Constructing Whiteness: Regulating Aboriginal Identity

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Abstract

Curricula in classrooms facilitate a national amnesia of colonialism that renders inconceivable the possibility of Aboriginal heritage or mixed-blood presence in national subjects. This thesis examines my own family history alongside the Indian Act and discourses of multiculturalism. I provide a personal account for the ways in which Aboriginal identities are regulated in Canada. I examine how glorified white settler narratives - reproduced through both formal and informal schooling - work to displace Aboriginal peoples as the original inhabitants of the land. I argue that this facilitates ongoing Canadian colonialism that continues to circumvent the possibility of particular mixed-blood Aboriginal identities within the confines of national belonging. Citizenship education in the Toronto District School Board is situated as a mechanism of formal schooling that continues to negate the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal people so that mixed-race Aboriginal students may continue to assume themselves as white subjects within the nation.
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This thesis is inspired greatly by my mother. Without her passed down memories and insistent narrations, the work that I present here would be impossible. Maman, je t’aime.

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In memory of Diane.
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Introduction

Rationalization(s) supporting colonial relations and agendas are created through a variety of strategies, which depend primarily on the ability of colonial agents to manipulate public perceptions.
- Winona Stevenson

Most French schools in Ontario celebrate November 25th as La Journee St. Catherine. St. Catherine was a woman beheaded in France in 307 AD for refusing to marry a Roman Emperor. She was named the patron saint of unmarried women. She became a symbol for the fate of French woman who refused to perform¹ their roles as woman (to marry) and has been upheld as a symbol of warning to those who do not conform. French tradition reportedly continues in France as every November 25th women gather to socialize with one another whilst wearing white bonnets in public spaces to show their unmarried status to eligible bachelors. While French tradition has disturbingly dictated November 25th as a day of governance over the performance of femininity (Butler, 1990) and gender roles, it is its historical (re) enactment, as well as its present celebrations, that makes this tradition by white settler women in “New France” exceptionally troubling.

The Imperial ritual was brought to New France (Quebec) by the first settlers but was largely upheld and perpetuated through schooling by a woman named Marguerite

¹ In Gender Trouble (1990) Judith Butler suggests that gender is a process of becoming within particular regulatory regimes. These regimes, or discourses, work to construct gender, sex, and sexuality as natural. These regimes oblige subjects to perform and repeat particular actions that come to maintain one’s core identity that the regime itself has produced.
Bourgeois. Marguerite Bourgeois was a teaching nun who celebrated the French custom every year by making taffy and leaving trails of the candies through the forest to lead Aboriginal children in the area to her school. As a student, my school celebrated “La Journée St. Catherine” every year by giving each class a chance to make taffy. Upon our return to class, teachers would leave trails of the wrapped candies through the hallways and students would reenact the pilgrimage of Aboriginal students to places of learning. I vividly remember colouring book worksheets as a small child depicting Aboriginal children dressed in “traditional” native dress following the nun. Great emphasis was put on their looks of jubilation as they reached the school. The juxtaposition of the images of the children prior to arrival and once in the classroom is worth noting, as once settled in the school, the Aboriginal students no longer wore the dress of constructed “tradition” or of the “imaginary Indian”. Instead, they wore pants, sweaters, and dresses similar to those of the white students in the illustration. Pictures showing the pupils hard at work surrounded by nuns who appeared to be loving and caring greatly informed my early perceptions about the indoctrination and assimilation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It was also a site through which my own perceptions of my family’s mixed-blood lineage could be undone and suppressed. Although my mother was of mixed-blood heritage and would often narrate her family’s history to answer my questions of why we looked so differently, acts of schooling such as La Journée St. Catherine have ensured that her family’s history (as well as the lost status of Aboriginal women in her family) remains very difficult to uncover. The Indian Act further cements a hierarchical system of native identity as based upon tribal affiliation and status. As Bonita Lawrence (2004:26) puts it:
Few individuals appear to have recognized the depth of the problem that the Indian Act represents: its overarching nature as a discourse of classification and regulation, which has produced the subjects it purports to control, and which has therefore indelibly ordered how Native people think of things ‘Indian’.

The Indian Act (1876) has ensured that Aboriginal women are possibly the most legislated against subjects in Canadian history; as they married white settlers their aboriginal status, tribal affiliations, and rights to land were judicially lost (Cannon, 2008). Consequently, their descendents have had restricted access to tribal rights of affiliation, and familial Aboriginal lineage and identity are often ambiguous and legally unrecognized. With respect to these matters, I am particularly interested in the ways that whiteness has become a national norm and the ways in which it is upheld and perpetuated in law and dominant pedagogical approaches to teaching Canadian nationhood. I often return to the question: How is the construction of the ‘good’ national subject in institutional spaces inherently premised on violent past and present colonial encounters?

Colonial legacies of slaughter, dispossession, sexual assault, and conquest of Canada’s Aboriginal populations are forcibly erased through acts of schooling. Schooling is both formal and informal. In this thesis, I use schooling to define the ways in which white settlers learn themselves as superior beings. The Indian Act, social ideologies, residential schools, images, etc. have all contributed to nationalistic discourses that center white bodies as Canadian subjects. These discourses influence contemporary institutional systems like schools and teach nationalistic pride by erasing from public memory its imperial legacies of subjugation. This thesis is shaped largely by my interest in my familial history and the imperial mechanisms that have made my
Aboriginal lineage so difficult to uncover. I have fond memories of my mother narrating stories of familial legacies interwoven with Acadian traditions of fiddle dances, meat pies, and northern winters. Inevitably, questions surrounding the differences between my mother’s appearance and my own surfaced and would often be answered by listed narrations of a lengthy line of Aboriginal women in her family. As friends would ask whether the contrast between my mother’s brown skin and my fairness meant that I was adopted I would defend our relationship with my own memorized inventory of Aboriginal history. Gradually, these narrations were relegated to hushed conversations amongst friends as I became schooled in the national norms of whiteness.

In this thesis, I will situate the establishment of white settler norms and practices as intrinsic to Canadian identity in a re-telling of personal narratives that link my own subjectivity within the practices that regulate Aboriginal bodies in Canada. I insert autobiographical memories and narratives as a methodology for complicating accounts of the unified and whole nation. My use of autobiographical stories is an attempt to place a narrative of colonialism that has been left out of historical accounts of the nation. This aligns with Maracle’s account of imagination and memories of Aboriginality in Canada. She writes:

\[P\]art of our colonial condition is that we are still too busy struggling in the whirl of it, paddling through the rapids of it, to be able to enter the dreams at the edge of it. Few of us have had the time to study our remembered story. Some have no memory to ponder. But those of us who have pondered our memorized stories know we have a criteria for story. (1992: 208)
I utilize my memories in this thesis in an effort to contribute to alternative histories of the Canadian landscape. In offering these personalized accounts I aim to rupture a nationalistic understanding of the colonial history that forms Canadian white supremacy. In this sense I use my “personal narrative as lens onto history and the contemporary world” (Egan and Helms as quoted in Rak, 2005: 3).

Rak suggests that autobiography be considered as a set of discourses and cultural practices (2005: 8). In this thesis the autobiographical memories that I put forth are about identity and representation. I illustrate the different mechanisms by which whiteness has come to symbolize the essence of being Canadian. I am not attempting to show that racism exists in Canada, but rather, to illuminate the subtle workings that allow white supremacy to remain invisible. In as much as whiteness symbolizes national belonging it also remains an unstable identity category. My appearance marks my body as white and I learned to situate myself as a white national subject as a result of schooling and colonial identity making practices. Autobiography, in this thesis, becomes a cultural practice of questioning. It destabilizes whiteness as a fixed category by shifting the boundaries of what it means to belong in a white settler society. Offering a personalized account of the racialized violence that marks the “white body as semiotic for nationality (Schick, 1998: 3) I insert my familial legacies and mixed-race body to highlight the erasure of Aboriginal lineage that has been necessary for the making of white national subjects.

Anderson (1991) suggests that the proliferation of autobiographical narratives works to provide evidence to support notions of linear national history. Common white settler narratives like that of my paternal grandmother’s have been written into the fabric of national consciousness. Autobiographical tales of virginal landscapes, peaceful
settlement processes, and harsh conditions contribute to the fiction of the nation as a unified and seamless whole. Inserting my mixed-race Aboriginal ancestry into this mythology attempts to “challenge[s] the unitary self of liberal humanism” (Holden, 2008: 39).

In this way, my memorialized tales threaten the precarious boundaries of nationalism. Sidonie Smith (1993) suggests that the body, the “I” of the autobiographical subject, situates itself within “the relationship of specific bodies to the cultural meanings of assigned bodies in the body politic” (128). My body, read as white, has been assigned a particular meaning within the nation. My autobiographical exposure of the violent conditions of this construction attempts to disrupt the construction of some “white” bodies as a coherent and unified whole (Smith, 1993). Smith writes:

[C]ulturally only certain bodies are experienced as different. The body is thus parcelled out and policed through discursive systems that establish identities through differences that normalize certain bodies and render some bodies culturally abnormal. (1993: 129)

Autobiography by particular subjects writes the history of the body. In this thesis, I place autobiographical tales of white settler conquest alongside ones of Aboriginality to complicate the construction of whiteness as synonymous to national belonging. I cannot remember, or rather have forcibly erased, a section of my geneology and my narrations of inheritance - of Aboriginality and whiteness - presents the construction of my “white” body as founded upon colonial violence (Rak, 2005: 12). As I support these narrations with documentary evidence I attach this violence to national identity to make real the injustices that continue to uphold our nationalistic white supremacy.
Each chapter begins with intimate tales of my own familial ancestry and experiences as an educator. I then move outward to examine different processes by which the collective history of colonial conquest continues to be erased from the core of national consciousness. I query how “colonial agents manage public perceptions” (Stevenson, 1999: 49) of Indigeneity through building a collective belief in the benevolent Canadian nation so that white “settlement [may] maintain itself” as being at the core of Canadian identity (Simpson, 2008: 253). In later pages, I situate Canadian national discourses within the current push for citizenship education in Ontario high schools. These discursive strategies continue to inform historical understandings of the nation. I use these strategies in an effort to illustrate the schooling of “good” citizens as a joist to the white-supremacist nation. I endeavour to show how national narratives of multiculturalism and benevolence are realized in schooling to entrench white supremacy as the foundation of the Canadian nation.

Aboriginality was a site of disavowal in my schooling. Through representations of Aboriginal history in the classroom, I learned not only that such lineage was unfavourable in national citizenship, but also how to un-imagine myself and others around me as potentially non-visible Aboriginal or mixed-blood subjects. The celebration of Marguerite Bourgeois in the trajectory of my education is a pointed example of how schooling ought to be considered an act of discipline and self-governance: I was able to forget both myself and my mother’s family as being of Aboriginal lineage and to produce myself as a settler subject in the classroom. Michel Foucault articulates how self-governance is taught through methods of discipline in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1975). He uses the example of military men learning how
to hold weapons and understanding when to fire their guns through repetitive exercises. Through repeat performances, they become indoctrinated to a point where they need only to hear a word or a gesture to react and perform their roles with precision. The reenactment of colonial conquest elicits a similar standardized and automatic reaction to stimuli; as students repeat the journey of Aboriginal children to settler spaces of education, racist interpretations of Aboriginality become an automatic reaction and settler violence is maintained.

My complicity in reenacting the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples through colonial encounters is hinged upon tactics of violence. Colonial narratives, taught explicitly through lessons such as Marguerite Bourgeois, as well as those taught through structural violence against Aboriginal bodies, serve to construct a closed category of a good national subject. Such good subjects - as representatives of nationalism - are necessarily agents of colonial violence that open categories of citizenship to Others only through the possibility of forgetting their histories. Creating categories of racial difference is intrinsic to building our nation and establishing white settler norms. I question whether the Canadian nation, as it exists today, has been made a possibility through historical constructions of the “Indian” Other? Speaking of what she terms the “savage/civilized redux of settler societies” Audra Simpson writes:

[T]his binary maintained the ideological might and justification for claimed lands, contained peoples, and the “social problem” of unassimilatable differences. Juridical efforts to incorporate or expel or contain difference such as the Indian Act were a way of disciplining Aboriginal and white bodies to a Victorian norm of white settler citizenship or Indian wardship (“Indian Status”) (2008: 254).
Whiteness is upheld in classroom encounters as an invisible orientation. This is how imperial traditions and settler norms are permitted to continue. In *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, Sara Ahmed examines the ways in which “white” subjects are permitted to constitute themselves as national subjects through the spaces that they occupy. Ahmed situates her discussion of whiteness in bodies that are both spatially and temporally located. Bodies, she argues, are “shaped by [their] contact with objects” (2007: 152). That is, bodies are understood within public spheres such as classrooms through their orientations to dominant structures of power and subordinate others.

Whiteness is a default position of being in the world. Students who conform to racial structures of power (white vs. *non-white bodies*) gain authority in their ability to align themselves with white settler identities. Whiteness as orientation supports the idea that bodies have differing capacities to work pending their familiarity with their place (Ahmed 2007: 153). Enactments of institutional white supremacy—seen in examples of colonial celebrations such as *La Journee St. Catherine* and a nationalistic fixation on multiculturalism—serve not only to fix whiteness as a dominant mode of being but also to make “*non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different*” (ibid: 157).

