Canadian = Blonde, English, White: Theorizing Race, Language and Nation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ways in which discourses of Canadian national identity intersect with those of gender through the lens of young girls of immigrant and refugee backgrounds. In particular, it explores notions of "Canadian-ness" among school girls of Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds. It also historicizes the emergence of nationalist discourses and traces Canadian government policies that set up exclusionary boundaries around the notion of "Canadian" as a category of identity.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie les façons dont les discours sur l'identité nationale canadienne croisent ceux sur l'équilibre des sexes à travers les yeux de jeunes filles immigrantes ou réfugiées. En particulier les écolières d'origine vietnamienne et chinoise. L'article fait aussi l'historique de la naissance du discours nationaliste et retrace les politiques du gouvernement canadien qui établissent les frontières d'exclusion qui définissent l'idée de "canadien(ne)" en tant que catégorie d'identité.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the ways in which discourses of Canadian national identity intersect with those of gender through the lens of young girls of immigrant and refugee backgrounds. These school girls[1] of Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds from West end Toronto, Ontario, were participants in a school-community programme initiated by their school. When funding for a programme facilitator did not materialize, I, a graduate student, was offered the opportunity to implement the programme on a voluntary basis and given permission to use the research towards my doctoral thesis. I spent two and half years at the school, working with girls in grades five to eight, producing in the first year a magazine and in the second a video. Both products were used as vehicles for an exploration of the complex and textured discourses relating to the girls' relationships to the school, their families and communities. Group discussions, which I often tape-recorded and transcribed, were an integral feature of the two projects. In our discussions the girls returned again and again to the overlapping themes of racism, language, power and their implications for belonging, community, acceptance,

rights and status.

Like the majority of their school mates, the girls come from families who have immigrated to this country. Some of the girls are recent arrivals to Canada. Others, while born overseas, have grown up here. Immigrants, citizens, Canadians - the questions I am asking here are how do these categories organize experience? How do these categories interface with that of race? How do the mappings of citizenship, nationality and race become lived as difference? As subjects of an official government policy of multiculturalism, how do the girls understand the subject positions made available to them through this discourse of multiculturalism?

To understand the girls' construction of Canadian-ness as well as my reading of that construction, another invention of meaning must be explored: that invention of Canada as a nation. Nations are "imagined communities" in the sense that they are systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community (Anderson 1991). As such, however, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind, but are historical and institutional practices through which social difference is invented and performed

(McClintock 1993, 61). A second series of questions must therefore include: What ideologies and racist practices have constituted Canadian identity in the past? What is the nature and impact of racism today? How have the limits of race come to coincide with national frontiers? And what are the contradictory identities that racial differentiation and national belonging chart out? To begin to answer these questions we need to historicize the mappings and re-mappings of geography, ethnicity, race, language and nation.

This mapping out is of paramount importance to my task. For while I use the term invention I am not suggesting that the girls' construction of meanings and understanding of their own positionality within the "nation" of Canada is not without a material and historical basis and very real effect. Rather, I am using the concepts of invention or imagined to underscore the socially and politically constructed character of the categories "Canada" and "Canadian."

The concept of "constructed" selves is adopted from Foucault's "ethical" investigations. One aspect of Foucault's ethics emphasizes the active construction of self by oneself, within a negotiating field of power relations. Foucault observed that in the constitution of one's identity, "these practices are ... not something that the individual invents by himself [sic]. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group" (11). To claim that one can construct oneself within a set of historically defined discourses is not, then, to assert that we can be anything we want to be. Rather, one's sense of self, expressed as racial, gendered, classed or nationed identity, will always be situated within parameters, a space of meanings that is already socially established.

I am working with the assumption that the girls have developed their ideas about race and nation within their everyday experiences. These experiences are socially organized, determined by social processes that extend beyond the scope of everyday experience (Rizvi 1993, 126). That is, the girls' social construction of race and nation takes shape within the social relations inherent in the

broader discourses and practices that express racialized national identity in Canadian society.

