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ÉMILIE OUIMET, RACE AND READING NATIONAL NARRATIVES

by

Helle-Mai Lenk

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Emilie Ouimet, Race and Reading National Narratives

Master of Arts, 1998

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This thesis offers a critical reading of the narratives of Quebec nationalism. It focuses on a central public moment in which a young schoolgirl wearing the Islamic headscarf or hijab was prohibited from attending school. Reading this incident first as a moment of racism, the study then progresses to an exploration of how a racial hierarchy underpins Quebec’s national narrative. Finally, in the last chapter, it explores how the narrative is also gendered and thus how the body of the Muslim woman (as symbolized by the wearing of hijab) must be read in order for a coherent story of nation to be told. The thesis demonstrates the multilayered hegemonies of national narratives—that is, how national narratives depend on a race and gender hierarchy. It is only through uncovering how such hierarchies are established that we can begin to contest them.
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INTRODUCTION

As in virtually all of this nation's great debates, nonwhites and women figure prominently, although their presence may be disguised, denied or obliterated. - Toni Morrison (1992:xix)

In September 1994, on the first day of the school year, Émilie Ouimet, a Montreal high school student, was sent home for wearing an Islamic headscarf or hijab, a mode of apparel which allegedly contravened the school's dress code. This incident unleashed a considerable public debate. For several months, in newspapers and on public airwaves, in organisations and in polls, opinions were expressed and expounded on topics ranging from the role of religion in schools and individual rights to the status of women and the integrity of national identity. Although the name of Émilie Ouimet may have faded from public memory, the "issue" of Muslim women has not. It continues to spawn a veritable industry of discursive activity, not only a never-ending spate of articles both academic and popular but also a book-length essay, a novel, at last count four documentary films and most recently a song.¹

What are we to make of all this? Is this yet another manifestation of the obsessive fascination the West has had with Muslim women for well over two centuries since it first established its presence in the Middle East and North Africa? But if this is at least partly so, why is there this surge of

¹See, for example, articles by Pétrowski, Tahon, Turenne; Yolande Geadah's Femmes voilées, intégrismes démasqués; Anne Claire's Chador; films by Bélanger and Émond, Rached, Carré, Tlili; and Céline Dion's "Zora sourit."
interest at this time and in this place?

This study offers a reading of the initial Émilie Ouimet incident and attempts to make sense of its voluminous aftermath by placing it in the sociopolitical context of contemporary Quebec. If it has an antecedent, it would be the 1992 collection of essays edited by Toni Morrison *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power*. In it, she and 18 other contributors explore the events surrounding the testimony of Anita Hill at the Senate hearings on the confirmation of Clarence Thomas as Supreme Court Justice. Although I do not for a moment equate the significance of these two events, what I would like to underline is their capacity to define the societies in which they occurred. As Morrison puts it, "[i]n addition to what was taking place, something was happening" (1992:x). I will propose that the disproportionate attention directed to the Émilie Ouimet incident was caused by more than the appearance of a hijab-wearing student at a Montreal high school. Rather what was being evidenced was a tension and uncertainty arising out of the urgent need to make sense of an incident for which the pre-existing narratives of a culture seemed not to work. With her patronymic, it was taken for granted that Émilie Ouimet would be a Québécoise "de souche," that is, one who descended "from the 60,000 [white, French-speaking] inhabitants who lived in the French colony (New France) at the time of the 1760 Conquest and who constituted 'une nation bien caractérisée'" (Salée 1997:8)--namely,
French, Roman Catholic and white. That she could be "de souche" and Muslim was, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, a mélange previously unrecognized in the glossary of Quebec national tropes. The content and imagery of the Émilie Ouimet story could not be absorbed into the dominant Québécois' one: it was at one and the same time its disruption and its essential counterpart. Émilie Ouimet, "white but not quite," to use Homi Bhabha's phrase, was the very embodiment of contemporary Quebec's worst anxieties: the fear of miscegenation and "disappearance." And yet it is only by acknowledging the Émilie Ouimets chez nous, that is, the realities of cultural pluralism and diversity, does the Québécois national project have any hope of coming to fruition.

It is, therefore, the richness of this actuality, the fact that it resonates with urgent social contests and concrete political issues, that interests me. As Toni Morrison again points out, in order to gain any real insight into an event such as this, "multiple points of address and analysis" (1992:xii) are imperative. To do otherwise would be to negate its complexity. Thus, what I will attempt is a series of hermeneutic detours that will get more complicated and, I hope, also more significant with each round. Although gender has been the privileged theoretical lens through which Muslim

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2Following both government discourse and perceptions that are widely expressed in the larger population, for the purposes of this study, "Québécois(e)" will refer to the French-speaking majority in Quebec (Elmer and Abramson 1997).
women have been viewed, the veil being the most noticeable marker of contemporary Islamic identity, I will not take gender as my point of departure. I will argue that the Émilie Ouimet story can only be adequately understood, on the one hand, by taking into account the constructs of nation, in which women have an edificatory role, and, on the other, by showing how race informs women's relation to nationalism. By not foregrounding gender, I aim not only to trouble its hegemonic theoretical appeal but also to destabilize the unified subject that the term "Muslim woman" has come to connote. It is only through an awareness of the intersecting discourses of gender, race and nation that one can arrive at an understanding of the significance of the Émilie Ouimet incident which responds to the political exigencies of the present.

If, therefore, in the first chapter I undertake a close textual reading of the news discourse surrounding the Émilie Ouimet incident, it is to show not only how race and racism become articulated within these discourses but also how those articulations in turn attend to different political projects relating to nationalism. Although Émilie Ouimet is a white, so-called "Québécoise de souche," she gets racialized because she chose to adopt cultural values and behaviour seen by some as antithetical to what constitutes the Québécois nation.

In the second chapter, I continue the textual reading. I extrapolate from that event, using the imagery of the Émilie
Ouimet story to evoke a salient metaphor of Quebec nationalist discourse, the "nègre blanc." The category of "not-yet-white" is one into which Québécois have been slotted but it is also one which they have actively sought. Comparisons between French-Canadians and blacks enabled Québécois to see themselves as similar in exploitation but only at the expense of ignoring their own oppressed populations. Looking at the story of national origins as it is articulated in a Quebec government report on racism, I examine how the metaphoric relationship of race and nation has reflected on Quebec's treatment of real racial "others," including the racialized Émilie Ouimet.

The third chapter introduces gender into what Brackette Williams calls "the race of nationality." By focusing on how feminist documentary filmmakers have taken up the cause of Muslim women, I show, how despite being motivated by a feminist empathy for their "sisters under the skin" (Lewis 1996:14), the same assumptions of white superiority and civilization also almost overwhelmingly structure their work. More specifically, I examine how Quebec feminists use the image of the victimized "Muslim woman" in order to position themselves as fully equal, rights-bearing citizens of the Quebec nation-state, when the notion of Quebec "citizenship" is itself not only a heavily racialized but also an inherently gendered one.

In this thesis, therefore, I will be tracing how a
particular nation, the "nation" of Quebec, is managed and imagined. Although theorizing about "nation" has been ongoing in political and philosophical circles in the West for several centuries, this study situates itself in the context of more recent scholarship linking issues of nation with culture. Benedict Anderson has argued that it is only with the onset of modernity and industrialization and the proliferation of print and literary culture that an imagined "nation" and a sense of belonging evolved. Homi Bhabha has developed Anderson's notion of imagined communities by exploring the question of difference and boundaries within the space of the nation. The notion of a unified, homogeneous community is continually disrupted by its disparate elements, those categories of gender, class and race, among others, that jostle and problematize the nation's boundaries. Bhabha's concern is with the ways the ambivalence of nation is reflected in the language which is used to speak about it, even when that language seeks to represent a unified image of the community. Toni Morrison has looked at how in the United States language and narrative produced a "literary whiteness" through which Americans were able "to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation" (1992:38) of African Americans and invent themselves as a "white" nation. Whites' self-definition as without colour and superior was dependent upon their difference from blackness as something marked and inferior.
In order for the nation to tell a coherent story, it has to be not only racially inflected but also gendered. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have focused on how women constitute and get constituted in relation to the nation in terms of the functions they fill as reproducers of the "race," cultural transmitters and participants in national struggles. They point out as well that women as "markers of collective boundaries and differences" (1989:10) may find themselves in conflictual situations in, for example, struggles against the nation-state. When we read the narratives of nation, we look therefore for the figure of the woman and also the relations among women. In my case, I will be focusing on the figure of the racialized woman, the foil, as it were, to the dominant woman (the "Québécoise de souche").

In all three stages of the inquiry (media discourse, political documents, government-funded documentary film), I rely on a methodology based on deconstruction of texts. The approach that I use will perhaps be closest to what is known as discourse analysis, as practiced most prolifically in the area of race and racism by Teun van Dijk. Van Dijk's research has consistently shown that elites (political, media, educational) play a crucial role in the reproduction of racism by perpetuating stereotypes and prejudice about minority groups. However, because of their privileged access to and control over public discourse, they are able to deny, mitigate and attribute to less powerful classes the paradigms of
racialism which they themselves often manufacture and propagate. By mapping, annotating and analysing the Québécois national project as it articulates through the Émilie Ouimet story, I aim to lay bare inconsistencies between the apparent content of these discourses all of which stress tolerance, equality and pluralism, values that most Canadians and Quebeckers feel are inherent to their national identity, and the often racist undercurrents that inform their articulation.

What do I hope to achieve by all this? If these discourses require a demystificational hermeneutic, it is not only so that we can become less their dupe but also so that we can recognize and further an alternative way of speaking, one that might actually make good on claims to the "moral duties of respect, of tolerance, of solidarity towards one another" (Gouvernement du Québec, 1995). However, as Michel Foucault's whole project has demonstrated, even to imagine certain transformations of a system of knowledge and discourse, one must first expose the rules of its functioning. I, therefore, see my task also as an attempt to demonstrate the potential of a form of "insurgent" educational practice; the analytical tools exemplified here can and need to be learned, taught and popularized (Meijer, 1993). For it is only when we become aware how textual power is wielded, how it rhetorically persuades and seduces, how it produces "common sense", that we can begin to "challenge the dominant ethnic consensus [and] write within an explicitly anti-racist perspective" (van Dijk,
This thesis therefore traces the textual power involved in the production of the Quebec "nation." While my hope is that it alerts us to its hegemonic commitments, I also fear that it will be read as an indictment of Quebec's national project. This is not my intention. Quebec's national project was originally based on a "post-colonial" nationalism; that is, it was born out of a desire to overcome a history of subjugation and attempted assimilation by the English. I recognize this history and have no reason to deny the citizens of Quebec their aspirations. However, as a non-francophone, "not-quite-white" resident of Quebec, I do have a stake in this project not being hegemonic. Let this thesis, therefore, be a provocation and a warning.
CHAPTER ONE
THE CASE OF ÉMILIE OUIMET: NEWS DISCOURSE ON HIJAB AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF QUÉBÉCOIS NATIONAL IDENTITY

La faiblesse des mythes nationalistes réside dans le fait qu’ils ne peuvent tolérer failles ou déviances. C’est parce qu’ils se présentent comme des systèmes totaux qu’ils sont vulnérables à l’opération d’un révélateur stratégiquement bien placé. Ils sont promptement alarmés par des choix et des actes indépendants qui sont pourtant à la portée de tout le monde [...]. - Nadia Khouri (1992:120)

INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 1994, the first day of the school year, a Montreal high school student, was sent home for wearing an Islamic headscarf or hijab, allegedly in contravention of the school’s dress code. This incident unleashed a considerable debate in the Quebec media and the society at large culminating in a report tabled by the Quebec Human Rights Commission.1 In this chapter, I will be examining the degree and range of controversy leading up to this report. For my analysis, I have collected all news reports, editorials, opinion articles and letters to the editor that appeared in three Montreal dailies: the French-language La Presse and Le Devoir and the English-language Gazette as well as the

1See Commission des droits de la personne du Québec (1995). According to a recent report in La Presse, because of budgetary cutbacks as well as internal problems, the Commission has been hearing and ruling on an increasingly reduced caseload over the last few years. Therefore, the very fact that the Commission chose to rule on this issue is indicative of its importance. (Berger, 1995:A4)
Toronto-based national newspaper, The Globe and Mail, over a three-month period immediately following the initial incident. My contention is to show how race and racism become articulated within these news discourses surrounding hijab and how these articulations in turn attend to different political projects relating to nationalism.2

In this endeavour, however, it is not my interest to brand particular journalists or specific newspapers as "racist." Rather, the point that needs to be made is that "racism is a structural and ideological property of white group dominance and therefore characterizes the Press as a whole" (van Dijk, 1991:22). Indeed, an attendant project might look at precisely the ways in which the press works together to forge the idea of "white" superiority, of a European or Western perspective. Étienne Balibar has described how the British and French colonial powers played "their" natives off one another and prided themselves,

in competition with one another, on their particular humaneness, by projecting the image of racism onto the colonial practices of their rivals. French colonization proclaimed itself 'assimilatory', while British colonization saw itself as 'respectful of cultures'. The other White is also the bad White.

(1991:43)

The legacy of this colonial racism is regularly reenacted in

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2Since the European colonial presence in the Middle East and North Africa, Muslim women and their wearing of hijab have often been vital sites of struggle in debates on nationalism and culture. See, for example, Ahmed (1992), Hoodfar (1993) and Lazreg (1994).
the anglophone and francophone press in Canada. When, for example, The Globe and Mail runs an article on its front page entitled "Educators outside Quebec mystified by hijab ban" (Nasrulla, 1994), the implication is that such things can happen only in Quebec and are representative of the peculiar shortsightedness of Quebec society. Similarly, Le Devoir dissimulates the rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Montreal under the headline "Quatre fois moins d'actes antisémites à Montréal qu'à Toronto" (Vear, 1993). By under-reporting racist occurrences closer to their home constituencies, these newspapers divert their readers rather than implicating them in the events described. The social order at home remains unsullied, intact. The groups on whose behalf these concerns are being expressed are reduced to the status of pawns in a contest of asserting "white" sovereignty or, as Balibar quips, which "White nation is spiritually 'the whitest'" (1991:43).

SOME QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

I will start my analysis with a few figures about the frequency and distribution of the hijab coverage in the press.¹ Media attention peaked immediately. Of the 43 articles published by the four newspapers during the three months, no fewer than 22 appeared in September. The number of articles dropped to 14 in October and 7 in November. La Presse and Le Devoir published 15 and 17 articles respectively in

¹See Appendix A which lists the frequencies of the articles by newspaper and type.
three months, whereas The Gazette published 9 and The Globe and Mail only two. This uneven apportioning of coverage suggests a lack of consensus between the French and English press about the newsworthiness of the hijab issue. That La Presse and Le Devoir each published almost twice as many articles as The Gazette may at least partly be explained by the fact that the initial incident occurred in a French-language school in the east-end of Montreal, a largely French-speaking area.