If classrooms are defined as institutional places, permeated by white bodies, then those that do not match the racial criteria of “white” skin are left without a place in institutional orders of learning. Ahmed asserts: “whiteness is an orientation that puts

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2 In a small group discussion on Ahmed’s *Phenomenology of Whiteness* Isaac Stein used the expression of whiteness as the “default position” for central structures of power. This analogy is particularly useful when thinking of dominant educational systems and their configurations; they are so founded upon whiteness that there is minimal space for effective change regarding the ways in which race and racism play out in classrooms.

3 Richard Dyer refers to bodies as ‘non-white’ to speak of people outside the borders of whiteness but subjected to its marker as “‘the human position’.”
certain things within reach” and “race becomes […] a question of what is within reach, what is available to be perceived and to do ‘things’ with” (ibid: 154). Colonial narratives in classrooms facilitate a national amnesia about the legacies of Aboriginal genocide, and ease the erasure of possible Aboriginal lineage amongst students in the classroom. Pedagogical approaches to teaching nationhood, pushed by the celebration of colonial rituals, inscribe a racial hierarchy of access that furthers a Canadian national agenda of erasure.

Whiteness cannot be studied in isolation from its effects outside of classrooms. Just as students learn white supremacy through curricular commemorations of imperial traditions, they also memorize its dominance though state policies and representations. A phenomenology of whiteness erected to “help[s] us to notice institutional habits” (ibid: 165) illustrates how affects of whiteness play pivotal roles in the ways in which we understand systemically structured injustices. A study of whiteness, as an institutional habit, requires a look at which differences must be upheld and which ones erased, in order for some (but not all) subjects to be permitted access to narratives of nationalist belonging.

In *U.S Empire and the War against Native Sovereignty* (2005), Aboriginal scholar Andrea Smith reveals enterprises such as the U.S War on Terror and repressive immigration policies as necessarily anti-Aboriginal initiatives. While her analysis is focused largely on American policies, it is an apt illustration of the ways in which whiteness saturates many nationalistic endeavors of racial containment whilst simultaneously effacing Aboriginal concerns from political agendas. She writes:
What is at stake for the U.S. government is its ability to determine who can be on these lands. By instituting repressive immigration policies, the U.S. government is once again asserting that it - and not Aboriginal nations - should determine who can be on these lands” (2005: 179).

Canada’s self-construction as a multicultural and progressive nation similarly serves to facilitate an erasure of violence against Aboriginal peoples. Just as we are instructed to celebrate Canada’s diversity, we are also taught to forge an erasure of colonial tactics of rule and the ways in which whiteness instructs teachings of history, (racist) immigration policies, and public structures of power. It is true that the racial diversity of a place like Toronto is notable, but the ways in which it is celebrated necessitate a localized amnesia of Aboriginal history. I do not mean to suggest that Aboriginal peoples be privileged over others in the analysis of racism but to complicate what is at stake in narratives of progress. As we constitute our multicultural place “and “celebrate diversity” not only does racist legislation (such as immigration policies) become difficult to uncover, so too do colonial histories of land theft and the ongoing colonization of the land spaces in which we “celebrate” (Lawrence and Dua, 2006).

As I theorize how white settler norms and practices become intrinsic national characteristics it is important to show how such identities - learned through tropes of multiculturalism and citizenship education in classrooms - continue to be produced spatially and, and therefore socially, in real ways. This is central to my introduction as it is structural violence that provides a site from which to examine the interlocking systems of colonial domination. These continue to be omnipresent in the manipulation of public perceptions of Aboriginality as they are fashioned by European colonial forces.
Sherene Razack suggests that “place becomes race” (2002: 1) through nationalistic mythologies that place European settlers as the bearers of civilization (2002: 2). This process is deeply connected to the Canadian landscape and largely informs the racialized hierarchies that situate white settlers as fundamentally national subjects. Different phases of conquest have informed Canadian mythologies so that white Europeans are consistently placed as the rightful owners of the land. Razack writes:

> The national mythologies of white settler societies are deeply spatialized stories. Although the spatialized story that is told varies from one time to another, at each stage the story installs Europeans as entitled to the land, a claim that is codified in law. (2002: 3)

These spatialized stories fuel a sense of belonging to the landscape that advents the construction of the Canadian nation as white. Spatialities of white domination are erected through the dispossession of Aboriginal land. As Aboriginal peoples were erased from the landscape the land became white space. Such spatial constitutions produce racial hierarchies through the proliferation of national stories that inform perceptions of national origins and history (Razack, year: 2). It is the production and reproduction of these stories that permits European settlers to imagine themselves as national subjects. In their self-definition they assert themselves as supervisors of the nation: their white bodies define who can and cannot legitimately belong. Through their adjudicatory positions they organize their space to “sustain unequal social relations” and in turn use “these relations to shape [racialized] spaces” (Razack, 2002: 1, emphasis mine).

White domination is founded on spatialities that have been violently erected to ensure that racialized bodies in Canada are produced in relation to the spaces -constructed
as degenerate - that they occupy. Razack suggests “unmapping” as a tool to uncover the violence upon which the nation is founded and rupture nationalist mythologies that inform ideologies of peaceful settlement. She writes:

Unmapping is not only to denaturalize geography by asking how spaces come to be but also to undermine the world views that rest upon it. Just as mapping colonized lands enabled Europeans to imagine and legally claim that they had discovered and therefore owned the lands of the ‘New World’, unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination (2002: 5)

Uncovering the relationship between racialization and space is essential to an analysis of space as an exercise of power. European settlers obtain senses of selves through the formation of rigid boundaries that demarcate particular spaces as places reserved for national subjects. In turn, this creates a cycle of knowledge production that articulates the boundaries of “space inhabited by the racial Other” (Razack, 2002: 12). Buendia and Ares (2006) propose that this knowledge - based in knowing the racialized Other through space - becomes a tool of differentiation. They write:

[S]patial markers…cohere into semi-fixed institutional meanings and practices. Various discourses converge and overlap to create a system of reasoning that bounds what a person or a collective can say or do within a particular set of relationships. (2006: 5)

Following, I will use the examples of an Aboriginal woman’s murder and environmental toxicity on a reserve in Sarnia to illustrate how settler societies, steeped in whiteness, work to cast Aboriginal bodies as inherently less human than white settler bodies through spatialities of white domination.
The murder of Pamela George is exemplary of white supremacist spatiality. Pamela George was an Aboriginal woman from inner city Regina who was murdered by two white men one night as she worked as a sex-worker in Regina in April, 1995. She was picked up by Steven Kummerfield and Alex Ternowetsky and driven to the outer limits of town where she was sexually assaulted, beaten and left to die (Razack, 2000). Details of the court proceedings and of the men’s arrests are outside the scope of this thesis, but they do offer an example of the spatial geographies, white privilege, and racism I am meaning to highlight.

In her essay *Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George* (2000) Razack undertakes a detailed analysis of the factors that led to a conviction for manslaughter and not a first-degree murder charge in the case. Razack suggests that as an Aboriginal woman, Pamela George’s body was necessarily marked by a history of dispossession and settler violence while the men’s white bodies were considered to be lawfully normate. The spatial geography of Regina is such that its inner city is a racialized low-income core with white wealth and privilege surrounding it. This spatial geography came to influence the men’s complicity in acts of colonial violence and displacement prior to their murderous act. Razack writes:

[I]n their everyday life, they would have had almost no chance of encountering an Aboriginal person. Absent from the university, the ordered suburbs of their families, the chalets and cottages, spaces that come into existence through the violent dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal bodies must be sought out in those marginal spaces of the city. (2000: 106)

The boundaries between wealth and poverty are racialized lines of divide. They also provide locations of subject constitution. The fixedness of inner city poverty and
racialized violence is a central factor in why women like Pamela George occasionally turn to sex work to help feed their children. At the same time, this violence and poverty mark bodies like Pamela George’s as different and Other in what allowed for convicted men like Kummerfield and Ternowetsky to establish themselves as “different from and superior to racial Others” (ibid: 108). Their status is premised on their “shared whiteness” (ibid: 110). In other words, spaces are constructed as degenerate through colonial violence. The Aboriginal bodies that inhabit them mark them as racially bounded spaces and places that may continue to be violated.

As spaces become demarcated as degenerate, the Canadian public comes to understand racialized bodies as necessarily less human than the national norm of white ones. These practices are not exclusive to Western Canada or even to the city of Regina. Closer to home, the city of Sarnia has one of Canada’s largest concentrations of petrochemical industries within city limits. The area, known to locals as “chemical valley”, illustrates how spatial geographies work to uphold whiteness in Canada’s ongoing colonial occupation. A tour of Sarnia reveals its spatiality, and pertinently displays the classed social stratification of its inhabitants. Large homes with secluded driveways and private beach access cling to the contours of the lake displaying the wealth of their owners through amenities like landscaping, expensive cars, and boats. As you make your way from the lake end of town towards “chemical valley” the signifiers of social class alert to changes in wealth. That is, social classes shift considerably between the city’s lakeside periphery and inland industry zone: wealthy people inhabit the north while mostly working-class people occupy the areas closest to the factories. What is especially noteworthy in this spatialization is the way in which these spaces are
racialized. Directly adjacent to the stacks and basins of chemical waste of Imperial Oil and Sunoco sits the Aamjiwnaang Aboriginal Reserve.

The people of the Aamjiwaang community have been receiving increased media attention lately. The community was featured in a CBC documentary entitled *The Disappearing Male*. For more than twenty years declines in fertility and birth rates have plagued community members. Women are having difficulties conceiving and carrying their babies to term and the babies being born are overwhelmingly female. The decrease in equal ratio births is demonstratable in ongoing monitoring and statistical analysis (Mackenzie et al, 2005). In *Declining Sex Ratio in a First Nation Community* Mackenzie, Lockridge, and Keith conclude that

> [T]he sex ratios of the Aamjiwnaang community over the twenty year period 1984-2003 presented here indicates that there is a significant ongoing decrease of male births beginning in the early 1990’s and continuing to the end of the study period 2003” (2005: 1297).

It is believed that decreases in fertility and male births can be chiefly attributed to the proximity of the reserve to the petrochemical factories and years of exposure to high rates of environmental toxins.

The reserve-based system is a spatial configuration steeped in colonial violence. Histories of land theft and violent colonial encounters have historically relegated certain Aboriginal bodies to compartmentalized parcels of land. It is indisputable that legacies of capital accumulation are responsible for the placement of reserves on poor quality land

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4 According to the Indian Act a reserve is defined as follows:
(a) a tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band (Minister of Justice Canada, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca)
and soil. The placement of the Aamjiwnaang reserve beside a densely crowded area of chemical factories provides an instance to examine not only the causal relationship between environmental pollution and decreasing sex ratios but also environmental toxicity as a tool of dispossession: the structural racism that has so woven the nation becomes almost impossible to name as such since it is “nature” and not capitalist exploitation that provides the grounds for [natural] extermination. In the case of the Aamjiwnaag reserve the link between toxicity and death is unavoidable “decreased sex ratios have been associated with maternal consumption of Great Lakes fish and fish contaminated with methylmercury”. Mackenzie et al write:

Studies have demonstrated that populations exposed to environmental contaminants such as endocrine disruptors, either through their close proximity to industrial plants or through other sources such as food, can have significant changes in the reproductive ability of the community (ibid: 1296).

The articulation of treaties and other governance mechanisms have granted Aboriginal communities the rights to fish and hunt as mechanisms for preserving traditional cultural practices. But in so doing, at least at Aamjiwnaag, they also create the “material premises of extermination” (Mbembe, 2003: 18). As the people of the community exercise their inherent rights it transforms their death into an “impersonal, silent, and rapid procedure” (ibid: 18). The reserve system is a spatial institution within which death can be managed, promoted and also ignored.

As we continue to define the Canadian nation within a narrative of progress and multiculturalism, ongoing colonial violence is eased from public memory. While instances such as the murder of Pamela George or the management of death on the
Chippewa reserve in Sarnia are not the primary base for this thesis they are key to theorizing the violence of colonization and how it continues to be erased in contemporary understandings of the nation. Both examples encapsulate informal schooling: while they are not narratives presented in classrooms they work to inform the Canadian perception that Aboriginality is of little importance to national belonging. These examples, in turn, inform knowledge production of Aboriginality which is recycled in discourses of formal education. It is thus that the violence that governs Aboriginality in Canada cannot be detached from an analysis of what students learn of themselves in white settler spaces.

Classrooms, spatial configurations, and government each play a part in the reproduction of whiteness. The Indian Act has dictated who can and cannot be considered an Aboriginal person and, consequently, who has access to rights of citizenship and national power. Curricula taught in classrooms and the organization of our institutional places facilitates a national amnesia of colonialism that also renders inconceivable the possibility of Aboriginal heritage or mixed-blood presence within national subjects. Colonial celebrations such as La Journee St. Catherine or murder trials of women like Pamela George cannot be viewed separately from the violence that is inherent in their very existence. Critical analysis of the ways that Aboriginal familial inheritance continues to be governed by state legislations, multiculturalism, and

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5 The Indian Act was legislated in 1876 to give the Canadian government authority over all legislation related to First Nations peoples and their land reserves. The Act has historically defined who can lawfully be considered as Aboriginal and has administered specific legal rights to those granted “Indian Status”. Aboriginal people have lost status through outmarriage and enfranchisement. Prior to 1985 status was revoked when Aboriginal women married non-Aboriginal men. Enfranchisement meant that in order to procure the right to vote in elections or to live as white an Aboriginal person had to renounce official Indian status.
education necessitates a recognition of the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. This could potentially allow us to “think critically about the gendered and racialized historical logics that enable or disable certain forms of recognition through time, through place and through bodies…” (Simpson, 2008: 256).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I examine white settler identity as synonymous with being “Canadian” through the arrival of my father’s family from Germany. I utilize my grandmother’s stoic tale of survival in Northern Ontario to situate the myth of peaceful settlement that continues to inform what it means to be a white settler in Canada. I juxtapose the tale of settlement with the story of my great-grandmother and other Aboriginal women, who had their status revoked upon marriage to white men. I explore, through my own familial legacies, the links between land and the making of the “white” national subject.