I wish to explore here three central theoretical issues. First, any knowledge claims I may make are inherently partial, necessarily situated and always in process. They are partial, as James Clifford has argued, because there is always an element of making up or fiction to all cultural and historical truths (7). Second, the partiality of knowledge claims is also related to their positionings. When I ask, therefore, about the charting of national boundaries, language and racial differentiation, my understanding must necessarily take into account my own socially established locations on this map. In referring to my meaning making as a reading, I am recognizing the embodied nature and social constructedness of my "vision" as researcher. My position as observer requires me to explore the relationship between myself and "my" subjects. In seeking to understand my reading of the girls' meaning making I must also take into account how I am both constructing and being constructed by the girls in our interactions. This involves, as Haraway suggests, a questioning of "how to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field?" (587). Vision is therefore always a question of the power to see - and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices (585).

A third issue concerns the status of knowledge-making as a rational process. While I may write about both the girls' meaning making of Canadian-ness and my reading of that meaning as though it is tangible and fixed, we must be aware that knowledge and understanding are constantly in process of formation and transformation.

THEORIZING RACE AS NATION

Nation has both a conceptual and social history intersecting with that of race. According to David Goldberg, the sense of nation was originally used in the fourteenth century to refer to those claimed to be of common birth or extended family (78). By 1600 the conceptual convergence of nation

and race was evident in the definition of race in the Oxford English Dictionary: "a tribe, nation or people considered of common stock" (63). During the Enlightenment the almost synonymous usage of the terms race and nation was further entrenched. For example, Goldberg points out, western Europeans were classified on a hierarchical scale moving upward from dark-skinned and passionate southern Europeans to fair-skinned and rational Northerners (30). According to Cedric Robinson, this stress on differentiation coincided with the rise of capitalism in Europe. "The tendency of European civilisation through capitalism," he writes, "was thus not to homogenise but to differentiate - to exaggerate regional, subcultural, dialectical differences into 'racial' ones" (Robinson 1979, 162 in Lawrence 1982).

Traces of this philosophy can be found in writings characterizing Canadian national identity from the last century to the present. For example, leaders of the Canada First movement, an imperial nationalist group established in 1868, wrote at length about the northern climate and icy land that, in their view, provided the core strength and spirit of Canada. Drawing on the dominant social Darwinist and Romantic ideas of the day, George Parkin maintained that the severity of the Canadian climate would ensure national vigour, order and strength. In the 1980s, Pierre Berton, a well known Canadian nationalist, distinguished Canadians from Americans in a similar way: "...there are cool nations and hot nations and ... this is not entirely a matter of climate....We are very much an indoor people, a closed-door people, a diffident people because we are a northern people; and, as a pioneer country, we attracted other northern peoples, Scots, Scandinavians, Slavs, Northern Irish..." (84).

The conceptual and social history of race and nation continue to intersect in important ways, such that discourses of race and nation are never very far apart (Balibar 1991, 37). In fact, they may overlap to such an extent that the distinction between nation, race and ethnic groups are not always clear. Communities which have been called national at one point in time or in one country, have been called ethnic and/or racial at other times. While each collectivity has to be analyzed in an

historically specific manner, all of them reflect ideological processes by which people are divided into collectivities or communities. Exclusionary / inclusionary boundaries form the collectivity, dividing the world into "us" and "them." But though the constructs are ideological, they involve real material practices and therefore have material origins and effects. Often there is a myth of a common origin or a common fate, so that membership of the collectivity is normally obtained through birth (Yuval-Davis 1986, 92).

ERASING RACE: MULTICULTURALISM AND DISCOURSES OF CANADIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

How is Canada's official government policy of multiculturalism - a policy devised to invent an image, a national face - understood and lived? In what ways does the concept of multiculturalism interface with the Toronto schoolgirls' understanding of the possibilities for their own nationed subject positions? If the policy was designed so that "members of different ethnic communities are able to retain their ethnic identity, and yet participate to the full in national life" (Smith 1975, 105 in Itwaru 1990, 16), how is it that the girls cannot find themselves pictured in the nation's image of its citizenry?