Van Dijk, however, claims that the "distribution of media attention is one of the first hints about a typical press 'panic'" (1988a:220). Therefore, I will argue that the vigorous debate that this incident provoked in the French media was also no doubt fueled by the critical historical juncture through which francophone Quebec society is now passing. The fall of 1994 was a particularly tumultuous time. On September 12, five days after the Émilie Ouimet incident, the provincial elections were narrowly won by the Parti Québécois. As the prospect of an independent Quebec became more of a possibility, media discussion centred increasingly around what is known as "le projet de société." In other

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4The Globe and Mail's paltry output is not altogether indicative of a lack of interest. In the subsequent three-month period (Dec. 1994-Feb. 1995), 9 articles on the hijab issue were published.

5Reference to Quebec's "projet de société" was first made in 1977 in the Charte de la langue française (loi 101) (Gouvernement du Québec, 1977:34). The latest envisagement of Quebec's social project can be found in the document entitled Déclaration de
words, what kind of society does Quebec—the "new" Quebec—want to become? Less prominent but no less partisan were the school board elections held on November 20. In this case, candidates were necessarily divided according to whether or not they supported the deconfessionalization of schools—that is, the replacing of Catholic and Protestant school boards with linguistic ones. As I will show in the following analyses, these key political events figured prominently in the debate surrounding hijab.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to study in detail all 43 articles. I have, therefore, restricted my investigation to two particular areas. In the first instance, I examine what are known as "proper news articles"—that is, those descriptions of news events that are sometimes deemed to be strictly factual or value-free. However, I show that "[i]mplicit opinions can be expressed or signaled even in the most factual news report" (van Dijk, 1988a:124). My corpus consists of the articles that "broke" the Émilie Ouimet story in each of the newspapers. I argue that subsequent reaction was largely fed by these initial accounts, the ways they defined the situation and the prejudices and stereotypes they promulgated. In the second instance, I look at the acknowledged site of opinion-making in newspapers, editorials and more specifically those of the French-language press. I

souveraineté made public by then-premier Jacques Parizeau on September 6, 1995.
show how the particular argumentative strategies employed serve to determine the limits of what is sayable, to crase the political determinants of the press and to produce a consensual position supportive of established power relations.

THE CASE OF ÉMILIE OUIMET:
A Brief Chronology

To understand the analysis reported below, I will give a brief chronological account of the main events related to the Émilie Ouimet story as they appeared in the press:

* September 7, 1994: Twelve-year-old Émilie Ouimet is sent home from Louis-Riel Secondary School in Montreal for wearing an Islamic headscarf, allegedly in contravention of the school’s dress code.

* September 12, 1994: Émilie Ouimet is admitted to Lucien-Pagé Secondary School where wearing hijab is permitted.

* September 13, 1994: The parents’ committee at Louis-Riel Secondary School refuses to put the issue of the school dress code on the agenda of their monthly meeting.

* September 19, 1994: Lorraine Page, the President of the Centrale de l’enseignement du Québec (CEQ), comes out in favour of religious and cultural diversity in Quebec schools, including the wearing of hijab.

* October 25, 1994: Bernard Landry, the Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities, encourages public discussion on the hijab issue and implies that the government may have to intervene.
* November 22, 1994: The St. Jean Baptiste Society unveils a document outlining its views on the conditions of citizenship in a sovereign Quebec. François Lemieux, its president, states that wearing hijab is not compatible with Quebec society.

NEWS STORIES:

"Just the facts"

La Presse broke the Émilie Ouimet story and printed it as a feature article (#1)⁶ by its ethnic affairs reporter on the front page of the September 9 edition, two days after the event. The following day, September 10, both The Gazette (#19) and The Globe and Mail (#22) ran shorter, signed articles on their inside pages citing La Presse as their source. La Presse also continued coverage with a second article (#2). Le Devoir did not take up the story until September 15, more than a week after the initial event (and three days after the provincial elections), and then in a very summary fashion with an unsigned article (#11) on an inside page. The smallest of the four newspapers, Le Devoir’s reticence can partly be explained by its size as well as by the omnipresence of the elections to which it, as the newspaper of the Quebec political élite, devoted extensive coverage. More notably, however, in an editorial on September 7 (Bissonnette, 1994), the day Émilie

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⁶All references indicated by a number sign (#) and a number refer to the 43 core articles retrieved from the four newspapers during the three-month period under study. See Appendix B for a complete numbered list including title, author (if known) and page number arranged by newspaper and date.
Ouimet was asked to leave Louis-Riel Secondary School, *Le Devoir* had endorsed the Parti Québécois in the upcoming elections, elections that it was favoured to win. In all likelihood, *Le Devoir* did not consider it politically propitious to introduce a potentially contentious issue into the campaign, hence its decision to delay coverage until after the elections.⁷

An informal comparison between the articles in *La Presse*, *The Gazette* and *The Globe* reveals important differences in discourse rules and news values even if, as I indicated above, both English papers were dependent on information from *La Presse* for at least part of their coverage. A quick perusal of the content indicates that, on the whole, *La Presse* focused on the main events (approximately 80% of content⁸) albeit, as I will demonstrate below, from a decidedly elite perspective. In *The Gazette* and *The Globe*, although the information about the main event was based on the *La Presse* report, it was presented less prominently (from 30 to 40% of content) and the correspondents provided more political analysis and evaluation. In *The Gazette*, for example, approximately 35% of the article was taken up by discussion of Bill 107, the law

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⁷Curiously enough, after the elections, *Le Devoir* ran two opinion pieces reproving the lack of discussion on issues of immigration and citizenship during the campaign. See Tremblay (1994) and Laidouï (1994) for opposing viewpoints.

⁸The percentages were arrived at informally (by counting the number of paragraphs devoted to each theme) and thus are only meant to be comparative.
designed to bring about non-denominational schooling, and its role in the hijab debate. Most significantly, The Gazette entered the fray with an implicit attack on the government’s position: "Parti Québécois chief Jacques Parizeau has said that a promised commission on the future of Quebec education won’t touch on the role of religion" (#19). The French newspapers only broached the subject of Bill 107 in later opinion articles (#8, #14) and, taking their cue from the government who did not intervene in the hijab debate until more than six weeks after the initial incident, remained silent on its broader sociopolitical implications.

Analysis of News Stories

A discursive analysis of news reports can, of course, be undertaken at many levels. My study of news stories emphasizes news schemata. In the following sections, I analyse the use of two structural news characteristics, headlines and quotations, in the reports of La Presse, The Gazette and The Globe and Mail.

HEADLINES

As van Dijk has often pointed out, headlines have special relevance in news discourse (1988b, 1991:50-70). In my analysis of the initial reactions to the Émilie Ouimet story, I concentrate on the ideological implications of headlines—that is, the sociopolitical position from which the news events are defined:

Since [headlines] express the most
important information about a news event, they may bias the understanding process: they summarize what, according to the journalist [or the editor], is the most important aspect, and such a summary necessarily implies an opinion or a specific perspective on the events. (van Dijk, 1991:51)

A cursory glance at the headlines of the three newspapers that chose to report on the initial incident concerning Émilie Ouimet reveals how each formulation has defined the situation differently:

* Élève expulsée de son école parce qu'elle portait le foulard islamique (La Presse, Sept. 9)
* Montreal principal denounced for ousting teen in Islamic garb (The Globe and Mail, Sept. 10)
* Hijab ban at Louis Riel fuels debate about religious expression in schools (The Gazette, Sept. 10)

In its headline, La Presse places the victim first in the sentence, thereby dissimulating the identity of the perpetrator of the action, the principal. In the text, however, Émilie Ouimet—the "élève expulsée"—is not interviewed; in fact, as we shall see, the principal of the school is the most oft-quoted personage and it is largely his perspective that informs the article. The Globe and Mail, on the other hand, chooses to inculpate the principal. He is identified near the beginning of the headline and burdened with two negative predicates; not only is he being "denounced" but he also bears the responsibility of "ouusting." In
addition, he is quite prominently from "Montreal." The Gazette alone displays a broader preoccupation. By choosing the nominalization "hijab ban", it deflects attention away from individual blame and focuses instead on the social consequences of this incident. It acknowledges that we are in no way dealing with an exceptional occurrence but rather a form of structural discrimination that requires the input of society as a whole, hence a "debate about religious expression."

QUOTATIONS

According to van Dijk, one of the most important functions of quotations in news reports is to "allow the insertion of subjective interpretations, explanations, or opinions about current news events, without breaking the ideological rule that requires the separation of facts from opinions" (van Dijk, 1991:152). Therefore, one can say, that those people or groups whose descriptions, interpretations and opinions are routinely embedded in news accounts are probably also those whose ideology most closely resembles that of the reporter or newspaper in question. Not all sources are equally credible. When La Presse reporter François Berger, for

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Two other non-Quebec newspapers also chose to run the hijab story on September 10. Interestingly enough, unlike The Globe and Mail, neither The Calgary Herald ("Girl sent home for wearing Islamic dress") nor The Vancouver Sun ("Muslim pupil sent home for wearing traditional head covering") felt the location of the story warranted prominent display in the headlines. The Globe and Mail, as I noted in my Introduction, has taken a particularly self-righteous stance around the issue of hijab and Quebec.
example, seeks out information about the Émilie Ouimet story, he finds it not in the person of Émilie herself whose credibility he effectively diminishes by frequent use of the epithets "jeune" and "petite." Rather he quotes at length Émilie's principal, the very person responsible for removing her from the school, but nonetheless a figure of greater authority because of his position, age and gender and therefore a seemingly more reliable source.

The only instance when François Berger does quote anyone on Émilie's "turf", it is her mother in the second La Presse article. However, Mme Ouimet's words come after her person has already been rendered suspect in the previous day's article. There, she is wrongly identified as a recent Muslim convert and it is implied that she has imposed this predicament on her hapless daughter: "La mère d'Émilie, Mme Henriette Ouimet, nouvellement convertie à la religion musulmane, avait envoyé sa fille à l'école en mouhajjaba (femme musulmane portant le voile)..." Not only do The Gazette and The Globe both pick up this erroneous piece of information and include it in their initial coverage, but the latter chooses to elaborate on the fictions: "Émilie Ouimet's parents [!] refuse to allow her to return to the Louis-Riel school because they obey the sharia...". In the second La Presse article, the information is corrected: Mme Ouimet is not

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10. In The Gazette, Émilie is qualified as a "13-year-old." The Globe describes her as a "teen" or "teen-ager."
Muslim but respects the choice her daughter has made following the example of her aunt and her cousin. Not surprisingly, unlike La Presse, neither The Gazette nor The Globe take the trouble to communicate these precisions to their readers. It is easier to reinforce stereotype—that is, to continue to demonize Islam (as a coercive religion)—than attempt to unravel the complexities of an incident for which prevailing explanations do not work.

*La Presse* nonetheless does make a semblance of seeking out the opinion of Mme Ouimet. Her very real concerns about the taunting her daughter received on the first day of school ("Are you afraid of being raped?") are included in the second day’s article. Van Dijk, however, has observed that, in cases of discrimination or racism, when negative actions of élite groups are involved, the opinions of the victims, if heard at all, are usually "followed by 'independent' (that is, white) sources that soften or deny these accusations." (1991:154)

Thus, although the journalist François Berger does seek out the opinion of Mme Ouimet, her concerns are undercut by the accompanying remarks, a reiteration of the principal’s views from the previous day’s article:

Mme Henriette Ouimet, la mère d'Émilie, dit hier à *La Presse* que sa fille s'était fait apostropher, à la rentrée des classes mercredi, par des jeunes qui lui auraient demandé: <<As-tu peur de te faire violer?>> La tenue islamique risque de <<marginaliser>> l'élève, a expliqué pour sa part le directeur de l'école Louis-Riel, M. Normand Doré. (#2)
What Berger is saying here is that, in effect, the principal's analysis of the situation has proved correct. The situation that he feared—that is, the marginalization of Émilie—has indeed occurred and, according to him, Émilie has only herself to blame. Van Dijk claims "the move of reversing the blame by attributing it to the opponent [is] part of a well-used strategy of 'blaming the victim'" (1991:192). By asserting that Émilie herself has acted in such a way that prejudice or unfair treatment is justified, the principal deflects attention away from the aggressive behaviour of his students and renders unproblematic his own inaction in that regard. François Berger, by choosing to highlight the principal's views, is thus able to insert, at a crucial point in his text, what he obviously considers a relevant opinion statement without, however, being held responsible for its content. Meanwhile, the underlying beliefs and ideologies that promoted the discriminatory actions of both the principal and the students remain unexamined and unchallenged.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\)La Presse is the only one of the four newspapers who had its ethnic affairs reporter cover the Émilie Ouimet story. It is also the paper that reported it most consistently. Nonetheless, one cannot accuse François Berger of oversensitivity to the ethnic viewpoint. Reporting on the parents' meeting at Louis-Riel school, he explains that "l'expulsion de la jeune musulmane Émilie Ouimet a provoqué un ramdam [my emphasis]" (#4). Here, in a seemingly banal turn of phrase, he perpetuates the contempt for Ramadan, Islam's holiest month, as first articulated by the French colonizers in Algeria. According to Gallimard's Trésor de la langue française. Dictionnaire de la langue du XIXe et du XXe siècle (1789-1960), the expression "provoquer un ramdam" was introduced into French from the Arabic around 1890 by French soldiers in the Algerian army: "[L]e sens du mot en français vient du fait que l'aspect le plus caractéristique du ramadan,
In both The Gazette and The Globe, minority opinions are more prominently engaged. In my informal content analysis, I found that whereas La Presse devoted little more than 8% coverage to dissenting views, critical reactions from ethnic, human rights and anti-racist groups comprised 32% of the content in The Gazette and 27% in The Globe. In both La Presse and The Gazette, negative reactions to Émilie Ouimet’s expulsion are voiced by the group S.O.S. Racisme and the Canadian Jewish Congress, both of whom issue news releases. Only The Globe deems it important to consult a Muslim. Nonetheless, Abdûl Amer, spokesperson for the Muslim Community of Quebec, gets less coverage in The Globe than the representative of the Canadian Jewish Congress who also has the prestige of being quoted directly. In none of the papers do we hear a Muslim woman’s reaction to the Émilie Ouimet incident. Only The Gazette gives general coverage to their views on hijab. It runs two news articles that are completely informed by the opinions of two community leaders, Fatima Houda-Pepin and Mayada Mourabet Hakim, and an academic, Homa Hoodfar (#34, #41)

In the entire 3-month La Presse coverage not one article
is authored by an ethnic minority speaker. This discrepancy reaches its ultimate absurdity when it asks a well-known columnist, Nathalie Pétrowski, to don hijab for one week and travel the streets of Montreal "pour voir la réaction des gens sur [s]on passage." One wonders if it wouldn't have been more pertinent to ask a Muslim woman about her daily reality in Montreal but, as van Dijk observes, minorities are seldom considered reliable sources on issues, such as prejudice and discrimination, that might put whites in a bad light (1991:159). Not surprisingly, Pétrowski's series of articles, which runs on three consecutive days in March 1955, are replete with racist innuendo about Muslims and Arabs. In the final installment of her series, she summarizes her findings on "la réaction des gens" in the following manner: "À l’indifférence ou à la gêne des Québécois qui me prennent pour une cousine proche de Mère Teresa, les musulmans opposent un regard plein de convoitise." Clearly, in Pétrowski's reasoning, "les Québécois" and "les musulmans" fall in opposite camps. Is it not possible for a "musulman" to be a "Québécois"? Who then is a "Québécois"? These are precisely the questions around which the Émilie Ouimet story turns.