Chapter two situates my mixed-blood heritage within the national discourse of benevolent multiculturalism. I query Canadian nation-building through the tropes of diversity and goodwill, both structural mechanisms for easing national consciousness and colonial conquest. I show how multiculturalism positions racialized bodies as Other within the Canadian landscape and permits public memory to dilute past and present injustices against Aboriginal populations. I theorize discourses of multiculturalism and goodwill, showing how both ease collective complicity in Canada’s history of colonial conquests.

The third chapter of my thesis wrestles with the concept of citizenship education in Ontario high schools. I will probe how the construction of “good” citizens in schooling ultimately works to cement whiteness as foundational to the Canadian nation. I
will illustrate the problems that arise when the schooling of “good” citizens rests on empathy and teaching about racialized Others (Kumashiro, 2000). I will show how multicultural and diverse literatures in classrooms, even if taught empathetically, reinforce national white supremacy.

This thesis is an exploration of self-identity. Through imperial legislations and multiculturalism I explore how my family’s Aboriginal lineage was erased in order to position their mixed-race bodies as white. I explore how discourses of nation-building in schooling promote a national innocence in ongoing Canadian colonialism. I aim to provide a personalized account of the ways in which white supremacy continues to inform Canadian identity in order to challenge understandings of Aboriginality in Canada. I use memorized tales of both conquest and assimilation to place memory - not always congruent with historical facts - as a place from which to write about the nation in ways that are accountable to its colonial atrocities.
Chapter One

Rendering Whiteness: Making National White Belonging

I sit patiently beside my grandmother. Dutifully, I nod and listen attentively as she tells me again. This happens every time I visit but I must remind myself to pay careful attention today. Although the stories, accompanied by binders of black and white photographs are no different this time, my interest in them has changed. I have memorized the brawny narrative of my family’s settlement but today’s pictorial story holds a new relevance to me as I question what it means to be a white settler in Canada.

My grandmother rocks in the chair beside me, dictating the tale of her family’s voyage to Canada through the images in front of her. She begins with photographs of her and her husband; post Second World War, posed in front of the general store they owned together in Flensburg, Germany. Subsequent photographs chronicle her children prior to
their voyage - all blond haired and blue eyed. There is a gap in the memory book. Photographs, I assume, were not taken on the lengthy trip. Rather, the book resumes with a picture of a wooden structure - a small hut, just a bit bigger than a regular sized tent, surrounded by forest. And this is where my grandmother really begins her story. She points to the photograph, gestures to the vast landscape outside, and tells me of how this is the beginning of her life as a “Canadian”.

Upon immigration to Canada, I have been told many times, my grandparents had little money and only a suitcase of belongings. The government, quick to assert its benevolence to new citizens, erected programs designed to feed the imported economy. On the condition that they donate fifteen acres of timber to the crown, my grandparents were granted one hundred acres of land in northern Ontario. Many times I have listened to the stories of northern winters, vast wilderness, and poverty. Moreover, I have heard my grandmother tell the history of her parcel of land as “empty upon arrival”. With nothing but an axe and the help of his two sons, the story goes that my grandfather cleared wooded acres, donated the required timber, and built a homestead. Affectionately dubbed “the crooked hill” the house is perched overlooking an expanse of peaks and valleys, at the edge of picturesque forests of white pine and birch trees. Bears wander to the living room window in the spring; my aunt brings a moose horn to the woods to attract the subjects of her paintings; and each year preserves are made from the wild blueberries that grow at the treeline.

The land is situated on what was once designated Cree territory and provides an apt accompaniment to Eva Mackey’s notion of the North as a nationalist text. She writes: “wilderness-unpeopled and savage-can also work as ‘other’ to ‘civilization’, a
comparison within Canada which reinforces the settlers’ sense of the difficult struggle to
civilize the wilderness and the success they have had in controlling it” (1999: 45). As
families like my father’s immigrated to the northern regions of the province they came to
know themselves and their place within the nation as pioneers through their relationship
to the land. Taming nature and building a homestead upon rough terrain became
elemental to the self-positioning of white settlers at the top of Canadian civilization.

Thobani writes:

Land, with all its resources, is the basis for a successful
nation-state relationship, and colonial land policies enabled
the state to expand its activities and institutional base even
as it expanded its population base. Racialization became
systematized and incorporated into the emerging market
economy, and the insistence on the rule of law, which
enabled all this, remains key to the self-
presentation/preserve of Canadian sovereignty as it does to
the self constituting practices of national subjects (2007:
61).

Stolen land, made into white settler space, is symbolic of the ways in which white settler
spatiality is constructed and structures of white supremacy sustained. Just as my
grandparents were able to claim their white civility from the taming of the savage land
they were also able to expel Aboriginal conquest from their consciousness and thus
effectively mark their parcel of land as “white”.

My grandmother’s romantic tale of virginal landscapes is juxtaposed with my
mother’s family history. My mother was of mixed-blood ancestry and from the same
small northern Ontario town as my father. Growing up, I often questioned my mother
about her familial lineage in an attempt to understand the contrast between our skin
colouring. Family reunions with her side of the family often left me puzzled as there was
an undeniable Aboriginal presence in the room but it was seldom spoken of or acknowledged. My mother - in response to questions of why we looked so different - would respond with a telling of her grandmother’s status. Her paternal grandmother had married a French Acadian man and left her reserve to live with him. The Indian Act, at the time, required that she and her five children lose status as Indians.

Because of imperial legislation and resultant social ideologies, Aboriginal lineage within my family was kept secret and to this day remains very difficult to uncover. While my mother identified as a mixed-blood person (her physical characteristics made it unavoidable) she could not answer questions regarding her grandmother’s tribal affiliations. She speculated, based on the narratives of Acadian displacement passed down to her, that perhaps she was Mi’kmaq or Cree. Due to the secrecy of her grandparents union and her grandmother’s lost status, she never knew with certainty, and I cannot answer questions of my great-grandmothers tribal affiliation or home reserve.

Laura Ann Stoler suggests that state regulations influence the formation of individual subjects and that close examination of them as such illustrates the unequal distribution of colonial privileges and deprivations (2006: 15). She writes:

> Locating the boundaries of what and who was “inside” and “out” is not an abstract administrative task. Nor did it ever reduce to a legally prescribed territorial one. The threshold between inside and out cuts through families and across them, traces through families and across them, traces through selective genealogies and adoption agencies, “degrees of blood” and dense webs of fictive kin. (2006: 13)

The Indian Act has played a primary role in ensuring that my great-grandmother’s Aboriginality be erased. It also lawfully affirmed her mixed-blood children and their
descendents as “white” and founded Canadian racism that has made self-affiliations with Aboriginality historically hinged on shame. How, I question, has the Indian Act, land expropriation, and enfranchisement informed the proliferation of white settler narratives to school particular bodies into erasing the potential of their own Aboriginality?

The stoic and romantic tale of my grandmother’s homestead is foundational to the national myth of peaceful settlement. The wooden structure no longer exists but is testament, symbolically, to the ways in which land became a tool to cement nationhood and white settler narratives. I use settler narratives like that of my paternal grandmother’s to illustrate how they inform and contribute to the national mythology of the first pioneers whom, through tenacity and hard work, built Canada to be “the place it is today”. The re-telling of such glorified settler narratives works to displace Aboriginal peoples as the original inhabitants of the land - perceived as empty in the first instance - and gloss over imperial legislation that has historically racialized Aboriginal peoples as “Other”. Schick demonstrates: “In the settler nation of Canada, the colonizing processes of entitlement, of First Nations peoples, and land ownership have become integral to the construction of white identity” (1998: 98). While I do not wish to access my great-grandmother as a token for my own Aboriginality, nor to claim myself as both the “victor and the vanquished” (Spivak, 1993: 10), I am curious as to how the privileging of white settler identities and narratives influence the disavowal of my own mixed-race identity? And finally, how has the myth of peaceful settlement constructed Canada as an intrinsically “white” nation?
**Making White Bodies**

*I want to get rid of the Indian problem... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian department* (Duncan Campbell Scott, quoted in Lawrence, 32)

The Indian Act has historically acted as a vehicle of classification for Aboriginality in Canada: it has defined legally who has access to the category of ‘Indian’ whilst simultaneously constructing white settler norms to be inherent to Canadian identity. Although the Act has been amended many times since its inception, it has accomplished, in many ways, what Duncan Campbell Scott articulates as his goal in the above quotation. Land expropriation, gender discrimination, and involuntary enfranchisement were - and continue to be - tools of colonial dominance that serve to define and lawfully assimilate Aboriginal bodies in Canada. Gender discrimination has historically been an act of involuntary enfranchisement. Prior to the 1985 Indian Act amendments Aboriginal women had to relinquish their Indian status upon marriage to white men. Since the 1985 amendments children registered under section 6(2) are forced to relinquish their Indian status should they choose to marry someone who does not have Indian status. Colonial tools of assimilation will be examined in the following paragraphs as I make links between white settler narratives like that of my paternal grandmother’s and the ways in which mixed-blood Aboriginal ancestry has been lawfully rendered impossible for particular subjects.

Martin Cannon (2008) explains how involuntary enfranchisement has historically been a tool for sexist colonial domination. He writes: “sexism is quite literally, a tool of
colonial policy that has resulted in the "involuntary enfranschisement" of children --
female and male --whose grandmothers married non-Indians." (Cannon, 2008: 5). The
making of mixed-race Aboriginal bodies into “white” national subjects functioned
through both cultural and legal assimilation. Cannon writes:

Cultural assimilation…were policies aimed at cultivating Euro-Christian behaviours, appearances, and values. They were intended to re-socialize Aboriginal peoples into productive members of an emerging capitalist economy. Legal assimilation is the word that is used to describe the act of losing Indian status in Canada… to encourage the "gradual civilization" of the Indian tribes. (2007: 5)

My great-grandmother was subjected to both forms of assimilation. Her offspring were no longer legally considered Aboriginal bodies. Through tactics of cultural assimilation she and her descendants learned an imposed self-loathing of Aboriginality that resulted in a familial legacy of passed-down secrecy. Legal assimilation has had a similar effect in my family: my great-grandmother’s offspring and their descendents could only imagine themselves within white settler society because they were legally constructed as white.

The Indian Act continues to inform the governance of Indigeneity in Canada and is crucial to an examination of white settler nationalist supremacy. Bonita Lawrence writes:

The Indian Act…is much more than a body of laws that for over a century has controlled every aspect of status Indian life. It provides a conceptual framework that has organized contemporary Aboriginal life in ways that have been almost entirely naturalized, and that governs ways of thinking about Native [and non-Native] identity. (2004: 25)

The Indian Act can therefore not be separated from the ways in which Canada has built itself as a white settler nation. Regulating access to formal Aboriginal identities has
served to uphold Aboriginality in particular subjects and has recreated others as “white”. This has therefore greatly shaped the building of national subjects as inherently white subjects. My grandmother’s stories of the land as terra nullius⁶ embody the historic process of sorting out lands in what is now Canada. While the government gifted portions of land to European immigrants in an effort to populate the northern regions of Ontario, they in turn forcibly erased the presence of Aboriginal bodies, the history of dispossession, and theft of the landscapes. As Smith writes:

[I]mmigration policy [was] more than simply a process of importing the labour needed for nation-building. It [was] also an expression of a political ideal of who is, or could be, eligible to receive the entitlement of residence and citizenship (cited in Mackey, 1999: 32).

Annexed to reserves in the area, Aboriginal peoples were of no consequence to white settlers like my grandparents who came to occupy the region. Nature - as granted through land expropriation - provided the backdrop for Canada’s civilizing mission. As Mackey puts it: “[p]ure untouched nature can be constructed as the raw material for the civilizing work of settlement; it re-affirms the settlers’ sense of themselves as those who transform raw nature into developed civilization” (1999: 38). Defining land as void of Aboriginal humanity through colonial conquest was instrumental to the ways in which white European immigrants imagined themselves as initial pioneers, and therefore, lawfully entitled to establishing themselves as national subjects.

Sunera Thobani examines whiteness as intrinsic to Canadian identity in *Exalted Subjects: the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (2007). She suggests that white

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⁶ Sherene Razack names terra nullius as the first phase of conquest. It is the relationship between law, race and space in legal documents that creates the national landscape as uninhabited and empty (2002: 3)
settler subjects, through processes of lawful exaltation, should be considered national subjects. The lawful rendering of land as “white”, and the categorization of particular bodies as inferior to white ones, rendered articulations of colonial violence and nationalistic racism possible. Legal articulations of white supremacy made through the theft of land and identity categories privileged white settler subjects. Structurally it has made racism an inherent national characteristic. Sherene Razack addresses white settler mythologies in her book *Race, Space, and the Law* (2002). She writes:

> A white settler society is one established by European on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans. As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus *become* the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruts of citizenship. (2002: 2)

Land expropriation supported white settler beliefs in their higher level of humanity and continues to inform mythologies of themselves as the nation’s lawful original inhabitants.