Breton writes that one of the objectives of Canada's official multiculturalism policy is to affirm symbolically that Canadian society is open to all cultural identities and recognizes all of them as equal (49). The policy was intended as another element in the inventing of Canada, as is suggested by the following excerpt from Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's statement to the House of Commons in 1971:

> A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal

sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all. (Canada, House of Commons 1971, 8545)

It was in a context shaped by ethnically and linguistically sensitive issues that the notion of a multicultural ideal for Canadian society entered the public domain. It appears that the government saw multiculturalism as a means of managing the potential conflicts of a multi-ethnic society as well as competing national claims by other groups such as Quebecois and Aboriginal peoples. Such a strategy is based on the construction of community through a celebration of differences, which are then subsumed into an imagined community of national cohesion. The policy, a repeated national self-statement attesting to the complete acceptance of the immigrant, is in fact an idealization of reality (Itwaru 1990, 16). That it has not resulted in a society where there is "fair play for all" is reflected in the following observations by LeLy made within the context of a group discussion on the racial dynamics within her school:

> LeLy: Even [if] you took a Chinese and a Canadian - like comparing? And you ask those people they'll say that - even they're Chinese - they're saying that the Canadian people is better.
> Marnina: Do you think that?
> LeLy: Yeah.
> Marnina: That Canadian is better?
> LeLy: No, I don't think that - inside I don't have sexism/racism - but I just think that - I don't know.

While the policy's stated objective was the incorporation of the ethnic groups into the cultural/symbolic fabric of Canadian society, it ignored or downplayed the unequal power relations in Canada, which are here recognized by LeLy. Those claiming anglo identity clearly still have hegemonic control over the cultural, political, social and economic fields. Those who differ from the "figure in dominance" find themselves marginalized - not there, or visible only as negative examples - and afforded only a particularly disembodied place within the socially legitimate polity, the nation (Young 1987, 63).

As the makers of ethnic ascription, those claiming anglo identity have projected ethnicity onto others and thereby naturalized their own as generically Canadian. Thus, while multiculturalism may be a celebration of difference it is also a fossilization or romanticization of immigrant culture. Despite multiculturalism's declarations of its relevance to all Canadians, it has done little to disrupt the normative notion of Canadian identity.

Himani Bannerji writes about living on the margins of the normative image of Canada - the distortions, limitations, and suppressions of one's sense of identity. In a story called "The Other Family" a young East Indian child's drawing of a "typical" (white) Canadian family provokes this response:

> Listen, said the mother, this is not your family. I, you and your father are dark-skinned, dark-haired. I don't have a blond wig hidden in my closet, my eyes are black, not blue, and your father's beard is black, not red, and you, do you have a white skin, a button nose with freckles, blue eyes and blond hair tied into a pony tail? You said you drew our family. This is not it, is it?   (1990)

Canada's multiculturalism policy was based on the recognition that the public character of the nation could no longer be represented as primarily British or exclusively bicultural. However, as we shall see, the girls' sense of exclusion from the community of the Canadian nation suggests that the re-invention of Canada as a multicultural society has not been entirely successful. The policy recognizes difference in the realm of the cultural, but otherwise denies that race

is a meaningful category. The policy has done little to untie the limits of race with those of national boundaries. For although Canada is a multi-racial society, it is still a long way from being a multi-racial nation.

