* in the relationship between master and slave, and the development of *ressentiment*, as well as its crucial contributions to the process of subject formation, it is evident that the *pathos of distance* has critical implications for the study of contemporary neoliberal political subjectivity and ought to be further examined. As such, a more thorough examination of the role of the *pathos of distance* in Brown's analysis of political subjectivity that does not ignore master-morality would offer a more in-depth study of subject formation. For despite not necessarily being specific to the liberal project,⁶⁶ the *pathos of distance* does constitute the essential binary at the core of the liberal imagination. In fact, in order to highlight the centrality of the *pathos of distance* in the study of contemporary political subjectivity, I will suggest that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is formed through a *pathos of distance* created in the gap between the impotent liberal subject and the impossible universality of the ideal liberal subject. That is to say, the gap between the subject's self-conscious perception of herself and the norms of intelligibility, is the *pathos of distance*.

While the political structures, social hierarchies, power relations, institutional frameworks, and cultural milieux in which one finds oneself invoke the *pathos of distance*, and contribute greatly in informing how one relates in the world, they merely

⁶⁶ According to Nietzsche's account, while the *pathos of distance* is most pronounced in aristocratic societies, it is not exclusive to aristocracy. The *pathos of distance* emerges wherever there is order, rank, strata, and difference. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 201.

constitute the external social influences in the construction of the subject. More importantly for the study of political subjectivity is an examination of how the *pathos of distance* has been internalized as a part of the process of subject formation. On this matter, Nietzsche writes of the “other, more mysterious pathos... – the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states – in brief, simply the enhancement of the type ‘man,’ the continual ‘self-overcoming of man,’ to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense.”⁶⁷ This distance within the self is what Daniel Conway calls the “internal *pathos of distance*.”⁶⁸ While the *pathos of (socio-political) distance* is concerned with how the subject is viewed and how her differences are framed by external forces, this *pathos*, the *pathos of inner distance*, is concerned with the image she holds of herself, her self-perception. In fact, the *pathos of inner distance* emerges out of the ways in which the subject internalizes her differences. Thus, in the case of contemporary politics, this craving to be better and more, and for self-overcoming, is the internal struggle within the subject who is constantly striving towards the imaginary of the universal liberal ideal. Yet the greater she struggles, the more pronounced her differences appear, the wider the chasm between her self-representation and the ideal grows, and the more impotent and powerless she finds herself to be. In other words, the subject finds herself trapped in an impossible mirror of (liberal) perfection.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 201.

⁶⁸ Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 40. Similarly, David Owen refers to it as the “*pathos of inner distance*,” distinguishing it from the “*pathos of (socio-political) distance*.” See: David Owen, “Pluralism and the Pathos of Distance (or How to Relax with Style): Connolly, Agonistic Respect and the Limits of Political Theory” *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 10 no. 2 (2008): 219-222. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-856x.2007.00310.x

In Nietzsche's formulation, the *pathos of distance* "grows out of the ingrained difference between strata," the difference between master and slave, strong and weak.⁶⁹ Moreover, he writes, "Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility."⁷⁰ Neoliberalism, with its focus on efficacy and profitability, is a political rationality of utility-maximization. Thus, it is possible to extend Nietzsche's diagnosis to the study of neoliberal subjectivity and morality. Applied as a form of governmentality, neoliberalism constructs its subjects in accordance with its utility-maximizing principles. As such, it can be argued that that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity, as a morality of utility, is essentially slave morality. In the case of contemporary politics, then, the *pathos of distance* lies in the difference between the neoliberal subject who, driven by slave morality and seething with *ressentiment*, perceives of herself as "the weak," and the universal liberal ideal, which she perceives as the strong, good, and noble – the master. However, this universal liberal subject is an unattainable ideal against which she both is constantly compared against, and constantly compares herself against. The universal liberal subject claims to be neutral and "universal" insofar as it describes a subject who fits the categories of white, bourgeois, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied, settler, and male.⁷¹ However, liberalism is only able to achieve this so-called universality through an erasure of difference, pseudo neutrality, and abstracted individualism. Nevertheless, the contemporary subject compares her politicized identity,

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 201.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷¹ Even for those who do fit the categories of the hegemonic universal ideal subject, the neoliberal devaluation and debasement of politics in favour of economics has led to a politics of passivity, insecurity, and powerlessness. Perceived as a loss of sovereignty for a purportedly autonomous liberal individual, the subject lashes out in response to the loss of order. See: Chapter 2 for a more extensive analysis of political subjectivity in response to the loss of sovereignty.

which was produced and internalized as “marginalized, deviant, or subhuman,”⁷² to the phantasmatic universal liberal subject. The differences and essentially irreconcilable nature of her subject formation are internalized and reinscribed as a further intensification of her injuries, which have become an integral component of her identity and subject formation. As such, the subject is torn between the hybridity of her actual lived experiences and the impossible imaginary of the fully realized liberal subject. Consequently, the impossible distance between the *ressentiment*-filled subject and the neutral, depoliticized universal liberal subject she is expected to, but can never be, further intensifies the rage, rancour, recrimination, and self-hatred.

According to Nietzsche, the subject of master morality “constantly looks afar and looks down upon subjects and instruments and just as constantly practices obedience and command, keeping down and at a distance.”⁷³ Similarly, liberalism maintains the distance and abstraction between the ideal liberal subject and the marginalized subject through exploitative, regulatory, and disciplinary practices that constantly subordinate and resubordinate the contemporary political subject. Faced with an irreconcilable and unbridgeable distance, impotent, incapable of value creation, and unable to measure up, the contemporary political subject of slave morality can only moralize and react. Constituted by this *pathos of distance* and its ensuing *ressentiment*, the contemporary neoliberal subject of slave morality is created in reaction to the universal liberal ideal, which is found external to her own subjectivity, but nonetheless part of her subject formation. As such, the contemporary political subjectivity of slave morality is

⁷² Brown, *States of Injury*, 53.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 201.

necessarily a reactionary identity in response to the unbridgeable distance between one's own politicized identity and the universal liberal ideal.

Brown draws her *ressentiment*-filled subject from a very particular, contemporary neoliberal context that has been dehistoricized and detached from the slave revolt in morality to which Nietzsche attributes *ressentiment*. Following Brown's analysis, it is similarly the case that this contemporary *pathos of distance* is also drawn from a very particular context. Both are contributory factors to subject formation that have existed long before modernity and neoliberalism, but in the contemporary context, there is a very particular modern and neoliberal manifestation of the *pathos of distance*. It is this particular and contextually-based expression of the *pathos of distance* that can offer a deeper reflection and more thorough examination of the internal logics (or perhaps illogics) of liberalism that contribute to the unparalleled contemporary resurgence of *ressentiment*.

Whereas Brown's argument diagnoses the contemporary subject as one seething with *ressentiment* yet hopelessly impotent due to her attachments to her injuries and politicized identity, it fails to consider the full extent of *how* the subject is constituted. For that purpose, the *pathos of distance* is useful in explaining the process by and through which the subject is formed. Indeed, the subject's injuries and politicized identity are how *ressentiment* is constituted, and anger, hostility, and bitterness are the ways in which it is manifested, but the *pathos of distance* is what structures and produces the subject. As such, *ressentiment* stems from the *pathos of distance*. As both Brown and Nietzsche explain, *ressentiment* needs a hostile external stimulus, and the *pathos of distance* – the gap between slave morality and master morality, the insurmountable distance between the

subject's politicized identity and the universal liberal ideal – is the source of that stimulus and cause of the hostility. Not only does the *pathos of distance* structure the relationship between the subject and the ideal, but more importantly, it frames how the subject subsequently internalizes her differences and that distance. As such, it is a crucial concept, inextricable from the study of subject formation and *ressentiment*. Moreover, perhaps it is in this relationship and this distance that a point of intervention and a possibility for action, as opposed to reaction, emerges. Thus, the underlying question of how to overcome this impotence and these feelings of inaction, which underlie contemporary political subjectivity, resurfaces.

Desiring, Wanting, and Willing

In a contemporary context where *ressentiment* has infiltrated political subjectivity, thereby affecting how we go about politics, and how our politics is structured and constituted, how do we act in a politics of *ressentiment*? How does one emancipate the will, which has been foreclosed in a vicious cycle of *ressentiment*? Brown suggests a shift in the characterization of politicized identity from a language of “being” to a language of “wanting”; a shift from “I am,” which denotes the liberal individual, to the “I want this for us,” bringing in the collective “we” and “our” collective good and political desire. As such, the subject would no longer be understood as static and foreclosed in a vicious cycle of *ressentiment*, but as a continually wanting subject; “as an effect of an (ongoing) genealogy of desire.”⁷⁴ Hence, in order to break free from the foreclosures of a discourse of being and a politics of rancour and *ressentiment* entrenched

⁷⁴ Brown, *States of Injury*, 75.

in politicized identity, Brown argues for replacing or admixing the discourse of being with the discourse of wanting.

Where the language of being is favoured by identity politics for its depoliticization of the modern subject and fixing of a politicized identity, Brown hopes to return to a point prior to the foreclosure, thereby pre-empting the fixed, static, and entrenched claims of politicized identity. Brown writes, “What if we were to rehabilitate the memory of desire within identificatory processes, the moment in desire – either to ‘have’ or ‘to be’ – prior to its wounding? What if ‘wanting to be’ or ‘wanting to have’ were taken up as modes of political speech that could destabilize the formulation of identity as fixed position, as entrenchment by history, and as having necessary moral entailments.”⁷⁵ For Brown, current formations of desire manifest in *ressentiment*-inspired, vengeful forms of desire to punish for the subject’s politicized identity, formed through hurt, suffering, subjugation, and marginalization, which results in a foreclosure of impotence and powerlessness. By staging an intervention in these formations of desire and pre-empting the passionate attachments to the injuries of the subject, Brown sees the potential of the language of wanting in “[reopening] a desire for futurity” away from the foreclosures of liberal identity politics.⁷⁶ That is to say, instead of “willing backwards” and allowing the feelings of inadequacy and impotence from never realizing the universal liberal ideal fix the discourse of being and identity, Brown hopes that a turn to a discourse of desire would offer more productive possibilities.

Although Brown presents the shift from being to wanting as opening possibilities to an alternative, more democratic and emancipatory future, there seems to be a

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

disconnect between the overly-simplified, reductionist, and perhaps even utopian, response she offers to the very complex and multifarious powers affecting contemporary political subjectivity that she outlines. In hopes of drawing out a more nuanced analysis of political subjectivity, I will explore some critiques of the proposed shift to a language of desire.

Firstly, despite recognizing the role of time and an unrecoverable and irreconcilable past in the internalization of *ressentiment*, politicized identity, and subject formation, Brown nonetheless suggests:

[T]he replacement – even admixture of – the language of ‘being’ with ‘wanting’ would seek to exploit politically a recovery of the more expansive moments in the genealogy of identity formation, a recovery of the moment prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which its sovereign subjectivity is established through such foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain.⁷⁷

Given the subject’s formation by the foreclosures of *ressentiment*, her subjectivity is and has already been produced by these foreclosures, pain, and injuries, and is therefore temporally inextricable from these foreclosures. Moreover, in proposing a return to a moment prior to foreclosure, Brown seems to be suggesting that we “will backwards,” which, as she had already deconstructed in her earlier analysis, would inevitably lead back to a *pathos of ressentiment* and reactionary vengefulness.

Secondly, the discursive solution Brown offers is overly simplistic, particularly when she draws a quarrel with Foucault’s discursive problematization of freedom, for its “lack of attention to what might constitute, negate, or redirect the desire for freedom.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Brown critiques Foucault’s definition of “the problem of freedom... as one

⁷⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

of domain and discourse,” thereby rejecting psychoanalysis and more importantly, the notion of the will, which is so prominently featured in Nietzsche’s thinking.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, despite her critiques of Foucault, Brown’s suggestions for a more emancipatory politics inexplicably return to a prescription for a Foucauldian discursive framework.

Brown briefly considers Nietzsche’s notion of “forgetting,” acknowledging that “if identity, structured in part by *ressentiment*, resubjugates itself through its investments in its own pain, through its refusal to make itself in the present, memory is the house of this activity and this refusal.”⁸⁰ However, she rejects the viability of forgetting, deeming it “cruel” in its necessary erasure of histories and identities, suggesting instead a rehabilitation of desire “prior to its wounding.” Since, according to Nietzsche, pain is tied to memory, and “only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory,”⁸¹ then the argument is that active forgetfulness and forgetting could resolve the pain and suffering associated with a politicized identity formed through injuries.⁸² However, in forgetting the histories and the pains that not only constituted, but continue to constitute contemporary political subjectivity, Brown considers it “inappropriate if not cruel.”⁸³ Moreover, this argument assumes that the wounded subject is in a position where she is

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 61.

⁸² Although even for Nietzsche, the ability to forget is a trait of the strong and noble. (Ibid., 39) He goes on to explain: “This animal which needs to be forgetful, in which forgetting represents a force, a form of *robust* health, has bred itself an opposing faculty, a memory, with the aid of which forgetfulness is abrogated in certain cases... This involves no mere passive inability to rid oneself of an impression, no mere indigestion through a once-pledged word with which one cannot ‘have done,’ but an active *desire* not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real *memory of the will*: so that between the original ‘I will,’ ‘I shall do this’ and the actual discharge of the will, its *act*, a world of strange new things, circumstances, even acts of will may be interposed without breaking this long chain of will. But how many things this presupposes!” (Ibid., 58)

⁸³ Brown, *States of Injury*, 74.

able to forget about these pains, ignoring not only the ways in which these injuries form her identity, but also more importantly, the fact that these injuries are ongoing and continue to make up crucial components of her subjectivity. That is to say, it is in the subject's daily lived experiences and realities, of which there is no escape, that her identity and injuries are formed. As a result, Brown suggests, "we have reached a pass where we ought to part with Nietzsche, whose skills as diagnostician often reach the limits of their political efficacy in his privileging of individual character and capacity over the transformative possibilities of collective political invention"; yet perhaps we have also reached a pass where we ought to part with Brown.⁸⁴

While Brown has provided a very precise reading and diagnosis of contemporary neoliberal subjectivity and its foreclosures, her prescriptions for addressing these issues are not only lacking, but also self-contradictory; and it is in response to her treatment of foreclosure that I draw my third critique.⁸⁵ Although Brown makes an important argument against forgetting's abandonment of the integral histories and constitutive elements of identity, replacing the discourse of being with the discourse of wanting, I argue, would also be guilty of abandoning and ignoring the very histories, experiences, and injuries that are integral to the formation of the subject. Brown constitutes much of her diagnosis of the contemporary political subject in the vein of Nietzsche's claim that "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will," arguing that the resentment-filled subject clings to her injuries; she would rather exist as a subordinated, *resentiment-*

⁸⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁵ Moreover, this reading of forgetfulness belies Nietzsche's notion of forgetting as an active trait of forgetfulness belonging exclusively to the master who is able to act without *resentiment*.

filled, injury-laden subject than not exist at all.⁸⁶ Formulated in dialogue with Brown's conceptions of political subjectivity, Judith Butler takes Brown's "wounded attachments" further and offers a deeper understanding of contemporary subjectivity in her conception of "passionate attachments" wherein the subject is passionately attached to her subordination, and thus desires her own subjection. Butler writes: "the desire to desire is a willingness to desire precisely that which would foreclose desire, if only for the possibility of continuing to desire."⁸⁷ The contemporary political subject's desire is a desire for her own subjectification; in "refusing to be neutralized,"⁸⁸ she desires her injuries, marginalization, and subordination. The reflexivity and foreclosed cycle of *ressentiment* of political subjectivity thus renders Brown's prescription for a turn into wanting and desire very problematic. In an attempt to break out of the foreclosures of liberal identity politics and its essentialism by proposing a discourse of wanting, Brown's proposal ironically forecloses the subject's being – her subjectivity through injury – as it has been constituted. Moreover, the shift to a discourse of wanting overlooks the desire in the discourse of being – the desire in being, and more importantly, *the desire to be*. Here again, Butler offers some additional insight into understanding the perils of desire, which Brown's suggestion fails to account for: "the desire to survive, 'to be,' is a pervasively exploitable desire."⁸⁹ Furthermore, in abandoning the discourse of being, Brown unwittingly forecloses the possibility for critical desubjectification – the possibility of "a

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 163.

⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 61.

⁸⁸ Brown, *States of Injury*, 53.

⁸⁹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 7.

willingness *not* to be”⁹⁰ – and a form of agency that resists and counters the powers and conditions that constitute and enable it.

Finally, I turn to my last critique of Brown’s discourse of wanting, which begs a question that troubles the fundamental basis of her (and Butler’s) reading of desire. In search of an escape from the paradoxes and foreclosures on the formation and production of contemporary subjectivities, Brown turns to desire. This notion of a latent desire that exists in the memory of the subject is derived from Nietzsche’s “instinct for freedom,” or “will to power.” For Nietzsche, the subject “would rather will nothingness than not will.” That is to say, if nothing else, the subject wills her own self-preservation, her politicized identity, and her metaphysical and existential being. Despite the nihilism, the *ressentiment*, moralities, and the degeneration of “man,” the one thing that remains a constant, Nietzsche argues, is the fact that the will continues to will; even when faced with the greatest despair and nihilism, the will would rather will despair and nihilism than not will at all.

In fact, Nietzsche acknowledges – and perhaps even anticipates – the possibility of nihilism overpowering the will: “[F]or the sight of him makes us weary. – We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent...[T]ogether with the fear of man we have also lost our love of him, our reverence for him, our hopes for him, even the will to him. The sight of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 130.

man now makes us weary – what is nihilism today if it is not *that*? – We are weary of *man*.”⁹¹

Yet despite the weariness of man, Nietzsche nevertheless willed the will, turning back to nihilism, and concluding that as dictated by human instinct, the will persists despite it being a will to mediocrity, indifference, lack of concern, complacency, and slave morality. What if, however, the contemporary subject no longer has the desire or tendency to want? Brown and Nietzsche both foreclose the possibility of the will ceasing to exist, and ceasing to will. What if wanting no longer exists, and desire has ceased to desire? What becomes of a political subjectivity that does not want? What happens when the contemporary neoliberal subject, weighed down by responsibilities and seething with *ressentiment*, but utterly and hopelessly powerless, and unable to act is so excruciatingly overwhelmed by impotence that she grows weary, and simply ceases to desire? What happens, that is, when the will to will itself becomes fully problematic?

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 44.

Chapter 2: *Pathos of Walling*

“We are more concerned about islanders like yourselves, who are still unsubdued, or subjects who have already become embittered by the constraints which our empire imposes on them. These are the people who are most likely to act in a reckless manner and to bring themselves and us, too, into the most obvious danger.”

– Melian Dialogue

My latest visit to Hong Kong coincided with the recent protests in the region. Although most of the original occupation sites had been cleared away in accordance with injunctions brought against them by the time I arrived, – the Causeway Bay site was cleared by police not long thereafter – the political tensions were just as palpable. In fact, my encounters with the Umbrella Movement and the antagonistic beliefs and opinions of many Hongkongers to the movement have helped shape my writing of this chapter and what I will call the “*pathos of walling*” that Brown diagnoses in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

Vulnerable and Violent

Faced with the pressing issues of climate change, environmental degradation, unsustainable population growth, hunger, poverty, organized crime, natural disasters, epidemics, terrorism, and economic collapse, the contemporary subject is constantly exposed to threats from all angles. It is this subject, the impotent subject rendered extraordinarily vulnerable by the tensions of the globalized world and the erosion of political sovereignty in today’s post-Westphalian world order, that Brown diagnoses. According to Brown, the subject, threatened by the “loss of horizons, order, and

identity,⁹² is overcome with feelings of helplessness, disorientation, dubiousness, and fear. Consequently, in response to these feelings of “smallness and vulnerability in a huge and overwhelming universe...[the subject] harbors a desire for protection, containment, and orientation in the face of this experience.”⁹³ As such, the subject’s fear, anxieties, sovereign impotence, and sense of insecurity are sometimes manifested as anger, hostility, aggression, violence, *ressentiment*, and egoism. In the subject’s desperate attempts to recover fantasies of order, stability, orientation, self-sufficiency, and potency, the subject seeks security, protection, and containment in the form of walls. However, the fear, retrenchment, violence, and vitriol underlying the desires for walls point to the many paradoxes these walls pose.

While the aggression, retrenchment, containment, and building of walls “may look like hypersovereignty, [it] is actually often compensating for its loss.”⁹⁴ Whereas historically, walls were a sign of sovereignty, strength, and fortitude, contemporary nation-state wall-building may be a sign of weakness; projecting illusions of sovereignty that have been eroded by transnational flows and global forces. Brown argues that the proliferation of walling is a “theatricalized and spectacularized performance of sovereign power” that no longer exists.⁹⁵

In accordance with the liberal conception of individual sovereignty, the subject expects and perceives of herself as autonomous, self-sufficient, and secure. In order for the trope of the social contract to function within liberal ontology, the subject is and always has been conceived of as a sovereign individual. Regardless of how the pre-social

⁹² Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 107.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

individual in the state of nature was characterized, the individual – even Thomas Hobbes’ deeply precarious, intensely violable, and highly insecure individual, struggling for survival in the war of all against all in the state of nature – necessarily held some form of individual sovereignty.⁹⁶ For Hobbes, this individual sovereignty is the natural right to “the liberty each man [sic] hath, to use his power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature.”⁹⁷ According to Locke, it is the “Executive Power of the Law of Nature” that is “resign[ed]...to the publick...where-ever any number of Men, in the state of Nature, enter into Society to make one People.”⁹⁸ Rousseau famously declares at the beginning of *The Social Contract*: “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”⁹⁹ According to his formulation, natural liberty is the “unlimited right to everything that tempts him and that he can acquire.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, although it was, as Brown characterizes it, a “primitive individual sovereignty,” nevertheless, in order to give up his natural freedoms and contract to establish civil society, man prior to the state of nature possessed a form of individual sovereignty.¹⁰¹ In exchange for contracting and ceding some of his natural freedoms to the sovereign, however, man in civil society enjoys much greater individual sovereignty, in addition to order, security, and protection. As per this liberal logic, it would follow that “the decline of state sovereignty therefore threatens a return to an intensely vulnerable and violable condition of existence for subjects.”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁹⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 325.

⁹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract,” in *The Basic Political Writings: Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 141.

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau, “Social Contract,” 151.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Although Brown does gesture towards the relations between, and effects of, waning sovereignty upon the subject, her exposition of reactionary walling in response to the flight of sovereignty is largely framed in the context of nation-state sovereignty. Therefore, in considering how the subject is affected – and consequently effected – by the flight of sovereignty, following Brown, I will engage in a deeper study of the *pathos of walling* from the vantage point of the impotent “sovereign” subject. Nevertheless, as they necessarily mutually imbricate one another, particularly in liberal discourse where the relations between individual and state sovereignty are at the heart of its founding myth, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle political power and state policies behind walling from the subject’s political desires for walling.

In a way that mirrors the nation-state’s response to its loss of sovereignty by erecting walls in a desperate attempt to hold on to whatever sovereignty it can cling to, the liberal subject may also resort to aggression and containment in response to the flight of individual sovereignty. Confronted with the prospect of vulnerability, dependency, insecurity, and impotence brought on by the loss of sovereignty, the subject sometimes responds by lashing out with anger, violence, and hostility. Given the interweaving of nation-state sovereignty and subject sovereignty, particularly within liberal ontology, in order to understand the subject’s response to the erosion of individual sovereignty, it is necessary to first examine the flight of nation-state sovereignty that Brown details in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

The Flight of Sovereignty

Since the 1648 signing of the Peace of Westphalia, the modern conception of the nation-state has largely been characterized by its claims to sovereignty.¹⁰³ Following Max Weber's definition of the state as a "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory," the nation-state is often understood as an entity that holds sovereignty over a particular geographical space. Yet, despite its centrality in political science and its framing of the (post-)Westphalian world order, sovereignty nevertheless remains a deeply contested concept. Like the terms freedom, or democracy, sovereignty is, as Brown puts it, "an unusually amorphous, elusive, and polysemic term of political life."¹⁰⁴

For the purposes of her argument, however, Brown does not outright define sovereignty; rather, drawing from a mixture of Bodin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Schmitt, she outlines and alternates between various classical conceptions of sovereignty as decisionist (deciding on the exception), supreme (highest power), absolute and complete (unconditional and indivisible), perpetual (temporally unlimited), non-transferable (inalienable), and territorial (located within specified geographic borders).¹⁰⁵ Although there are many differences between the diverse sketches of sovereignty as elaborated by the various classical theorists of sovereignty, they do share a similar approach to the concept.¹⁰⁶ These classical theorists attempt to define sovereignty,

¹⁰³ For a historically-contingent argument on the narrative of contemporary sovereignty as derived from the Peace of Westphalia as a myth, see: Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 251-87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3078632>.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-2.

¹⁰⁶ When speaking of classical theorists of sovereignty, I am referring in particular to Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four chapters from The Six books of the Commonwealth*, trans. Julian H. Franklin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996);

generally understanding it as a fixed, determined, immutable, and settled affair. As Brown explains: “Sovereignty is identified with settled jurisdiction, not with settling it. Put the other way around, land jurisdiction premises rather than constitutes earthly sovereignty for the classical theorists.”¹⁰⁷ Contrary to these traditional framings of it, however, sovereignty does not seem to be a concept that can be settled. Carl Schmitt counters this classical framing sovereignty, suggesting that it is “a borderline case and not...routine.”¹⁰⁸ Giorgio Agamben further develops this line of thought, suggesting that sovereignty is “at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order.”¹⁰⁹ As evidenced by its elusiveness and indefinability, it appears that the terms of sovereignty are continually being negotiated and renegotiated. In fact, perhaps the inability for any definition to capture how sovereignty is practiced may be an indication towards one of its defining characteristics – sovereignty is unattainable. That is to say, as a practice, sovereignty is undeterminable; rather, it is an incessant struggle, constantly changing, full of contradictions, and represented by ongoing (re)negotiations.

Furthermore, these contradictions are accentuated when sovereignty is considered in relation to (liberal conceptions of) democracy. Brown explains:

It is nearly impossible to reconcile the classical features of sovereignty – power that is not only foundational and unimpeachable, but enduring and indivisible, magisterial and awe-inducing, decisive and suprallegal – with the requisites of rule by the *demos*. Again, the very fact that the people are declared sovereign in Western democracies while the appellation of

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract,” in *The Basic Political Writings: Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.

sovereign power is given to autocratic state action and especially to action that violates or suspends democratic principles suggests that we have known all along that popular sovereignty has been, if not a fiction, something of an abstraction with a tenuous bearing on political reality.¹¹⁰

On the one hand, liberal democracy espouses the discourse of popular sovereignty, whereby power is in the hands of the people. On the other hand, in order to secure this sovereignty, the sovereign must hold supreme authority over the people.¹¹¹ Brown writes: “Sovereignty is inherently antidemocratic insofar as it must overcome the dispersed quality of power in a democracy, but democracy, to be politically viable, to be a (political) contender, appears to require the supplement of sovereignty.”¹¹² However, it seems here that she conflates democracy with liberal democracy. For this paradoxical formulation of sovereignty is intrinsic to the liberal democratic tradition, and can be traced to the Lockean distinction between prerogative power and legislative power, which distinguishes between state and popular sovereignty.¹¹³ In fact, Brown does remark that this is where “Locke’s thought grow[s] incoherent in a way avoided by Hobbes.”¹¹⁴

This incoherence, which lies at the heart of the relationship between liberal democracy and sovereignty, thus renders the concept of sovereignty further convoluted and contradictorily unattainable. To say that sovereignty is unattainable, however, is not to say that it does not exist. In spite of its nebulous, ambiguous, and illusory character, it is indubitable that the concept of sovereignty – however tautological its claim may be –

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 49.

¹¹¹ See: Sheldon S. Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” *Constellations* 1, no. 1, (1994): 11-25, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8675.1994.tb00002.x, and Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 520-1, 600, 602.

¹¹² Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 51-2.

¹¹³ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 354-380.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 50.

not only defines but also characterizes the internal and external relations of nation-states. Moreover, while sovereignty may be fictitious in nature, it has nonetheless been a powerful myth with very real effects, having generated much violence and destruction in its name.

Based on these traditional formulations of sovereignty, Brown's thesis argues that "key characteristics of sovereignty are migrating from the nation-state to the unrelieved domination of capital and God-sanctioned political violence."¹¹⁵ As such, whereas the modern notion of sovereignty is tied to the nation-state, Brown traces the unravelling of the two amidst a "post-Westphalian" context in which states are no longer the central actors in global order. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite their detachment from one another, states maintain a significant role in global politics, and sovereignty – and its effects – persists, albeit in a different form.

This contemporary phenomenon of states and sovereignty coming apart, which Brown calls, "waning sovereignty," is attributable to a myriad of transnational flows including capital, ideas, goods, people, labour, and religions; the growth and prominence of international economic and governmental institutions and their influences; and challenges of international law, rights, and authority.¹¹⁶ These transnational flows pose a serious challenge to political sovereignty's claims to supremacy, absoluteness, and decisionism. Brown explains:

The idea of political sovereignty depends on the conceit that political life dominates other fields of power and activity, including those conventionally named the social, economic, religious, and cultural. If political power is not sovereign over these fields, if it cannot deal with them decisively when necessary (in the moment of the exception), then

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

political sovereignty cannot be said to exist. It would remain vulnerable to these other fields of power, contestable and potentially manipulable by them, and hence, not sovereign.¹¹⁷

While the challenges of globalization and neoliberalism are not new, the sheer plurality and speed at which its accompanying forces flow and undercut sovereignty in today's globalized world is certainly unprecedented. Furthermore, the reaction on the part of nation-states in the form of walling, and the subsequent psychic implications for its subjects are crucial to understanding the *pathos of walling*.