The Indian Act effectively institutionalized violence against Aboriginal peoples as European settlers were granted the “power of law” (Thobani, 2007: 51). This too shaped their relationship to a landscape perceived as empty. Thobani examines the lawful construction of Aboriginality as a colonial tool for securing the domination of white national subjects. She writes:

> The Indian Act was as much about enhancing the domain of nationals as it was about controlling Aboriginal peoples…With an evolving sense of national identity, possessed of the right to be present on the land, to own it, to work it, to travel across its length and breadth, the
national subject constituted itself as such in the knowledge that although the Indian might be of the land, he/she was not worthy of it, had no legitimate or respectable claim to it. The white national subject, however, was worthy of the land, this worthiness being decreed by the very law of the land. Such exaltation entitled the successful national to claim the right to territory, to mobility, and in the process, to experience itself as a juridical, hence fully human, subject (2007: 51-52).

Land is inextricably tied to the making of white settler subjects. As my grandmother’s narration of immigration and hardship dictates, settlers have constituted themselves as lawful Canadian subjects but only through the visible absence of Aboriginal peoples on their lands. Reserve-based territories benefited the Canadian project of white domination as it served to render Aboriginal bodies as unworthy of the (often most fertile) parcels of land seized by white settlers. The normalization of white settler narratives was accomplished symbolically through the “historical development of the Indian Act and other ‘Indian policy’ coincident with the building of Canada as a Nation” (Cannon, 1998: 11). In short, if we are to insert colonial conquest into Canadian settler mythology, its genocidal projects must be understood in relation to the ways in which the “colonizing culture is predicated on the vanishing native” (Lawrence, 2004: xvii).

The production of Canadian landscapes as white settler spaces must also be understood as a gendered act of regulation. My mother’s inability to answer my questions about her paternal grandmother’s tribal affiliations embodies the ways in which the Indian Act installed patriarchal understandings of Aboriginality. Upon her marriage to my great-grandfather, my great-grandmother lost Indian status and thereby her legal land and band entitlements. The severing of her rights to the land and the community was, in effect, a tool of enfranchisement designed to further entrench whiteness and
maleness as the core of Canadian identity. The removal of women from reserve lands guaranteed that, over time, there would be fewer Aboriginal women and children living on reserves and the privatization and the accumulation of capital could progress. Bonita Lawrence writes: “Removing women, then, was key to privatizing the land base. For [all of these] reasons a central aspect of the colonization process in Canada would be to break the power of Aboriginal women within their nations” (2004: 47). Not all Aboriginal bands are matrilineal, but for those that were, these practices served to transform gender relations, as well as the power of women.

The removal of women from Aboriginal land reserves ensured that their offspring could be considered lawful “white” subjects. This is an imperial tool for regulating the growth of Aboriginal populations. It must be noted that a piece of paper ordaining Indian status is not all that comprises Aboriginal Identity but that it has historically afforded belonging in ways that profoundly shape and continue to affect the ways in which Aboriginality is understood by its members. Laura Schwager (2003) charts the recovery of her own Mohawk identity with insights into how the Indian Act continues to govern how Aboriginal belonging is understood. She writes:

The issue of Native identity involves conflicting views of who is legitimately entitled to “Nativeness” between government, non-Native society and Native people…It involves a history of colonial domination and classification. It is also culture, tradition, language and values. It is spiritual. It is blood-quantum. It is a feeling, an inner energy. It is also a piece of paper, a legal affirmation given to a select few. The absence of it threatens the (formal) status of entire Nations (ibid: 51).

The 1985 Indian Act amendments have attempted to undo the gendered inequities of colonialism. However, legacies of shame imposed by colonial subjugation – evidenced
in the secretive genealogy of my own family - have made it so that Aboriginal identity or status can be recovered by a relatively small number of people. These legacies persist for me and my family in real ways as, just as Laura Schwager, “[we] do not have a section in the Indian Act” (2003: 51). My familial relationship to its Aboriginal and mixed-blood inheritances cannot be understood outside the confines of colonial legislation. The Indian Act continues to inform a telos of nation-building that rests on a foundation of white supremacy.

Aboriginal populations become increasingly subordinated through colonialism. Aboriginal peoples were originally conceived of as partners to newcomers but the adoption of the Indian Act relinquished this possibility as it specified that Aboriginal persons could neither retain Indian status, relinquish their nationhood, nor become citizens of Canada. One might well question whether Canada as a Nation could exist without the category of “Indian” from which to uphold “white” citizenship.

Whiteness was constructed through Aboriginal difference. My grandmother became a Canadian citizen through her state constructed whiteness and her children inherited this through generations of shame infused ideologies. In this way, my conception of Aboriginality rested in my comprehension of Aboriginality as a shameful lineage and I understood myself only as a white subject. Cheryl Harris theorizes the links between property and the construction of “white” nations. She writes:

[T]he origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of contingent forms of property and property rights…whiteness shares the critical characteristics of property even as the meaning of property has changed over time. In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise – of a right to exclude. This conceptual nucleus has proven
to be a powerful center around which whiteness as property has taken shape. Following the period of slavery and conquest, white identity became the basis of racialized privilege that was ratified and legitimated in law as a type of status property. After legalized segregation was overturned, whiteness as property evolved into a more modern form through the law’s ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline. (1993: 1714)

The Indian Act governed articulations of citizenship so that Aboriginal peoples could only belong to the white nation through enfranchisement. Gendered regulation of Aboriginal identity guaranteed that mixed-blood identity became conceptually impossible. Recognizing Aboriginal lineage meant “seeing women and men in state constructed terms [that] conceals the historical events which, first, imposed citizenship boundaries on all Aboriginal peoples, and later required that people be legislated outside of them” (Cannon, 2008: 3). The violence of the Indian Act equated being Canadian with whiteness and ultimately constructed a binary that ensured one could be Aboriginal, Canadian, but not both.

The familial narratives in which I am situated are connected in unusual ways: my grandmother’s status as a white settler was necessarily premised on the removal of my great-grandmother’s Indian status and dispossession. Lawrence addresses the categorization of “Indian” bodies and the Canadian landscape. She states:

[T]hrough [Indian Act] classification, the citizens of subordinated Aboriginal nations were not only to be legally dismembered from their own identities and recast as ‘Indians’, as part of the process of taking their lands, but in the process they were to be dismembered from theirs pasts and therefore from their futures (2004: 41)
Families were made national subjects within nationalist narratives of settlement, but often with drastically different consequences. My grandmother was permitted, because of her whiteness, the humanity and resulting legal entitlement to a parcel of land that necessarily required Aboriginal absence in order to be claimed as a white settler space. My great grandmother and her descendants were forced to forget their lands, ancestry, and mahogany skin through imperial legislation bent on making mixed-race bodies into “white” Canadians.

**Mythologizing Peaceful Settlement**

*Canada’s nation-building narrative is a dominant ideology, or enjoys hegemony, in that it is the most widely shared and has the greatest impact on social action at any particular time.*

- Patricia A. McCormack

The national narrative of a passive and benign settlement process has not only shaped my own relationship to Aboriginality, it has had major “behavioural implications” for the way that white settler identities have historically been constructed as superior (McCormack, 2005: 112). My phenotypical appearance marks me as white, and is partially responsible for the way in which I came to align myself with white settler identity. Although I grew up knowing my mother’s Aboriginal ancestry, I never considered myself as someone of mixed-blood heritage. It is not until recently that I have begun to question the external processes that influenced my self-constructed white identity. How, did I come to reject my mother’s familial history as a part of my own? As whiteness laid the foundation for the Canadian nation through expropriations of land, gender discrimination, and enfranchisement, subjects like myself continue to unimagine
the possibility of their own Aboriginality. The regulation of Aboriginal women, evidenced in my own family, has ensured that mixed-race bodies like mine may learn to affiliate themselves with their white settler lineages encircled by the confines of national belonging and white supremacy.

The project of nation-building in Canada has worked to construct a history falsely representative of its members. Through yearly celebrations of colonialism - the fanfare of Canada day celebrations are exemplary - white settler narratives become intrinsic to the ways in which members of the nation-state understand themselves. As McCormack states “The story of Canada purports to represent the history of us all. Yet it is inherently exclusionary. It constructs some groups - Europeans and their descendents - as prime movers, at the heart of the Canadian success story” (2005: 112). Stories of settlement like that of my paternal grandmother’s epitomize the Canadian narrative of peaceful settlement and the repetition of such narratives throughout the course of Canadian “history” convene to embed a nationalistic racism. These narratives continue to “prescribe a course of action vis-à-vis Aboriginal peoples and the land through federal, provincial, and territorial policies, legislation, and regulations” (ibid). The racism embedded in the structure of the Canadian nation have made it so that the mixed-blood identity of my mother’s paternal grandmother was made lawfully impossible. At the same time, this also guarantees that subjects like myself could subconsciously position themselves within white settler narratives in order to warrant the erasure of Aboriginal ancestry. This erasure is not only facilitated in white settler narratives, it is also accomplished in the shaming of Aboriginality that makes lineage or familial pride difficult to uncover.
The advent of the Canadian nation is premised upon racism and colonialism. 

Through celebrations of conquest I learned to position my white body within the white settler narratives portrayed in positive projections of national history. Eva Mackey comments:

The ‘positive’, ‘generous’, and ‘tolerant’ treatment and representations of Native people that historians credited Canadians with must be seen within the contexts…of the colonial project in Canada…historical relationships have been interpreted and re-shaped within national tradition in order to create a mythology of white settler innocence, a mythology that exists in various forms today. Such myths do not simply hide qualities and oppression but contribute to a mythology of national identity (1999: 26).

Narratives of a peaceful settlement taught me how to construct myself as a white settler. These narratives coupled with imperial mechanisms of regulation constructed white national subjects. This made the possibility of understanding myself as someone of mixed-raced ancestry increasingly difficult. In other words, the myth of “peaceful settlement” supported the benevolence of whiteness and made my affiliation with it - however unconsciously - seem harmless. In many ways we are all complicit in narratives of colonialism and white settler nationhood. Whether Aboriginal or not, these narratives invite our participation at the expense of realizing our mixed-race or Aboriginal identities. It remains that I can neither deny nor uncover my family’s Aboriginality. My whiteness has been largely cemented by my immersion in such narratives. This is the insidiousness of whiteness. It is all encompassing.

The collective belief in Canadian benevolence continues to structure the way in which we learn understand ourselves to be a tolerant and humanitarian people. As long as we continue to believe in the benevolence of immigration, and the stories of our
pioneering grandparents, the contemporary unveiling of Canada’s racism against Aboriginal bodies becomes very difficult. Susan Dion illustrates the way in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been historically located on opposite ends of history. Aboriginal peoples have been dehumanized in nationalist renditions of history. As Dion puts it,

Canadians ‘refuse to know’ that the racism that fuelled colonization sprang from a system that benefits all non-Aboriginal, not just the European settlers of long ago. This refusal to know is comforting: it supports an understanding of racism as an act of individuals not a system. It creates barriers allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country’s racist past and the extent to which that past lives inside its present, deep in the national psyche. The need to deny racism in Canada’s past resurfaces again and again in its present (2009: 57).

Aboriginal bodies disappear from the Canadian landscape when white settlers are permitted to formulate themselves as rightful owners of the land. Whiteness is furthered in contemporary mechanisms of schooling, premised on the national narrative of goodwill. These narratives work to further entrench white settler innocence. The racialized violence of the nation is thereby masked so that a number students cannot fathom themselves as potential Aboriginal subjects or as complicit in Canada’s ongoing colonization. Lawrence writes “…myths are crucial to Canadian nation-building, such as the myth that the colonization process was benign and through which Canada maintains its posture of being ‘innocent’ of racism and genocide” (Lawrence, 2002: 26)

Settler narratives have played a role in my renunciation of Aboriginality. I learned through coupling my grandmother’s story with the hushed murmurs about Aboriginal lineage that I was a white subject within nationalist narratives of peaceful and
benign settlement. Mackey highlights the importance of these historical narratives to an understanding of national identity. She writes:

[N]ationalism often depends upon mythological narratives of a unified nation moving progressively through time—a continuum beginning with a glorious past leading to the present and then onward to an even better future. These mythical stories require that specific versions of history be highlighted, versions that reaffirm the particular characteristics ascribes to the nation. In Canada, the nationalist mythmakers draw upon particular versions of national history to explain the ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’ today (1999: 23).

With blond hair, white skin, and blue eyes, I fashioned myself as white settler subject through celebrations of historical figures and French holidays. I therefore imagined the possibility of Aboriginal lineage in my own family out of existence. My family’s narrative fit neatly within the boundaries of what I came to understand as “being Canadian”. My mother’s narrations of Aboriginal ancestry, and surrounding politics of representation, ensured that I conceived of Aboriginality as hinged upon physical appearance and skin colour. While my mother was not legally recognized as a status Indian her brown skin meant that the possibility of her own Aboriginal inheritance was at least conceivable. At the same time, my white skin ensured that I stayed within the confines of constructed white settler identity, unable to conceive of myself, as a person of Aboriginal ancestry. My experience holds an important set of consequences for the possibility of erecting a contemporary understanding of Aboriginality in Canada.

Thobani insists that past colonial atrocities are judged by the “ethos of the present” (2007: 34). This is critical to the ways in which the nation conceives of itself as a non-
racist place. The refusal to know the racism that founded the nation affects its subjects.