To return to that incident then, we have seen how, as van Dijk has so perceptively observed, "the social hierarchy seems to be reproduced in the rhetorical hierarchy of credibility and reliability." (1988c:87). Émilie Ouimet is not interviewed; her mother's words are undermined; and Nathalie
Pétrowski becomes the Muslim woman surrogate. The voices of women and children are as under-valued in the textual economy of these news reports as they are in public life—and this, even when they are white! Indeed, as I will argue in more detail in my conclusion, Émilie Ouimet is perceived as a transgressor precisely because she is "white but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994). She is, in Ann Stoler's words, the "enemy within" who has transgressed the "interior frontiers" of the nation (1995:52). The ultimate aberration is not the hijab-wearing Muslim woman; rather it is Émilie Ouimet's betrayal of her Québécois identity. To this effect, in several of the news articles, an explicit comparison is made between the recalcitrant Émilie Ouimet and other Arab Muslim students who, unlike her, have changed their mode of dress and have learned to perform the dominant identity: "M. Doré a dit avoir reçu, la semaine dernière, la visite d'une mère d'origine arabe, portant le hijab, qui a compris et accepté les règles vestimentaires de l'école. Sa fille est arrivée à l'école sans le voile" (#1). (See also #6.) We can well ask: who is Émilie Ouimet then? She is neither "Nous" or "les Autres" but rather a shattering of that distinction. As Nadia Khouri has pointed out, it is precisely those events and acts that reveal or deconstruct "les oppositions binaires: Nord/Sud, Noir/Blanc, Métropole/Colonies, Civilisés/Primitifs, Tribu/État, Europe/Afrique, Moderne/Archaique, Majorité/Minorité" (1992:109) that are ultimately the most destabilizing of a
political order. That is why, as I will demonstrate in the following section dealing with editorials, Émilie Ouimet is perceived as a threat to the social body, one that Pétrowski's "Québécois" nation at least must defend itself against.

EDITORIALS

Of the four newspapers under study, three editorialized on the issue of the veil during the period under study, La Presse and Le Devoir with one article each (#6 and #29, respectively) and The Gazette with two (#20, #43). Here the differences between the two French newspapers and The Gazette are striking not only in the opinions elicited but also the argumentative strategies employed. Not surprisingly, considering the viewpoint implicit in its news stories, The Gazette in its first editorial categorically denounces the actions of the Louis-Riel principal as "quite wrong."

Appealing to classic liberal notions of rights and responsibilities, it states its position on the issue of hijab with a rhetorical question: "Why should any public or quasi-public institution--in a society that recognizes religious freedom as fundamental--not make reasonable accommodation for observant members of religious minorities?" In the second editorial, which appears on November 24 largely in reaction to the St. Jean Baptiste Society document (see chronology), The Gazette once again criticizes the government for its inaction on issues of religious tolerance, a theme which has run through most Gazette reports (#19, #34, #42). In another
article in the same day's issue, The Gazette quotes Sheema Khan, a hijab-wearing Montrealer, who says an increasing number of Muslim women are facing harassment at school and work, a fact that she attributes to the uncaring attitude of the government:

She traces the backlash to an incident in September, when a 13-year-old girl was sent home for wearing the hijab to school. The provincial election campaign was at its height at the time. Khan said it didn't strike her until later that neither Parizeau nor Liberal leader Daniel Johnson took a stand to defend the girl’s religious freedoms, as protected in the Quebec and Canadian charters of human rights. "That was dangerous, and that allowed it to mushroom." (#42)

In each of the three Gazette articles, the Émilie Ouimet controversy is seen as a struggle over people’s rights to religious expression. Islam is therefore invoked as the primary explanatory force behind the current popularity of hijab. In recent years, however, the predominance of the religious paradigm as an interpretive tool for discussions of Muslim women has been criticized for promoting an ahistorical, static conception of women:

The overall effect of this paradigm is to deprive women of self-presence, of being. Because women are subsumed under religion presented in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in nonhistorical time. They have virtually no history. Any analysis of change is therefore foreclosed. (Lazreg, 1988:86)

The religious paradigm, when applied to the controversy generated by the Émilie Ouimet incident, precludes any
attempt at understanding why at this particular historical juncture hijab has emerged as a significant factor in women’s lives. According to Shahnaz Khan, Muslims in Canada experience isolation and exclusion from the dominant society:

Our marginalisation was most clearly expressed during the Gulf war, when the media promoted (and continues to promote) negative stereotypes of Arabs/Muslims. Notwithstanding the spiritual aspects of Islam, for this minority in Canada, asserting Muslim identity appears to have become an integral part of maintaining a presence. Canadian Muslims want the past to generate strength and dignity with which to face discrimination and exclusion from mainstream life in Canada. (1993:53)

By focusing on Canada’s liberal traditions and insisting on a rights-based solution to the controversy, The Gazette is able not only to gain political points at the expense of the Parti Québécois government, thereby confirming the self-satisfied biases of its mainly anglophone readership, but also to effectively remove itself and them from the less savoury aspects of Canadian life--that is, the racism and sexism which is an inherent, structural property of Canadian society as a whole, the hijab controversy being but one manifestation.

In the French newspapers, on the other hand, although the hijab debate provokes some discussion of school reform, its implications for Quebec society as a whole are left untouched. Typically, Agnès Gruda concludes her editorial in La Presse with the following solution: "Ce n’est que dans une école vraiment laïque que l’on pourra en toute cohérence interdire tout appareil religieux, quel qu’il soit." This, of course,
begs the question: If school is the place where societal values are learned, is it not also a reflection of that society? If wearing hijab is to be forbidden in schools, is it not to be expected that this will also be the case in society at large? These are precisely the kinds of issues that are not addressed.

Even more evasive is editorial-writer François Brousseau in Le Devoir. The reader can search in vain to find the newspaper’s opinion about the hijab debate in Quebec, for its editorial deals solely with the controversy in France! Perhaps this is not so surprising considering the content of Le Devoir’s news stories during the three months surveyed; of the eight proper news articles that Le Devoir published on hijab, only three dealt with the situation in Quebec, the remainder being about France.\(^{12}\) That France figures prominently in Quebec media discourse can, of course, be explained by the historical, linguistic and cultural ties between the two

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\(^{12}\) Of the 36 articles surveyed from Quebec newspapers, including The Gazette, in only one case (#13) is reference made to policies in place in other parts of Canada. Specifically, in Le Devoir, Lorraine Pagé (see chronology) castigates Quebec for being "la seule province canadienne à ne pas avoir de politique en matière interculturelle", this with one child in five in Montreal schools having been born outside Canada. On the other hand, as Yuki Shiose and Louise Fontaine point out, it is not in the interests of the nationalist agenda of Quebec’s élites to make explicit comparisons with other Canadian provinces: "Les élites (intellectuals, universitaires, technocrates, dirigeants politiques) ont systématiquement promu l'idée d'une différence radicale entre le Québec et les autres provinces du Canada pour légitimer leur demande d'une espace étatique autonome par rapport au gouvernement fédérale" (1995:105).
Moreover, France's long tradition of secular schooling is undoubtedly a point of interest amongst Quebeckers grappling with Bill 107. Nonetheless, given the greater numbers and the extremely different history of the Muslim population in France, one can seriously question

13. Another more incisive take on the filial relationship of Quebec to France might situate it in the context of what Edward Said has described as the colonizer's "power to narrate, or to block other narratives from emerging or forming" (1994:xiii). To illustrate his point, Said quotes a passage from Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth. Although referring to the colonial context in Algeria, Fanon’s words could be construed as equally revelatory of Quebec as a settler society whose story must be told from European parameters: "The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history that he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skins off, all that she violates and starves" (1961:51). In other words, the Québécois nation-state is given a pedigree; its integrity (otherwise threatened by the violence of its founding moments and its continued exclusions) is stabilized by extending its heritage through space and time to include France. By mapping its history onto the territory of the "mother country," the "imagined community" which is Quebec is able to transcend the disruptive aspects of its existence and to more closely approximate "homogeneous empty time" (Anderson, 1983:26) or "immemorial spatial memory" (Alonso, 1994:387), the preferred chronotopes of the nation.

14. A school which was "publique, laïc et obligatoire" was created in France in 1881-2. (Boyzon-Fradet and Boulot, 1991:237)

15. Muslims may form the second largest religious group in France but "[c]ontrairement aux juifs et aux protestants, les quatre millions de musulmans de France ne jouissent pas d'un réseau d'écoles confessionnelles subventionnées par l'État (dites conventionnées)...La seule école musulmane qui obtient aujourd'hui une aide du gouvernement français est à 10 000 km de Paris...à l'île de la Réunion" (#12). In Quebec, on the other hand, there are 80,000 Muslims (Houda-Pepin, 1993). In 1991, government subsidies granted to private elementary and secondary institutions, including Muslim schools, accounted for approximately 52% of their total funding (Commission, 1995:45).
whether comparisons are apt. Although the editorial in La Presse is also structured as a comparison of the situations in France and Quebec, it seems that Agnès Gruda is somewhat conscious of the bad fit. She concedes that "le débat ne se pose pas exactement dans les mêmes termes ici et dans l'Hexagone [France]." Nonetheless, she perseveres. Having admitted that while in France there are more than a thousand Muslim women who wear hijab to school and in Quebec at the most multiethnic school only 15, she continues:

[C]e qui est clair, c'est que la vague des tchadors [en France], née d'une toute petite goutte, a pris les proportions d'un psychodrame. Le Québec n'est pas immunisé contre un tel effet multiplicateur.

Other than fearmongering, it is difficult to find any other purpose behind this kind of slippery slope reasoning. Devoid of facts or historical background, the article constructs Islam as the imputed evil, ready to take over the world. While Gruda favours the medical metaphor ("psychodrame", "immunisé") or Islam as spreading disease, Brousseau at Le Devoir frames his diatribe in military terms: "des intolérants se réclament de la liberté et du pluralisme pour avancer leurs pions", "des petits commandos épris de <<liberté>> vont, d'une école à l'autre." His predilection for the military image is justified as a defense of France against Islam: "La France est aux portes du Maghreb. Des attentats contre les Français ont eu
lieu, ayant pour origine les milieux islamistes algériens."16

Brousseau, however, leaves the history of France's own aggressions in North Africa untouched. In this respect, his conclusion merits a closer look, if only for the transparency of its argumentative moves and rhetorical operations, and the consequent ideological knowledge produced.

Les sociétés modernes ont tous besoin de diversité, de tolérance devant le multiple et le différent. Mais elles ont tout autant besoin de cohésion et de références partagées. À cette fin, l'école est un instrument essentiel. Car la face négative du multiple--on le sait, on l'a vu et on le verra--s'appelle libanisation, balkanisation, yougoslavisation...

In the first sentence, Brousseau tries to convey the impression that he is for tolerance and diversity. In a society where the official norms dictate that racism is immoral or illegal, one major strategy in discourse about minorities is positive self-presentation (van Dijk, 1991:187-8). However, these disclaimers are necessarily always followed by a restrictive "but". And so Brousseau qualifies his magnanimity by appeals to cohesion and shared references. His memory for "shared references", however, is selective; while invoking the spectre of Algerian Islamic hordes, for example, apparently best forgotten are 130 years of French colonial

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16A pernicious manipulation of the depiction of events in Algeria and France and their superimposition on the Quebec landscape are not the exclusive preserve of the Quebec "mainstream" press. See Richard Martineau's "Leçons d'Alger" in the alternative weekly Voir (1995). See also Bélanger and Émond (1996) and Geadah (1996). For a trenchant critique of this tendency, see Tahon (1996).
rule in that country, a period of untold ruthlessness and subjugation but apparently unrelated in Brousseau's mind to Algeria's present deplorable state.\textsuperscript{17}

In the final sentence of his editorial, Brousseau spells out the dire consequences of giving way to pluralism. He is aided in his assertions by a self-conscious patterning of language. Any reader will most certainly feel the effects—even fall under the sway—of Brousseau's rhetoric, but a critical response requires an awareness of how the process works. The forceful repetitions of phrases ("on le sait, on l'a vu et on le verra") and syllables ("libanisation, balkanisation, yougoslavisation") no doubt heighten the emotional impact of Brousseau's warning. However, another, albeit unintentional, effect is their pounding sameness, a not untimely reminder of the consequences of a pluralism thwarted.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

In my introduction to this paper, I remarked on the disproportionate amount of attention the hijab issue attracted in the French press. This analysis has shown that also qualitatively the coverage afforded by English and French newspapers differed significantly. Not only did they both implicitly and explicitly, in news stories and editorials, take opposing stances on hijab but the consistent refusal of the French press to broaden the context of the debate and

\textsuperscript{17}For a less sanguine view of the French role in Algeria, see Ruedy (1992).
engage the issue of hijab at the level of sociopolitical concerns is, I think, evidence of a lurking, unacknowledged malaise. It is to this point that I would now like to briefly turn. The Ouimet family gets racialized, even though they are white, so-called "Québécois de souche," because they have decided to adopt cultural values and behaviour that are perceived by some to be antithetical to what constitutes the Québécois nation. They are victims of what David Goldberg, among others, has referred to as "the new racism" or race coded as culture (1993:73). This obsessive circling by the Quebec media around the Émilie Ouimet story is, I think, not exhausted by the fact that she wears a hijab. There is something else more vital going on—and it is marked by the evasive silence around her "whiteness." What we are confronted with here is not unlike the submerged fear that haunted the colonial enterprise: the danger of "going native,"

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18See, for example, the controversy surrounding the 1989 National Film Board/Radio Canada co-production Disparaître: "Il véhicule la menace pour les femmes du retour à la natalité, sinon l'immigration, devenue trop visible, risque de mener à la disparition de la société québécoise et de la race 'pure laine'" (Recourt and Alcindor, 1990:32). Or, contemporaneous with the Émilie Ouimet incident, the alarmist headline of a La Presse article decrying the influx of children of non-French/non-British origin in Quebec schools: "Les Québécois: la nouvelle minorité visible. Dans les écoles de Montréal, la proportion des allophones ne cesse d'augmenter" (Berger, 1994). The implications here are twofold. First, as in Pétrowski's articles, it is understood that "Québécois" and "allophones" form mutually exclusive groups. Second, not only are the "Québécois" in danger of becoming a minority (or of being "swamped by immigrants", to use Margaret Thatcher's infamous phrase), they will be "visible", that is, their supposedly white faces will be outnumbered by
Brantlinger has identified the archetypal event as Stanley's discovery of Livingstone, white man meeting white man in the depths of the African jungle:

[T]he famous scene of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" suggests a narcissistic doubling, a repetition or mirroring. The solipsistic repression of whatever is nonself or alien characterizes all forms of cultural and political domination. (1985:215)

In analogous fashion, the hijab-wearing Muslim is revealed to be none other than a Québécoise "pure laine." Mais quelle laine? Who in Quebec today can guarantee that their genetic make-up owes nothing to the 1,132 Africans brought to New France and Lower Canada between 1686 and 1806 (Trudel, 1960:89)? And even the most nationalist-minded of Quebec historians will attest that "marriage between Indians and whites has always been more common among the French Canadians than among the English" (Rioux, 1978:23-4). Add to this all the other ethnic and racial groups which are integral components of Quebec society and history. In other words, what Émilie Ouimet has so graphically revealed is the deep ambivalence of the laundered categories in which the Québécois national identity has been traditionally inscribed. Is it possible to be Québécois(e)--and also Other? "To exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness," says Homi Bhabha (1994:44). But what happens when that Otherness turns out also to be the Self or, as Bhabha observes, "the threat of those of "allophones", who are assumed to be non-white."
cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other people' [and] becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one" (1994:150)? At precisely the moment when the Québécois national project is once again fully underway, a project that is dependent on the articulation of a distinct historically-centred Québécois identity, the Émilie Ouimet incident serves to highlight the fragility of that notion. A national project of a state can seldom be seen as equally representative of the interests of all who live within its physical boundaries (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:32). Those who are unable to share in the narrative of the nation, its origins, its uniqueness, its mission or, as with the Algerians in France and the indigenous peoples of Quebec, those who conjure up the wrong stories are not included. It remains to be seen how these emerging counter-narratives from the nation's margins are taken up in Quebec, if at all.¹⁹ If the issue of hijab, however, is at all representative, it is unlikely that the national press will be the locus of a para-doxical discourse.