Brown explores the contemporary nation-state walling in response to the erosion of sovereignty. These new walls differ from those erected in the past for reasons of fortification, defending against other sovereign entities, or attacks by other nation-states. Furthermore, these new walls are erected in reaction to transnational, informal, and subterranean powers, rather than international forces and relations. The weakening of state powers has propelled the proliferation of nation-state wall-building. While the targets of these walls may vary, they are in response to transnational forces, which unlike international forces, do not have the influence of political sovereignty behind them.¹¹⁸ Anxious in the face of contemporary flows of power, which are not saddled by political sovereignty, nation-states revert to constructing large, visible, material, territorially-situated, and spatially-bounded walls to performatively rein in a form of sovereignty they no longer possess. That is to say, in response to waning sovereignty, the nation-state draws on the tautology of state sovereignty, and puts up walls – many of which do not

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 70-1.

¹¹⁸ “Poor people, workers, or asylum seekers; drugs, weapons, or other contraband; smuggled taxable goods; kidnapped or enslaved youth; terror; ethnic or religious mixing; peace and other political futures.” Ibid., 20.

correspond with nation-state boundaries – in order to perform a political legitimacy that may already be weakened.

Furthermore, these new walls are ineffective at blocking or keeping out their supposed targets; they merely reroute illegal immigration, drug smuggling, terrorism, and whatever else they may claim to target. As such, they are built to “regulate, rather than impede flows.”¹¹⁹ Despite their ineffectiveness at barricading against flows of people, contrabands, and violence, these walls do function as a technology of power wielded by the nation-state to manage people, sovereignties, violence, and land. In so doing, however, these walls often amplify tensions and aggravate the problems they purportedly address, leading to increased hostility and violence.¹²⁰

The Paradox of Walling

As a symbol of containment and security, walls project a power and efficaciousness. As

Brown explains:

“[Walls] are often visual signifiers of overwhelming human power and state capacity, and in the context of receding sovereignty, they project a restored sovereign power to decide, delimit, protect, and repel. They visually encase the nation as a protected compound and present to the outside world a mighty national shield.”¹²¹

To say that walls are spectacular and performative awe-inducing signifiers, however, does not take away from the real, material nature of the walls and their effects. Brown diagnoses their effects on political subjectivity: “Walls are consummately functional, and walls are potent organizers of human psychic landscapes generative of cultural and

¹¹⁹ Specifically, illegal immigration, drug smuggling, and terrorism. See: *Ibid.*, 103.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 109-114.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

political identities.”¹²² Due to their materiality and physicality, in addition to barricading, delineating borders, and organizing the geopolitical space around it, walls also serve to construct the subjectivities on both sides of the wall. Brown writes:

Walls built around political entities cannot block out without shutting in, cannot secure without making securitization a way of life, cannot define an external ‘they’ without producing a reactionary ‘we,’ even as they also undermine the basis of that distinction. Psychically, socially, and politically, walls inevitably convert a protected way of life into hunkering and huddling.”¹²³

Thus, walling presents a litany of paradoxes and dual functionality, the effects of which would be dependent on which side of the wall one finds oneself. On the inside, in their enclosure, walls offer a barricade, security, protection, and containment. On the outside, however, as a result of the discourse of protection and security, that which is not contained is rendered dangerous, volatile, insecure, and Other. In drawing the barrier, and delimiting what is on the inside, walls inevitably create a distinction between that which is inside, and in contrast, that which is not. Brown points out that:

As such, the new walls defend an inside against an outside where these terms ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ do not necessarily correspond to nation-state identity or fealty, that is, where otherness and difference are detached from jurisdiction and membership, even as the walls themselves would seem to denote and demarcate precisely these things. Walls today articulate an inside/outside distinction in which that which is on the inside and being defended and what is on the outside and being repelled are not particular states, or citizens, indeed in which subjects, political power, political identity, and violence may be territorially detached from states and sovereignty on both sides.¹²⁴

Tracing the Schmittian definitions of the political (as determined by the friend-enemy distinction), sovereignty (through decisionism), and the state (as the locale in which the

¹²² Ibid., 74.

¹²³ Ibid., 42.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 82.

political and the sovereign unite),¹²⁵ Brown argues that with the flight of sovereignty, these formulations of the political, sovereignty, and the state are being torn apart; globalization has ripped the territorial cohesion from Schmitt's framework.¹²⁶ The disentanglement of these concepts amidst waning sovereignty, however, does not mean the political no longer exists. The walls are clearly drawing distinctions between friend and enemy, us and them, inside and outside, and that act is very much a political act, which continues to suffuse political subjectivities. While global flows and forces may have led to the deterritorialization of subjects and sovereignty, the aggressive *pathos of walling* and shoring up of sovereignty are indications of desperate and reactionary attempts to reterritorialize and reorient oneself in the face of the disorder, instability, and vulnerability brought on by waning sovereignty.

Reterritorializing Democracy

The ironic and paradoxical throwback to physical, permanent, obdurate, territorialized walls provides a very stark visual contrast to the postmodern forms of power it (literally) stands against. The key threats to states today, such as cyber attacks, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, climate change, financial crises, epidemics, massive economic disparities, terrorism, and organized crime, generally operate through fluid, circulatory, rhizomatic, and deterritorialized forms of power. However, as Brown points out: "By contrast, walls appear to harken back to a modality and ontology of power that is sovereign, spatially bounded, and territorial. Walls would

¹²⁵ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹²⁶ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 83.

seem to express power that is material, visible, centralized, and exerted corporeally through overt force and policing.”¹²⁷

Consider the recent protests in Hong Kong.¹²⁸ On July 17, 2014, citing “security enhancement,” the government closed off Civic Square, a popular protest site outside of its Central Government Offices (CGO).¹²⁹ In stark contrast to the open-door theme that the government complex was originally built with,¹³⁰ when Civic Square reopened in September, an imposing, three-metre-high “security fence” made of steel stood between the square and the sidewalk.¹³¹ The Hong Kong protests and subsequent Umbrella Movement began outside the CGO as protests in response to the decision regarding the 2017 elections for the Chief Executive, but its momentum was tipped when hundreds of student demonstrators breached the barrier and scaled the newly constructed fence in order to “reclaim” Civic Square. The heavy-handed police responses that followed spurred the protests, which quickly reached an unprecedented and unpredictable scale, and led to the occupation of several key traffic arteries across the city.

In this case, the Hong Kong government literally fenced itself off, closing its doors to the people in the name of security. When the protestors, incited by demands of

¹²⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁸ Brown specifically mentions Hong Kong as a “colonial outpost” in which the “the idea of physically enclosing geopolitical entities become exceptional rather than normal.” The recent protests, however, would indicate otherwise. See: Ibid., 47.

¹²⁹ According to the press release: “A review on the existing security arrangements for CGO has revealed that it is necessary to enhance the overall capacity of the CGO to withstand potential security threats to the building.” See: <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201407/17/P201407170201.htm>.

¹³⁰ “Designed with the main theme of ‘Doors Always Open’, ‘Land Always Green’, ‘Sky Will Be Blue’ and ‘People Will Be Connected’,” the Central Government Offices was completed in 2011 as part of the Tamar Development Project, which included the CGO, the Legislative Council Complex, and the Office of the Executive of Hong Kong. See: http://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/visiting/complex_tamar.html.

¹³¹ Once construction of the fence was completed, the square would be closed to the public between the hours of 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Furthermore, only pre-approved protests and rallies would be allowed to take place on Sundays and public holidays. See: http://www.news.gov.hk/en/categories/admin/html/2014/09/20140908_174349.shtml.

democracy and “true universal suffrage,” challenged the strength and efficacy of the wall, the state apparatus, in the name of security and defence, and armed with batons, tear gas, and pepper spray, lashed out with anger, violence, and hostility, against students armed with laboratory goggles, surgical masks, ponchos, and umbrellas. Although the demonstrations were initiated in protest of the Beijing interpretation of democracy, the electoral process, and Hong Kong municipal politics, the aggressive reaction of the state in response to a threat to its claims of sovereignty drew over 100,000 demonstrators to the streets and opened up a dialogue about the region’s political future. Underlying the movement’s demands for democracy and “true universal suffrage” are palpable currents of alienation and disenchantment, a lot of which can be traced back to Hong Kong’s long history of colonial (and arguably ongoing neocolonial) rule, and a politics of elitism where power is held by a handful of tycoons, oligarchs, and pro-Beijing elites. Furthermore, as “one of the most market-oriented and open economies in the world,”¹³² with strong influences of neoliberal rationality undergirding its politics, Hong Kong also boasts one of the largest wealth gaps in the world. The Umbrella Movement revealed the extent to which the disaffection of the protestors, mostly students and youth, but also academics and activists, is tied to the intensification of neoliberal rationality and its role in Hong Kong’s deep economic inequalities and skyrocketing housing costs. The response of the youth and students, however, demonstrate a completely different desire for walls from Brown’s analysis of waning sovereignty. Caught between an unpredictable authoritarian Chinese State on the one side and the Hong Kong elites’ tight grip of the

¹³² World Trade Organization, Trade Policy Review, “Report by the Secretariat: Hong Kong, China (Revision),” January 25, 2011, https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE_Search/FE_S_S009-DP.aspx?language=E&CatalogueIdList=98339,95892,83884,110253,81159,84051,89201&CurrentCatalogueIdIndex=2&FullTextSearch=.

region on the other, Hong Kong does not and never did hold sovereignty. Perpetually tied to one colonial power or another, self-determination was never a claim for Hong Kong. Yet, as these recent protests have demonstrated, there is manifestly a *pathos of walling* that has emerged in Hong Kong. However, this *pathos of walling* is not in response to the erosion of sovereignty, the weakening of state powers, nor an influx of transnational forces; it is a different manifestation of the *pathos of walling* from the hyperaggressive displays of sovereignty that Brown describes. Rather, this *pathos of walling* rises out of its disaffected subjects' desires for protection from the increasingly uncorralled cultural and political powers of the Chinese State, and economic powers of the Hong Kong elite. That is to say, the *pathos of walling* on the part of the student movement can be understood as a call for walls against and protection from China. Nevertheless, in both manifestations of the *pathos of walling*, whether as a reactionary and hyperaggressive response to feelings of insecurity or as a desire for protection and containment, the walls that are summoned are ultimately ineffective.

All I Want For Christmas Is “True Universal Suffrage”

Where the state is threatened and insecure, sensing instability and waning of its political sovereignty, it props up physical walls to literally ground and (re-)territorialize the space in a performative show of might. However, its attempts at reterritorialization merely reveal the extent to which its sovereignty has waned, the walls themselves serving as “monuments to [its] fading strength or importance.”¹³³ Walling then, can be seen as “the ‘renationalizing’ of political discourse corresponding to denationalized economic space.

¹³³ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 32.

...Visible walls respond to the need for containment and boundaries in too global a world, too unhorizoned a universe. They produce a spatially demarcated ‘us’.”¹³⁴

Consider the inefficacy of walling and reterritorializing in the face of fluid and deterritorialized transnational forces in the following story.

On Christmas Eve, I was heading home after dinner with my family. The streets of Hong Kong were busier than usual, filled with people of all ages decked out in Santa hats, wrapped up in tinsel, and dressed in various sorts of festive wear. As I turned the corner towards where the Umbrella Movement’s Causeway Bay encampment had been until just the week prior, I noticed a group of police with bullhorns, clearing the pedestrian zone onto the sidewalks. Their orders, however, were drowned out by the commotion behind them. Leading a procession of what I guessed to be around 200 protestors and a crowd of yellow umbrellas was a large, wooden cross with “I want universal suffrage” in bold characters running down the cross, and “We Will Be Back!” written vertically. At first, the protestors seemed to be singing, “We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” but after a few verses, I noticed that they had modified the lyrics. Rather than good tidings or a figgy pudding, the protestors were carolling for “*gau wu*,”¹³⁵ and universal suffrage. Inspired by the fluid occupations of the *gau wu* in Mong Kok, the Christmas carollers and other similarly deterritorialized acts of resistance have continued the Umbrella Movement through creative disruptions. Moving and ungrounded, these

¹³⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹³⁵ *Gau wu* (鳩鳴) is a term adopted by the Umbrella Movement. A Cantonese transliteration of the Putonghua “gou wu” (shopping), the term “*gau wu*” originated from an interview with a Chinese tourist attending a pro-government rally who claimed to be in Hong Kong to have fun and “*gau wu*.” After the clearing of the Mong Kok protest site, Chief Executive CY Leung encouraged shoppers to return to the area and support the local businesses that had been affected by the occupation. Heeding Leung’s requests, protestors would return to the area en masse to *gau wu*, deliberately filling the streets and sidewalks, and slowly ambling along under the pretense of shopping. These nightly “shopping tours” often run throughout the night and into the morning; at the time of writing, the *gau wu* activities have been ongoing for 60 days and counting.

detrterritorialized acts of resistance clearly demonstrate the inefficacy of physical walls and territorialized demonstrations of sovereignty by taking and holding space in a manner that defies containment. Moreover, these productive acts of resistance represent alternative responses to threats of insecurity and waning sovereignty undertaken by the protestors in order to supplement the inefficacies of the *pathos of walling*.

The Power of Awe and Fear

Despite their ineffectiveness at keeping out their supposed targets, the very spectacle of walling does nonetheless generate a characteristic of sovereign power: awe. In its desperate and theatricalized performance of sovereignty, walls tautologically project power and features associated with sovereignty, thus resurrecting a phantasmagorical form of sovereignty. Brown explains: “Walls thus bear the irony of being mute, material, and prosaic, yet potentially generative of theological awe largely unrelated to their quotidian functions or failures.”¹³⁶ Following Hobbes, sovereignty, in its role as the “common power to keep them all in awe”¹³⁷ derives its authority from God; for Hobbes, the Leviathan is a “Mortal God.”¹³⁸ Thus read, political sovereignty reproduces the awe of God in its subjects, through which it subsequently justifies its laws, governance, and rule over its subjects. Brown explains: “We generate and authorize what then overawes us and is unaccountable to us because of its divine status.”¹³⁹ Similarly, Schmitt understands sovereignty as a theological concept. Unlike Hobbes, however, for Schmitt,

¹³⁶ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 26.

¹³⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 112.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³⁹ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 60.

sovereignty is not theological because it was conferred with the authority of God, but rather, with its quality of decisionism, which is founded on its supremacy and omnipotence, sovereignty takes on a theological dimension. Thus understood, sovereignty is the human instantiation of God's power. This theological component for sovereignty is crucial for Hobbes and Schmitt because for both, sovereignty is a potent human fiction that we, as humans created and subsequently deified, in order to keep us in awe. It is this theological quality of awe that the spectacle of walls manage to recreate. As Brown writes: "They resurrect the imagined space and people of the nation that sovereignty would contain and protect. As scenes of awe rather than efficacy, and of force rather than of right, the new walls stage sovereign state power in its most theological dross."¹⁴⁰

Beyond awe, another theme that Hobbes draws extensively upon – and one that is implicit in Schmitt's conception of sovereignty – is the power of fear; in any instance of awe, fear follows as a supplement. For Hobbes, civil society was founded on the "continual fear, and danger of violent death"¹⁴¹ in the state of nature, and maintained by the "fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants."¹⁴² In an effort to escape the perpetual fear of insecurity, death, and danger, individuals join together to form a covenant. Jan Blits best sums up Hobbesian fear as follows: "Imbued with a radical uncertainty leading to an endless demand for security, [the subject's] most basic fear is an indeterminate or objectless fear, a primal fear of the unknown."¹⁴³ Thus, fear plays an

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 104-5.