EXCLUSIONS/INCLUSIONS: CANADIANS AND CANADIAN CITIZENS

One of the most prominent mythologies surrounding debates about Canadian national identity is the absence of one. And yet, the girls who spoke to me seemed to have a very clear sense of who was and was not a Canadian. The categories of understanding articulated by the girls are socially organized, not randomly arrived at, and related to broader discourses and practices that express national identity in Canadian society. They are also related to structural, historical and political issues and are linked to a number of different Canadian government policies (for example, policies on immigration, refugees, and multiculturalism). Furthermore, the social consequences of these categories have material effects that are intensely and painfully felt by the girls, who talk about the rights and privileges, restrictions and constraints of living within or outside the collective boundaries of their conceptualization of the Canadian nation.

The discourses around Canadian national identity, both those that lament an absence of any standard of Canadian-ness, and those that proclaim it in ringing declarations of nationhood, draw on a number of themes interrelating unity, diversity and geography. Many of the explanations for both the lack of or need for a distinctive identity stem from the tensions derived from, on one hand, Canada's political and colonial ties to Britain, and on the other hand, its physical proximity to the United States. My purpose here, however, is to discuss the ways in which this discourse might be used to minimize the specificities of nationalism and ideologies of national identity and divert attention from analysis of the political processes by which national and social identities have been aligned.

The 1970s was a period in Canadian history that saw the long term repercussions of the loosening of imperial ties with Britain, the rise of a nationalist movement in Quebec, an influx of American draft dodgers and academics, as well as a new wave of immigration that included people of non-white and non-european backgrounds. The themes of unity and diversity took on new meanings as the federal government sought to keep Quebec within the federation while having to recognize its distinct linguistic and cultural character. This tension is evident in the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which reaffirmed the invention of Canada as consisting of two founding nations. As a consequence, the non-British and non-French segments of the society were left at the margin of the identity system being redefined (Breton 1986, 49). To appease these "minorities," the government added a policy of multiculturalism to the bilingual framework being created.

Coined in the 1970s, the term "Canadian mosaic" offered those seeking to differentiate Canadian identity from that of the American a means for doing so. Nationalists drew contrasts between the Canadian mosaic and the American melting pot, which reflected their concern over American influence in cultural, economic, political and intellectual realms of the country and the large numbers of Americans settling in the country, particularly those filling up Canadian universities (Bashevkin 1991, 12). While some celebrated this distinction, others feared that too much diversity would hinder the development of a distinct and unified identity, thus enabling further Americanization (Horowitz 1972). While I am not suggesting that the concerns raised by such nationalist authors are not legitimate, I do wonder about how and why this view that Canadian national identity lacked any content could be so popular at a time when the policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism were taking shape. What purposes might this notion have served? What was being erased or suppressed as a result? Perhaps some of the answers to these questions can begin to be found in the girls' understandings of what "Canadian" means.

I first became interested in issues of Canadian national identity when I noticed that the girls with whom I spoke drew distinctions between

Canadians and Canadian citizens. I asked what the difference between the two meant to them:

> LeLy: Canadians are original Canadians - like English.
> Marnina: And Canadian citizens?
> LeLy: You have to live here for five years and then you get your papers - I'm not a Canadian citizen.
> Trinh: I'm a Canadian citizen.
> Marnina: Would you say you're a Canadian too?
> Trinh: No - I'm half Chinese and half Vietnamese.

Their understandings of "Canadian-ness" reflect a melange of classifications based on legal statuses (as a result of immigration policy), race and ethnicity. It seems that in their conceptualization, one can move from the category immigrant to Canadian citizen with the proper paperwork; identities in the name of which social subjectivities express themselves are sedimented in the language of the law (Goldberg 1993, 76). However, beyond the law the category Canadian is reserved for "original" Canadians, that is the English. There are, I would suggest, at least two interrelated obstructions operating here. There is the sense that as immigrants they are a particular kind of "other." As Itwaru writes:

> The stranger categorized in the name and label "immigrant" is already invented as "immigrant," a distinctiveness which is also anonymous, upon arrival. This person is no longer only the bearer of another history, but has now become a particular other, the bearer of a label invented by the "host." This person has become the immigrant - this term of depersonalization which will brand her and him for the rest of their lives in the country of their adoption. (14)