¹⁹See, for example, Vincent (1992) for a media analysis of the Oka crisis or, as she calls it, "Crise québécoise." See also Legault (1994) on the still active suppression of information concerning the events of October 1970.
CHAPTER TWO

HOW THE QUÉBÉCOIS BECAME WHITE: THE LANGUAGE AND POLITICS OF RACE IN QUEBEC

Jus’ feel de muscle along hees back
Won’t geev heem moche bodder for carry pack
On de long portage, any size canoe,
Dere’s not many t’ing dat boy won’t do
For he’s got double-joint on hees body too,
Little Bateese! - William Henry Drummond, "Little Bateese" (1912)

speak white
tell us again about Freedom and Democracy
nous savons que liberté est un mot noir
comme la misère est nègre
et comme le sang se mêle à la poussière des rues d’Alger ou de
Little Rock - Michèle Lalonde, Speak White (1970)

Come to think of it, the only French Canadians I heard of were athletes. - Mordechai Richler, The Street (1972)

Vous savez, ces gens qui adooooorent les minorités. Qui, lorsqu’ils croisent un Noir ou une Mexicaine, se mettent à parler <<bébé>> pour bien se faire comprendre. Qui s’adressent aux Africains ou aux Esquimaux comme s’ils étaient des malades mentaux, des poupons en couche, ou des veillards de cent deux ans.

<<Aimez-vous ça, vivre au Québec? Comment trouvez-vous notre hiver? Vous ne vous ennuyez pas trop de vos belles jungles?>>

Ces gens-là ne sont pas méchants, non. En fait, c’est tout le contraire: ils sont gentils, gentils. Quand ils croisent un homme qui a la peau foncée ou qui parle avec un accent, ils deviennent tout chose et se mettent à parler comme un animateur d’émission jeunesse ou un vendeur de chez Gap:
<<Allô, comment ça va? Belle journée?>> La tête un petit peu penchée sur le côté, les yeux ronds, le sourire fendu jusqu’aux oreilles...

<<Tu l’aimes le papa à titi? Tu l’aimes, le toto à gaga?
Didi-dada, dodo-gou gou, à titi à tata...>>

Il y a deux groupes qui se comportent comme ça avec les Québécois. Les gauchistes canadiens-anglais, et les Français ouverts d’esprit.

Il y a rien de plus drôle qu’entendre un gauchiste canadien-anglais parler des Québécois. Hou, qu’ils les aiment, les Québécois. Leur joie de vivre, leur côté grégaire, leur esprit de la fête. Tétement fantastiques, tellement chaleureux. Le Carnaval de Québec? Génial, my dear. Les cabanes à sucre? Oh so cute, you won’t believe it. They drink
beer, they play in the snow, they vomit in the woods behind their ski-doo, it's all so typical. Que serait le Canada without our Quebec friends? Il faut protéger leur culture comme on protège les phoques. They need us, poor things.

Quant aux Français ouverts d'esprit, c'est la même chose. "Putain, que les Québécois sont accueillants! Putain, qu'ils s'amusent! Putain, qu'on est bien chez vous!">> Le style docteur Schweitzer chez les Papous. Les Bronzés dans le Grand Nord.

- Richard Martineau, "En bédaine chez les Papous" Voir (1997)

In the heady early days of the Quebec independence movement, Pierre Vallières wrote an influential book--part heart-rending autobiography, part bracing political manifesto--entitled Nègres blancs d'Amérique. His thesis was provocative: French-speaking Quebeckers had been subjugated, disinheritited, and otherwise mercilessly treated by their exploiters, most effectively embodied in les anglais of Quebec and Canada, thereby earning them the title of "white niggers" of America.

Although more than thirty years have passed since the publication of Nègres blancs, the invocation of race remains a vibrant rhetorical strategy in Quebec politics. One of its more recent manifestations occurred when, in the autumn of 1996, Howard Galganov set out with a busload of supporters from Montreal to New York to tell Americans how badly English speakers were being treated in Quebec. His initiative was compared to that of Rosa Parks, the black woman who refused to move to the back of the bus, a ground-breaking event in the U.S. civil-rights struggle (Galganov, 1996:A16). Not to be outdone, Gilles Rhéaume, Galganov's counterpart in the
movement for French-language rights and former president of
the St. Jean Baptiste Society, remonstrated by inviting
onlookers at a public protest to inspect his tongue. "My
tongue is black," he declaimed.¹

Speaking specifically about the Galganov case, Jeffrey
Simpson, for one, pointed out the patent ridiculousness of
these comparisons:

Anyone even slightly acquainted with the
struggle of U.S. blacks--slavery, the Civil
War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, voting rights
denied, de facto segregation, lynchings, the
Klu Klux Klan--appreciates the absurdity of
any comparison between Mr. Galganov and Ms.
Parks, let alone between U.S. race relations
and the plight of English-speaking people in
Quebec. (1996:A20)

Neither should it imply that the Québécois experience was or
continues to be parallel to that of African Americans. If
French-speaking Quebecers were sometimes perceived as of
contestable racial composition (Craig, 1987; Clarke, 1996),
the duration of their "not-yet-whiteness," when set against
that of racial oppression of the Black and indigenous
populations in the Americas, has been quite brief.

All this notwithstanding, the concerns that I address in
this chapter are going to be of a different order. What
occupies me is not whether the comparisons are apt, but rather
what accounts for not only their emergence but also their
continued appeal. As the epigraphs to this chapter

¹This exchange was broadcast on the August 28 1996 8 a.m.
edition of the CBC national radio news.
demonstrate, the "nègre blanc" idea reaches far back into history and articulates with different discourses of power. In part, it is this "polyvalent mobility", to use Ann Stolzr’s phrase, which accounts for its sustained power and appeal. In this essay, my intention is not, however, to reconstruct the genealogy of this idea. The examples that I will draw on are not exhaustive. What I hope will become clear, however, is the central role this formulation performs in the contemporary Québécois psyche. Jeffrey Simpson’s claims to the contrary, there is nothing inherently "absurd" about the appellation "nègre blanc". It is a metaphor and, as Hayden White has demonstrated, the persistence and longevity of certain metaphors bespeak a need: "[T]he fact is that human culture cannot do without such metaphors, and when we have to identify things that resist conventional systems of classification, metaphors are not only functionally useful but necessary for the well-being of social groups" (1978:184). Homi Bhabha identifies nation-ness as one such problematic domain of existence.

As an apparatus of symbolic power, [the "nation" as a narrative strategy] produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or 'cultural difference' in the act of writing the nation. What is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is

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2 Holman Hunt's A Handbook to Literature defines metaphor as "[a]n implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second."
In other words, the notion of a unified, homogeneous community is continually disrupted by its disparate elements, those categories of gender, class, and race, among others, that jostle and problematize the nation's boundaries. This ambivalence, according to Bhabha, is the very condition of modernity. "The entitlement of the nation is its metaphor" (1994:141), he therefore concludes, citing a plethora of literary examples, *Middlemarch, Midnight's Children, One Hundred Years of Solitude, War and Peace, Moby-Dick, Things Fall Apart*, to which we can, of course, add Hubert Aquin's *Trou de mémoire*, Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* as well as any number of other Quebec works. Bhabha situates the nation's need for metaphor in its ambivalence as a concept. "[T]he data always resist the coherency of the image which we are trying to fashion of them." (White, 1978:1).

In what follows, I want to take a closer look at the intricacies of nationhood and the metaphorizing turn, as they are emblematically inscribed in Quebec and, further, as they specifically intersect with race. That Quebec, an aspiring nation-state, has found and continues to find its image in the metaphor of the "nègre blanc" is, I think, hardly surprisingly. One might say the concept of a specifically Québécois identity is immanent, yet to be determined. It is therefore only negatively identifiable, a French-speaking Quebecker being emphatically what les anglais and the
natives/blacks are not. Occupying an ambiguous middle ground, the Québécois longs to be in the position of the truly "white", property-owning English but is forever in danger of slipping into backward landlessness as exemplified by natives and blacks, hence the notion of the "nègre blanc", a projection of the tension of both repressed desires and anxieties. However, were this interpretation all there was, my task in this chapter would be relatively straightforward.

I think, however, racial consciousness among so-called white Québécois is much more complex and worthy of sustained attention. In this chapter, therefore, I want to focus instead on the process of becoming white, or how white Québécois have been forced to think of themselves as white. By doing so, I hope to raise two important points. First, I want to look at the language of race as strategic choice. For, not only was "not-yet-white" a category into which Québécois were "slotted" but one which they actively sought. At different moments, they chose their racial identities as "black" or "white." How and why were these choices made? What were the processes at play when both rejecting whiteness and claiming it became necessities of cultural survival?

Secondly, and here I will turn to the work of Ann Stoler, if we were to stop here and infer that the relationship of race and nation is merely one of metaphor, a politically expedient allegory, as it were, then the assumption would be that race and nation are somehow discrete social categories.
What I would like to show is how the "notion of race must figure much more organically in the making" (1995:127) of Québécois identity, specifically how race and racial identity are not merely a product of but constitutive of nationalist discourse. So, if I begin this study by undertaking an analysis of the ambivalence surrounding the apposition "nègre blanc", it is so I can move beyond metaphorical ascription and toward an attempt to read strategically the role and importance of race in Quebec.

Making whiteness, rather than simply white racism, the focus of study has the effect of throwing into sharp relief the impact that dominant racial identity has had not only on the treatment of racial "others" in Quebec but also on the ways that whites think of themselves. (Roediger 1994:75)

Following David Roediger, I conceive of this chapter as a call, not to aspire to, but rather to problematize whiteness. In such a way, I hope to gain insight into the historical context that has produced the frenzy surrounding that metaphor embodied which is Émilie Ouimet.

"NÈGRE BLANC": THE APORIAS OF A QUÉBÈCISME

In my study of the Émilie Ouimet incident, the epithet "nègre blanc" presents a particular advantage, for it, like Émilie Ouimet herself, is "a symptom, the condensation of contradictions" (Balibar, 1994:63). There is an equivocality of meaning surrounding the term "nègre blanc." The ostensible meaning arises out of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, a powerful anti-colonial treatise which inspired self-styled
revolutionaries around the world. When writers as disparate as Hubert Aquin (*Trou de mémoire*) and Leonard Cohen (*Beautiful Losers*) used the "nègre blanc" metaphor to describe the Quebec independence movement in the 1960s, they were acknowledging that movement's self-identification as an indigenous anti-colonial revolutionary force. As the Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael put it back then: "Every brother on a rooftop can quote Fanon" (Macey 1997:68). And back then, everyone wanted to join the brothers. Or, as Leonard Cohen observed describing the crowd at a separatist demonstration, "they think they are Negroes, and that is the best feeling a man can have in this century" (1966/1991:125).

Yet, this self-identification was ambivalent at best, especially in the light of the fact that Quebec was not without its own oppressed populations, including blacks. Writing his treatise in the Manhattan House of Detention for Men, Pierre Vallières may have been inspired by the Black Power movement in the United States, but his politics partook of a European model, specifically the French left intellectuals of the 1960s whose defense of an independent Algeria or opposition to the war in Indochina were framed as an assault on imperialism more than on racism per se. It is significant, therefore, that "les nègres" were evoked to fulfill the metaphoric function for the imagination of Quebec when both the native and Jewish communities were also, and perhaps more obviously, underdogs. Blacks, however, have been
called "the invisible population" in Quebec. Dorothy Williams explains:

Though Blacks have been in Quebec for over 300 years many Quebecers still believe the Black presence is a phenomenon of only the last two decades. This belief has stemmed from several factors: inaccurate Census reporting, problems of self-identification, lack of a 'cultural' emphasis within Canadian historiography and a lack of visibility due to a relatively small population in francophone Quebec. (Williams 1989:109).

Was it an innocent blindness then? One explanation is offered by Jonathan Boyarin. In an essay subtitled "Europe's Indian, America's Jew", he tackles the tendency both Europe and America have exhibited "to create fascinated images of and to eulogize the other's victim." He contends that an effect of "this displaced eulogization is to encourage amnesia about domination closer to home" (1992:10). Speaking specifically of the erection of the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., Boyarin maintains that "by advertising that America has the space in its heart and in its capital to commemorate genocide committed elsewhere, the genocidal origins of the United States will be further occluded" (18). An analogous process might be happening in Quebec. Among the reasons for the deliberate omission of the Black presence, Williams contends, is Quebeckers' (and Canadians') complicitous relationship to the institution of slavery. In fact, the earliest history of the 350-year-old Black presence in Quebec is one of enslavement. Here too, however, even when the question of slavery has been tackled by historians, the
savagery and brutality of that institution has seldom been the object of study and debates have once again resuscitated that old bugaboo of Anglo-French rivalry and inevitably turned around the relative "humaneness" of the two slave-owning regimes, the French Catholic and the English Protestant (Williams 1997:17-31).