¹⁴¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 84.

¹⁴² Ibid., 111.

¹⁴³ Jan H. Blits, "Hobbesian Fear," *Political Theory*, 17, no. 3 (1989): 417-31. www.jstor.org/stable/191224.

integral role in establishing the narratives of both nation-state and individual sovereignty. With the erosion of sovereignty and the subsequent feelings of insecurity, however, fear once more becomes a key component of the political, economic, cultural, and psychic landscape. In which case, the recent influx of walls that Brown diagnoses can be read as a reactionary and defensive response to the fear of waning sovereignty in an increasingly globalized world.

The translation of fear into reactionary wall-building also exposes the role of fear in producing, ordering, and hierarchizing subjectivities. Hobbes writes, “To show any sign of love, or fear of another, is to honour; for both to love, and to fear is to value.”¹⁴⁴ Generally, one does not fear that which is good, safe, benign, or noble; rather, one typically fears that which is deemed dangerous, different, unknown, harmful, immoral, bad, or evil.¹⁴⁵ Nietzsche writes: “[I]nto evil one’s feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the act of fearing something (or someone) assigns it a value; to fear is to make a moral judgement or moral valuation. According to Nietzsche, “Fear is again the mother of morals.”¹⁴⁷ Values and subsequently, morals, are not neutral; they are created, shaped, and defined by fear. Nietzsche called for “a critique of moral values,” suggesting “the value of these values themselves must first be called into question.”¹⁴⁸ Similarly, it is worth calling into question the capacities of fear as a value-creator and its effects on classifying and

¹⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 60.

¹⁴⁵ While this is generally the case, of course there are exceptions to this generalization in which one fears that which is deemed good. The Christian tradition, for instance, preaches fear of its omnibenevolent god.

¹⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 20.

organizing subjects, particularly when that fear is manifested in the form of material walls.

Underlying Hobbes' social contract theory, which claims that fear of chaos, danger, and insecurity leads to covenants, fear motivates the desire for order and stability. Therefore, not only do walls provide a visual reassurance of order, structure, and security, but their materiality also serves to create a physical distance, delineating between that which is safe and secure and that which is dangerous and unruly. As David Campbell argues:

While dependent on specific historical contexts, we can say that for the state, identity can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the 'inside' are linked through a discourse of 'danger' with threats identified and located on the 'outside.' The outcome of this is that boundaries are constructed, spaces demarcated, standards of legitimacy incorporated, interpretations of history privileged, and alternatives marginalized.¹⁴⁹

The discourse of danger and insecurity thus inscribes identity through the elicitation of fear. However, it is important to note that with the construction of walls, the distinction between that which is on the outside and that which is on the inside, danger and safe is further amplified, which in turn offers serious implications for ways in which it contributes to subject formation. Campbell goes on to explain:

The walls, or boundaries that are constructed serve to separate the inside from the outside. But the boundary both separates and joins, thus making it impossible to conceive of a space that could be traversed by a bridge between independently existing realms. The spaces of inside and outside serve to delineate the rational, ordered polity in which good, sane, sober, modest, and civilized 'man' resides from the dangerous, chaotic, and anarchical realm in which the evil, mad, drunk, arrogant, and savage people are found.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 68.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

Thus, the original intention behind the walling was not to fence “us” in, but rather to fence “them” out; the “us” did not exist prior to the self-containment. Moreover, it is important to note that in creating that distance, the walls consequently group those huddled together on the inside as “us” while simultaneously labelling those who fall outside as “them.” However, neither the “us” nor the “them” can be constituted without one another; it is in the separation of inside/outside that the identities of “us” and “them” are formed.

Master of Security, Slave of Sovereignty

This deliberate distancing that underlies the *pathos of walling* is again, very similar to Nietzsche’s *pathos of distance* discussed in the previous chapter. That need to create order and rank, which informs the *pathos of distance* from the perspective of slave morality is also behind the same logic that undergirds the *pathos of walling*. For both, the desire for distance stems from a desire for order and anxiety of inferiority, which is ultimately motivated by the threat of danger.

The new walls, then, offer a “sense of order” in response to instability and lawlessness, but more than anything, they offer containment and a sense of stability and potency in response to the fear of danger, vulnerability, and powerlessness brought on by globalization and neoliberal rationality’s crumbling horizons. As such, their projection of order, stability, security, and sovereignty are in fact performative; the walls are reflective of a psyche of retrenchment, bunkering, hunkering, and huddling. Behind the outward

grandness, confidence, and preparedness of the walls are the vitriolic fears of vulnerability, impotence, and inferiority.

Nietzsche explains: “According to slave morality, those who are ‘evil’ thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are ‘good’ that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the ‘bad’ are felt to be contemptible.”¹⁵¹ Fearing her own feelings of inferiority in contrast to the strength, vengefulness, foolhardiness, craftiness, independence, and superiority of her neighbour, the subject takes on the qualities of slave morality and moralizes, thus labelling the neighbour “evil.”¹⁵² Nevertheless, the distinction between the neighbour, the enemy, the evil one, and myself, the friend, and the good, is an internal distinction, rather than an external distinction. Thus, the distance created between “us” and “them,” good and evil, friend and enemy, is again a territorially detached one, which does not correspond to nation-state identity; the delineation between inside and outside, and the walls that emerge from it, occur within the boundaries of the pre-existing society. That is to say, one is first faced with the threat of insecurity and external dangers; but once society has been structured and secured, a subsequent fear rises from within that which has been secured: the fear of the neighbour.¹⁵³

Therefore, while the proliferation of walling may seem to depict the image of a cool, and in control “master of security,” in actuality, these walls are signs of the slave morality that is constitutive of the concept of sovereignty. The *pathos of walling* is indicative of a subject who, in refusing to relinquish her attachment to an already departed sovereignty, allows herself to be controlled by her insecurities, vulnerabilities,

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ The term “fear of the neighbor” is borrowed from Nietzsche. See: Ibid., 113.

and loss of sovereignty. Ultimately, the *pathos of walling* is a reactionary response, fuelled by a subject of slave morality's chains to a waning sovereignty that it desperately clings to.

As mentioned earlier, in their demarcation of space, walls also play a significant role in the production of subjectivities. Given the inextricably entangled relationship between nation-state and individual sovereignty within liberal ontology, it follows that the *pathos of walling* behind the nation-states' expressions of sovereignty would also be imbricated with the subjectivity of an individual grappling with waning sovereignty. Moreover, the paradox between the discourse and *pathos* behind the walling would seem to engender further disorientation and incoherence in the subject. As Brown writes:

Officially aimed at protecting putatively free, open, lawful, and secular societies from trespass, exploitation, or attack, the walls are built of suspended law and inadvertently produce a collective ethos and subjectivity that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarized. They generate an increasingly closed and policed collective identity in place of the open society they would defend.¹⁵⁴

The fear underlying the wall building is channeled into a defensive yet aggressive, angry, and violent reactionary *pathos* that suffuses the collective subjectivities.

When *Pathos* Becomes *Ethos*

Consider again the situation in Hong Kong. The protests escalated when the student demonstrators who had rushed the walls erected by the State were violently and aggressively suppressed by the police forces, which subsequently led to a seventy-nine day occupation of several key junctions across the city. While the protests first garnered

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 40.

much public sympathy and support, particularly in response to the police brutality against the students, the Umbrella Movement soon led to deep divisions, and much of Hong Kong devolved into two general camps: the “yellow ribbons” who support the pro-democracy protestors, and the “blue ribbons” who oppose the protests. Whereas the yellow ribbons generally consists of students, youth, activists, and intellectuals; the blue ribbons – also a symbol of support for the police – consists of groups affected by the occupations, such as store owners, taxi drivers and bus drivers, but also the older generations, who view the protests as ignorant, idealistic, futile, disruptive to the economy, and detrimental to the well-being of Hong Kong and Hongkongers alike. The extended occupation eventually led to a loss of public opinion for the protestors when the government refused to cede to their demands and the protestors stood their ground, leading to a standstill between the two parties, and prolonged disruptions to many crucial parts of the city, transportation, and businesses. The disruptions further fuelled the backlash against the protests, intensifying the antagonism between the blue and yellow ribbons.

Throughout my visit to Hong Kong, most conversations with family, friends, and strangers quickly led to opinions concerning the Umbrella Movement. In fact, I found many relatives who, despite self-identifying as apolitical and apathetic towards politics, were actually quite impassioned and held strong opinions about the matters once the topic was broached. While much of the political divisions lay between the two generations, therefore causing much strife amongst many families, as a *jook-sing*¹⁵⁵ in Hong Kong to visit family, I was viewed by many of my older relatives as “not a threat,” unlike many of

¹⁵⁵ Jook-sing (竹升) meaning “hollow bamboo pole” is a Cantonese slang referring to a Canadian- or American-born Chinese person who grew up in a Western environment.

my cousins and other youths and students who had been “radicalized” by the movement. In one instance, when the conversation inevitably turned to the Umbrella Movement, an older relative quickly expressed trepidation and disdain at the prospect of discussing the protests with someone of my generation, and a student at that. It was not until my aunt reminded her that I am a *jook-sing* and had not been “brainwashed” unlike the rest of my cousins and “them students,” and so it was “okay” to chat about the protests with me around. The distinctions between “us” and “them,” blue ribbons and yellow ribbons have suffused much of Hong Kong, with much resentment on both sides. According to the blue ribbons, the protestors have alienated themselves by disturbing the lives of the “ordinary citizens” and “working people,” affecting the economy, businesses, and the people’s ability to put food on the table. Painted as selfish for pursuing their political goals at the expense of the taxi drivers, bus drivers, business owners, and ordinary Hong Kong citizens, the students’ protests are also labelled as ignorant, idealistic, and futile by the blue ribbons. In many of my conversations, I found many of the older generations and supporters of the blue ribbons harboured the fear that the students’ protests would disrupt the order of things and the precarious relationship between Hong Kong and China.

Furthermore, on numerous occasions, suspicious and at times xenophobic sentiments underlying much of the anger echoed by the blue ribbon supporters rose to the surface, ranging from convictions that the movement is a puppet of the West, funded and influenced by Western (particularly American and British) parties trying to harm China, to the rumour that foreign travellers and the homeless were taking advantage of the demonstration and occupation by taking the free lodging offered by the movement to appear larger than it actually is. Recognizing its helplessness against the authoritarian

powers of China, many blue ribbon supporters clung onto the discourse of stability and the good will of the current order.

Brown makes the claim that groups that take on the ethos of the State in an attempt to shore up state power are in fact furthering the deterioration of its political sovereignty. She cites the Minutemen, a vigilante group that patrols the U.S.-Mexico border, defending “America’s sovereign territory against incursion, invasion, and terrorism,” as an example.¹⁵⁶ The Minutemen, finding the State’s response to “illegals” deficient, have taken it upon themselves to police the border and erect heavy-duty barriers, which make it much more difficult to scale.¹⁵⁷ For Brown, these acts of vigilantism undercut the authority of the State in that they challenge the decisionist powers of political sovereignty, which ought to be held exclusively by the State. Yet, while these groups may present themselves as opposed to the State and its methods, ultimately, their acts are ideologically in line with the aims of the State in that they are motivated by nationalist sentiments to reinforce the sovereignty of the state. Therefore, it would seem that these actions do not challenge decisionism (or a Schmittian sovereignty), as Brown suggests, but rather the “the state *monopoly* on decisionism.”¹⁵⁸ That is to say, in acting on the ethos of the State and in lieu of the State, these groups challenge the Hobbesian conception of sovereignty as the absolute power of the state. As such, I would counter that the acts of these citizens can be seen as an extension of the State’s claims to sovereignty in the form of what Althusser called an “Ideological State Apparatus” (ISA).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 85, 87-8.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 87. Emphasis added.

Institutions such as religion, education, family, law, politics, trade unions, media, and culture, all of which Althusser considers ISAs, are ideological practices and apparatuses that ensure the subjection of the individual and encourage subjects to behave in accordance to the “rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination.”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, ISAs, which function primarily through ideology, are contrasted to the (Repressive) State Apparatus (RA), which contains the government, police, administration, courts, the army, prisons, etc., and functions primarily through repression and violence. While there is one, unified (Repressive) State Apparatus, there are a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses whose diversity may cause contradictions amongst the ISAs; despite their incongruencies, however, these ISAs are nevertheless unified under the ruling ideology of the dominant class.¹⁶⁰ Thus, alternatively, it is possible to read these vigilantes as subsumed by, and therefore an extension of, the State apparatus. Similarly in the case of Hong Kong, beyond the early days of the protests, the State largely refrained from actively intervening in or shutting down the occupation. In fact, the occupation sites were shut down in accordance to injunctions brought against the protestors by groups and unions representing the taxi and bus drivers. Furthermore, although the dismantlement of the occupation sites were achieved through legal, state-based means, I would argue that the crucial point here is that the groups and unions that effected the shutdowns, in reflecting and enforcing the dominant ideological position, functioned as extensions of the State and its ethos. Thus, in shelving the (Repressive) State Apparatus in favour of

¹⁵⁹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 89.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

ISAs, the State succeeded in achieving their goals of nonviolently shutting down the occupation without actually having to do the dirty work themselves, thereby saving face and avoiding further vilification.

Desiring Walls, Desiring Distances

Thus far, it has been established that walls respond to the psychic fantasies for containment in light of fears, anxieties, and vulnerabilities brought on by the disorienting conditions of globalization and neoliberal rationality. As a method of coping with the desires for potency and security in the face of the psychic unmanageability of waning sovereignty, states and subjects put up walls in order to physically demarcate the space.

Despite their inefficacies, however, these walls serve a phantasmatic purpose; in their performativity, they offer a visual security that operates in a dual fashion. On the one hand, the spectre of the walls offer a real, material sense of protection and containment that can be seen by those on both sides of the wall. In doing so, the visuality of the walls clearly delineate between the “us” and “them,” simultaneously rendering the distance between us and the Other visible, and at the same time serving as a permanent, physical reminder of that distance. On the other hand, that same physicality of the walls also serve as a shield, blocking from view and abetting the denial of the dependency on the Other. In so doing, “they” are reformulated and portrayed as dangerous, and as a threat, thereby erasing their history of exploitation and subordination at the hands of the master, and transforming dependency into a discourse of autonomy. Furthermore, the containment provided by the walls allow for the displacement of the aggressions and violent effects of those on the inside onto an external Other by disavowing its

dependencies and desires, which nevertheless necessitates the exploitation of those same Others. Thus, the walls respond to the psychic unmanageability by hiding from view that which threatens us, and that which we wish not to see. In that sense, the Other challenges the “we,” thereby exacerbating the need to separate “us” from “them” and to maintain the distance between the two. Consequently, the walls are not built to keep out threatening outsiders per se; but rather their purpose is to maintain the divide between “us” and “them.”