Thobani writes:

Contemporary moral judgments should certainly not be applied to the early pioneers and settlers, it is asserted, and certainly not to their descendents who today are the well-meaning subjects of a benevolent liberal democracy that treats its Aboriginal population with a heightened consciousness of their human rights (2007: 34).

The assertion of the nation as a place of goodwill, willing to treat its racialized Others with dignity, acts to erase past colonial atrocities.

In the following chapter I consider how the construction of the Canadian nation as a benevolent place - a place of goodwill - is articulated through current expressions of “managing difference” in multiculturalism. I will situate narratives of benevolence and the enactment of multiculturalism within my school to theorize how national subjects refuse to know the colonial violence that secures the white supremacy of the nation while easing complicities in ongoing colonialism.
Chapter Two

National Benevolence and the Erasure of Canadian Colonialism

The status quo in terms of violence against Aboriginal people is silence.
-Robyn Bourgeois

The photograph is wrinkled around the edges, frayed with the passing of time. Faded from years in boxes and now from its place in the sunlight of my kitchen where it is posted to my fridge. Others around it - of my mother mostly - greet me in the morning and remind me of my daily preoccupation with schooling, whiteness, and colonialism as it is entrenched in the body of my family. These pictures remind me of a familial lineage that has long been suppressed. It is a lineage that - without photographs - would likely be stored away and eventually forgotten. The faces that emerge from these photographs are brown skinned, coupled with my mother’s narrations of her paternal grandmother’s enfranchisement and memories of passed down moccasins. This is what leads me to write this chapter.

Again, I am not seeking to utilize my great-grandmother’s Aboriginality as a mechanism for asserting an Aboriginal identity. To do so would be an act of appropriation: my blond hair, white skin, and blue eyes are attached to a great deal of white settler privilege that would be not easily overwritten were I to position myself foremost as an Aboriginal person. Rather, I hope to use the photomontage magnetized on my refrigerator to situate my scholarly interest in examining multiculturalism and national narratives of benevolence that help facilitate complicities in ongoing colonial
histories of theft and genocide\(^7\). Although my mother’s brown skin and Aboriginal ancestry were unavoidably present, I learned through collective belief in the nation as a non-racist place, to align myself with white settler norms and practices.

Multiculturalism, as an ideology, positions Canada as a nation of goodwill and tolerance but one must ask: who benefits most from perceptions of the “goodness” of the nation? How do discourses of multiculturalism school national subjects to consider racial Others as outside the confines of belonging? How does multiculturalism in formal schooling impose racial categories to erase the possibility of Canadian racism and what does this mean for Aboriginality? As an educator, I wish to query how multiculturalism-as a catalyst for the development of pedagogical practices like citizenship education - is derived from national narratives of benevolence to sustain white supremacy. In this chapter I will show how multiculturalism, as currently articulated in Canadian society, fuels the disavowal of the colonial violence upon which the nation is founded and repeatedly constructs Aboriginality as Other to Canadian identity.

Fleras and Elliot (1993) offer a series of comprehensive definitions of multiculturalism in Canada. They examine multiculturalism from a sociological perspective intent on exposing how both its lawful and unofficial implementations work to justify state - minority relations. It is their concept of multiculturalism as an ideology that I will be using as my analysis in this chapter. They write:

\(^7\) In this chapter I am writing about nationalist narratives of benevolence and goodwill in the sense that, as Canadians, we situate ourselves as a moralistic and ethical nation. This is articulated through our belief that we are a nation of polite, subtle, and generous peoples. I argue here that this is articulated through multiculturalism and “tolerance” to ensure that social inequities, racism, and colonialism become inconceivable in the Canadian imagination.
In contrast with its descriptive denotation, the ideology of multiculturalism is employed in an evaluative and prescriptive sense. What is essentially a descriptive reality has been elevated into a prescriptive ideal with powerful repercussions for our national identity and collective image. Multiculturalism as ideology is used normatively to refer to a set of ideas or ideals (“values”) whereby cultural differences are celebrated for personal and societal enrichment (1993: 53).

I use the definition of multiculturalism as ideology to illustrate how, when we conceive of ourselves as belonging to a nation where difference is celebrated, we overlook the collective racism upon which it thrives.

My family history shapes my desire to understand the different imperial mechanisms for easing a project of national amnesia. But my experiences of being an educator in Toronto’s northwest Jane and Finch neighborhood also play a pivotal role in how I have come to reflect on the function of schooling in the trajectory of Canadian nation-building. The Jane and Finch area is characterized by its poverty and immigrant populations. The school where I teach consists of a mostly racialized student population. This is important to mention at the outset, as it greatly influences the way in which I am able to theorize my own actions as a teacher in this demographic space.

In my original application to graduate studies, I intended to examine the erasure of Canadian genocide from national narratives through a critical examination of the Indian Act. I have since realized that it is not enough to situate white supremacy solely within these colonial legacies. It is crucial that current discourses of multiculturalism and diversity, designed to support our notions of a benevolent nation, be investigated as tools that racialize bodies, position them as Other, and permit public amnesia and other
injustices against Aboriginal populations. How do discourses of multiculturalism and tolerance work to erase colonial conquests of Aboriginal peoples as inherent to national identity? How do students in Canada come to understand themselves within a white settler society and yet, remain complicit in ongoing projects of racism and genocide?

I will answer these questions by examining the construction of Canada as a place of goodwill and kindness, a country that is premised upon the exaltation and innocence of white subjects (Thobani, 2007). I suggest that multiculturalism, as ideology, stimulates discourses of belonging, informs how Canadian national subjects learn to absolve themselves of the colonial violence enacted upon Aboriginal bodies. This, in turn, allows people like myself to undo the possibility of their own Aboriginality.

**Benevolent Subjects and the Impossibility of Canadian Racism**

Nationalist narratives construct Canada the nation as a moral and benevolent place. They facilitate a collective belief of polite, generous, and equal subjects that founds the “national dream of innocence” (Razack, 2004: 118). White bodies have historically removed themselves from discussions of racism in order to build a national narrative hinged upon their roles, as a benevolent people. Schick writes: “against a historical presence of Aboriginal and minority people of colour, assumptions about white skin privilege as the norm in the Canadian context allows whiteness to appear as an invisible unmarked centre” (1998: 3). This is not distinct from the ways in which Canadian colonial legacies are both taught and understood by national subjects. I came to realize this through a photograph.
On a recent trip to Sarnia, I came across a picture in my friend’s living room of her father’s classroom. When I asked about this photograph, I couldn’t help but theorize the advent of the white settler subjects as a benevolent being within the discourses of nationalism. Clad in a plaid shirt and adorned by a scruffy beard, my friend’s father is posed as the head of the classroom, obviously as the teacher figure to a dozen Inuit children. When he explained his Northern travels, I begin to understand, in the unraveling of his account of the Canadian nation as filled with benevolent white subjects: his tale of journeying to the North as an educator affirmed his belief in himself as a moralistic and “good” man. He tells me of his obligation to do some “good” for those Other to him whilst seeking a wilderness adventure. It becomes obvious to me that he has not only been permitted to understand himself as intrinsically more human than the Inuit but also that he is an innocent bystander to the historical conditions which continue to allow for the subjugation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.—insert residential schools here—fits more with citizenship education, I think?

The belief in a collective innocence is indivisible from white supremacy as both work simultaneously to exalt white bodies (ibid: 8). Sunera Thobani explains the exaltation of white settlers in the definition of the nation. As she writes:

[T]he historical exaltation of the national subject has enabled his subject’s humanity and sanctioned the elevation of its rights over and above that of the Aboriginal and the immigrant. The inscription of specific ‘national characteristics into these subjects as elements of their innate humanity elevates such traits from the realm of ‘natural’ human existence and writes them into the body politic…it simultaneously ‘naturalizes these qualities as the essential possessions of the individual subjects who form this community, as being intrinsic to - and reflective of –
the superior order of humanity, arising organically from their natural, individual moral goodness (ibid: 9).

The construction of Canada as a place of goodwill must be examined critically in discussions of colonialism. This is how we otherwise silence the racial terror that is inherent to notions of a collective national identity.

White bodies like the exalted subjects articulated by Thobani are permitted to situate themselves as innocent bystanders in situations of both subtle and spectacular violence. Ahmed demonstrates how white subjects constitute themselves through the spaces that they occupy. Bodies are situated both temporally and spatially located, she argues, and they are “shaped by [their] contact with objects” (Ahmed, 2007:152). National subjects come to know themselves in relation to their connections with dominant structures of power and racialized Others. Understanding how whiteness operates - however invisibly - is necessary for illustrating how notions of benevolence shape nationalism and Canadian refusal to imagine itself within projects of Empire.

Mackey reflects:

Whiteness often came across as emptiness or absence, and is almost always defined in reference to otherness and to differences, as if only ‘non-whiteness can give whiteness any substance’. This characteristic of whiteness is also a characteristic of Canadianness, an identity always defined in relation to internal and external ‘others’. The dilemma is that in order to begin to focus on white Canadianness it is necessary to explore how it is defines in relation to ‘others’ (1999: 22).

Canadian identity is defined in and through the relationships between white nationals and racialized Others. Because Canadian colonialism is seldom illuminated in nationalist
discourse, new questions must be asked in order to challenge the violence that continues to inform Canadian participation in the subjugation of racialized peoples. Military peacekeeping missions to Middle-Eastern and African countries, are exemplary discourses of “goodwill” in schooling, conferring racial power on white subjects and constructing in turn national narratives hinged upon tolerance and acceptance in a “non-racist” nation. In this way, white supremacy is foundational to Canadian nationalism and instructs, in crucial ways, how subjects come to internalize racial hierarchies in understandings of national identity in both formal and informal schooling.

Razack illustrates the discursive dimension of Canada’s peacekeeping mission in Somalia, exposing the ease with which the nation accepts stories of atrocious crimes, exonerates individuals from blame, and restores itself as a tolerant and non-racist place (2004). Canadian peacekeepers heard screaming throughout the murder of Shidane Arone, and yet, did little to investigate or acknowledge the excessive violence that was taking place. Torture requires un-imagining violent acts in order to restore certain bodies as “good” Canadian subjects. The soldier’s refusal to see themselves as anything but innocent bystanders is symptomatic of their relation to Canada as a place where peacekeeping is meant to signify our helpfulness. Narratives of peacekeeping missions to “conflicted” nations, those in turmoil, or those that are chaotic, work to inform national subjects of the Canadian nation as a place where violence is the exception.

Andrea Smith speaks of the difficulty of acknowledging histories of colonialism within national narratives that construct third world degeneracy and terror. She writes, “the notion that terrorism is something that only happens in other countries makes it difficult to grasp that the U.S [and Canada as well] is built on a foundation of genocide,
slavery and racism” (Smith, 2005: 177, emphasis mine). The Somalia affair is exemplary of white settler participation in colonial violence against Aboriginal peoples as it provides an instance from which to theorize how “race disappears from public memory” (Razack, 2004: 7). As such, the “violence directed against bodies of colour becomes normalized as a part of the civilizing process” in white settler societies like Canada (ibid: 8). The racism upon which Canada as a nation is built is in a constant cycle of erasure as we continue to constitute ourselves as members of a nation of goodwill. The racism and violence committed against Aboriginal peoples needs to be relentlessly erased if the white settler nation is to convince itself of racial innocence.

It would be irresponsible to not theorize structural violence when it arises, or national narratives of benevolence and goodwill without theorizing the power of certain bodies to be innocent bystanders to collective racism. Bauman explains the difference between a bystander and a perpetrator as a difference in actions of “evil.” By distinguishing ourselves as mere observers, and not inflictors of harm, we come to deny the violence that is committed by the state in the names of national subjects. Bauman explains:

‘Denial’ is the answer to such vexing questions as ‘what do we do with our knowledge about the suffering of others, and what does this knowledge do to us?’ - the questions that arise whenever people, organizations, governments or whole societies are presented with information that is too disturbing, threatening or anomalous to be fully absorbed or properly acknowledged. The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted. (2002: 203)
The Somalia affair and the placement of white teachers in Aboriginal communities are discursively similar: national subjects learn themselves to be intrinsically more humane than the racialized bodies that they are meant to be helping.

Just as exalted subjects in peacekeeping missions afford their innocence in learning themselves as blameless bystanders, so do the settler teacher and student through pedagogical approaches to teaching Canadian history. Razack writes “the dehumanization of Others is more easily accomplished and condoned when we understand those Others to be different and we understand ourselves to be...impartial and compassionate observers” (Razack, 2004: 14).

In his book *Learning to Divide the World* (1998) Willinsky examines education as an imperial set of practices bent on attributing meaning to racial differences within the nation. He suggests that, in the interest of empire, national subjects are educated in subtle ways to discriminate between themselves as civilized and primitive (Willinsky, 1998: 1). This education, he writes, becomes a “distinguishing feature of this country” informed by a legacy of imperialism that “is about forms of knowledge that preserve and complete the hegemony of the knower” (1998: 74). Regarding imperialism’s educational project, Willinsky writes:

> Much of the knowledge achieved through conquest and colonization was understood to legitimate the political and cultural domination of imperialism. The resulting perspective on the world formed an educational legacy that we now have to reconsider (1998: 1)
As students bear witness to stories of colonial dominance they learn their rank within the racialized social order of things. Some of them even come to understand themselves as different from subjects that are continuously dominated in narratives of benevolence.

There are many accounts of the negative effects of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples. Sadly, this has meant that some Aboriginal peoples - including my mother’s family - were forced to assimilate into white settler norms and practices or subjected to imperial legislation that fixed them as racialized Others in Canadian discourse. I will now explore how the concepts of multiculturalism and anti-racism smooth over the dehumanization and domination of Aboriginal peoples in the project of Canadian white supremacy.