Because Black history and the contributions of Blacks to Canada and Quebec have been ignored, so also have discussions around issues of race and racism, which have been and continue to be an integral component of the lived experience of the Black collective. In Quebec, there is a tendency to treat racial incidents as new, unique, isolated, or even implausible. Typical of this trend is the report issued in March 1996 by the Ministère des Affaires internationales, de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles entitled Le racisme au Québec: éléments d'un diagnostic. The authors, Marie McAndrew and Maryse Potvin, acknowledge the dearth of information: "[L]a documentation québécoise sur le racisme et la discrimination n'est pas très volumineuse and reste marginale" (34). In their eyes, their task is rendered even more difficult by the fact that "les écrits québécois sur le racisme relèvent le plus souvent des perceptions de personnes issues de minorités "visibles"." (34), whose reports, they say, tend not to distinguish sufficiently between racism and other non-racial forms of discrimination based on social and economic factors (28-9, 34). They also problematize the findings of the nineteen interviews they conducted with representatives of various public-sector organizations because
they communicate "un ton alarmiste ainsi qu’une tendance à unifier sous la catégorie du racisme les obstacles à l’intégration ou les problèmes d’adaptation" (34). Having effectively discredited all their sources, McAndrew and Potvin are able to proffer their own version of their data. Not surprisingly, they diagnose racism as a marginal phenomenon, largely a consequence of non-European immigration. They summarize their findings in the following manner:

L’étude évalue que les faits de racisme explicite et organisé sont rares, tout comme les situations extrêmes de marginalisation des minorités racisées. Ainsi, suivant le schéma présenté dans le problématique du rapport, les auteures constatent l’essentiel des éléments cernés se situe dans les zones <<intermédiaires>> du racisme et de l’intégration, correspondant à la persistance de barrières sociales et à certains blocages des efforts d’intégration et de développement du sentiment d’appartenance à la société. (13)

Although their research shows that without a doubt Blacks and other minorities are excluded and marginalized in various sectors of Quebec society (education, housing, labour market, police and judiciary system, health and social services, media), McAndrew and Potvin consistently refuse to interpret these acts of discrimination as racism per se. Instead the blame is laid on the failure of racial minorities to adopt the dominant culture. This becomes apparent when they articulate their degré zéro of racism:

À l’inverse, on peut parler d’absence totale de racisme lorsque les membres de la société d’accueil tolèrent les différences culturelles qui ne nuisent pas à leur propre
équilibre identitaire et lorsqu’il n’y a pas de hiérarchisation raciale sous le couvert de rapports sociaux de domination. (29)

What is confirmed here is the superiority of the dominant culture. It is they who must "tolerate" cultural differences provided that these differences do not harm their own identity, which rests supreme. As Philomena Essed has pointed out, "tolerance presupposes that one group has the power to tolerate, and others have to wait and see whether they are going to be rejected or tolerated. Therefore, cultural tolerance is inherently a form of cultural control" (1991:210). Moreover, the dominant culture models itself as the "welcoming society" even though their stay in Quebec has been of shorter duration than that of the Aboriginal peoples. That cultural difference is so obviously ordered hierarchically in the first half of this quotation renders its latter half moot. A rhetoric of goodwill is used to mask unequal power relations and the dominance of a particular group. The internal conflict ("out of many one") which Bhabha has identified as endemic to the modern nation-state is here

1In this respect, it might be enlightening to quote Tomson Highway’s letter in the September 3 1997 edition of the The Globe and Mail: "With regard to her column on sovereigntists and their appropriation of the word "Québécois", I hate to tell Lysiane Gagnon this, but the word "Quebec" is actually Cree (not to mention all the Algonquin languages related to it, such as Montagnais et cetera). It means "get out!" (Sorry, sometimes it gets a bit tricky translating all the subtleties of Cree to English, or French for that matter.) But more specifically applied, the word is a nautical term, meaning a combination of "disembark" (i.e. from your boats) and "welcome." Yes, exactly: Welcome to our land! C’est un grand plaisir de vous avoir ici avec nous."
made explicit.

ON BEGINNINGS

But who makes up the dominant culture, the "société d'accueil"? Although McAndrew and Potvin choose not to elaborate, this does not mean that the question remains unanswered. What the textual surface fails to reveal is often writ elsewhere. Some schools of textual interpretation especially those of a Marxist persuasion (French "sociocritique", for example) have shown a marked predilection for studying the beginning or the incipit of a text as a way of opening the text onto its extratextual relationships (Duchet 1984). Because it marks the instance when textual language pulls itself away from everyday language, the incipit is said to reveal most clearly what the textual surface seeks to repress, namely, the non-dit, impensé, or, in Fredric Jameson’s words, "the political unconscious" of the text. The incipit doubles in analytic potency when it opens onto a story of origins. The authors of the Quebec government racism report preface their study with a brief overview of the history of ethnic and visible minority communities in Quebec.

La présence de communautés ethniques et visibles n'est pas un phénomène nouveau au Québec. En effet, déjà au tout début de la colonie, Mathieu Da Costa, un Noir d'origine portugaise, accompagnait Champlain dans ses voyages en Nouvelle France, et dès la fin du XVIIe siècle, la présence d'esclaves noirs ou panis y est attestée. (15)

So who were the first ethnic and visible minorities to arrive in Quebec then? Curiously, the authors choose to highlight
Mathieu Da Costa⁴, the Black man, as the visible ethnic arriving in New France although the white European, Champlain, would also have fallen into that category, New France being overwhelmingly peopled by Aboriginal populations during the period 1606 to 1635 when Champlain made his voyages.⁵ For the authors, though, the presumption is that not only does history begin with the arrival of the Europeans but the colony which Champlain founds is indelibly "white".⁶ Even though Da Costa arrives at the same time as Champlain, he is in fact "late." He is the "immigrant." Second, not only are the Aboriginal peoples effaced from this report's overview of Quebec history, they are also excluded from its study of racism. In a footnote appended to the first sentence of the above quotation, McAndrew and Potvin point out that since the Aboriginal peoples lie outside the mandate of the Ministère des Affaires internationales, de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles⁷, the ministry sponsoring the report, "la dynamique des rapports francophones-autochtones n'est pas

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⁴Da Costa was chosen by Champlain because he had learned the language of the Mi'kmaq on previous visits as a crew member of Portuguese fishing vessels (Williams 1989:7).

⁵When Champlain died in 1635, the colony at Quebec numbered 300 people of European origin (Brown and Linteau 1988:122).

⁶Quebec-based theorists are by no means the only ones who frame their analyses according to the terms of the "white settler colony" construct. See Abele and Stasiulis (1989) for a critique of its applications in English-Canadian political economy.

⁷The Aboriginal peoples of Quebec fall under the jurisdiction of the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones which reports directly to the Premier of the province.
To begin to unravel what is being revealed in the above passage, I would like at this point to return to Fanon, not in his guise as revolutionary mentor but as he has been recuperated more recently by academe as "global theorist" (Gates 1991), most particularly in the work of Homi Bhabha. Bhabha, I believe, can help us understand not only how the above passage performs in its very enunciation the racial typology which underpins the idea of Quebec but how that typology gets subverted. In his essay "'Race', time and the revision of modernity", Bhabha quotes a line from Fanon’s "The Fact of Blackness", a chapter in Black Skin, White Masks, which effectively summarizes Mathieu Da Costa’s predicament: "You come too late, much too late, there will always be a world--a white world between you and us" (Fanon 1967/8:122). For Bhabha, Fanon’s "sense of the belatedness of the black man" (1994:236), "the time-lag of race [i]s the sign of cultural difference" (1994:248) which interrupts, interrogates and finally upsets those unifying and totalizing visions of the modern nation. So, Mathieu Da Costa’s disjunctive presence in the text creates a kind of tension, there but not there. To continue with Fanon’s idea, if Mathieu Da Costa is "too late" (having arrived at the same time as Champlain), the Aboriginal peoples are "much too late" (being already there before he arrives). In fact, they are so late that they are "not-there"; the text emphatically reassures us of that, both implicitly
and explicitly. But is that true? Are they really "not-there"? Toni Morrison, among others, has taught us to be wary of the continual circling of the "not-there" (1989:11). She has also said that "race surface[s] on the very site of its internment" (1992:xxii) and so at the end of the passage, the "projective past" leaps out of the void, out of "the terra incognita or the terra nulla, the empty or wasted land whose history has to be begun, whose archives must be filled out; whose future progress must be secured in modernity" (Bhabha 1994:246). We are revealed the true state of the original inhabitants of the land after the arrival of the colonizers. They have been turned into panis or Amerindian slaves. That we were not meant to acquire this information is apparent in the manner it is communicated to us, that is, inadvertently in a breakdown of language: "dès la fin du XVIIe siècle, la présence d'esclaves noirs ou panis y est attestée." The use of the conjunction "ou" rather than "et" makes one think that the authors mistook "panis" to mean "black slave".8

However, I want to put another spin on this sentence fragment. What if we were to ignore the semantic error and analyse this not as a mistake but as a manifestation of an unconscious equivalency, that is, a Black slave is the same as an Amerindian slave? Certainly, this is what Jean Morisset had in mind when in a book about the inhabitants of the Canadian

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8See Williams (1997:17-23) for conditions of different slave populations in New France.
North, he evoked the catachresistic idea of "un nègre-rouge" (Laroche 1997:623)! In this case, what cannot be articulated, what is in fact repressed--namely, the prior presence of Aboriginal peoples on the North American continent and their subsequent servitude--reappears endlessly in another guise. We need only look at the continuation of the above quote:

Plus tard, après la Conquête, le Québec fut une terre d’accueil et d’espoir pour de nombreux Loyalistes, dont un nombre non négligeable d’esclaves affranchis venus des États-Unis après 1776, pour les Irlandais fuyant la famine de 1847, pour les Chinois en quête de travail, pour des Juifs fuyant les progroms et les problèmes politiques en Europe de l’Est, ainsi que pour les Noirs américains utilisant l’underground railroad pour échapper à l’esclavage. L’immigration de personnes appartenant à des minorités visibles a donc été un élément constitutif du développement et de l’essor de la société québécoise,.... (15)

Here, Blacks are again mentioned twice, at the beginning and end of the first sentence. They frame this synopsis of Quebec immigration history, but it is surely a disproportionate recognition of an immigrant population which by all accounts was not numerically significant in Quebec.9 Furthermore, the information is erroneous. While it is true that Canada’s Black population grew as a result of the various migrations of American Blacks including free Black Loyalists and fugitives

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9In the 1871 census figures, Blacks may have been the fifth largest ethnic group in Canada (after the French, Irish, Scots and Germans but not the English who were not considered "ethic"), but that figure is not representative of Canada East (Quebec), which failed to attract significant numbers of Blacks for reasons which I will detail further on (Williams 1997:27).
using the Underground Railway, McAndrew and Pctvin's imputations to the contrary, very few of these settled in Quebec.¹⁰

Why then this overemphasis of the Black presence in Quebec to the point of historical inexactitude? And why the concomitant absence of the Aboriginal peoples? Following Jonathan Boyarin, I have already offered one explanation: unlike the Blacks with whom French-speaking Quebeckers had little direct contact and who could thus be drawn on as "an exemplary victim of someone else's excesses" (Boyarin 1992:16), the injustices done to the native peoples were only too visible. Blacks were therefore easier to accommodate to the Québécois reality: not only were they fewer in number but there were some redeeming stories to tell, even when those stories proved to be false. They are then an all-purpose or overdetermined category, infinitely substiutable, doing triple-duty rarely as themselves, more often as metaphors for French-speaking Quebeckers and now as surrogates for the

¹⁰According to Dorothy Williams (1989, 1997), one of the main reasons that the Blacks who arrived in Quebec soon left was the lack of land which was arable and which was not already meted out to family and kin through the seigneurial system. Unlike Ontario, the Maritimes, and the Prairies (Thomson, 1979), there were no recognizable Black communities into which newcomers could integrate until the turn of the 1900s when the rail companies began to hire American Blacks as sleeping car porters for their lines that connected in Montreal. On the other hand, because of the low visibility of the Black population, Quebec was spared the rash of segregationist legislation that swept other Canadian provinces in the mid-1800s. As a consequence and also as a way of survival, there was a greater degree of intermarriage between Blacks and whites as well as Blacks and Aboriginal peoples in Quebec.
Aboriginal peoples. In other words, they are as exploited for their surplus value in the textual economy as they are in real life.

But I would like to go back to the "non-presence" of the natives. We have seen how the unspeakable has spoken through the textual contortions of the racism report. There is however another more self-conscious trend at work in Quebec society, one which Hayden White has unmincingly described as the "return of the repressed suspicion that the natives being brutalized share in fact a humanity with their brutalizers" (1978:188). This is effectively summed up in the title of an article written by Pierre-André Julien in Le Devoir in the aftermath of Oka. "Ne sommes-nous pas tous des Amérindiens?" he asks. "Are we not all Amerindians?" He argues that widespread miscegenation among the Québécois (an estimated 60% of the Québécois population have "du sang indien") points to their alleged lack of discrimination towards racial minorities making the French morally superior to English Canadians (Julien, 1992). Indeed, it has become increasingly fashionable among Quebeckers to point with pride to their native ancestry. Michel Tremblay, arguably Quebec's most popular playwright, recently revealed in his memoirs that his maternal grandmother was Cree, albeit a unilingual anglophone from Winnipeg (1994:15-19). 11

11Not everyone interprets this trend so equanimously. Scott MacKenzie, for one, recently opined (contra Julien) that the great number of French-Aboriginal interracial unions has been
As soon becomes apparent, the rehabilitation of the native is a move wrought with ambivalence. Quebeckers' relatively recent interest in their native ancestry could doubtless be construed as a step toward acknowledging a more diverse sense of identity. It is significant though that this interest is being shown at a time when the conflict between the Europeans and the Aboriginal peoples, once thought to have been definitively resolved to the advantage of the former, has once again resurfaced with such events as James Bay, Meech Lake, Oka, Churchill Falls and Listuguj. Today, given the determining role territoriality plays in debates on Quebec nationalism, (no doubt a partial consequence of the weakening of the link between nationality and language due to a greater number of French-speaking immigrants), the Aboriginal peoples are being perceived as a threat to that identity of nation-as-territory. If, however, following Pierre-André Julien's logic, in Quebec everyone is a native, then the Aboriginal land claims are effectively annulled. What is being intoned here, I would argue, is not merely a contiguity of identity but rather an invitation to assimilate, the twentieth century version of what Europeans have been proposing to the Aboriginal peoples

"the bête noire of the pure laine nationalist". He elaborates: "This ur-text of what it means to be Québécois throws into question many received categories: what Québécois means; what roles are played by language and ethnicity; and what the oft-shouted statement 'le Québécois aux Québécois' belies" (1996:62). He cites Pierre Trudeau's supposedly offhand remark on the eve of the 1980 referendum campaign: "I ask you: is this the face of an exclusively European man?", undoubtedly meant to undermine the nationalist cause.
in less benign forms for three centuries.