Erected out of a fear, the walls are rife with vulnerabilities, which inevitably leads to states and subjects backing them up with aggression and anger in order to preserve their illusion of might. The distance becomes the only way through which the subject is able to orient herself in the world; it is in distinguishing herself from that which is different from her that she is able to determine who she is. Again, this is a key component of slave morality wherein one defines herself in relation to an external enemy. Thus, while the subject continues to draw the distance between “us” and “them,” the very “them” that she desperately seeks to disavow by walling out paradoxically constitutes her subjectivity. As Judith Butler notes, one of the key aspects of contemporary subject formation is the subject’s passionate attachment to her subjectification.¹⁶¹ In this case, the subject is passionately attached, not only to the distance that the walls can provide, but more critically, to the conception of herself – and her very existence – as a sovereign individual. In her desire to become a master of security and (re)gain some form of order, control, and orientation amidst an increasingly dizzying world order, the subject of neoliberalism and globalization turns to the *pathos of walling* in pursuit of a form

¹⁶¹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 6-10.

sovereignty that has already disappeared. Yet as Butler observes, “the desire to survive, ‘to be,’ is a pervasively exploitable desire. The one who holds out the promise of continued existence plays to the desire to survive.”¹⁶² As such, the *pathos of walling* exploits the desire for self-preservation, offering a simulacrum of sovereignty, while in actuality reentrenching the conditions of subjectification. Ultimately, the *pathos of walling* can be viewed as a nostalgic chase after the illusions of potency, stability, and security in which the subject only succeeds in tightening her chains to her fears, unavowed vulnerabilities, and an unattainable notion of sovereignty.

¹⁶² Ibid., 7.

Chapter 3: *Pathos of Difference*

Tolerance is placid contempt.

– Mason Cooley

We are a young country; much younger than the mother-countries of modern Canada - Great-Britain and France; much younger than most other countries, on all continents, from where millions of Canadians have come in recent decades. But in the space of these 126 years, as a federation we have created on this continent a model for civilized societies everywhere. Together, anglophones and francophones, Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians, women and men, young and old, we have built a country that was founded and has thrived on personal initiative and the simple but strong principles of tolerance, justice and equality.

– Prime Minister Kim Campbell, 1 July 1993.

“No, Where Are You Really From?”

Growing up, I was taught to be a nice, disciplined, polite, and law-abiding Canadian citizen. I say my please's and thank you's, am quick to say “sorry” even when I may not have been at fault, beg pardon when I cannot hear or need to pass through, and generally avoid confrontation. Stereotypically magnanimous, non-confrontational, and tolerant, Canadians are often seen as humble, deferential, proud (but not too proud) of our politeness, and readily apologetic. A part of this “politeness” comes from an emphasis on individualism and the celebration of diversity in the “cultural mosaic” that makes up Canada. This diversity, which is manifested as varying cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual differences, often leads to contradictions, clashes, and conflicts. Thus, in order to manage these conflicts and co-exist peacefully amidst this diversity, we are encouraged to be politely tolerant of other people's differences.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ *We* are always the ones tolerating the differences of *other* people. It is always *them* who are different and must be tolerated; never *us*.

Yet, about once a week, I am asked by a complete (often male) stranger – and sometimes, this is someone I have just met; others, it is someone with whom I am making “polite conversation” – where I am from, to which my response is usually something along the lines of “Toronto area.” Sometimes, this answer is satisfactory and the conversation continues amiably, but more often than not, this answer does not sit right with the questioner, which leads him to press, “No, but where are you *really* from?” Variants of this follow-up question include: “That’s nice, and where are your parents from?” “Okay, but where were your grandparents from?” and the most forthright “And what is your background/ethnicity?”

Regardless of how the question is framed, the implication of all these questions are the same – because I am not white, I cannot *really* be from Canada. It does not matter that I was born and raised in Canada, that I have nowhere else to call home, or that I am a settler just the same as the questioner. Due to my racialization as a Chinese woman, I am different, I am not part of the hegemonic group, and I do not belong.

It is of no import to this stranger where my parents or my grandparents are from; my grandparents mostly passed away long before I was born so I never had much of a relationship with them, but regardless, none of this affects the stranger in any way. Yet this stranger feels as if he has the right to pose these intrusive questions about my family, my personal life, and me.

Disguised as curiosity, my inquisitor can play off his questions as a form of benign interest, perhaps even an attempt at friendly conversation. In response, I am expected to tolerate these extremely uncomfortable and personal questions that I know to be racism veiled as curiosity. On top of that, I am expected to respond politely, satiate his

thirst for knowledge and curiosity about my difference – perhaps even exoticism? – and explain myself to him. After all, he is just curious, he is not approaching these questions with an ill intention; in tolerating his intrusion and imposition and answering his questions, I would be teaching him and sharing my culture with him – or so I am told. Yet it is not my responsibility or my duty to educate every curious stranger, and teach him how to “properly” racialize me. Moreover, in responding to him, I would be helping him to categorize me, put me in a box that conforms to preconceptions, and reassure *him* of his view of the world.

This is further exemplified in the cases where I succumb and respond, “My parents are from Hong Kong,” only to have the stranger go from inquisitor to genealogical expert and ask if I am “sure,” or if I am “full Chinese,” because I look “[insert ethnic background here].”¹⁶⁴ This line of questioning makes it clear that the inquisitor’s only interest is in reaffirming his preconceived notions of my identity and what I ought to be, as if he would know better than I.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, it simultaneously forces me into a position where I am not only reminded of my differences, but also expected to tolerate this implicit yet insidious form of racism. But why should I tolerate these questions that make me uncomfortable and serve to remind me of my alterity for the sake of a stranger’s “curiosity”?

¹⁶⁴ In my most recent encounter, after telling the man that I am Chinese, he suggested to me a little disappointedly, as if my ethnicity were something to be negotiated, “Oh, I thought you looked Korean.” Yet when I asked him, “What exactly about me ‘looks Korean’? What does a Korean person ‘look like’?” he could not give me an answer. After gesturing vaguely at me while in search for words, and laughing a little uncomfortably, he responded, “I don’t know...umm...something about your face? They look something like you?”

¹⁶⁵ In this case, it is very much *what* I ought to be and not *who* I am because I have already been objectified and categorized according to his matrix. Who I am, how I identify, and the ways in which my subjectivity have been constructed do not matter; all that matters is that he can rest assured that his categories, preconceptions, and understanding of the world are upheld.

Reframing Tolerance

Heralded as a crowning achievement of multicultural liberal societies, tolerance is often celebrated as a key virtue of the modern West. As I write this chapter, everywhere I look, from inspirational posters in elementary school classrooms preaching “Tolerance: Share our similarities, celebrate our differences,” to the WWE’s ads between wrestling matches promoting “Be a STAR (Show Tolerance and Respect),”¹⁶⁶ tolerance is touted as a noble virtue that ought to be encouraged and cultivated. Celebrated as the answer to celebrating diversity and living in harmony, tolerance is trumpeted as leading to the fundamental principles of equality, justice, and freedom in a pluralistic liberal democracy. Tolerance is hailed as a peaceful solution and promoted as a seemingly neutral and nonpartisan response to resolving conflicts arising from cultural, racial, ethnic, social, and sexual differences.

However, as Wendy Brown argues in *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, tolerance should not be viewed uncritically. According to Brown, tolerance is a technology of power wielded by modern Western liberalism to regulate groups, individuals, and identities that do not concede to its modes of governing. As a form of governmentality, the discourse of tolerance is used to normalize and control that which is ‘different,’ while at the same time reinforcing the dominance of the pre-existing liberal order’s principles of individual rights and freedoms, private beliefs, and personal choices. In so doing, the discourse of tolerance is significant in the production, organization, and regulation of political subjectivity. Furthermore, Brown argues that

¹⁶⁶ “WWE Be a STAR,” WWE, accessed March 26, 2015, <https://community.wwe.com/diversity/programs/be-star>.

discourse of tolerance's conflation of cultures and identities, and its essentializing tendencies have depoliticizing effects on power, politics, and political subjectivity.

Using Brown's analytical framework, this chapter will explore the depoliticizing effects of tolerance on contemporary political subjectivity and argue that not only is it not a neutral, value-free virtue, but there seems to be an inescapable violence to the discourse of tolerance. Loaded with power and wielded as a form of governmentality by neoliberalism to maintain its hegemony, the ways in which the discourse of tolerance produces and situates (liberal) political subjectivity are inevitably violent. This chapter will ask the questions: what kind of political subjectivity does tolerance produce? What are the relations of power and domination underlying the discourse of tolerance? How is the discourse of tolerance used as a tool of depoliticization? What are the effects of tolerance on contemporary liberal conceptions of identity, citizenship, and civilization? How does the tolerated subject (re)act to its identity construction as inferior, deviant, or marginal, and only ever tolerable? How does power circulate through the discourse of tolerance and what are its effects on subjectivity, passivity, and indifference? In doing so, it will examine the framing of tolerance as a liberal virtue used to supplement the liberal principle of equality. Particularly, it will examine how liberal democracies employ tolerance as a form of governmentality with which to regulate their populace. Furthermore, focussing on the Canadian context, it will interrogate the limits of tolerance by considering how the discourse of tolerance is employed as a justification for the imperial and colonial pursuits of liberalism. Finally, to tie these themes together, this chapter will conclude by examining the relationship between tolerance and indifference.

Tracing Tolerance

Although the concept of tolerance has existed since Antiquity, the contemporary liberal notion of tolerance can be traced back to the Reformation. The bitter religious conflicts that marked Europe in the 16th to the 17th century led to the emergence of many theories of toleration in that period.¹⁶⁷ John Locke's "A Letter Concerning Toleration" in which he draws a sharp distinction between religious belief and the civil and political society is arguably one of the most defining post-Reformation writings on toleration.¹⁶⁸ In divesting the religious from the political and individualizing, privatizing, and subjectivizing religious belief, Locke frames the Western notion of the sovereign individual for whom religious belief is a private, individual concern, separate from the public life of civil and political society. Albeit rooted in an understanding of tolerance as the management of religious differences in a period rife with religious conflicts, the contemporary understanding of toleration has since shifted to the management of cultural, racial, ethnic, and sexual differences – that is to say, the regulation of identity. Today, the discourse of tolerance is viewed as a solution to multiculturalism, cultural differences, and free speech, on top of religious conflicts.

¹⁶⁷ See for example: Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed in a Conference Between Truth and Peace: Who, in All Tender Affection, Present to the High Court of Parliament, (as the Result of Their Discourse) These, (among Other Passages) of Highest Consideration*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001); Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Pierre Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary on these Words of the Gospel, Luke 14.23 : "Compel them to come in, that My house may be full,"* ed. John Kilcullen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005); Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four chapters from The Six books of the Commonwealth*, trans. Julian H. Franklin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁶⁸ John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration" in *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro, 482-572 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Etymologically, tolerance is derived from the Latin *tolerāre*, meaning to “bear, endure, tolerate, support, carry.” It is also related to the Ancient Greek *tlántos*, meaning “bearing, suffering.” In its current usage, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines tolerance as (1) “the action or practice of enduring or sustaining pain or hardship; the power or capacity of enduring; endurance; (2) “the action of allowing; license, permission granted by an authority”; and (3) “the disposition to be patient with or indulgent to the opinions or practices of others; freedom from bigotry or undue severity in judging the conduct of others; forbearance; catholicity of spirit.” Furthermore, in physiology, tolerance is defined as “the power, constitutional or acquired, of enduring large doses of active drugs, or of resisting the action of poison, etc.; hence diminution in the response to a drug after continued use;” in biology as “the ability of an organism to survive or to flourish despite infection with a parasite or an otherwise pathogenic organism;” and in mechanics as: “an allowable amount of variation in the dimensions of a machine or part. More widely, the allowable amount of variation in any specified quantity.”¹⁶⁹

Thus, tolerance is a coping strategy for “managing the presence of the undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty – even the revolting, repugnant, or vile.”¹⁷⁰ Tolerance is the grudging acceptance of an unwanted, objectionable, deviant and unfavourable entity; it regulates and decides the limits of what can be deemed acceptable, that which is tolerable. As Brown explains:

In every lexicon, tolerance signifies the limits on what foreign, erroneous, objectionable or dangerous element can be allowed to cohabit with the host without destroying the host— whether the entity at issue is truth,

¹⁶⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “tolerance”
<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/Entry/202979?rskey=63pBVF&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

¹⁷⁰ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 25.

structural soundness, health, community, or an organism. The very invocation of tolerance in each domain indicates that something contaminating or dangerous is at hand, or something foreign is at issue, and the limits of tolerance are determined by how much of this toxicity can be accommodated without destroying the object, value, claim, or body. Tolerance appears, then, as a mode of incorporating and regulating the presence of the threatening Other within.¹⁷¹

So how did tolerance – the management of contempt, disdain, and aversion – come to be framed as a virtue and harbinger of peace today?

Tolerance: A Liberal Interpretation

In spite of its claims of universality, however, it is necessary to emphasize that the form of tolerance addressed in this chapter is, politically viewed, a liberal interpretation of tolerance. More specifically, this discourse of tolerance stems from the universal liberal values of autonomy, the sovereign individual, freedom, choice, and equality. As such, it is rendered a *liberal* virtue; that is to say, it is merited as a virtue in accordance to liberalism. For it is not neutral or value-free; in fact, its very designation as a virtue makes it a moral judgement, and therefore subjected to liberal values.

Yet, given its privileged position as a hegemonic ideology, liberalism has been able to conceal the ways in which it constructs and situates both liberal and nonliberal subjects, as well as the ways in which it structures and effects cultures, social stratifications, and global ordering. As the hegemonic order, liberalism has been able to disseminate its values and principles, which it claims as universal. Cloaked under the veil of universality, these values and principles, which are inherently liberal values and principles, are normalized and operate from the presumption of neutrality. Yet despite the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

normativity of liberal values, and the liberal pretence of neutrality, these values are resolutely liberal values; even the conception of universality, which encompasses various other liberal principles, is a liberal conceit.

As previously mentioned, liberal tolerance is derived from the Protestant Reformation during which the key concern was in addressing how to allow Protestants to worship God in their own ways without destabilizing the authority of the church and the state. Tolerance responded to these violent religious conflicts by framing religion as a private matter of fundamental beliefs. In so doing, tolerance discourse presumed individual autonomy and more broadly, the notion of the sovereign individual. Although the concept of the sovereign individual is central to modern Western thought more generally, it is of particular importance to liberalism, which holds liberty and equality as its most fundamental principles.

Thus, the discourse of tolerance emerges in response to liberal equality and the paradoxes that arise in the practices of it. According to liberalism, equality is understood not as equality of outcome; equality means that subjects are to be treated equally before the law.¹⁷² In the eyes of the state, all individuals are to be treated in the same way in accordance with the law. In order to manage the inevitability of differences while maintaining a coherence to the logic of liberalism, tolerance emerges as a solution.