However, it is more than just the label immigrant that acts as a barrier to inclusion. As Trinh later observed, "there may not always be a

difference [between 'Canadians' and 'Canadian citizens'], but you'll never look the same as the Canadians." Her impression, then, is that racial difference is a constraint that will always mark her outside the prevailing category of Canadian. "Original" Canadians are English; by contrast, Vietnamese and Chinese Canadians, no matter what their legal status might be, will always be marked by their racial and ethnic difference. As they seek to locate themselves within the discourses of Canadian nationalism, the girls' construction and development of their racial and national identity are linked both to the way they are viewed and to their own processes of self-representation. Their understanding of the racial boundaries of inclusion/exclusion to the nation, and the limitations this poses for them, is further articulated in the following discussion of Audre Lorde's story, "The Last Summer of My Childhood was White:"

> LeLy: It's not fair.
> Trinh: Because we never make fun of the white, "oh, you're white - you're like the sun or something."
> LeLy: Why do they make fun of us?
> Marnina: Why do you think you don't make fun of whites?
> LeLy: Because, I don't know, they're Canadian.
> Marnina: And what does that mean?
> Trinh: We can't do anything -
> LeLy: We can't do anything to that person, that's their country.
> Marnina: But Trinh you're Canadian.
> Chantrea: Yeah, she's a Canadian citizen but she's not Canadian.

Here, once again, "Canadian" is defined by race; a Canadian is white. This definition leaves these girls outside the nation's border. They express a certain powerlessness when it comes to ways of contesting this definition and the exclusion it engenders (Yeatman 1993). There is also a gendered dynamic at play. That is, in claiming to have no effective way of responding to the racist teasing of their school mates, the girls also seem to invoke a particular discourse of femininity that

seems to magnify the sense of powerlessness. This linking of discourses of femininity with those of race and nationality is suggestive of the ways in which nationality is always also a deeply gendered construction (Molloy 1995, 105).

In order for individuals to feel that they belong in society, that the society is their society, writes Raymond Breton, "there must be a certain degree of consistency between their private identities and the symbolic contents upheld by public authorities" (30). The discrepancy between the girls' imagining of what a Canadian is and their imagining of what they are or might become, seems to be related not only to symbolic but also material and social relations. I return here to the question posed earlier: what are some of the ideologies and racist practices that have constituted Canadian identity in the past? It is perhaps in looking to the past that we might begin to find some explanations for the girls' differentiation between Canadians and Canadian citizens. An obvious place to start is Canadian immigration policy.

From the 1880s to the 1960s, successive national governments employed widely varied strategies to limit Asian, Black and Jewish immigration (Carty and Ward 1986, 68). The policies were not only racist but also sexist. For example, turn-of-the-century Canadian immigration regulations denied entry to South Asian women, who were not allowed to join husbands who had arrived in Canada by way of the Far East. Furthermore, there was a general ban on South Asian immigration between 1909 and 1947 (Ghosh 1987, 328). Similar restrictions were placed on Chinese women who were not allowed to accompany their husbands, who had been brought into Canada through an indentured labour system to build the national railway (Ng 1993, 55). Prime Minister MacKenzie King's government policy of "deporting" Canadians born of Japanese ancestry in 1945 and 1946 was also a clear indication of prevailing assumptions about Canadian citizenship. The result was that before the advent of colour blind admission requirements in 1967, the proportion of non-whites in the Canadian population was by conscious design extremely small (Carty and Ward 1986, 68).

The racial, ethnic and class preferences of successive governments have been as evident in their recruitment programmes as in their exclusion policies. Policy-makers sought both to exclude non-white women (and the children they might produce) from entering the country, and to attract single working-class women from Europe, especially the British Isles. According to historian Barbara Roberts, women reformers of the ruling class in England and the new colony organized the early movements of British women. These immigrationists often spoke of themselves as empire builders. Their aim was to build a Canada "founded upon the moral, patriotic and racial influence (and unpaid labour) of British wives and mothers in Canadian homes" (Roberts 1990, 111 in Ng 1993, 55). Until the 1960s most policies encouraging migration reflected the assumption that northwestern Europeans and Americans of like descent made the best prospective citizens (Carty and Ward 1986, 68).