At the basis of the confusion over the nature of the Aboriginal peoples--glorious ancestor or trespasser on our lands--stands a deep and abiding anxiety over Québécois identity, an identity which has its origin (as the Quebec government report on racism has shown) in a racial distinction. Like the Blacks but even more so, the Aboriginal peoples define the limitations of that identity, so that in either incarnation--as friend or foe--the move is toward eliminating the native difference by assimilation. The presence of Émilie Ouimet, on the other hand, though also a liminal case, cannot be so easily assuaged. Unlike the native peoples (who if not physically at least rhetorically are absorbed), she is unassimilable because it is she who has chosen to opt out of the race. She cannot even be "consumed" (in bell hooks' sense of becoming a commodity) because Islam itself (compared to Native American spirituality, on the one hand, or Middle Eastern belly dancing, on the other) has no cachet in mass culture. Émilie Ouimet is out, both physically and rhetorically (she quickly disappeared from the news discourse) rejected, an unwanted item, turned into an appendix of the Muslim world and into the discards of Quebec. For however much the Québécois have resented les anglais, they have wished more to partake of their privileges than to get rid of the distinction between the "better" and "worse" parts of society. And, as McAndrew and Potvin made clear, what
constitutes the "better" part of society is European and white. When Fanon said: "Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence" (1967:228), one could substitute Québécois for the black man.

Keeping this in mind, I would like to propose one last reading of the idea of the "nègre blanc." As we have seen, the "nègre blanc" metaphor has had no effect on the treatment of Blacks or how they have been perceived by their oppressors. Its true referent has not been the real "nègre" but, of course, the "blanc." The very notion of "blanc" is comprehensible only as it stands in opposition to "nègre." To paraphrase Hayden White's insights, there would be no contradiction in "nègre noir" since these are in fact the same words, so that "nègre noir" is a pleonasm. "Nègre blanc", however, is an anomaly because the idea of "whiteness" is meant to stand opposed to "blackness." Given the intent of the metaphor, the "nègre blanc" idea represents not so much an ennobling of the idea of blackness. (In fact, it serves to confirm the opposite not only by the use of the contemptuous "nègre" or "nigger" but also by the linguistic slippage from noun to merely noun-like.) Rather it is the degrading of the idea of whiteness. It is whiteness that is under scrutiny. And so I return to my original query: Given the choice between "black" and "white," is being "white" what Québécois really want? David Roediger contends that whiteness has revealed
itself as an empty category and those who espouse it "build an identity on what one isn’t and on whom one can hold back" (1994:13). James Baldwin writes: "As long as you think you are white, there’s no hope for you" (Quoted by Roediger 1994:13). In identifying themselves as unrecognized whites, Québécois, too, have opted for hopelessness. They have not only retreated from meaningful anti-racism (as this chapter has shown) but also class affiliations (in Pierre Vallières’ day "nigger" meant "worker," a colouring it has largely lost) and gender awareness. Women have been strikingly absent from the "nègre blanc" configuration. How does introducing gender into what Brackette Williams calls "the race of nationality" affect its assumptions of white superiority? This is the question that I will attempt to answer in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

BETWEEN THE WEST AND A HARD PLACE: FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY AND THE ARAB-MUSLIM WOMAN

"Then listen," said Scheherazade. "I am determined to stop this barbarous practice of the Sultan’s, and to deliver the girls and mothers from the awful fate that hangs over them." (Lang 1898/1969:2)

[O]ur attempts to "explore the 'Other' point of view" and "to give it a chance to speak for itself," as the passion of many current discourses goes, must always be distinguished from the other’s struggles, no matter how enthusiastically we assume the nonexistence of that distinction. Letting the other live" with a liveliness never visible before is a kind of investment whose profits return, as it were, to those who watch. (Chow 1993:68)

In an early essay, "Language to Infinity", Michel Foucault writes: "[S]peaking so as not to die is a task undoubtedly as old as the word. The most fateful decisions are inevitably suspended during the course of a story" (Foucault 1977:53). He evokes the example of Scheherazade who staved off her impending death for a thousand and one nights by distracting her husband with stories. Among her stories she wove in her own. It is the story of King Shahriyar who having once been betrayed by his wife vowed never to be deceived again and chose instead each night to remarry and have his wife murdered in the morning. Not only does Scheherazade use her stories to save her own life but also those of other women who would also have experienced certain death at the hands of their ruler and husband. While Scheherazade’s life-saving stories were accorded legitimacy only within the privacy of her home, her listeners being only her husband and sister,
centuries later, women are "speaking out" to a wider audience. Advocates of "women's rights as human rights" encourage women to tell their stories publicly and often at great risk so that violations of women's human rights can be stopped. At the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Charlotte Bunch opened the Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights with the following remarks:

We are tearing down the wall, the wall of silence that has prevented the world from recognizing the abuse of women's human rights everywhere. And to help us tear down that wall, we have brought here women from 25 different countries that will testify to the nature and extent of human rights abuse in their parts of the world. We hope that you will listen closely, hear the stories and remember that behind each of these stories stands the lives of millions of women. (Augusta 1994)

This move from invisibility to visibility, from private expression to public disclosure of traumas has been positioned as a social and psychological necessity for women. "Speaking out serves to educate the society at large about the dimensions of sexual violence and misogyny, to reposition the problem from the individual psyche to the social sphere where it rightfully belongs, and to empower victims to act constructively on our own behalf and thus make the transition from active victim to active survivor" (Alcoff and Gray 1993:261-2). The potential of story-telling, its transgressivity, its pedagogical import, its capacity for empowerment, is thought to be best realized therefore not only with voice but also with visibility.
In this, the feminist project is not alone. According to Johannes Fabian, it is through visualism that all of modern Western culture needs to be understood (1983:105-141). Rey Chow remarks that the "obsession with visuality means also the obsession with a certain understanding of visuality, namely, that visuality exposes the truth" (Chow 1993:166). The visualist bias of Western culture has done much for promoting the idea of the camera image as the authority for truth. It is not surprising, therefore, that to promote public awareness of women's human rights abuses, Charlotte Bunch and the convenors of the Vienna tribunal chose not only to organize this public event but also to commission the resources of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) to produce The Vienna Tribunal: Women's Rights are Human Rights, a video account of 15 women testifying before the UN tribunal, that is, a re-union of voice and visibility, a testimony of testimonies, if you will.

For women, however, visuality--and, in particular, cinematic visuality--has not always been a source of empowerment. It has been argued by feminist theorists that films appeal to a voyeuristic male gaze and reproduce stereotypes of women (Mulvey 1975). Documentary film has not been immune to this criticism. Ruby Rich, for example, writing on the NFB documentary Not A Love Story, has argued that, despite its purported anti-pornography stance, the film's own methods compound the visual exploitation of women. The camera "gaze" that it uses simulates, through intimate zooms, the
typical vantage point of a male consumer of pornography while he himself is never visually exposed or verbally confronted (1990:408). Maggie Humm, on the other hand, maintains that the moving stories told by the women during the course of the film have the potential for dislodging any purely visual reading, as they did for the students in her Women's Studies class (1997:46-7). "[I]t is articulation which must be stressed, not simply representation" (57), she says. To press her claim, she, too, cites the example of Scheherazade as only the first of many "women who have always known to utilise the power of speech to save their sexuality as well as themselves" (57).

As I remarked in the Introduction, the Arab/Muslim woman has been the impetus for a veritable outpouring of cinematic activity in Quebec. Of the four documentary films produced on this subject in the last two years, Au nom d'Allah and Rupture have dealt specifically with the situation of the Arab/Muslim woman in Quebec.¹ In this chapter then, I want to turn to what may be construed as the other face of Émilie Ouimet which is the Arab/Muslim woman as immigrant, the one who chooses to opt into the "race." Whereas Émilie Ouimet's donning of hijab was depicted as a literal fouling of the face of "Québécois" identity and resulted in her expulsion from its roster, the Arab/Muslim woman immigrating to Quebec is being afforded a

¹The other two films are Tahani Rached’s Quatre femmes d'Égypte (NFB/ONF:1997) which, as the title suggests, talks about four Egyptian women and the independently produced Mon cœur est témoin (1997) in which the filmmaker Louise Carré interviews 15 Muslim women world-wide.
different place. As I demonstrated in my analysis of the Quebec government report on racism, immigration has now been constructed as a fact of past and present-day Quebec. How then is Québécois national identity being imagined and managed when the project is the integration of the Arab/Muslim woman and not her ouster, the making of an incipient citizen and not her disinherence?

In this paper, therefore, I want to explore the relationship between women's story-telling and visuality, how "[t]he very act of speaking out has become [to be] used as performance and spectacle" (Alcoff and Gray 1993:275), how in particular the visualized image of the Arab/Muslim woman speaking out has been used to counter an invisibility and explode stereotypes but also how this ostensibly oppositional practice has served new interests at a time of national anxiety over identity. Lauren Berlant maintains that "immigration discourse is a central technology for the reproduction of patriotic nationalism" and immigrant women in particular are valued for their "utility as symbolic evidence for the ongoing power of American democratic ideals" (1997:195). According to Berlant, "the female immigrant fleeing from an archaic patriarchal family" (1997:203) has perhaps the most potential to reinvigorate white nations. White nations are able to construct themselves as a haven for women of colour, a fiction that masks how immigrant women are actually treated. By containing injustice to the familial or
private level, a Western country is able to pass itself off as anti-patriarchal while leaving intact and unaddressed much more overwhelming economic and structural concerns.

The analysis in this chapter will proceed in two steps. The first part will briefly review the arguments that have been advanced to problematize speech and story-telling as tools of emancipation. Particular reference will be made to the case of Arab/Muslim women speaking out. The second part will focus on Najwa Tlili’s Rupture, a recent NFB documentary dealing with Arab/Muslim immigrant women victims of spousal abuse. Although I will argue that at times Tlili’s views do complicate some Orientalist tropes, ultimately Rupture is an appeal to its Western audience to save these women from oppressive patriarchal social structures and thereby secure the West’s own shaky self-definition of superiority. My overall argument is that Quebec, like all white nations, relies on the body of the immigrant woman to make itself.

Recently, and especially following Michel Foucault’s ground-breaking work on discourse and power, speech and story-telling have come to be viewed in an ambivalent light (Alcock and Gray 1993; Razack 1998:36-55). "[I]t is possible to make a fetish of breaking silence," says Wendy Brown. She continues: "[I]t is possible that this ostensible tool of emancipation carries its own techniques of subjugation" (1996:186). In particular, she worries that the feminist tradition of "breaking silence" is most often used to confess injury "in
which the story of greatest suffering becomes the true story of woman" (1996:192). Consequently, not only do those who have suffered risk becoming chained to their stories, identical to them and solely constituted by them but even those who haven't are viewed through the lens of victimhood. If we go back to the emblematic figure of Scheherazade, for example, how well has she fared through the centuries and perhaps, more notably, in the translation from East to West? We remember her as a story-teller, we may be familiar with the bowdlerized contents of some of her tales now staples of children's literature\(^2\), but as for her proto-feminist stance, her attempt to reeducate her husband, her willingness to risk her own life to save other women—her voice, in effect, little remains. If

\(^2\)Sandra Naddaff writes that there is a certain irony in the fact that the tales "which are best known today and that are thought of as quintessentially 1001 Nights material, cycles such as the "Sinbad the Sailor" and "The Story of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," are not part of the original Arabic corpus of tales" (1991:6). A similar irony exists in the recycling of "women's rights as human rights" stories of dubious authenticity. The Stoning of Soraya M. is a case in point. First published in France in 1990 as La Femme lapidée by expatriate Iranian journalist Freidoune Sahebjam, the book is based on the testimony of a single witness, a woman whom the author claims to have met while surreptitiously visiting Iran in 1985. Nonetheless, this book, along with Betty Mahmoody's Not Without My Daughter, has been welcomed in the West as a confirmation of all its worst prejudices about Iran in particular and Muslims in general. In the documentary The Vienna Tribunal, the longest of the 15 testimonies is taken verbatim from the book (p.116-124 of the English edition). Khalida Messaoudi, an Algerian, however, makes no mention of the source of her words: "Allow me to conclude by remembering a woman who died in Iran. Her name is Soraya. I will speak for because I still can do it. Iranian women can't even dream of speaking for themselves" [My emphasis]. See Hoodfar 1993:13-14 for an Iranian-Canadian woman’s views on Not Without My Daughter; see Yamina Benguigui’s film Femme d’Islam for Iranian women in Iran who are "speaking for themselves."
anything, she has been the inspiration for that other far more vivid western construct, "the harem beauty," the exotic and seductive face of what Mona Fayad has termed the "two-in-one Arab Woman," the other half being "the Faceless Veiled woman, silent, passive, helpless" (1994:170-2). When it comes to the question of women's rights, it is of course "the Faceless Veiled woman" who predominates and it is also under the rubric of "women's rights as human rights" that that "image" has been used to greatest effect. In fact, amongst activists and legal scholars who pursue gender persecution in non-Western societies, the Arab/Muslim woman is often depicted as the most oppressed of all women (Razack 1998:97). In The Vienna Tribunal, for example, of the fifteen testimonies presented, the one by the Arab woman is by far the longest, occupying 15% of the total film time. It is also the last, the culmination of a litany of horrors. What effect is left with the viewer? Is Western discourse not working as much in collusion with the oppressive elements of Arab/Muslim culture as against them? By repeatedly constructing Arab woman as captive to Arab patriarchy, is it not merely perpetuating the racist, gendered stereotypes of both Arab women and men and stripping Arab women of the very agency which it pretends to endow her?

Moreover, in contrast to the purveyors of "women's rights as human rights", Brown laments the contemporary tendency to public exposure of private lives. Titillation in the personal, she contends, "leaves injurious social, political and economic
powers unremarked and untouched" (1996:186). Depoliticization in turn leads to the regulation of lives where, for example, a reliance on a discourse of rights or generic personhood "may subject us to intense forms of bureaucratic domination and regulatory power even at the moment that we assert them in our defense (1996:121). As Wendy Brown suggests, a refusal to speak can be "a method of refusing colonization, refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or subjection through regulation" (1996:197).

This interpretation is seldom applied to Muslim women’s reluctance to "speak out." Their silence is most commonly attributed to fear. Au nom d’Allah is a 1996 documentary on the purported rise of so-called Islamic fundamentalism in Quebec. Made less than two years after the Émilie Ouimet incident, it claims the wearing of hijab in Quebec might one day spawn extremism and violence here. Yet, no hijab-wearing women appear in the film. In a voice-over, the filmmakers explain this omission:

3Compare this to another incident when the picture of a 14-year-old hijab-wearing girl was used without her permission to illustrate an article in La Presse (Turenne 1996) reviewing a book that compares Muslim fundamentalism with Nazism. The book was Yolande Geadah’s Femmes voilées, intégrismes démasqués. The offensive passage reads: "Le processus [d’islamisation] se rapproche en somme de l’embrigadement des jeunes dans un mouvement fasciste, que d’aucuns comparent au nazisme, mais dans ce cas sous le couvert de la religion. Cette comparaison n’est pas exagérée comme certains le croient, et de plus en plus de caractéristiques communes aux deux mouvements se font jour comme nous le verrons plus loin" (1996:110). When the girl’s family was interviewed on the evening news, the father’s response was eloquent in its simplicity: "We want to live here in a peaceful society."
Dans le cadre de ce reportage, nous avons approchés 30 musulmanes, victimes ou témoins de la pression de la part des fundamentalistes religieux. Par peur de représailles, toutes ces femmes qui croient en Islam ont décliné notre invitation de participer à une émission de télé même si on assurait l’anonymat. (Bélanger and Émond 1996).