**Situating Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism re-fashions a national history void of colonial conquests and contemporary injustices to exalt white national subjects (Thobani, 2007). Our national belief in a collective innocence is focused on liberal individualist ideas that allow for subjects to constitute themselves within the national rhetoric of moralistic goodwill. Multiculturalism is a nationalistic narrative for reproducing white “humanity” and formal schooling is necessarily steeped in the colonial violence of white settler supremacy. Schick writes, “historically and in the present, public school education has been an important agent in the constructions of national narratives as well as in the production of the nation’s citizens” (1998: 331). Lessons about multiculturalism and diversity must be carefully scrutinized in order to tailor a pedagogy that confronts the racial terror that is implicit in national Canadian narratives.
Diasporic identities need to challenge Canadian racism, but when placed alongside Aboriginality inherent to discourses of multiculturalism, colonial legacies of theft and conquest are frequently erased from being at the heart of the nation. Gill highlights the expulsion of a Cree member of parliament in Manitoba as an example of the ways in which law promotes “the will not to know” of Canadian histories of violent conquests (ibid: 282). The House member was ejected from parliament for refusing to retract the use of the word ‘racist’ in describing government policy and programming for Aboriginal peoples. Gill writes:

[T]here are critical connections that law renders unspeakable - connections between speech, actions, places, and groups of people - in a racialized, liberal democratic, colonial society. Law can produce and sustain a racial social hierarchy by ruling violent histories of Aboriginal peoples as being out of order and irrelevant (2002: 150)

How does multiculturalism serve to continuously create the Canadian mythology that cements us as a nation of innocent white bystanders to legacies of colonial violence?

It is necessary to state that my criticism of multiculturalism is not to suggest that racial difference go unacknowledged in classrooms. Rather, I want to show how, in the school where I teach, a school-wide commitment to “celebrating diversity” renders a nationalist narrative of multiculturalism as one of benevolent, racial domination. I suggest that multiculturalism in education further entrenches racial, cultural and ethnic difference in Canadian society by placing whiteness at the center of the nation. Additionally, multiculturalism displaces Aboriginal peoples as the original inhabitants of this land in order to uphold white settler supremacist values. The marking of some Aboriginal bodies as a homogenous racial group has had some positive effects for some
nations to negotiate with the state, but current pedagogical approaches to multiculturalism - as I witness them - attempt to stabilize the category of Other to affirm white supremacy.

Das Gupta terms multiculturalism as “state ideology” that has “produced a peculiar brand of Canadian racism described by many as ‘polite’, ‘subtle’, ‘systemic’, even ‘democratic’ (1999: 187). The nation conceives of itself as a place tolerant of difference while simultaneously requiring difference to create itself as a benevolent nation where everyone has equal access to a “piece of the pie” (Das Gupta, 1999: 197). And yet, any critique of multiculturalism must necessarily note that “demographic heterogeneity does not automatically imply the success of multiculturalism” so that celebrations of diversity pushed in education may be dissected to show the racism inherent within such concepts (Gupta, 1999: 191).

In my experience, the multiculturalism that Das Gupta articulates is evidenced at the end of each year when English teachers in the public school system fill out a survey entitled “Including Voices”. In doing so, they tally the literatures of different cultures that they have managed to include in their curriculum. Kevin Kumashiro investigates approaches to anti-oppressive education and names this process as teaching “about the Other” (2000: 8). He writes:

[L]essons about the Other should be treated as both catalysts and resources for students to use as they learn more. Disruptive knowledge, in other words, is not an end in itself, but a means toward the always-shifting end/goal of learning more. For example, novels from writers of color have traditionally been used to teach students about different cultures, or to give students entry into different cultural experiences. (2000: 8)
On all accounts, the array of narratives I have presented in my classroom reflect the
diversity of students present in my classes. Each term, upon review of these items by the
head of the department, we are congratulated as a group on the variety of our
programming. As a new teacher it is often difficult to criticize the actions of veteran
teachers. I learned quite quickly how little room there was for expressing discomfort
around the ways in which we - mostly white - teachers understand our respective
“commitments” to multiculturalism and diversity as acts of benevolence when teaching a
largely racialized student body. Our benevolence, recorded on sheets of paper, is a
testament to understanding ourselves as national subjects. We teach about the Other
through literature to meet a quota of diversity but in so doing risk reinforcing essentialist
stereotypes amongst ourselves and our students. That is, marking the checkboxes of
diversity becomes a tool for asserting that the cultural and racial difference of our
students marks their deviation from white settler norms and practices. Such difference is
intrinsic to the maintenance of the Canadian nation as a moralistic and benevolent place,
and is exemplary of how multiculturalism works to “stabilize white supremacy” through
schooling (Thobani, 2007: 146)

Official discourses of multiculturalism are firmly rooted in attempts to guarantee
equality between the French and English while encouraging and supporting the success of
immigrant populations. The myth of the two founding Nations and the promotion of
tolerance between them and Others secures racial difference as a non-nationalistic
characteristic. Das Gupta writes:

The implication is that a Canadian is white, middle or
upper class and Anglo or Francophone. Anybody who
deviates from this stereotype-someone who is a person of
colour, has a non-dominant accent, wears a different dress or headgear coupled with a working class occupation—would be referred to as ‘immigrant’ or non-Canadian, even though they may be holding Canadian citizenship. Conversely, white, English-speaking immigrants from the U.K or the U.S are often immediately identified as Canadians even though they may not hold Canadian citizenship (1999: 190).

Much lauded for his contributions to national pride and bilingualism, Pierre Elliott Trudeau is instrumental to the way that Canada has come to regard itself as a moralistic nation. Equality between the two charter groups of French and English settlers became a governmental preoccupation. The then prime minister - often considered one of the nations most progressive - commissioned the official policy of multiculturalism. Original policies of multiculturalism originally granted Aboriginal peoples their original treaty rights. Of course, these multicultural discourses position Aboriginal peoples as an interest group alongside Other minority groups in schools. Ultimately, the policy of multiculturalism erases Aboriginal peoples as the earliest inhabitants of the land and relegates them instead to the status of an “interest” group within national politics of recognition so that students continue to view the nation as a white place.

Multiculturalism is an agent of transition for white settler society and therefore marks an important site from which to examine the construction of the nation as a non-racist place (Thobani, 2007). Thobani highlights the continual affirmation of difference as a medium sustaining whiteness as the natural foundation of the state. She writes:

I want to highlight another aspect of state power in settler societies that becomes evident in policies such as multiculturalism: the power of the state as a communalizing power; that is, a power which constitutes communities as discrete racial, ethnic, and cultural groups existing within
its territorial borders, yet outside the symbolic bounds of the nation (1999: 149).

The Canadian preoccupation with multiculturalism marks racial difference as an inherent characteristic that enables exalted subjects to affirm their benevolence by symbolically marking racial difference as un-nationalistic. Under multiculturalism, racial difference and identity becomes lumped together to signify bodies as un-Canadian. This is particularly problematic for Aboriginal peoples. To be grouped under the banners of difference re-fastens the violence historically committed by the Indian Act. The categorization of ‘Indian’ bodies under the Indian Act, homogenized Indigeneity into a grouping of anti-nationalistic ‘difference’. Cannon names this process as racialization. He writes:

[R]acialization, as it is often defined, does not refer to the act of taking up or realizing racial categories, however conscious a person might be of that process. Aboriginal peoples did not play a part in creating the "racial" category Indian, but policy has had the effect of institutionalizing the category as a system of relations among status Indians in Canada. This is what is meant by racialization (2007: 5).

Under multiculturalism, racial difference signifies the impossibility of particular bodies to be Canadian. It represents a relatively new way of ensuring that Aboriginal bodies - those who physically appear to be Aboriginal, who have tribal affiliation, reserve ties, or Indian status at least - get caught in a binary divide between being recognized as Canadian or Aboriginal but not both. Although the divide is useful for articulating Aboriginal sovereignty, my skepticism rests in the construction of Canadian identity and citizenship as “white” in education.
The pledge of diversity in which I participate as a teacher is often misleading. My skin colour carries considerable privilege in comparison to the immigrant population of my school. I am not suggesting that staff ignore questions of power and privilege that influence how students are perceived and treated on a daily basis. Instead I want to illustrate how discourses of multiculturalism and anti-racism operate to mask the violence of a white settler state: a society that utilizes imperial practices of education to constitute itself under the false banner of tolerance and inclusion. I am reluctant to fill out the survey at the end of each term and often question: What service do we perceive ourselves to be performing as educators for the good of our students?

Multiculturalism, it seems, is panacea of racial insecurities: we are willing to acknowledge and celebrate our student’s difference only through the inclusion of literatures that we have authoritatively decided represent their breadth of experience. Such stories afford the privilege colonial norms of whiteness. Andrea Smith considers sexual violence in order to highlight the tensions of multiculturalism. She writes:

> The answer is not simply to provide ‘multi-cultural’ services to survivors. Rather, the analysis of and strategies around addressing [gender] violence must also address how [gender] violence is a tool of racism, economic oppression, and colonialism, as well as patriarchy (2005: 151).

As educators, committed to “multicultural” curricula, we cannot afford to be silent on the racial violence inherent in racial and cultural categorizations and in the lives of our students. Multiculturalism, serves to demarcate racial difference in the interest of sustaining the supremacy of white settler norms and facilitates what Razack terms the “refusal to know” (Razack, 2004: 282) the racism upon which Canada is built.
Positioning racial and cultural difference as fundamental to the national narrative of benevolence has complicated effects for the ways in which Aboriginality is addressed. Placing a checkmark beside the category “Aboriginal” holds no more critical relevance than others I consider in the diversity of my curriculum. However, increasingly I have come to assess the dangers of including Aboriginality under the banner of multiculturalism, especially for matters of Native sovereignty. Lawrence and Dua argue that multiculturalism and anti-racism are, as a matter of course, implicit in the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples (2006). The differentiation of Aboriginal peoples as separate and distinct under multiculturalism negates the way in which Aboriginal people continue to be dominated by imperial policies in settler states. Terming the competition between subordinate groups as the “Race to Innocence”, Razack and Fellows write:

\[
\text{[P]ut another way, how do those who are most unmarked …come to know themselves through the containment or marking of others, both symbolically and materially? … How do identity boxes continue to operate among subordinate group come to know themselves as innocent? (1998: 342)}
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Multiculturalism positions racialized peoples in post-colonial and terms and therefore negates the status of Aboriginal peoples as first peoples. Situating Aborignal identities within the confines of post-coloniality overlooks the fact that “these identities are situated in multiple projects of colonization and settlement on Aboriginal lands” (ibid: 130) and permits subjects to remove themselves from discussions of Canada’s current colonial occupation.

Legislated multiculturalism - in its official and unofficial implementations - relegates Aboriginal bodies to a mythic past and situates matters of Aboriginal self-
government and sovereignty as irrelevant. Not only does this forestall the possibility of taking Aboriginal peoples seriously - it allows for the ongoing dispossession of lands. If questions of land are omitted from discussions of multiculturalism, we risk re-inscribing the notion that Canada as a first and foremost a white settler state (ibid, 2006). This allows for ongoing Canadian colonial injustices, facilitated through land theft, to be re-installed in public memory as events from long ago. Lawrence and Dua (ibid: 132) posit that such omissions primarily serve to fashion a national history of forgetfulness.

Speaking of colonial atrocities they write:

Critical race and postcolonial theory systematically erases Aboriginal peoples and decolonization from the construction of knowledge about ‘race’, racism, racial subjectivities, and antiracism. This has profound consequences. It distorts our understanding of ‘race’ and racism, and of the relationship of people of color to multiple projects of settlement. It posits people of color as innocent in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Left unaddressed is the way in which people of color in settler formations are settlers on stolen lands...It distorts our writing of history; indeed, the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the project of antiracism erases them from history (ibid: 132).

Celebrations of multiculturalism and diversity continue to regulate Canadian identities based on racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Even small initiatives use racial difference to sell whiteness in a way that alienates Canadian national subjects from their own cultural production. As we constitute ourselves within benevolent individualism, we distance ourselves from needing to critically probe racial categorizations that erase the collective racial violence that whiteness requires in order to constitute itself as a primary Canadian characteristic. For students like myself, schooling in multicultural discourses removes the potential for understanding our mixed-race subjectivity as well as our role in
contemporary colonialism. I now examine how citizenship education, taught through a grade ten Civics courses in Ontario and a prescription of “good” character traits, works to reify whiteness through a schedule of conduct effecting “good citizens” and nationalistic behaviour.
Chapter Three

Citizenship Education: Reinscribing Whiteness

*Education is the cultivation of intelligence.*
Understanding curriculum as a racial text might enable us to make the process real.
-William Pinar

Michel Foucault insisted that power be studied not as something that is possessed, but rather, as something that circulates *between* individuals within the nation-state. Olssen applies these analyses to education. He writes, “Foucault forces us to consider that it is not just educational principles but also school premises and modes of organization that are important for understanding the constitution of subjectivity” (2006: 184). Classrooms provide an instance from which to study the production of subjects who enact the prescription of “good” citizenship set out in education.