What is being deployed here is a typical nation-building narrative. A fiction of common heritage is being written by which these immigrants and some of those already settled in the country are deemed to be of the same lineage. The reliance on the iconography of familial relations is frequently used to narrate a nation (McClintock 1993, 62). While McClintock argues that in part, the trope of the family offers an indispensable figure for sanctioning social hierarchy as natural, it also seems to naturalize the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. It works to authorize and rationalize the nation's attempt to construct "cultural homogeneity." The image of the family also helps to smooth over an inherent contradiction of nation building, one that Denise Kandiyoti (1991, 430) has called the modern janus.

Racism, then, pivots on the exclusion of certain groups from the imagined community or family of the nation, such that the contradictions around citizenship remain important constituents of the political field. They provide an important point of entry into the nation's sense of self (Gilroy 1987, 50). The characteristics that were drawn up to constitute the Canadian nation were implicitly racialized. Even though there were non-whites

present - Aboriginal peoples, black communities in the East, Chinese labourers and others - the nation's sense of itself was of a homogenous, white, Northern, European people.

This fashioning of national identity involved a suppression of knowledge. What had to be suppressed were the differences between and among those European peoples that were said to make up the nation. Also ignored were the four nations (or principal ethnic groups) that constitute the "British" nation state (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morrissey 1992, 8). This conceptualization of national identity is able to displace or dominate the equally lived and formed identities that are based on class, gender, language, region, age, etc. Finally, the naturalization of Canada as a white nation involves a suppression of knowledge about the overt efforts made by government authorities to limit the numbers of non-white citizens, as well as the brutal colonial activity directed against Aboriginal peoples. Racism seems to be operating as an instrument for securing social solidarity. By drawing the boundaries of the nation in an exclusionary way, racism creates an "imagined community," drawing people together through affective links which transcend conflicting socio-economic and political interests.

IMAGINING CANADA: LANGUAGE, RACE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The way in which issues of language, race and national identity are bound together in the girls' talk first became intelligible to me in a discussion we had about teen magazines and the models found in them. In an attempt to introduce a discourse of race to our discussions, I noted that the models were white. The girls, however, offered a more specific definition of the models:

> Marnina: So, they're white people eh? All the models?
>
> ...
>
> Tammy: They're mostly English people. I think most English people are models. Most of them are English models.

In choosing to use English as a category to describe the models, Tammy's observation demonstrates how English as a category may conflate the categories of language with those of race and possibly nationality. Furthermore, just as English seemed to be the category that the girls assigned to designate white North American English speakers in subsequent discussions, they referred to themselves as Vietnamese, Chinese and Asian; that is, in interchangeable terms of language, nationality and race. Although Tammy, like the other group members, speaks fluent English, she does not include herself as a member of the community of people she considers English people. Although these girls share with many white North Americans the English language, they nevertheless used "English"as a signifier of difference. In their talk it seems to stand in for the marked category of race.

Language has played an integral role in the imagining of the nationalist project in Canada. Canada's present understanding of itself as a society composed of two languages and many cultures is both a souvenir and an erasure. It is a reminder of the historic struggle between the English and the French that was perceived by themselves as the struggle between two races (Ng 1993), and as members of the nations competing for hegemonic control over the geographic territory that was to become the country Canada. At the same time it obliterates the presence of the several hundred languages spoken by the aboriginal groups that peopled the same geographic space prior to the arrival of either the English or the French.