Instead, the actions and speech of these invisible and silent women are interpreted by the sociologist Micheline Milot, who positions herself as "the enlightened rescuer" (Grewal 1996:12). Having interviewed "les centaines de musulmanes", she and her team claim to have noticed "quelques signes" on the part of these women, signs which she interprets as implorations: "Pouvez-vous faire quelque chose pour moi?". Among critics of Western-style feminism, this move has been defined as "colonial feminism" or "imperial feminism". Leila Ahmed explains:

[I]t captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men.[...] The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or

“Curiously, the soundtrack veers off at this point and we are only able to catch the beginning of her response: "Malheureusement, les intervieweurs..." What indeed can Micheline Milot do? Obviously her participation in this documentary is her response. And to what effect? As Sheila McDonough has pointed out, referring to Yolande Geadah’s Femmes voilées, intégrismes démasqués which also draws parallels with Muslim fundamentalism in Egypt and the wearing of hijab in Quebec, "[p]eople who know nothing about Islam may get the impression from it that the Muslim girls walking around our streets with veils on their heads represent a political threat to our society and they might even be abused or attacked because of this" (Montreal, Pulse News, n/d). Coincidentally (or not!), Ariane Émond, the co-producer of Au Nom d’Allah, is also the director of the collection <<Des femmes en changement>> in which Yolande Geadah’s book appears.
societies beyond the borders of the
civilised West, oppressed women was to be
used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to
render morally justifiable its project of
undermining or eradicating the cultures of
colonized peoples. (1992:151)

Micheline Milot’s neocolonial rhetoric makes of the absent
Muslim woman an object of pity to be contrasted to the
"liberated" Western woman, who in turn is used to shore up
Western cultural superiority. "[T]he one enables and sustains
the other" (Mohanty 1991:74), and both, as Leila Ahmed’s
definition implies, are equally in thrall to
imperialist/patriarchal interests.

Having said all this I would like to make clear that I do
not for a moment doubt that Arab/Muslim women, like women all
over the world, are being subjected to the most horrible
abuses and that these urgently demand to be heard and
addressed. What I would like to focus on in the next part of
this chapter, however, is how this is being done. What might
it mean for an Arab/Muslim woman to speak out in Quebec in the
late 1990s? Given the climate of Islamophobia in the West, the
hijab controversy in Quebec being but one manifestation, how
can a Arab/Muslim woman tell her story of abuse publicly
without feeding into the West’s worst prejudices, including
stereotyped images of demonized Arab men and captive Arab

5In deploying the conflated term "Arab/Muslim", I do not
mean to imply that all Arabs are Muslims or all Muslims Arab.
Rather it is in the public imagination, in particular in the use
of stereotype, that the confusion exists and it is this
stereotype which this paper aims to explore, hence, the use.
women? Is it even possible to do so without, for example, evoking Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter*, a book and film which continues to monopolize the public imagination?

Najwa Tlili's *Rupture* is a recent attempt to steer through the shoals of voice and visibility. Like *The Vienna Tribunal*, it is essentially a feminist project whose intent is educational:

They came to start a family and a new life but found only suffering and humiliation. Fadhila and Roula are both Arab women, immigrants, and victims of spousal abuse. To help break the wall of silence, they have courageously decided to tell their stories. These moving personal accounts are intercut with interviews with social workers, a Canadian immigration lawyer and members of the Montreal Arab community. Framed by songs magnificently performed by the diva Aïcha Redouane, the film explores how immigrants integrate into a new country with different cultural values and a different view of women's rights.⁶

Because of its subject matter, the film has been able to present itself and has also been viewed as inherently ground-breaking. As the writer Fawzia Zouari says in the film, speaking publicly has put an end to Scheherazade: "Les femmes arabes racontent le jour." François Berger writing in *La Presse* praised *Rupture* as a breakthrough for relations between the sexes in the Arab community: "Le film de Mme Tlili, qui vient de recevoir le "<Prix de l'originalité>" du festival Vues d'Afrique, lève le tabou qui imprègne la communauté

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⁶This description was available to those attending the film's 3-day run at the Cinéma ONF in Montreal in May 1998.
arabophone sur toute la question des relations entre les hommes et les femmes" (Berger 1998). In what follows, I would like to explore my altogether more equivocal reaction to this film. The idea that Rupture represents a kind of breakthrough, a "rupture", if you will, is only thinkable if one erases the fact that "[f]rom Aisha, the Prophet’s wife in seventh century Arabia, to Alifa Rifaat in our own day, women have had and continue to have a great deal to do not only with speaking the body in a lively oral culture, but also, directly or indirectly, with writing it" (Ahmed 1989:54). Rather than being hidden behind a wall of silence, to readers of Nawal El Saadawi’s work, the Arab woman writer most familiar to Westerners, the negative attitudes in Arab culture toward women and their bodies seem only too apparent. Rupture, however, is able to present itself as a breakthrough because it partakes of a historical blindness, a blindness which according to Cornel West is a legacy of the European Enlightenment, namely, "the inability to believe in the capacities of oppressed peoples to create cultural products of value" (Quoted by Harlow 1989:166). To insist that a documentary such as Rupture, produced, disseminated and consumed in the West, has opened the eyes of the Arab community to problems of spousal abuse is to at least partially align oneself with the notion that "feminism" too "is a western or First World concept exported along with modernization and technology to Third World countries" (Harlow
But how can the facts of Arab/Muslim women's indigenous awareness and activism be so easily overlooked? Why does a filmmaker such as Najwa Tlili, herself of Tunisian origin and surely conversant with the feminist discourse of Arab/Muslim women writers, choose to ignore those texts? The answer resides in the fact that the film has not been made primarily for the Arab community. Since it has only been released in French, it not only gives a non-Arabic-speaking audience viewing priority, but it effectively excludes those members of the Arab community who might most benefit from seeing it, that is, unilingual arabophone women such as Roula Koudsi, one of the women who testifies in the film. Therefore, not surprisingly, when asked by an audience member to elaborate on her goals for her film, Najwa Tlili chose to qualify her initial assertion of serving the women in her community by assuming a position of "innocence." "Je suis une simple cinéaste," she said, implying that how the film was used was really out of her hands. Underlying this apparently self-effacing comment is a disturbing lack of awareness of the politics that undergird any kind of cultural production. The fact that she is working within the constraints of her funder, the NFB, whose mandate is to make films in English and French, Canada's two official languages, may be at least partially to

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7This exchange occurred in a question session following the May 6, 1998 showing of Rupture at the Cinéma ONF in Montreal.
blame for the disingenuousness of her remarks. Yet I think we can well ask when dealing with a subject that focuses so exclusively on a negative aspect of Arab/Muslim life, how racism might shape and inform the interpretations of the experiences seen on the screen. To say, as Tlili does, that the questions her film explores, questions of "how immigrants integrate into a new country with different cultural values and a different view of women's rights", have a pertinency beyond that of the Muslim/Arab community may be true, but this contention does not "neutralize" her gaze. It does not, for example, interrogate why in the last two years there have been no less than four documentaries made in Quebec about the lives of Arab/Muslim women. Why are we so fascinated with this subject in these times? How do we explain this "excess of spectacle"? How is this, as Rey Chow calls it, "automatizing of 'the other'...the source of our pleasure" (1993:61)?

The disproportionate attention directed to Arab/Muslim woman may be explained by what Michel Foucault in The History of Sexuality calls "the speaker's benefit" (1978:6). He maintains that the speaker--or, in our case, the filmmaker--would have an interest in constructing the act of disclosure or "speaking out" as a difficult and arduous process because it invests the act with more power and meaning and intensifies the pleasure of the audience. "[T]he more it was repressed, the more eagerness and pleasure there was in the telling and thus the more incitement to tell" (Alcoff and Gray 1993:269).
The danger, of course, is that the act of "speaking out" loses its communicative function and hence its transgressive potential and becomes a mere spectacle for the audience. The risk is greater if that audience is non-Arab. The fact that all the perpetrators of violence in Rupture are Arab males and that the white male is never visible in the film means that it is the white male's spectatorship which is being appealed to and he stands to gain the most in "pleasure." What cannot be mentioned, what is unstatable, however, is the relationship of white men to Arab/Muslim women. We are once more in the realm of Spivak's statement, "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (1988:296), the white male gaze being also the imperial gaze. This is just one way whites, both men and women, can cast themselves as the "saviours" of these women without interrogating their own complicity. What could be more comforting to a white audience fearful that Islamic extremism is gaining a foothold in Quebec than a documentary affirming that victimized Arab/Muslim women are all too ready to be complicit in perpetuating the fantasy that Canadian/Quebec culture, that is, Western culture, is the quintessential site of freedom. As Laurent Berlant says, this is the only possible context in which a Western country "can be coded as antipatriarchal" (1997:197). Indeed it is the very power and

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8The film, for example, does not mention the cases of white men who have married Arab/Muslim women and upon the breakup of these marriages have been able to limit their ex-wives' access to their children by resorting to the stereotypes of "passive," "helpless" Arab/Muslim women.
pleasure that so many viewers with white privilege experience when watching this film that acts to censor dissenting voices who may find the film and its reception problematic. Gayatri Spivak urges the "Third World" feminist to be aware of her complicitous relationship with the "First World":

The privileged Third World informant crosses cultures within the network made possible by socialized capital...[T]he desire to "cross" cultures means accession, left or right, feminist or masculist, into the elite culture of the metropolis. This is done by the commodification of the particular "Third World culture" to which they belong. Here entry into consumerism and entry into "Feminism" (the proper named movement) have many things in common. (1989:221)

Had Najwa Tlili approached her subject with greater awareness of how white/male supremacy shapes cultural production - determining what representations of Arab/Muslim women are

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9I am not in a position to theorize on the video’s impact on the Arab community although the fact that it is contentious was made amply clear during the after-film discussion. Reactions were varied. That hearing stories can be powerful for survivors was borne out by the number of testimonials elicited from women in the audience. These, however, were often in reaction to objections which were raised by other members of the Arab community, both men and women, who perceived the film as unduly negative and even defamatory. In reaction to the latter, a non-Arab man chose to draw a parallel from his own society: "Ici, au Québec, on a des drop-outs, mais personne ne pense qu'on est une société des drop-outs." What was lacking in his analysis was precisely what was also absent in the film, a recognition that "the risks taken in critical reflection are never equally shared" (Razack 1998:50).

10Consumerist "feminism" has reached its apogee now that Céline Dion is about to release the single "Zora sourit" which, according to The Globe and Mail, is about "an Algerian-born Frenchwoman who savours the freedom of her adopted country by removing her veil to expose her 'naked face to the wind'" (Yakabuski 1998).
deemed acceptable and marketable - perhaps the film would not have so easily turned these women's testimonies into a spectacle for those on the outside looking in at the expense of those on the inside looking out.

The notion that the West signifies safety and protection, for example, is belied by the very circumstances under which one of the women is being interviewed. It seems somewhat disingenuous to vaunt the West's "different view of human rights" when at the moment that she speaks Roula Koudsi is in hiding, there is a Canada-wide warrant out for her arrest, and her husband who is serving a 14-day prison sentence for assaulting her is about to be released (Semenak 1996). Is that better than Syria? Only Roula Koudsi knows and she has made her decision. And it is this idea that she has choice and that she has in fact chosen that "must be prima facie evidence that freedom and democracy exist in [Canada/Quebec]" (Berlant 1997:196).

Granted that one can never be truly "Québécois," the closest any one group of immigrants can come to that ideal is directly proportional to their identification with and desire for that status. In Rupture, the Arab/Muslim woman is given, as Lauren Berlant puts it, a "facelight" (1997:200-1); in other words, she is "whitened." Her potential to assimilate is enhanced by diminishing her threat. None of the women interviewed in Rupture is veiled, for example.

On the other hand, the framing of these women's stories
of victimhood, their filmed representation, their performance, at times breaks with but also reinforces the stereotypes to which they are in thrall. That both the beginning and end of Rupture invoke the Oriental topos of the female harem is, I think, significant. The testimonies themselves are in effect framed within a "harem"-like scene, voice and visibility enclosed within its metaphoric opposite. The opening scenes of Rupture serve up several clichés from the Orientalist repertoire. A camera descends a shadowy staircase uncovering a room full of women sitting on divans, talking and sipping coffee. There is the glint of silver, the glow of brass. A singer is entertaining: "La vie s'est apitoyée pour nous/Tellement nous sommes loin l'un de l'autre/Elle nous souriait parfois/ Et d'autre fois nous tirait des larmes." Could this be a scene from Delacroix's "Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement?" Might we not be Delacroix himself penetrating the harem whose sight, it is said, inspired him to paint the famous tableau (Djebar 1980:167-193)? Yet Delacroix's adventure was not without its imperial subtext. The ability to penetrate the secret recesses of the harem and possess the veiled female reenacted the imperialist project of the political and military conquest of the Arab world (Harlow 1986:xv-xvi). It has become a commonplace for feminist postcolonial critics to similarly encase their works in Orientalist covers adorned with odalisques, hammams, black
slaves and other Orientalist tropes. As we delve into their oeuvre in our effort to know better the Orient described within are we not also repeating Delacroix’s penetrating gesture? Or can this overly familiar scene be interpreted otherwise?

The harem has generally been perceived negatively as a place of seclusion and segregation but just as scholars have been analyzing the veil, that other signifier of Arab/Muslim culture, as a context-specific phenomenon enveloping a multiplicity of meanings and strategies, so the stereotype of the isolated harem has also come to be challenged (Ahmed 1992, Hoodfar 1993). Leila Ahmed, in a controversial piece written in the 1980s, viewed the harem positively as a women’s space: "In their space, woman can be, and often are, freely together, freely exchanging information and idea, including about men, without danger of being overheard by men" (1982:528). For Ahmed, the harem is a prototype of the consciousness-raising session which, of course, it predates by several centuries (531). These sentiments have been echoed more recently by Margot Badran: "The site of the first emergence of women’s ‘feminist awareness’ and nascent ‘feminist expression’ was the urban harem" (1995:4). However, as Reina Lewis has said, no representation of a harem stands alone and "to represent the harem in any form was to enter into a long-standing, well-

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11See, for example, McClintock (1995), Lewis (1996), Lowe (1991), all of whom probably took their cue from the cover of Edward Said’s seminal Orientalism.
understood narrative about the harem and the East" (199f:164). Academic discourse can do little to dispel the mind-set of a Western spectatorship imbued with Orientalist tropes. Indeed, the makers of Rupture themselves seem to have an equivocal relationship with those stereotypes.