Borrowing from the Derridean concept of *supplement*, Brown argues that tolerance acts as a *supplement* to liberal equality: “that which conceptually undermines

¹⁷² According to s.15 (1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which lays out equality rights: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” However, the right of equality only applies to the extent that the law applies. In the eyes of the law, all individuals are treated equally, but once outside the law, the guarantee of equality no longer exists; the limits of equality are found at the limits of liberal legalism. *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 15, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11.

the binary of identity/difference or inside/outside yet is crucial to the conceit of the integrity, autarky, self-sufficiency, and continuity of the dominant term.”¹⁷³ More importantly, as Brown goes on to note: “the very appearance of the supplement is also a sign of crisis in coherence or narrative continuity.”¹⁷⁴

Tolerance is not an alternative, substitute, or even extension of equality; it is a supplement because it makes up for the failures and shortcomings of liberalism. Whereas alternatives and substitutes offer various other possibilities in lieu of the original, and an extension uses the original as a base and broadens its possibilities by adding to it, a supplement acts as an addendum, it functions as an external entity brought in to sustain the original. A bandage of sorts tied on to liberal equality, tolerance is brought on to make the principle of equality “true” and possible. As such, tolerance allows liberalism to make its spurious claims towards equality in spite of its inability to implement – let alone uphold – them.

While equality is concerned with sameness, tolerance is based on difference. Therefore, in order to manage the differences that inevitably arise, liberalism invokes tolerance to balance out and validate its claims. Whereas equality functions legally and is usually administered through officially codified processes such as the law, tolerance functions informally and discursively. Thus, while law acts to universalize equality and blanket everything under a presumption of sameness, liberalism turns to tolerance to cope with the differences that liberal equality cannot address, cover, or brush away. As such, the discourse of tolerance is invoked at the limit of liberal legalism. Yet, while that which falls beyond the law is subjected to tolerance, conversely, the limits of tolerance are also

¹⁷³ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 27.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 215-6.

designated by the law. As Brown explains: “we are tolerant not by law but in addition to the law.”¹⁷⁵ Benjamin L. Berger writes:

If the limit on tolerance is justified, it is justified owing to its fidelity to the commitments, values, and overarching objectives of the rule of law. If the limit on tolerance is not justified, *the reason is the same*. It is not justified because we erred in thinking that the practice *actually* offended the basic commitments of law’s rule. The limitation was unduly onerous or we did not appreciate that, in fact, the religious practice of belief in question could be viewed as or rendered consonant with these commitments – commitments such as autonomy, the protection of individuals, and the maintenance of a private sphere characterized by personal values and a public sphere cleansed of the influences of choice and taste. Within this analytical structure, law always vindicates its own cultural understandings.¹⁷⁶

The law and that which is tolerated do not start as equals, quite the contrary, in fact. As an expression of liberal legalism, the law is shaped by its cultural and ideological biases, which have already predetermined the terms under which the negotiations for tolerance before it are wrought.¹⁷⁷ Liberalism achieves this balance by framing sameness and difference through the public-private divide wherein that which is of public interest is not an issue of tolerance, and that which is deemed a private, individual matter beyond the scope of the law is subjected to tolerance.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin L. Berger, “The Cultural Limits of Legal Tolerance,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 21, no. 2 (2008): 258, [https://apps.osgoode.yorku.ca/osgmedia.nsf/0/5148CDD049E6FB4F852578E20062FEA8/\\$FILE/Cultural%20Limits%20of%20Legal%20Tolerance.pdf](https://apps.osgoode.yorku.ca/osgmedia.nsf/0/5148CDD049E6FB4F852578E20062FEA8/$FILE/Cultural%20Limits%20of%20Legal%20Tolerance.pdf).

¹⁷⁷ Berger argues: “Law and religion are certainly not engaging in a conversation as relative equals, one that may result in the transformation of either. Law’s formal encounter with religion is neither an instance of cultural borrowing nor of dialogic engagement. Neither, though, is there an attempt – at this point – to subordinate difference by means of the kind of ideological force that characterizes conversion or assimilation. Instead, the law affirms diversity, but at arm’s length. Religious cultures are entitled to the benefit of a liberal philosophy of *modus vivendi* tolerance.” Ibid., 256.

Consider the Quebec Charter of Values,¹⁷⁸ and the French *Loi interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public*¹⁷⁹ and *Loi encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics*¹⁸⁰ respectively. Tabled by the governing Parti Québécois in 2013 under the guise of “State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men,” the Quebec Charter of Values sought to ban public sector employees from wearing “conspicuous” religious symbols at work, as well as forbid anyone providing or receiving state services from having their faces covered.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the French headscarf ban passed in 2004, although worded as an enforcement of secularism and ban of conspicuous religious symbols in public primary and secondary schools, and technically applicable to any and all religious symbols, is often considered to specifically target the hijab. Finally, the French face covering ban, passed in 2010, prohibits the concealment of the face in public spaces for reasons of security, social cohesion, and individual freedoms, while simultaneously claiming to liberate Muslim women. Through the criminalization of difference under the name of secularism, the law mandates social cohesion as sameness. In all these cases, the state uses the law to set up a clear delineation between what and where is deemed public, and

¹⁷⁸ Although the bill died on the order paper when the Liberals won the provincial election, the sentiments behind proposing the bill were – and arguably are – still there. Quebec, Bill 60, *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests*, 1st sess., 40th Legislature, 2013. <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-60-40-1.html>

¹⁷⁹ Popularly known as the “burqa and niqab ban” in English. France, Loi n° 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 *interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public*. <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022911670>

¹⁸⁰ Often referred to as the “headscarf ban” in English. France, Loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics. <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000417977>

¹⁸¹ Quebec, Bill 60.

what and where is deemed private. The public sector, work, primary and secondary schools, and public spaces, are considered to be in the public domain, and therefore governed by the law; religion and personal beliefs, on the other hand, are sequestered into the realm of the private, and beholden to tolerance. Working in tandem, the law regulates public space while tolerance manages the private. In rendering that which is tolerated a matter of belief and individual choice, and distinguishing it from the public order, liberalism limits equality and sameness to be the realm of the state, and tolerance and difference a matter of private choice that is separate from and beyond the reach of the law.

Despite operating outside the scope of the law, tolerance nevertheless continues to propagate the hegemonic social norms of the liberal democratic state, and liberalism more generally. From its position outside of the law and as a supplement to the law, the discourse of tolerance thereby reaffirms the existing power structures by disseminating hegemonic social norms. Tolerance discourse thus ensures the hegemony that the state requires but cannot explicitly endorse due to its commitment to liberal egalitarianism.¹⁸² This allows the state to encourage and even promote tolerance without directly enacting or granting it. Consequently, as a method of managing the differences that abound in a multicultural, pluralistic, globalized, and increasingly interconnected world, tolerance forms a part of the dialectic set against equality in the liberal paradox. As the supplement of the ideal of the universal, tolerance brings it closer to attainability, yet at the same time, the need for tolerance itself is at odds with that very ideal and conceit of universality.

¹⁸² Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 207-8.

Governmentality

For the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to focus specifically on tolerance as a politically contextualized discourse, and not only as an abstract concept. As a discourse, not only is tolerance influenced by the relations of power that circulate, but it itself is also a medium through which power operates, constructs knowledge, and produces and situates subjects. In a debate with Rainer Forst, Brown argues that in order to take into account the workings of power that it implies and are implied in it, tolerance should be studied as a discourse. Furthermore, the role of tolerance discourse in subject formation clearly demonstrates the power relations at work, and as such, Brown argues, it would be insufficient and wholly uncritical to frame tolerance as a conception without considering the implications of power it carries with it.¹⁸³

The role of tolerance as a management of threat to the universality of liberalism and its claims to equality allows it to incorporate differences without unsettling the hegemonic order and the norms that served to marginalize these differences in the first place. Brown writes: “Tolerance is invoked in liberal democratic societies when a hegemonic norm cannot colonize or incorporate its Other with ease, when that norm maintains or regroups its strength through a new technique of marginalization and regulation rather than through incorporation and direct relations of subordination.”¹⁸⁴

That is to say, when disciplinary forms of domination are not possible, the state turns to tolerance as a form of *governmentality*. “The art of government,” or the “rationalization

¹⁸³ Wendy Brown and Rainer Forst, *Power of Tolerance*, ed. Luca di Blasi and Christoph F. E. Holzhey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 5.

of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty,”¹⁸⁵ governmentality is the way in which the state organizes and governs populations in order to suit its interests. As such, governmentality can be considered a form of Foucauldian *biopower* used as “regulatory controls” of a population.¹⁸⁶ A technology of power to “‘make’ live and ‘let’ die,”¹⁸⁷ biopolitics is “not a matter of taking the individual at the level of individuality but, on the contrary, of using overall mechanisms and acting in such a way as to achieve overall states of equilibration or regularity; it is, in a word, a matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not disciplined, but regularized.”¹⁸⁸

Brown argues that tolerance discourse uses this technology of power as a form of governmentality to manage differences and populations: “Tolerance carries with it an antagonism towards alterity as well as the capacity for normalization. Developed into a civil ethos and social practice in modernity, and more recently, attached to all manner of cultural identities, tolerance appears as an element in the formation Foucault named *biopower*.”¹⁸⁹

As such, the discourse of tolerance reinforces the hegemonic values and order through its powers of normalization and renders all identities that fall outside of those norms and that which is deemed acceptable as Other. In so doing, the discourse of tolerance creates social stratifications and hierarchizations based on differences.

¹⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, (New York: Picador, 2010), 2.

¹⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1990), 139.

¹⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003), 241.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 246-7.

¹⁸⁹ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 26.

Furthermore, according to Foucault, biopolitics is employed as “factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.”¹⁹⁰ Similarly, the discourse of tolerance addresses differences by incorporating them as “tolerable,” thereby distinguishing them from the norm and marking them as subordinate through techniques of marginalization and regulation.

Although these differences may have originally been founded on differences in belief, particularly religious beliefs, the discourse of tolerance has since shifted from differences in religious beliefs to differences in cultural identity claims. While this shift may be attributed to various principles of liberalism that have abetted the dissemination of the discourse of tolerance, a significant aspect of the shift may be traced back to the conceit of liberal equality. In framing tolerance and difference as the solution to equality and sameness, liberalism reifies and essentializes those very differences, constructing them as culturalized identities. Brown explains:

By converting the effects of inequality—for example, institutionalized racism—into a matter of ‘different practices and beliefs,’ this discourse masks the working of inequality and hegemonic culture as that which produces the differences it seeks to protect. As it essentializes difference and reifies sexuality, race, and ethnicity at the level of ideas and practices, contemporary tolerance discourse covers over the workings of power and the importance of history in *producing* the differences *called* sexuality, race, and ethnicity.¹⁹¹

Furthermore, given that those who are tolerated will always be those who do not adhere to the norm and are identified as different, the discourse of tolerance only serves to further entrench the subjects’ alterity by reinforcing their marginalization and

¹⁹⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 141.

¹⁹¹ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 45-6.

subordination. Thus, as a form of governmentality, tolerance discourse has significant cultural, social, and political effects on the formation and positioning of political subjects, citizens, and states.

Depoliticized Subjects

Consequently, tolerance as a political discourse and form of governmentality carries with it depoliticizing effects on political subjectivity and social ordering. Brown writes:

The enactment of social, political, religious, and cultural norms; certain practices of licensing and regulation; the marking of subjects of tolerance as inferior, deviant, or marginal vis-à-vis those practicing tolerance; and a justification for sometimes dire or even deadly action when the limits of tolerance are considered breached. Tolerance of this sort does not simply address identity but abets in its production; it also abets in the conflation of culture with ethnicity or race and the conflation of belief or consciousness with phenotype. And it naturalizes as it depoliticizes these processes to render identity itself an object of tolerance. These are consequential achievements.¹⁹²

Thus, tolerance produces depoliticized subjectivities by removing the processes of marginalization and subordination from the process of subjectification. In conflating belief, ethnicity, and race with culture, tolerance discourse also contributes towards naturalizing and essentializing differences as identity. As such, the discursive move of tolerance towards personalization and naturalization (or culturalization) of differences serve to individualize and privatize the inequalities that arise.

Brown argues: “Tolerance discourse reduces conflict to an inherent friction among identities and makes religious, ethnic, and cultural difference itself an inherent site

¹⁹² Ibid., 13-4.

of conflict, one that calls for and is attenuated by the practice of tolerance.”¹⁹³ Therefore, while the act of depoliticization may not be deliberate – and in fact, Brown suggests, “depoliticization may well issue from a certain blindness about power and dominance that is the privilege of the powerful”¹⁹⁴ – depoliticization always stems from the ruling class and the effects of depoliticization will always serve the hegemonic order.¹⁹⁵ As such, depoliticization can be defined as the removal of “a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, depoliticization does not assume a political *a priori* that is rendered depoliticized or removed from the realm of politics; rather, it speaks to ways in which a political phenomenon is understood once it has been completely removed and decontextualized from the histories and powers that produced it. Moreover, the erasure of the effects of power and the naturalization of differences makes identities appear essential and ontologically derived. Thus, in producing and reifying differences as essentialized identities, tolerance discourse is able to essentialize and reduce differences to identity claims. Furthermore, in doing so, tolerance discourse is also able to project an erasure of differences, inequalities, marginalization, and subordination altogether.

However, it is this very act of depoliticization when the relations of power are concealed that the relations of domination between tolerator and tolerated are at play. As Brown characterizes it: “Power discursively disappears when a hegemonic population

¹⁹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 212.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

tolerates a marked or minoritized one. The scene materializes instead as one in which the universal tolerates the particular in its particularity, in which the putative universal therefore always appears superior to that unassimilated particular—a superiority itself premised upon the nonreciprocity of tolerance (the particular does not tolerate the universal). It is the disappearance of power in the action of tolerance that convenes the hegemonic as the universal and the subordinate or minoritized as the particular.”¹⁹⁷ The depoliticizing effects of tolerance have been normalized to the point of invisibility such that the process of depoliticization itself also becomes cloaked in the veil of normativity.

Consider the following encounter as an instance of a liberal claim to universality achieved through an erasure of difference. When I first moved to Victoria, I looked into a women’s basketball league in the city that I could join. Dismayed when my search came up empty, I turned to the university’s intramural leagues. According to the university’s recreation guidebook, the divisions offered for 5-on-5 intramural basketball were “Rec Co-ed,” “Comp Tier B Co-ed,” or “Comp Tier A Open.” Baffled by the unclear wording in the guidebook, I went to the gym to inquire in person about a 5-on-5 women’s league, and clarify the differences between Comp Co-ed and Comp Open. I was told that unfortunately, due to a lack of interest, the university does not offer a 5-on-5 women’s intramural league, so my best bet would be to join the Co-ed division. Curious, I asked the staffer about the Open division and how it differs from Co-ed. Beyond the level of competition, I was told that officially, the difference between Open and Co-ed lies in the minimum requirements; according to the policies of the intramurals program: “Any Coed league requires that a specific number of femal [*sic*] players must be in the game at all

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 186.

times depending on the sport. Open leagues are just that, open. There are no specific requirements for number of females.”¹⁹⁸ The staffer then went on to explain that while technically, Co-ed is co-ed and Open is open to everyone; effectively, Open functions as the men’s league, although it cannot be officially labelled as such. Since the university does not offer a women’s division, it cannot offer a men’s division; however, in practice, I was told, Open is more competitive and “pretty much a men’s division.”