Foucault’s concept of “the science of discipline” is useful to theorizing citizenship education through discourses of racial power. Power - enacted between bodies - has historically been and continues to be essential to the civilizing of nations (Foucault 1975). It is in the study of the ‘micro-physics’ of power that links can be made between citizenship education and the creation of “docile bodies” needed to enact nationalistic traits of belonging (ibid 1975). Foucault states that principles of discipline such as spatialization, minute control of activity, repetitive exercises, hierarchies, and normalizing judgments establish codes of conduct that unconsciously enact a national ethos of citizenship. (willinsky) Dean suggests that it is these regimes of practices
borrow from one another in an “attempt to colonize and subjugate another” (1999: 21). However, the enactment of particular traits cannot guarantee equal access of national belonging as only bodies that are conceived within national parameters of belonging are afforded belonging within a white settler state.

In Canada, white settler subjects have learned their superiority through immersion in nationalist discourses of belonging in classrooms. Historically, Aboriginal peoples were subjected to educational practices bent on making them ascribe to the values of settler society. While schooling - in many forms - has taught the racialized hierarchy of the nation, residential schools epitomize the most blatant form of citizenship education. Schick claims “schooling’s part in promoting whiteness [has been] historically articulated through segregated schooling - by drawing a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (1998: 5)(emphasis mine). Residential schools may no longer exist but a brief examination of them is an apt illustration of education as an imperial tool for white domination.

Residential schools were in operation in Canada from the early 1900’s until 1996 (http://www.afn.ca/residentialschools/history.html#). Attendance was compulsory and clergy, police, or Indian agents forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families. Many accounts exist of the horrible conditions that children were subjected to in these schools. It is not within the scope of this chapter to narrate particular atrocities of the residential school system but knowledge of them is essential to understanding how these schools acted as a mechanism for civilizing Aboriginal bodies. Chrisjohn et al write:

Residential Schools implemented a well-established technology that targeted the spirits, minds, feelings and bodies of its wards. Its goal was not so much to create as to destroy; its product was designed as far as possible, to be something not quite person. Something that would offer no
intellectual or spiritual challenge to its oppressors, that might provide some limited service to its ‘masters’ (should the ‘masters’ desire it) and that would learn its place on the margins of Canadian society. (2005: 94)

Residential schools forced Aboriginal bodies into becoming a particular kind of subject within the nation-state: education served as a system of reform that situated them as less human than white settlers. This indoctrination occurred through religious, cultural, and physical discipline to ensure a racialized hierarchy of the nation.

Citizenship education, as it currently takes place, acts as a more subtle mechanism for schooling citizens on their place within white settler society. Citizenship education is widely supported as a mechanism of social incorporation and common rhetoric for its support are articulated similarly to the following example:

Citizenship and citizenship education are especially important in Canada, which is a country characterized by a vast geographical area, a scattered population, cultural and linguistic diversity, regional identities, and a system of divided political authority. In these circumstances, a sense of shared citizenship is one of the key links that join Canadians in all parts of Canada and provides a sense of Canadian identity. (The Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University, 1999: 1)

The TDSB has defined principal elements of citizenship education in a list of seven character traits. These are: co-operation; responsibility; teamwork; honesty; kindness; caring; empathy; integrity; fairness and perseverance (Toronto District School Board, 2009). Through professional development sessions, teachers are trained in these principles in an attempt to ensure that as students develop in the TDSB they are educated in how to be active agents on behalf of themselves and others. As students are able to demonstrate their aptitudes in each of these character traits they are considered good
citizens. The making of “good” citizens - based on a prescription of character traits - must necessarily uphold the presence of “bad” citizens from which to judge morality between subjectivities. This raises important questions: How is citizenship education a programme of conduct that constructs the acts of students as good or bad within understandings of citizenship? How does the idea of a “bad” citizen defuse a national consciousness of colonial conquest and genocide?

Instructing white settler citizenship requires that students become familiar with various codes of morality. Citizenship education in Ontario is taught directly through the civics curriculum under the strands of “informed, purposeful, and active citizenship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The course is extended across disciplines as all teachers are asked to focus their classroom lessons in “democratic beliefs and values” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Curricular expectations suggest that students learn Canada as a place where “democratic citizenship” involves a tolerance of the “diversity of beliefs and values of various individuals and group in Canadian society” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2008). I am not suggesting that the nation be considered a homogenous whole but, rather, that when education attempts to build good subjects through terms of citizenship, national belonging is again constructed as intrinsically white.

Aboriginal peoples are listed in citizenship education curriculum documents as a group that must be taught about in the classroom. The delineation of Aboriginal groups as an interest group within citizenship education suggests, once more, that Aboriginal presence in Canadian history is unequivocal to the presence of white settlers on the land. The peripheral inclusion of Aboriginal history is geared towards producing good citizens
and functions to solidify Aboriginal bodies as “Other” within discourses of nationhood. Citizenship education requires students to “explain how democratic beliefs and values are reflected” in Canada through celebrations of “Black history month, National Aboriginal Day, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, etc.” they learn to situate white bodies as normative to Canadian identity. (Ontario Ministry of Education 2008). As students are immersed in learning the character traits of good citizenship they are necessarily schooled in identifying racial Others as recipients of their learned tolerance.

As a classroom teacher, I have often been puzzled by the relative discomfort that the Aboriginal students in my classes display when it comes to their familial legacies. It is not uncommon to learn of their Aboriginal affiliations only after speaking with their parents or siblings. I believe the frequency with which this takes place extends beyond simplistic explanations - it cannot only stem from a lack of pride. I intend to demonstrate how the advent of nationalist narratives of multiculturalism, tolerance, and benevolence, are presented in citizenship education in ways that also reify whiteness as the core Canadian identity. I wish to ask: How does citizenship education become a “racial text” affording students an understanding of their own racial compatibility with the terms set by Canadian citizenship? How do students imagine themselves, through discourses of citizenship, in relation to a national history of colonialism and genocide?

In this chapter, I will specifically explore the character trait of empathy within the contexts of a grade twelve English classroom. I will demonstrate how empathy - as a principle of citizenship education - uses the teaching of the Other to cement whiteness as a national characteristic. I consider these questions and the terms surrounding citizenship education in Ontario high schools. I aim to provide an analysis of how the schooling of
“good citizens” is a contemporary site from which to examine the white supremacy of the Canadian nation. I situate formal schooling as a mechanism for glossing over the colonial violence upon which the nation sits.

Making Good Subjects

In the Toronto District School Board teachers are educated in the seven character traits of citizenship education in order to implement teachings of “good” citizenship across all curricular subjects. These seven key principles provide a glimpse into how students situate themselves in nationalist discourses through schooling. The naming of character elements is key to the development of citizenship education, but it potentially categorizes the character of students into the dichotomous categories of desirable and undesirable subjectivities. That is, those with the necessary resources, and support develop such skills as cooperation, kindness, empathy, and perseverance and are rewarded with the label of good citizen. As educators seek to develop the set of traits deemed necessary for producing good citizens they govern the thought and conduct of their pupils to facilitate their growth into groupings as either worthy or unworthy citizens.

There are different kinds of citizenship for different bodies depending on their location. Grewal examines American identities and the shifting of bodies marked as “Other” in state-sanctioned multicultural frameworks. She writes:

Multiculturalism has become one such technology in the US as a state project, produced through the census, laws, regulations of immigration and those ‘protecting’ minorities to create racialised and gendered subjects who see themselves as ‘American’ at some points and as different kinds of Americans at other times and places (2003: 538).
Multicultural diversity is couched in the language of citizenship and this regulates Canadian identities based on racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As Citizenship Education focuses on the teachings of the benevolent nation particular aspects of Canadian history are highlighted. Citizenship education situates “good” citizenship in acts of tolerance and inclusion. When Aboriginal peoples are marked as an interest group, their entitlements to national belonging must be measured against other minority groups. Not only does this forestall the possibility of understanding Canadian colonialism it eases collective responsibility for colonialism and dispossession of lands. If “land as a contested space” is omitted from discussions of citizenship, Canada as first and foremost a white settler state is re-inscribed (Lawrence and Dua, 2006: 126). Celebrations of national diversity, which include Aboriginal peoples, primarily serve to fashion a national history forgetful of its colonial ties to land theft. Lawrence and Dua write: “ongoing settlement of Aboriginal lands, whether by white people or people of color, remains part of Canada’s nation-building project and is premised on displacing Aboriginal peoples” (2006: 136).

Hook (2005) investigates the kinds of racism hidden in political narratives of progress, and seeks to uncover the ways in which whiteness functions as a form of governmentality and citizenship production. In his view, “[whiteness is] a silent denominator of

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8 An example of this frequently occurs in the grade twelve “World Issues” course. The course focuses on issues of social injustice and incorporates a unit on genocide. Of particular interest in this unit is the software distributed to high schools that allows students to simulate themselves as Romeo Dallaire in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In this program students re-enact Dallaire’s plight in Rwanda and, in the end, learn to situate him as a hero, within discourses of peacekeeping and racialized Others. Follow this link for a more thorough explanation: http://www.paxwarrior.com/home/student.php.
postimperial privilege that underpins even leftist celebrations of national/historical/cultural belonging” (2005: 74). That is, whiteness cannot be separated from modes of teaching citizenship because even “progressive” curricula are underpinned by imperial values (Willinsky, 1998).

Citizenship education becomes a pedagogy of patriotism where students assess their conduct through parameters of national belonging. As traits of good character determine benevolent subjectivities the nation is celebrated for continuing to require the domination of Aboriginal peoples and people of colour. Kincheloe (1993) illustrates how curriculum sparks repetitive domination of peoples by privileged white bodies. Writing from an American context, he writes:

[Curriculum] is an attempt to win the consent of the governed and is used in the effort to diffuse the social conflict which inevitably emerges from domination. Of course, the creation of a one-dimensional national interest is the strategy employed to win the consent of the people—a national interest, it must be added, which excludes the [Aboriginal] community…The surface harmony heralded by the media, the government, and education is merely an image in the minds of those individuals who are shielded from the injustice experienced by dominated peoples. Such a pseudo-harmony idealizes the future as it covers up the historical forces, which have structured the present disharmony, which it denies. (Kincheloe, 249)

Curricular initiatives promoting characteristics of “good” citizenship use racial difference to promote whiteness through schooling; the unmarked category of whiteness and celebrations of foundational settlers reify white bodies as intrinsically Canadian. As students learn to constitute themselves as members of a “tolerant” place, education distances itself from teaching the colonial nature of the nation.
Garratt and Piper articulate tensions of national belonging in citizenship education. They write: “a precondition of the notion of citizenship requires an acceptance of the necessity for nation-states that individuals can belong to in the first place” (2008: 85). Students who cannot assert their national belonging, based on white settler ideals, on the other hand, are expected to perform acts of good citizenship and kindness premised on whiteness as a national characteristic. Garatt and Pratt state: “[citizenship education’s] guidelines continue to trace a lineage through time, place, and tradition that reinforces a them-and-us scenario of these people” (ibid). The responsibility of enacting the ethos of citizenship lies unequally with those who have been visibly marked by their difference in discussions of citizenship. Such difference situates them as both the recipients of national kindness as well as those who must be schooled on how to belong to the nation.

In colonial contexts, the law has inscribed white bodies as “citizens” and marked “Others” as undesirable. This has taken place through nationalist processes of exaltation (Thobani, 2007) that afford the privilege to white skin – and thus to citizenship – and mark racialized Others as inferior within the parameters of national belonging. The Indian Act marked Aboriginal bodies as undesirable national subjects and imposed external definitions of identity. Claude Denis explains the Indigenous/Canadian binary as follows:

there was no talk of an Indian/Indigenous citizenship: Indians were wards of the Canadian state, as they could not be expected to take care of themselves. To the extent that an otherwise Indian person learned/decided to run her own life in a more or less whitestream manner, the law considered that she stopped being Indian (2002: 113)
The ramifications continue today. Citizenship education is a direct affront to Aboriginal history because, in the creation of upstanding citizens, it asks few questions about the advent of the nation. Garratt and Pratt put it thusly;

In spite of the rhetoric of global citizenship, the national curriculum is just that: national, and ‘rooted’ in imperial history of the political state, or, in narrower cases, even single countries…very few discussion of ‘nation’ ask whether there should be a nation to begin with, and whose interests it may be serving (ibid).

Citizenship Education hinges upon moulding “ethically responsible” people. This upholds Canadian belief in its own innocence so that the colonial violence that has built the nation may continue to be erased. Aboriginal peoples continue to be denied rights to land reclamation, self-governance, and sovereignty and yet by the mere definition of “citizen” should be of utmost importance in nationalistic teachings. Definitions of “Canadian” identity are built upon the eradication of First Nations that were required in the erection of national borderlines. In other words, students learn directly through the structure of citizenship education - as I did from the inherited tales of peaceful settlement - that the Canadian physical landscape was once void of peoples. They consequently imagine the history of its land only from the point of its population by European settlers.

In speaking of the ways in which liberal democracies require national subjects to imagine national histories devoid of previous populations and landscapes. Hook questions, “how might the terms in question be linked to histories of privilege and dispossession, to lingering hegemonies of benefit and exclusion…?” (2005: 77)
Students acquire a sense of citizenship through acts of benevolence. They understand their own positionality in the course of Canadian nation building and are permitted to disengage from critically reflecting upon the ways in which state legislations has demarcated certain bodies as undesirable. Citizenship education aims to promote life through building foundations of morality and ethics steeped in European colonial norms.

Reid’s question: “[h]ow do we explain the fact that regimes of power expressly concerned with promoting life, establishing peaceful civil societies, in turn create forms of warfare between and within societies involving unprecedented forms of slaughter?” (2006: 134).