The end of Rupture, I would argue, both reiterates and subverts the Orientalist tropes. The camera drops down from an ornate, domed ceiling to reveal another harem-like room but this time it is empty. The women have gone. While a voice-over details the life of Scheherazade, we are taken to a public forum where the writer Fawzia Zouari is addressing a crowd and reading from her book Pour en finir avec Shahrazade. She later joins a group of Arab women (and one man) to continue their discussion. Unlike the two testimony-givers who speak to the camera, these women exchange words and gazes with each other. The debate quickly broadens beyond the well-worn theme of patriarchy ("J’ai fait ma paix avec les hommes.") to include concerns ("le regard des autres," the struggle within Arab/Muslim societies to integrate the notion of the individual into that of community) which the film has up to now suppressed perhaps in deference to its primary audience.12 Might this not be an intimation of what "speaking out" really entails, that is, "a survivor speaks out among other survivors and [...] participates in a collective process of analysis and

12Not surprisingly, this segment has been singled out as the least interesting part of the film by some critics in the mainstream Quebec media (Bilodeau 1998).
evaluation of experience" (Alcoff and Gray 1993:283)? Could this not be the latent content of the harem made manifest? As if to reinforce this idea, in the final scene we return to the harem-like setting of the opening but, I would argue, with a change of perspective. The singer's words take on a new, more defiant meaning. Unlike the testimony-givers whose stories are dramatized by rotating camera movements that caress their heads and the play of light and shadow on their faces, the singer faces us in close-up but with a self-presence that dominates the scene and the screen. Although she is the object of our gaze, she was looked at first by the other women in the room, thereby breaking with the voyeuristic viewing position typical of the cinematic gaze (Lewis 1996:164-5). Unlike the pathos of the testimonies where we are urged to over-identify, here there is a distance that effectively marks the spectator as Western and other. The testimony-givers spoke in French or were dubbed while here the use of subtitles exposes the viewer to the unfamiliar idiom of Arabic song. The harem's traditionally frozen space "awaiting the husband's transforming presence/gaze" (Lewis 1996:164) is socialized. The incorporation of children and women of various ages further weakens the sexualized aura. Moreover, it displaces the central force in harem relations from the all-powerful male figure to one of mother/daughter (Lewis 1996:156-8). There is a continued stress on difference but not necessarily to condemn.
And yet although one may argue that throughout this sequence a different view of the Oriental is being presented, it is neither beyond appropriation nor does it make an irrevocable difference. If, as I mentioned above, one way immigrants have been "whitened" is by diminishing their threat, another is by heightening their allure—and the harem-like images I have described are nothing but alluring. If Émilie Ouimet was a blot on national identity, the degeneracy of these women fails to register. Instead their faces and bodies, whether sexualized or socialized, whether in pleasure or in pain, never desert their primary function of "someone who desires America" (Berlant 1997:195). For whether these women want to be saved from abusive husbands or from the conformism of community, they are performing for the camera, "America," their man.
CONCLUSION

In March 1995, *La Presse* asked one of its high-profile journalists, Nathalie Pétrowski, to don hijab for one week and travel the streets of Montreal "pour voir la réaction des gens sur [s]on passage." One wonders if it wouldn't have been more pertinent to ask a Muslim woman about her daily reality in Canada but as we soon realize it is not Pétrowski’s to root out racism: "Les musulmans eux-mêmes n’affirment-ils pas qu’ils sont victimes de racisme tous les jours à Montréal? Rien de tout cela n’est arrivé." Her forays into what she calls "le pays du hijab" are informed by a rather different ethic, one that follows in the tradition of a long history of incognito travelers to the East. Sara Mills explains: "The westerner in disguise is a figure of great textual power since it demonstrates great knowledge to a western audience, and at the same time it asserts even greater power over the people of the colonised country since they are represented as being fooled by the disguise" (1991:140). Although these earlier travelogues to which Mills is referring were meant to expand knowledge of the world, what they often served up were self-aggrandizing narratives, where the debased native was used to bolster the self-esteem of the European colonizer (Said, 1978; Kabbani, 1986; Lewis, 1996). While it may be true, as Reina Lewis and Sara Mills contend, that women travelers' accounts possessed some counter-hegemonic potential, on the whole they upheld rather than challenged the prevailing idiom of
imperialist ideology. It is not surprising then that Pétrowski's reports of her encounters with Muslims in mosques and Islamic dress shops, on city buses and in schools, endlessly reiterate their difference, inferiority and threat, for her series of articles, although predicated on a feminist concern for Muslim women, is itself structured by the same assumptions of white superiority and civilization (Muslim women are oppressed by their backward menfolk and must learn to follow the example of their more advanced white sisters) that informed the accounts of her nineteenth century predecessors.

The primary concern of these earlier writers was, of course, the shoring up of the civilizing mission abroad. If the natives were shown as inferior, the conquest of their territory could be justified. However, this is not the situation in which present-day Quebec finds itself. What specific political interests then can be found to underlie the binary logic of Pétrowski's discourse? Hayden White has described how

[1]n times of sociocultural stress, when the need for positive self-identification asserts itself but no compelling criterion of self-identification appears, it is always possible to say something like: "I may not know the precise content of my own felt humanity, but I am most certainly not like that," and simply point to something in the landscape that is manifestly different from oneself. (1978:151)

He calls this technique "definition by stipulation rather than by empirical observation and induction" (1978:151) and we can
see it at work in Pétrowski's discourse. In the final installment of her series, she summarizes her findings on "la réaction des gens" in the following manner: "À l'indifférence ou à la gêne des Québécois qui me prennent pour une cousine proche de Mère Teresa, les musulmans opposent un regard plein de convoitise." Clearly, in Pétrowski's reasoning, "les Québécois" and "les musulmans" fall in opposite camps. For her, the very notion of being "Québécois" relies on the construction and exclusion of a racialized (and Orientalized) other.

In Orientalism, Edward Said has described how since antiquity Islam has stood as the great antithesis of and thus constant danger to the Christian West. It "represents a resurgent atavism, which suggests not only the threat of a return to the Middle Ages but the destruction of what is regularly referred to as the democratic order in the Western world" (Said 1981:51). That this menace might be more acutely felt in Quebec can perhaps be explained by the fact that the evolution of Quebec society has traditionally been represented as "being out of step, being behind, inferior, frozen in time", as having undergone a relatively slow and recent "modernization" in relation to other societies (Létourneau 1995:1042-30). According to this version of history, a major factor in the anachronic development of Quebec has been the hegemony of the clergy. If, therefore, according to Pétrowski, the hijab-wearing woman evokes indifference or embarrassment
amongst "les Québécois", the implication is that they now constitute a modern, secular/catholic, pluralistic, open-minded society, one that has progressed beyond its church-ridden past, a past of which the hijab-wearing woman-cum-Mother Theresa is nonetheless an equivocal living reminder. She represents what the "Québécois(e)" might have been at one time and what s/he might become once more if s/he fails to observe the dictates of modernity. To paraphrase Toni Morrison, religion resurfaces at the site of its very internment (1992:xxii). To confirm the "Québécois" claim to "modernity" and to dispell the notion that the two groups might in fact share a common humanity, it is therefore necessary to dwell further on the primitiveness of "les musulmans". That they exist in some retrograde state is reinforced by appealing to the Orientalist trope of sexual licentiousness ("un regard plein de convoitise"), a trope which has no resonances in Q discourse. As Rana Kabbani has pointed out,

[t]he villainy of Oriental men is aggravated by the fact that they are portrayed as traders in female bodies. They are the cruel captors who hold women in their avaricious grasp, who use them as chattels, as trading-goods, with little reverence for them as human beings. This idea was highly important in distinguishing between the barbarity of the Eastern male and the civilised behaviour of the Western male (1986:78, my emphasis).

In other words, what is specifically secured here in Pétrowski's account is the "respectability" (to use George
Mosse's term) of the "Québécois" male in contrasting to the Muslim man who is depicted as lacking control over his sexual passions and behaving improperly towards women.

But, Nathalie Pétrowski's claims notwithstanding, how "respectable" is this "Québécois?" Not only do these Orientalist stereotypes misrepresent the Muslim male, they also obscure in their flattering vision of "Québécois" masculine superiority internal tensions along gender lines within the fantasized unity of the "Québécois" nation. This "respectability" is far from assured when discussion turns to matters of cultural survival, for example. The anxiety over the sexual excesses of non-Western peoples historically has been heightened by a more concrete fear of their procreative energies. Just a few months after Pétrowski's series of articles appeared, the then-Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard sounded the alarm. Lamenting the low birth rate in Quebec, he declared that Quebec was "une des races blanches qui fait le moins d'enfants" (Lévesque and Venne 1995:1). These remarks created a stir but not sufficient to prevent the president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Françoise David, from standing supportively at Bouchard's side when two days later he explained them away as a "purely demographic observation". That Bouchard's construction of "la Québécoise" was constituted in terms not unsimilar to those Pétrowski claims mark the attitude of Muslim men toward hijab-wearing women--namely, as sexualized beings, as reproducers of
ethnicity, as "the symbolic markers of the group's cultural identity" (Chatterjee 1993:7)—warrants, I think, closer attention. As Lois West (1997) among others has pointed out, what cannot be ignored is that nationalisms of whatever variety as well as being heavily racialized phenomena are also inherently gendered ones in which men have traditionally defined the terms. By circumscribing the meaning of what it is to be "Québécois" to a racial hierarchy, Nathalie Pétrowski and Françoise David are conveniently able to overlook this other differential, one that they as nationalist-minded feminists might have more trouble defending: the unequal integration of women into the Québécois national project.

I maintain that there has been so little questioning of the national project by Québécois feminists even if they are constituted negatively by it because by not endorsing it they would have risked erasure. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack have described this practice as securing a "toehold on respectability": "Feeling only the ways that she is positioned as subordinate, each woman strives to maintain her dominant positions. Paradoxically, each woman asserts her dominance in this way because she feels it is the only way in which she can win respect for her claim of subordination" (1998:336). Confronted with the competing claims of anti-racism, feminism and nationalism, Québécois feminists largely ignored the first (the "whiteness" of Lucien Bouchard’s remarks was not taken up) and between the latter two chose nationalism because it
afforded them the more respectable i.e. white vantage point, a vantage point that explains the easy dismissal of the first claim. However, as Fellows and Razack state, "because subordinate groups that gain a measure of respectability do not by definition possess all of the attributes of respectability, they are in an inherently unstable position. Those attributes that remain classified as degenerate will always threaten their toeholds on respectability (1998:352)-- hence, an emphasis on women as reproduces of the nation and a return to a pro-natalist politics reminiscent of an earlier church-dominated era of which the Québécois "projet de société" was supposed to be a rejection. Only when the Québécois(e) becomes aware of "the interlocking structure of domination" (Fellows and Razack 1998:352), of the intersecting discourses of race, gender and nation, of the Émilie Ouimets chez nous, can there be such a thing as a non-race-affirming, nation-building project.
# APPENDIX A

## ARTICLES ON HIJAB BY NEWSPAPER AND TYPE

**SEPT. - NOV. 1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Editorials</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Letters</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLOBE &amp; MAIL</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

ARTICLES ON HIJAB
(TITLE/AUTHOR/DATE/PAGE NUMBER)
SEPT. - NOV. 1994

SEPTEMBER 1994

LA PRESSE

#1 Élève expulsée de son école parce qu’elle portait le foulard islamique (Berger, François). 9 sept., p. A1

#2 L’élève au voile islamique ira dans une autre école: La mère d’Émilie Ouimet a demandé son admission à la polyvalente Lucien-Pagé (Berger, François). 10 sept., p. A3

#3 La France interdit le foulard islamique dans les écoles. 11 sept., p. A7


#5 Les directeurs d’écoles conviés à étudier le port du hijab (Berger, François). 17 sept., p. A3

#6 L’école à voile (Gruda, Agnès). 19 sept., p. B2 [Éditorial]

#7 Les Québécois sont divisés sur le port du voile islamique (Berger, François). 25 sept., p. B12

#8 Il serait naïf de considérer le hidjab comme un simple symbole religieux (Baril, Daniel). 28 sept. p. B3 [Opinion]

#9 Des principes fondamentaux sont en jeu dans le débat sur le foulard islamique (Gaudet, Jules Édouard). 28 sept., p. B3 [Opinion]


LE DEVOIR

#11 Voile islamique: Les parents évacuent la question. 15 sept., p. A2


#13 Le port du hidjab dans les écoles: La CEQ souhaite
l'adoption d'une politique d'éducation interculturelle (Montpetit, Caroline). 20 sept., p. A3


#15 Hidjab et crucifix (Bourgault, Pierre). 20 sept., p. A6 [Opinion]

#16 France: Le foulard islamique est interdit dans les écoles. 21 sept., p. A6

#17 Pas d'élèves voilées (Gomez, Daniel). 28 sept., p. A8 [Lettre]

#18 Lever le voile sur le hidjab: Où finit la tolérance et où commence la discrimination sur le port du voile islamique au Québec? (Geadah, Yolande). 28 sept., p. A7 [Opinion]

**THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**


**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**

#22 Montreal principal denounced for ousting teen in Islamic garb (Picard, André). Sept. 10, p. A4

**OCTOBER 1994**

**LA PRESSE**

#23 Québec envisage d'intervenir sur le port du voile islamique (Berger, François). 26 oct., p. A16

#24 Un lycée de Lille expulse huit autres étudiantes portant le voile islamique. 26 oct., p. A16

#25 La France <<laique>> déclare la guerre au voile islamique (Robitaille, Louis B.). 30 oct., p. A2

**LE DEVOIR**

#26 Le foulard islamique (Gingras, Adrien). 3 oct., p. A8
[Lettre]

#27 La controverse sur le voile islamique en France: Des musulmans font de la résistance. Journée de désobéissance au règlement Bayrou. 3 oct., p. A6

#28 L’affaire du foulard en France: La vie d’un lycée est perturbée. 6 oct., p. A5

#29 Les islamistes et l’école laïque (Brousseau, François). 6 oct., p. A6 [Éditorial]

#30 La tête dans le sable pour le voile islamique: Peut-on mettre sur un pied d’égalité le hidjab, la kippa, le turban et même la croix chrétienne au cou? (Vaillancourt, Yves). 12 oct., p. A9 [Opinion]


#32 Hidjab et soumission (Bernatchez, Suzanne). 20 oct., p. A6 [Lettre]

#33 Landry veut un débat sur les symboles religieux à l’école (Paré, Isabelle). 26 oct., p. A1

**THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**

#34 Forcing hijab on teachers unacceptable: Houda-Pepin (Bellemare, André). Oct. 24, p. A3

#35 Quebec won’t support hijabs in public schools, Landry says (Block, Irwin). Oct. 26, p. A6

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**

#36 Time to debate headgear issue, minister says. Oct. 26, p. A4

**NOVEMBER 1994**

**LA PRESSE**

#37 Le foulard islamique (1) (Gagnon, Lysiane). 5 nov., p. B3 [Série]

#38 Le foulard islamique (2) (Gagnon, Lysiane), 12 nov., p. B3 [Série]

**LE DEVOIR**

THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Hijab incompatible with Quebec society, nationalist group says (Norris, Alexander). Nov. 23, p. A4

Lemieux blasted for remarks attacking hijabs (Norris, Alexander). Nov. 24, p. A3

"Not compatible": minorities feel excluded when values are attacked (Curran, Peggy). Nov. 24, p. A3 [Opinion]

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