On the surface, then, it would seem that as a woman deciding between which division to join, Co-ed and Open would hold no difference; both are open to anyone, regardless of sex or gender, who wants to play intramural basketball. The sole difference factoring into my decision, therefore, would lie in my own skill level and desired level of competition. Both Co-ed and Open appear as divisions accessible to, and welcoming of, any and all basketball players, regardless of sex or gender. Open is framed as open – attainable, universal – to anyone, but in reality, Open is only universal to those who are male; Open is universal to the male basketball player, and the universal is thus defined as the male. As a female basketball player, I am not a male, I do not fit the universal, and Open is not open to me; consequently, I am categorized under the sign of the Co-ed. Co-ed thus becomes a category of choice for the men who choose to join it, and the category by default for women, all of whom are forced into it. In our categorization as Co-ed, women are thus blanketed under the sign of Co-ed and thereby erased from the sign of the Open. Furthermore, through Open’s masquerade under the sign of the open and universal in spite of its treatment and functioning as men’s division, the difference – the female – is effectively erased in the name of the universal male sign of the “Open.”

¹⁹⁸ “Vikes Recreation Programs,” University of Victoria, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://vikesrec.uvic.ca/programs/intramurals.php#section0-19>.

Performing as a placeholder for a men's division, which could not be, Open thus becomes the universal sign of the male.

It is on the basis of this process of depoliticization that tolerance gains its impunity as a virtue. As a result, the tolerator, in graciously subjecting himself to the affront of the deviant, undesirable, and repugnant, is consecrated as virtuous, benevolent, and magnanimous. Conversely, the tolerated is constructed as inferior by and through her difference as that which is not universal. Yet this notion of universality is a phantasmatic deception of modernity and particularly in this case, liberalism. While universalism is an ideal propagated by liberalism, it is also an ideal that, as tolerance discourse has shown, liberalism itself cannot fulfill. Nevertheless, it has been a pervasive principle of liberalism, which has suffused the psyches of the subjects of liberalism. Thus, when a tolerated subject is looking up to and competing with that "universal" – or more accurately, hegemonic – model and constantly searching for similarities and comparisons to it, yet repeatedly failing and unable to ever live up to the universal due to her purportedly essential differences, her feelings of inferiority flare up.

The *pathos of distance* can also be applied here. Born out of the internalization of her supposedly natural and essential differences, this manifestation of the *pathos of distance*, which I shall call the "*pathos of difference*," is integral to her identity formation. In constantly being compared to, and constantly comparing herself to that unattainable universal ideal, the norms of the society that she finds herself in, the tolerated subject winds up internalizing her differences and growing resentful of the ways in which her own lived experiences do not line up with the narrative of the universal she is told. She asks herself, "Why not me? Why am *I* different?" There is no congruency

between her lived experiences and the universal ideal she has always been told to subscribe to; she does not see her own reflection in the supposed ‘universal,’ only her differences. Consequently, this jarring disconnect between the tolerated subject and the universal serves to further reinforce her differences, particularity, alterity, and Otherness; it fosters and emphasizes her marginalization and subordination to the norms, that which she ought to be, the hegemonic ideal of a wholly assimilable universality. At the same time, it reinforces the power relations and dynamics wherein she is the tolerated, the dominated, the Other, the slave and those who fall within the universal mold are the tolerator, the dominator, one of ‘Us,’ the master. Thus, the tolerated subject’s image and esteem of herself serves to turn her own differences and identity against her by providing a constant reminder of her own inferiority, thereby convincing her that these differences and reasons for her inferiority are simultaneously essential to her, and yet at the same time, inescapably her responsibility. As a result, the tolerated subject becomes attached to her differences as they construct her identity. Nevertheless, her identity is reinscribed as a reaction to her differences and ways in which she is marginalized and subordinated; this cycle in which her identity is formed therefore leads to a subjectivity of *ressentiment*. Yet in this case, the “hostile external world” is the hegemonic universal ideal perpetuated by liberalism. Thus, depoliticized and saddled with an inferiority complex, the tolerated subject is formed by the *pathos of difference*.

Violent Formations

Although that which is deemed tolerable becomes subject to the depoliticizing effects of tolerance, as mentioned earlier, despite its sanctity as a liberal virtue, tolerance does have

its limits. When those limits are breached, or the threat to the hegemonic order is too great, inassimilable, or unmanageable, the threat is deemed intolerable. Thus, due to its position outside the realm of tolerance, the intolerable entity can therefore be excusably and justifiably subjected to intolerance without disrupting the claims of the liberal order. In particular, the relationship between the imperial and colonial pursuits of liberalism and the discourse of tolerance provides a nuanced understanding of the limits of tolerance and the justificatory deployment of intolerance.

According to Frantz Fanon: “Their first confrontation was colored by violence and their cohabitation – or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer – continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire...It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject.”¹⁹⁹ That is to say, the colonized subject is and continues to be fabricated both through and by violence. Therefore, this form of subject-formation, effected by the discourse of tolerance is, I would argue, deeply violent. Furthermore, when employed as part of a civilizational discourse, the discourse of tolerance is often employed to justify the imperial and colonial pursuits of liberalism. Brown argues that through the framing of the West as the tolerant and civilized, tolerance offers legitimation for imperial conquests in non-Western states that are deemed intolerant and uncivilized.²⁰⁰ As Glen Coulthard explains in the context of colonialism in North America: “Because Indigenous societies were considered so low on the natural scale of social and cultural evolution, settler authorities felt justified in claiming North America legally vacant, or *terra nullius*, and sovereignty was acquired by

¹⁹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.

²⁰⁰ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 171-2.

the mere act of settlement itself.”²⁰¹ As such, the imperialism and aggression of the Western state is disavowed in its violence; instead, it is framed as an extension of democracy into an illiberal state – the liberation of an uncivilized, barbaric Other. Cloaked in the language of liberalizing and liberation, imperialism and colonialism are legitimated and justified by the rule of law, rights, and choices, all of which are dubbed universal and acultural.

While the form of subject formation outlined thus far in this chapter mostly describes subjects in modern, Western, liberal states, Brown argues that similar concealments and effects of power are at play in the “civilizing missions” of liberalism in non-Western states. As the hegemonic world order, liberalism views itself as superior to, more advanced, better developed, more progressive, and freer than illiberal non-Western states. Just as liberalism lays claim to the “putative universal [that] appears superior to that unassimilated particular – a superiority itself premised on the nonreciprocity of tolerance”²⁰² in the formation of the tolerated subject, similarly, Western liberal states justify their aggressions by framing their colonial and imperial undertakings as liberal democracies liberating and democratizing the uncivilized and unassimilated illiberal states by spreading their objective, universal liberal values. Where the universal is again held by liberalism, the particular in this case is represented by states that do not conform to the universal liberal ideals and values; states viewed and portrayed by Western liberal democracies as non-Western, illiberal, uncivilized, and undemocratic.

²⁰¹ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 100.

²⁰² Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 186.

However, Brown's analysis falls short in her portrayal of tolerance as a part of civilizational discourse towards non-Western states, particularly in her failure to address the ongoing colonialism within many Western states, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and Greenland. The imperialist and colonialist aggressions of Western states are not only directed outwards at illiberal and non-Western states; they are also continually ongoing within these settler-colonial "Western states." For example, a recently exposed internal RCMP document written by the "Aboriginal liaison for the national capital region" referred to the Indigenous mass movement, Idle No More as bacteria: "This Idle No More movement is like bacteria, it has grown a life of its own all across this Nation."²⁰³ Beyond the lack of acknowledgement of the First Nations as sovereign nations, the racism of that comment's comparison between Indigenous people and bacteria reveals the intolerance and aggressions of the Canadian state towards its Indigenous populations as a quintessential form of biopolitics.²⁰⁴

According to Foucault, "the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population."²⁰⁵ As such, Indigenous claims to sovereignty hold little merit when confronted with the State's power of discursively reducing the biological existence of the Indigenous population to bacteria.

²⁰³ Jorge Barrera, "NDP MP demands apology for RCMP Idle No More 'bacteria' comparison," *APTN*, May 8, 2015, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/05/08/ndp-mp-demands-apology-rcmp-idle-bacteria-comparison/>.

²⁰⁴ When MP Niki Ashton, the Official Opposition Critic for Aboriginal Affairs demanded an apology for the discriminatory comparison in the House of Commons, the government rejected "the premise of that question," calling it "abhorrent." According to the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Safety, MP Roxanne James, "Painting the RCMP in that light is absolutely unacceptable." *Niki Ashton Demands Apology for Derogatory Language about Idle No More*, YouTube video, 2:19, from Question Period in the House of Commons, May 8, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Olpg4KLoaTI>. Thus, in addition to defending the comment and the RCMP, the government reversed the issue, framing it as a case of MP Niki Ashton (and in a sense, the Idle No More movement) daring to challenge the dominance of the State.

²⁰⁵ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 137.

Furthermore, in referring to Idle No More as bacteria, the RCMP dehumanizes it, reducing the movement and its people to an unpleasant and unhealthy biological matter that is prone to being parasitic and infectious, and causing diseases. By likening it to bacteria, and implying that the Idle No More movement needs to be disinfected and sanitized, this metaphor speaks the language of biopolitics, which claims that “one ha[s] the right to kill those who [represent] a kind of biological danger to others.”²⁰⁶

Through the juxtaposition of Us (the Nation) vs. Them (the bacteria), the State is also able to imply that “We,” the Nation, our laws, and those who support these laws, are the civilized and tolerant, whereas “They,” the disruptive Indigenous people and their Idle No More movement, are the uncivilized and intolerant.²⁰⁷ Consequently, in labelling “Them” as intolerant, the State uses the discourse of tolerance as the legitimizing logic for colonialism and racism. Foucault argues that in the exercise of biopower, racism becomes an inevitable mechanism employed by modern States.²⁰⁸ Inassimilable, uncivilized, and infectious, the language of bacteria frames the Idle No More movement as a threat to be exterminated. Foucault writes:

Enemies who have to be done away are not adversaries in the political sense of the term; they are threats, either external or internal, to the population and for the population. In the biopower system, in other words, killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable...in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race. There is a direct connection between the two. In a normalizing society, race or

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 138. It is important to note that when Foucault uses “kill,” he does not mean “simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on.” (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256.)

²⁰⁷ According to the RCMP report, “We are experiencing more main stream [*sic*] people and Ethnic Communities coming out in support of the “Aboriginal Community.” Here, the distinction is between “Us” and “the Aboriginal Community,” wherein those who are “compliant to laws” are the civilized, and “the Aboriginal Community” and its supporters, in challenging the legitimacy of the State, are uncivilized (and intolerant). Barrera, “NDP MP demands apology.”

²⁰⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254.

racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable. When you have a normalizing society, you have a power which is, at least superficially, in the first instance, or in the first line a biopower, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State.²⁰⁹

Through a biopolitical calculation, the State uses the discourse of tolerance to determine who and what is tolerable (and subsequently normalized through governmentality) and who and what is intolerable (and therefore justifiably subjected to the “murderous function of the State”). As Coulthard remarks:

What is also ironic is the fact that the state’s assumed authority in these matters is premised on the profoundly essentialist, indeed, *racist*, understanding that Indigenous peoples were too uncivilized to constitute equal and self-determining nations when European powers unilaterally asserted their sovereignty over Native North America. ... Over the last decade, numerous scholars have convincingly shown how the conceptualization of Indigenous societies as politically and culturally inferior continues to inform Canada’s presumed authority over Indigenous lands and people.²¹⁰

Thus, by framing Indigenous peoples and societies as inferior and uncivilized, the state is able to legitimate its colonialism, which is then supplemented by a biopolitical management of race.

Nevertheless, Brown maintains that in deconstructing the language of tolerance, it bears:

the possibility of conceiving and nourishing a liberalism more self-conscious of and receptive to its own always already present hybridity, its potentially rich failure to hive off organicism from individuality and culture from political principles, law, or policy. This would be a liberalism potentially more modest, more restrained in its imperial and colonial impulses, but also one more capable of the multicultural justice to which it aspires. Above all, it would be a liberalism less invested in the absolute

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 256. To be clear, the implication here is that the death of the “inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer.” (Ibid., 255.)

²¹⁰ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 100.

and dangerous opposition between us and them, thereby losing one of its crucial justifications for empire under the flag of liberal democracy.²¹¹

It is under the banner of liberalism that these forms of violence are legitimated – better yet, celebrated. The virtues of tolerance and civilization are virtues deeply embedded within the fabric of liberal values and principles, and therefore, to consider that there could be an alternative form of liberalism that would be “more modest, more restrained in its imperial and colonial impulses” would be dangerously naïve and foolish. Furthermore, not only is liberalism heavily dependent upon colonialism, but through the ongoing processes of colonization, liberal democracies such as Canada continue to perpetuate violence against its Indigenous populations. The Canadian state was and continues to be constructed through violence against Indigenous peoples in the forms of land dispossession, institutionalized racism, residential schools, eugenics, broken treaties, disproportionate rates of incarceration, and the refusal to act on the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, amongst a much lengthier list of injustices. Coulthard observes: “[I]n the Canadian context, colonial relations of power are no longer reproduced primarily through overtly coercive means, but rather through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation.”²¹² He goes on to argue: “[I]n situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction instead rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler

²¹¹ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 175.

²¹² Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 15. Coulthard’s definitive critique of liberal recognition politics offers a more nuanced examination of the perils of “ostensibly tolerant, multinational, liberal settler politics such as Canada.”

state and society.”²¹³ Although the relations of power may have shifted from a focus on physical force and overt coercion to biopolitics and governmentality, the effects on the colonial subjects are no less violent; rather, as Fanon puts it, “[m]atters have become more subtle, less bloody.”²¹⁴ Rather than through explicit violence, these forms of power work to effect colonial subjects by forcing them to internalize their status as inferior.

Following Fanon, Coulthard contends:

[T]he long-term stability of a colonial system of governance relies as much on the “internalization” of the forms of racist recognition imposed or bestowed on the Indigenous population by the colonial state and society as it does on brute force. For Fanon, then, the longevity of a colonial social formation depends, to a significant degree, on its capacity to transform the colonized population into *subjects* of imperial rule.²¹⁵

No matter how modest or restrained they may be, imperialism and colonialism remain imperialism and colonialism, and as such, their violence is inevitable. Likewise, the paradoxes of liberalism render its values of freedom, equality, and universality unattainable ideals, which are inextricably linked with imperial and colonial impulses. Thus, similarly, the violence of liberalism is inevitable as well.