The hegemonic control the British were able to achieve in the new colony has left its historic traces in the economic, social and political structures of this country. It is these structures that organize national ideology and the material and symbolic order. There is no doubt that the creation of a national ideology is part of the political process of establishing a nation. While there are many characteristics a new nation state might be seen as having, only some of them prevail. The question of which national characteristics prevail depends on the balance of social forces within this process. Those who have the power to create and rule a

nation state have the most influence in defining the "national character" (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morrissey 1992, 6). The understanding of what it means to be Canadian is in fact tightly bound to the culture and language of the British colonial project.

This association of English with Canadian-ness was made by earlier generations of immigrants; for example, poet Miriam Waddington: "Then, as now, I felt an outsider as far as English Canadians were concerned. The message that had come through to me in public school in Winnipeg, and again in high school in Ottawa, was that to be a Canadian was to be English, to have your mother in the IODE and your father in the Rotarians" (1989, 40).

This way of imagining Canada as a nation composed of two languages and cultures gained new support in the 1960s. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was a nation-building project designed to identify all Canadians; it designated all citizens according to language preference, as either Anglophone or Francophone (Jenson 1993, 341). This move left undesignated and therefore outside the boundaries of the nation those citizens - that is, immigrants and their children - whose first language is neither English nor French. This relationship between English, nation and power is recognized by the girls in the following exchange:

> Marnina: Are there differences in the way you feel when you're speaking English compared to the other languages you speak?
> LeLy: When you're speaking English, it makes you feel more powerful like you live in Canada and you're Canadian and you speak other languages. People always put you down when you speak Chinese.

The somewhat contradictory suggestion being made here is that being Canadian also has a performative element to it, that is, by speaking English, LeLy too can be Canadian. The implication is that language is integral to a system of hierarchial social relations. In speaking Chinese LeLy is at risk of being put down. That this is partially a result of colonial relations of power is inferred by LeLy at another point in our discussion:

> LeLy: Well, I just don't know. It's my family. Like because we used to live in Vietnam and those people don't speak English? And when someone comes from the other country? you think that Wow! that person is so famous or something like that just because they speak English and come from another country and stuff like that right? I see that since I was small and then when I grow up I think that you speak English you make yourself more powerful and stuff like that? And I don't know it's just because my country, or my family or my friends.

This observation raises the issue of cultural conversion through the linguistic medium. The pressure on the non-English speaking immigrant in anglophone Canada to communicate in English indicates the state of English as the cultural medium of social power in anglo Canada. It is in this language that the symbols of power and prestige are transmitted (Itwaru 1990, 14). It is only practical and reasonable that an immigrant should learn the adopted country's language. But what happens to the person who lives a life of language bifurcation? That a splitting or dividing occurs is again alluded to by LeLy who says: "I would say I usually talk those things kind of - I know more Chinese than those words right? Some special word I know Chinese - like to share my feelings out? I talk Chinese it's more easier for me to talk than English."

"The possession of two languages," Memmi says, "is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participation in two physical and cultural realms." The linguistic dichotomy is a dichotomy of consciousness. Memmi goes on to add that the immigrant's mother tongue is "that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expresses, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is least valued" (107).

Memmi is talking about language in the context of colonial realities, but there are similarities between the situation Memmi describes and the case at hand. The speaker, Lely, faces a dominant cultural force different from her own culture and language; the linguistic dichotomy she confronts has serious implications. As Itwaru notes, the great irony is that "despite the reverberant national self-statements pertaining to the acceptance of the immigrant as part of the main-stream Canadian culture - the immigrant in effect remains the 'immigrant', the outsider" (1990,15).

The prevailing notion of who is a Canadian still seems to be lodged in Berton's notion of a northern people, a people who share British ancestry. When I asked the girls "When you think of who a Canadian is, what do you think of?", they offered a succinct response:

> LeLy: Blond.
> Trinh: English.
> LeLy: I think there's three things that make a Canadian - blond, English and white.

ENDNOTE

1. In this paper I shall refer to my subjects as "girls."

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