The Impossibility of Indifference

Tolerance, therefore, is not a matter of indifference or neutrality. Tolerance discourse is a form of violence disguised by liberal hegemony as a virtue. As such, it is not a passive or unbiased act; the discourse of tolerance is the active management of that which is deemed undesirable and inferior. Brown writes: “At its heart tolerance fundamentally expresses

²¹³ Ibid., 5.

²¹⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 27.

²¹⁵ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 31.

choice or ability; it is [cancelled] by mandate on one side and passivity on the other.”²¹⁶

Tolerance cannot be indifferent; it is premised on difference – it is the management of difference. Emerging as a response to the inevitability of differences that it cannot simply equalize or do away with, tolerance discourse is a tool of liberal governmentality.

Liberalism may make claims of equality and universality, but those claims collapse in the face of the differences that it cannot assimilate, and tolerance discourse is needed to compensate for those lapses. Tolerance takes differences and submits them to the norms, thereby regulating and hierarchizing them in accordance to that with that which has been deemed acceptable. To be tolerant, therefore, the subject cannot be indifferent; the tolerant subject is full of disdain and contempt for the differences. Thus, the discourse of tolerance is not a passive or objective discourse and tolerance itself is not a neutral sentiment; rather, it is active and employed as a tool of domination to uphold the existing liberal hegemonic order, and thus, necessarily violent. Moreover, in its framing as a virtue and somewhat contradictorily as neutral, tolerance discourse represses these differences and obfuscates the relations of power and domination at play, thereby rendering the violence it perpetrates more subversive and insidious.²¹⁷ Tolerance discourse is tinged disdain, contempt, and repugnance, and while the pseudo-neutrality brought on by liberalism serves to obscure these deep-rooted *pathea*, the violence of it is undeniable.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

²¹⁷ Although according to liberal universalism, liberal values are neutral, and therefore, under a liberal worldview, it would not be a contradiction.

Reinforcing Reminders of Repression

The virtue of tolerance is enshrouded in the liberal principle of equality. Yet despite liberalism's declarations of equality, liberal equality does not live up to its claims; rather, liberalism represses the differences that fall beyond its norms and frames them under the discourse of tolerance. In so doing, tolerance erases the differences, histories, and powers in those relations, thereby depoliticizing them. While the relations of power in those dynamics may be depoliticized and therefore enshrouded and normalized, that is not to say that they do not exist. Rather, it is a display of the hegemonic order submitting those they deem as different and tolerated, to their social norms. As such, it is a demonstration of the power of the hegemony in their role as masters, and a reminder to the tolerated of their marginalization and subordination. Additionally, this show of might on the part of the tolerant, framed as a virtue, allows the tolerator to feel generous and magnanimous for subjecting himself to the affront of the undesirable, thus reinforcing his feeling of nobility and superiority. At the same time, this reinforces his dominance as the tolerator and the inferiority of the tolerated Other while shrouding her powerlessness.

Furthermore, on the surface, the tolerated Other is formally enfranchised. There is an equality to which she has been guaranteed, which has been codified, legalized, and therefore officially and formally recognized. As such, the liberal hegemony can reassure itself of its equality and the tolerators can congratulate themselves for their generosity and magnanimity in tolerating the Other. Moreover, these acts of tolerance, despite their appearance of generosity, do not appear as displays of weakness; rather, they appear to take power from the equation, framing the differences and deviances of the tolerated as natural, thereby forcing her to internalize her struggle and identity as essential. The

tolerated subject is repeatedly told that she is a sovereign, autonomous individual possessing free will and therefore responsible for her actions and interactions; as such, she is forced to and can only internalize her differences as her identity, her responsibility, and her own fault.

Although tolerance is enacted as a form of governmentality through discursive relations and not as an overt or physical display of power, that does not make it any less violent; rather, it makes it more subversive and insidious. Nevertheless, the discourse of tolerance as a technology of power is just as real, damaging, and violent in its production and situation of political subjectivity. Through its circulation through discourse, tolerance as a form of governmentality regulates how the tolerated Other's life is to be lived, which is in turn internalized by the tolerated subject. As such, the discourse of tolerance plays a significant role in how the tolerated Other's subjectivity is constituted and regulated through those relations of power as laid out by the hegemonic liberal order.

Conclusion

Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth --that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else men will not be able to attain even that which is possible today. Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'In spite of all!' has the calling for politics.

– Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”

In embarking on this thesis, I sought to problematize the relationship between political impotence and indifference, and contemporary political subjectivity, asking in particular how political impotence and indifference are cultivated through (neo)liberal subject formation. In concluding, therefore, I would like to sketch out the theoretical contributions made in this thesis to conceptualizations of neoliberal subjectivity and subject formation. Furthermore, I want to offer a rethinking of the implications of *pathos* in contemporary politics, particularly in relation to the perceived feelings of impotence and indifference. In doing so, I hope to gesture towards creative and productive ways of channelling *pathos* that can open up alternative, more emancipatory lines of flight against the foreclosures of neoliberal subject formation.

In my conceptualization of contemporary subjectivity, I identified three exemplary forms of *pathos* manifested in contemporary politics and the types of subjects that each *pathos* produces. Moreover, I suggested that contemporary neoliberal subjectivity is constituted through the *pathos of distance* found in the chasm between the

impotent liberal subject and the imaginary universal liberal ideal. Arguing that the fictions of liberal discourse have completely permeated the imagination of contemporary politics, I problematized the liberal portrayal of the sovereign individual as a free, equal, autonomous, rational, and rights-bearing actor. Furthermore, through an examination of the processes of liberal subject formation, I identified the disjuncture between the narratives and ideals espoused by liberalism, which claim universality, progress, freedom, and equality, and the actual lived realities of contemporary (neo)liberal subjects.

Specifically, I argued, the impotent subject constituted by the *pathos of resentment* is founded in the image of the universal liberal ideal; the vulnerable subject constituted by the *pathos of walling* is chasing after (the departed) liberal conceit of the sovereign individual; and the tolerated subject produced through the *pathos of difference* is constructed in contrast to the hegemonic liberal order's norms of sameness. Thus, in tracing the relationships between the *pathos of resentment*, the *pathos of walling*, and the *pathos of difference*, and the subjectivities they respectively constructed, I explored the ramifications of the liberal imaginary on contemporary neoliberal subjectivity.

Drawing from Brown's characterization of the subject of *resentiment*, I argued that in the case of the impotent subject, her anger, bitterness, and hostility are in response to the injurious process of her subject formation. Both founded through and in reaction to her marginalization and subordination, the impotent subject is paradoxically attached to her differences and exclusions. As the source of her pain and suffering, as well as her politicized identity, these injuries are manifested as a *pathos of resentment*, which only serves to reinforce her feelings of failure and impotence. In the context of contemporary political subjectivity, this *pathos of resentment*, I argued, is in response to the neoliberal

subject formation. Although Brown provides a critical engagement with the concept of *ressentiment* as applied to contemporary politics, to develop this argument, I returned to the theoretical groundwork laid out by Nietzsche. I suggested that it is through Nietzsche's notion of the *pathos of distance* from which *ressentiment* later emerges, that subject formation, specifically how the process of subject formation is internalized, can be better understood. In the case of contemporary politics, the neoliberal subject is thus formed through the *pathos of distance* between the impotent liberal subject and the unattainable universal liberal ideal. Consequently, the *pathos of ressentiment* emerges as a reactionary response on the part of the impotent subject who internalizes the distance between her self-consciousness and the impossible mirror of liberal perfection. Clinging to her desires for an imaginary liberal ideal, the impotent subject is trapped in the abyss founded upon her wounded attachments.

Similarly unwilling to renounce the liberal conceit of the sovereign individual, the vulnerable subject is marked by her fears of insecurity and need for order brought on by waning sovereignty. In response, the vulnerable subject turns to an aggressive *pathos of walling*. While the walls themselves may be ineffective as physical blockades and signs of weakness, they nonetheless have critical implications in their influences on subject formations. Expressed as physical manifestations of the need for distance, rank, and order, these walls offer a façade of order and a sense of security. As such, the *pathos of walling*, I argued, exploits the liberal subject's desire for individual sovereignty and fears of insecurity by offering an illusion of sovereignty; however, this only serves to re-trench the conditions of her subjectification and intensify her unattainable desires.

The tolerated subject, constituted through the *pathos of difference*, is also founded through distance. Contrary to liberal discourse's portrayal of tolerance as a peaceful, neutral, and value-free virtue able to resolve cultural, ethnic, racial, social, and sexual differences, I argued that tolerance is deployed as a form of governmentality in order to reinforce and normalize the hegemonic liberal order and its values by managing differences. In framing the tolerated subject as difference, tolerance discourse produces the tolerated subject against the norms and sameness of the hegemonic order. Furthermore, the depoliticizing nature of tolerance discourse and its veiling of the relations of power between the tolerator and tolerated give rise to the latter's feelings of inferiority. Labelled and produced as a subject of difference, the tolerated subject is constituted against the benchmark of sameness to which she aspires but again, can never attain.

Thus, the impotent, vulnerable, and tolerated subjects exemplify, as forms of neoliberal subjectivity, the centrality of the *pathos of distance* in their subject formation. Underlying each of these subjects is a latent desire for external validation based in fictitious liberal ideals. It is this unattainable desire that creates the irreconcilable binary at the core of the liberal imaginary and subject formation, which in turn facilitates the feelings of impotence and indifference. Earlier, I looked at Butler's theory of desire in which the subject desires her own subjection merely to perpetuate "the desire to desire...if only for the possibility of continuing to desire;"²¹⁸ wherein the subject's very existence, that is to say, the ways in which she has been constituted as a subject, are contingent upon these desires. Here, I would like to further supplement this

²¹⁸ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 61.

understanding of desire by turning to the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari.

For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is recognized as a productive force inextricable from the complex assemblages that shape it; understood as such, it is (necessarily) a social production. On the one hand, this reading of desire renders it subject to capture, cooptation, or appropriation by the State and its repressive forces:

Why does desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its own repression? The masses certainly do not passively submit to power; nor do they ‘want to be repressed, in a kind of masochistic hysteria; nor are they tricked by an ideological lure. Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. Leftist organizations will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective.²¹⁹

These dangerous and repressive tendencies of desire are therefore internalized by the subject and impressed upon her subjectivity by the same forces that constitute her as a subject. Thus, while she may not outright ‘want’ her own oppression and exploitation – or to be fascist, as in Deleuze and Guattari’s argument, – this “perversion of the desire” means that she nonetheless desires her own repression – and she herself is unwittingly nourishing the prototypical fascist.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 215.

²²⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 29.

On the other hand, and more importantly in the pursuit of a more emancipatory future, this reading also opens up the productive capabilities of desire as a form of resistance:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. Despite what some revolutionaries think about this, desire is revolutionary in its essence – desire, not left-wing holidays! – and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude and hierarchy being compromised.²²¹

Yet in spite of the productive possibilities and potential power of desire, the question of how one can extricate oneself from the repressive perversions of desire in order to harness desire as a mode of resistance remains. First, however, I will turn to the contributions this conceptualization of desire can offer to an understanding of the implications of *pathos*.

In the case of desire, Deleuze and Guattari write:

As Marx notes, what exists in fact is not lack, but passion, as a ‘natural and sensuous object.’ Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are counterproducts within the real that desire produces. Lack is a countereffect of desire; it is deposited, distributed, vacuolized within a real that is natural and social.”²²²

Understood in this way, desire is not defined by lack, that is to say, it is not a tendency towards or making up for what the subject is missing; rather, desire is defined by passion. This reading of desire, transposed onto the subject who desires her own repression and is passionately attached to her pain and suffering then, is productive in the sense that it

²²¹ Ibid., 116.

²²² Ibid., 27.

produces her repression. As such, these passions are productive passions emanating from desire.

At this point, I would like to consider the implications of *pathos* in contemporary politics, particularly in relation to the notion of indifference. As established in the Introduction, indifference refers to a lack of emotion, care, interest, and passion – apathy, in particular, can be broken down to “not” (or without) *pathos*. Yet as I have repeatedly argued throughout this thesis, contemporary politics is suffused with *pathos*; in fact, the process of contemporary neoliberal subject formation is rife with affect. The impotent subject’s anger, hostility, and *ressentiment*; the vulnerable subject’s fears and aggressions; and the tolerated subject’s feelings of inferiority and self-contempt are all manifestations of passions, pains, and suffering – in a word, *pathos*. As in the case of the tolerated subject constituted by the *pathos of difference*, who is unable to be indifferent by virtue of being *constituted by difference*, similarly, it seems that the contemporary neoliberal subject who is constituted through the *pathos of distance* also cannot be indifferent. To the contrary, it appears that the contemporary neoliberal subject is bombarded, perhaps even overwhelmed, with *pathos*.

In a contemporary politics suffused with yet seemingly stymied by *pathos*, how then, is it possible for the subject to channel these affects of anger, *ressentiment*, aggression, fear, and feelings of inferiority, into a productive *pathos*? For this question, I revisit Coulthard’s theorization of an alternative politics through Indigenous resurgence by turning into the anger and resentment as a form of critical desubjectification. According to Coulthard, “these negative emotions nonetheless mark an important turning point in the individual and collective coming-to-consciousness of the colonized. More

specifically, [he thinks] that they represent the *externalization* of that which was previously *internalized*: a purging, if you will, of the so-called ‘inferiority complex’ of the colonized subject.”²²³ However, this is not to discount the harmful and destructive capabilities of emotions such as anger, aggression, and feelings of inferiority,²²⁴ but as Coulthard argues, “these emotional forces are rarely, if ever as destructive and violent as the colonial relationship they critically call into question.”²²⁵ As such, by embracing these emotions, desires, passions, pains, and suffering, that is, in turning into these *pathea*, it may be possible to cultivate a productive *pathos* or in Deleuzian terms, a “desiring-production,” and develop alternative, more emancipatory subjectivities.

²²³ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 114.

²²⁴ Although Coulthard largely refers to anger and resentment as the “negative emotions” with productive capabilities, he also specifically addresses *ressentiment* and its portrayal as an “a pathological inability to ‘get over the past.’” However, “what makes *ressentiment* so problematic is that it is also an *irrational* attitude.” In the case of Canadian settler-colonialism, however, Coulthard argues that the inability of Indigenous peoples to get over the harm, violence, and injustices inflicted upon them is in fact “*righteous resentment*: that is, [their] bitter indignation and persistent anger at being treated unjustly by a colonial state both historically and in the present.” (Ibid., 126.) It is important to note that the violent injustices and colonial subject formations imposed by settler-colonialism are clearly not the same as the violence of liberal subject formation; despite significant overlaps, they nevertheless cannot be conflated. However, I would argue that in the case of the neoliberal subject constituted through the violent processes of (neo)liberal subject formation, the *pathos of resentment* of the neoliberal subject is not a wholly irrational reaction either, and in some instances, could also be considered as resentment as opposed to *ressentiment*.

²²⁵ Ibid., 120.

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