The construction of national subjects through “mythological narratives of unified nation moving progressively through a time continuum beginning with a glorious past leading to the present and then onward to an event better future” (Mackey, 1999: 23) facilitates an erasure of past and present legacies of violence. Such violence is racialized and its erasure is eased through educational programmes of conduct like citizenship education. Garratt and Piper contest utopic ideas of multiculturalism and citizenship promoted in classrooms. They contend: “[m]any current forms of anti-racist and multicultural teaching, while well intentioned, nevertheless serve to ‘fix’ identities on children in ways that inhibit their agency and reinforce stereotypes” (2008: 77). Whiteness, as the backbone to narratives of educational progression, serves to pacify a population so that white supremacy may continue to invisibly inform pedagogical approaches to teaching the nation. Forms of multicultural teachings such as citizenship education require the
assimilation of “Other” bodies to promote ideas of diversity that “build bridges” (Boler, 1999) between white nationals and Others. This glosses over the racial inequities upon which multiculturalism thrives. In the following section I will briefly study the character trait of empathy in my experiences of teaching the book April Raintree. I will theorize my choice of the book as a pedagogical tool for introducing Aboriginal history and the dangers that articulations of empathy - through colonial literatures - can pose when informing “good” citizenship.

**Teaching Empathetic Citizens**

Schooling “good character” traits such as empathy forces important questions: How is national identity hinged on selective teachings of historical narratives that become forms of knowledge? How do such teachings facilitate the erasure of Aboriginal, Métis, and mixed-blood identity in the classroom so that the nation’s pupils are forced to imagine themselves without Aboriginal familial lineage or as complicit within historical (and ongoing) acts of Canadian genocide?

Empathy is the ability to put oneself into another’s situation in order to comprehend pain. Megan Boler (1999) illustrates the dangers in channeling empathy through neo-liberal teachings of history in ways that promote pity as a way of tolerating and identifying with the ‘Other’. She writes, “…in the last fifteen years of Western “multiculturalism”, empathy is promoted as a bridge between differences, the affective reason for engaging in democratic dialogues with the other” (ibid: 156). Boler uses the Holocaust to illustrate the dangers of using historical narratives of struggle and injustice in reductive ways. She argues that without an appropriate examination of origins of
cruelty and oppression the use of empathy as an ingredient to good citizenship signifies only “the numb consumptions of another’s suffering, grateful for distances that seem to confirm our safety” (ibid: 172). Empathy, as a signifier of good character, thus serves to privilege some bodies over racialized ‘Others’.

The novel *April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton shows how empathy positions some bodies in colonized states and makes students complicit in histories of Aboriginal genocide. *April Raintree* is a fictional account of the lives of two Métis sisters, April and Cheryl Raintree. Each year I read this novel in my grade twelve English course. It is an attempt to bring Aboriginal history and colonialism into critical discussion. April tells the story of her family as a Métis woman whom, along with her younger sister, is taken from her family by Children’s Aid as a child and raised in foster homes. The story details her violent experiences in foster care, her encounter with sexual assault, and resistance to claiming her Métis identity. April’s relationship with her sister is a site of tension throughout the story; Cheryl is unavoidably Métis while April has a much easier time hiding her Aboriginal roots and passing for white. Throughout the novel we learn that April’s reluctance to claim Métissage is primarily based on the negative stereotypes she learns through schooling about her cultural identity. Contrary to her sister, Cheryl displays pride in her Aboriginal heritage but eventually succumbs to alcoholism and commits suicide at the end of the novel. The novel provides many avenues to theorize the construction of racialized power within nationalist discourse but it is April’s experience with sexual assault that has brought me to critical reflection on the workings of empathy.
Using empathy to teach sexual assault in the novel is particularly problematic because students situate themselves as the victims of sexual assault rather than as implicated in the colonial project of dominating women’s bodies. Set in a part of Winnipeg that April notes as “run down” (1992: 110), the sexual assault occurs as she is attempting to collect her sister’s things from her boyfriend’s apartment. April spends most of her life passing easily as a white woman but throughout the sexual assault is called names such as “dirty squaw”, “little Indian”, and “savage”. April is unaware that the men are meant to be after her sister (who looks Aboriginal and works as a prostitute) and wonders several times throughout the chapter how they have marked her body as “half-Indian” (Cullteon, 1992: 112).

Without appropriate historical analysis of colonialism, empathetic reactions to April’s rape risks the displacement of her pain as known by the reader. In the context of my classroom, students react to April’s narrative with dismay. Because they are not strangers to spatialities of violence and white supremacy their empathy with April allows them to believe, fleetingly, that the racial injustice directed so frequently towards them is equivalent to the violence experienced by April and her sister throughout the novel.

Kumashiro writes of the dangers in this process. He writes:

[T]he expectation that information about the Other leads to empathy is often based on the assumption that learning about "them" helps a student see that "they" are like "us"; in other words, learning about the Other helps the student see the self in the Other. Such a perspective leaves the self-Other binary intact, and allows the self (i.e., the normative identities) to remain privileged.
Many of my students are situated within histories of colonialism but this does not mean that there is not risk in using empathy to bring issues of colonialism and Aboriginality into discussion. Without a careful presentation of the historical conditions of Aboriginal subjugation students are permitted to disavow their positions within Canada’s colonial project and remove their bodies from the history of the land they now occupy. Similarly, mixed-race Aboriginal presence within the classroom becomes difficult to conceptualize. Students learn - through the placement of themselves in tragic narratives like April’s - to fashion an understanding of Aboriginality that neglects historical conditions of colonialism. Asking students to know “about the Other” (Kumashiro, 2000: 5) through empathy therefore renders mixed-race Aboriginality amongst themselves an impossibility. Students come to equate themselves with April’s experience and situate Canadian colonialism outside of an understanding of themselves. Colonial pain rests with in the student’s knowledge of the Other when empathy is uninformed by the historical conditions that form subjectivities. Students placed similarly to me in discourses of nationalism learn from their empathetic reactions to April’s plight that, should they be afforded white skin privilege, alignment with white settler identities is more favourable to conceptions of citizenship.

Teaching the residual pain of colonialism in ways that ask students to “place their bodies” in the character’s position confirms for them who they are not. It simultaneously allows them, - through the pain of Others - to obscure their own participation within colonial structures of violence. Although my class is made up of mostly racialized bodies, many themselves familiar with racial violence, their empathy for April’s pain
allows them to situate their own “humanitarian character” within the Canadian narrative of benevolence. Inserting their bodies within the national narrative of benevolence is an attempt to, perhaps, buy themselves a place within the white settler state. Empathy, used to illustrate the traumas of colonization to marginalized peoples, makes it very difficult to fashion a radical awareness of diasporic identities constructed on stolen land. April Raintree, taught through empathy, risks students aligning themselves with the protagonist to criticize white supremacy in ways that negate their own entanglements in the colonial conditions that have produced her. Building empathetic subjects involves the further dehumanization of Aboriginal peoples. Razack writes:

Believing ourselves to be citizens of a compassionate middle power who is largely uninvolved in the brutalities of the world, we have relied on these images and stories to confirm our own humanitarian character (2007: 376).

An examination of colonial spatialities renders racial injustice detectable. Examining what Razack terms the “relationship between identity and space” yields some indication of how racial power is memorialized onto bodies through the spaces that they occupy (2002: 5). The men who rape April understand her body to be intrinsically sub-human. That is, as someone who occupies the degenerate space of Winnipeg’s inner city core, a space of the city associated with Aboriginal bodies, her body, regardless of the way it looks, is constructed as rapeable in the course of white domination (Razack, 2002). The murder of Pamela George - outlined in earlier pages - provides a similar location from which to undertake a spatialized analysis of how Aboriginal bodies are constructed through geographical spaces to be sub-human. As an Aboriginal woman, Pamela Georges’s body was necessarily marked by a history of dispossession and violence while
the men’s white bodies were understood judicially to be of a white settler norm. Similar to Winnipeg, Regina’s inner city core is characterized by Aboriginal bodies and low-income neighborhoods. Like April, Pamela George was presumed to belong to a space of degeneracy. Prostitution and Aboriginality were inscribed on both women’s bodies in the spaces they were occupying. Just as Pamela’s killers understood themselves to be inherently superior to her, April’s assailters could not believe her to be equivalent to their humanity (Hanson, 2008). Razack offers an explanation for this that intertwines whiteness, gender, and patriarchy in the production of the racial Other. She states,

> While it is certainly patriarchy that produces men whose sense of identity is achieved through brutalizing a woman, the men’s and the court’s capacity to dehumanize Pamela George came from their understanding of her as the (gendered) racial Other who degradation confirmed their own identities as white—that is, as men entitled to the land and the full benefits of citizenship (2002: 126).

Examining how, through geopolitical spaces, certain subjects come to know themselves as national subjects is ripe with potential for teaching alternative historical accounts of the nation. Perhaps Razack’s technique of “unmapping” (Razack, 2002) can accompany the use of empathy in teaching colonial literatures. As students learn to deconstruct spatialities in lessons of conquest and subjugation they may displace themselves as equivalent to the protagonist and understand the placement of her “degenerate” body in relation to their own.

For Citizenship Education to truly affect change through its generations of pupils a decolonizing perspective regarding the subjugation of Aboriginal bodies in Canadian history must be of utmost importance. Measurable qualities of good character negate an acknowledgement of Canadian legislations bent on denying certain bodies rights of
citizenship. To suggest - as citizenship education does - that mastering a set of character traits grants citizenship to pupils refuses an acknowledgment of the ways in which race, sexual orientation, and class restrict individual rights within narratives of nationalism. Canada’s stringent immigration policies, rates of poverty, and colonial legacies will always ensure that there will be bodies clearly demarcated as un-nationalistic. Jacqui Alexander reflects upon the different ways in which her body is marked by her identity as a woman of colour and a lesbian in discussions of citizenship (1994). Although she carries a green card to work in the United States she explains that in the crossing of state borders her sexual identity posits the possibility of arrest and imprisonment, regardless of her immigration status. Queer bodies, she asserts, are threatening to national health: “[h]aving refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation” (ibid: 7). While any child may learn traits of good character it is outrageous to claim, as does citizenship education, that the ability to be a “good” person fundamentally guarantees rights of national belonging.

Empathy is necessarily rooted in racial power differentials when taught in relation to citizenship. It suggests that in order for students to consider themselves as “good” national subjects they must learn to place themselves in relation to the pain of Others. Narratives of dispossession and violence are often racialized and it becomes that in order to empathize, students must understand themselves as superior to racialized tales of hardship. Whiteness saturates classroom teachings of Canadian history and citizenship education - as a programme of conduct - attempts a public amnesia of past and present state violence towards Aboriginal peoples. Asking readers to engage empathetically with
the chronicles of hardship and trauma experienced by April makes it difficult to raise an awareness of the individual complicities in collective racism against Aboriginal peoples. As students in my class identified with the plight of the main character in *April Raintree* they frequently expressed pity towards her life but offered up little analysis of the historical conditions responsible for her hardships. Placing their bodies in April’s provides the students with a currency of knowledge: they fell they know what it means to be a Metis woman and understand her pain as their own. In this way, they absolves themselves from any complicity in the historical conditions that fuel her suffering.

Citizenship education provides a cover-up for state violence: as long as students are disciplined in mechanisms of good character, the language of citizenship portrays that they have equal right of access to the merits of citizenship. Citizenship education constructs national bodies to adhere to a system of discipline, which promotes a sense of Canadian identity that harbors a refusal to acknowledge state-sanctioned racism. Reid writes, “Discipline subjects the individual to an evolution understood in terms of genesis. It programs the individual for a series of graduated tasks and exercises geared toward some terminal state of being” (2006: 132). Citizenship education is a technology of control that requires an erasure of violence from national consciousness and remains an important site for the maintenance of whiteness in Canadian nationalism.

Citizenship education trumpets the benefits of including diverse backgrounds of teaching but in ways that seek to govern the docility of some bodies whilst requiring violence from others. Empathy - taught in high school curriculum through exposure of students to “Other” voices - requires that some students be the benefactors of pity that teachings of empathy in classrooms elicit. As students are exposed continually to Others
in need of empathy rituals of pity are erected. In the case of Aboriginal literature and teachings of genocide exposure to such “voices” operates as a mechanism of governance; bodies that operate within white settler normativities are constantly located as the centre: their whiteness having already made them citizens. Students positioned similarly to me in familial legacies of Aboriginality learn through character traits such as empathy to position themselves as white settler subjects: as they know the plight of the Aboriginal Other they learn that understanding themselves within a framework of national belonging necessitates the impossibility of their own Aboriginality.

Citizenship education is therefore a form of governmentality; it provides disciplinary means of constituting national subjects. Power is circulated among bodies of the classroom in discourses of citizen production and, as a matter of course, this marks white bodies as better citizens than non-white bodies.
Conclusion

Students often assume their identities out of existence. An example of this occurred when I recently facilitated a grade ten civics course as a substitute teacher. The lesson plan involved students learning the symbolism of different coat of arms. First, they learned that coat of arms historically represented different parties or people in battles. They then explored several different provincial coats of arms and were assigned the task of creating their own coat of arms that they felt was symbolic of them. Students came up with a wide variety of representations and explanations for their symbols, that in many cases were rooted in understandings of themselves as people on the margins of Canadian citizenship. The one Aboriginal student in my class provided a most fitting example of this marginalization. His assignment demonstrates how schooling is based on liberalist teachings of democracy that endeavors to make seamless a prescription of citizenship exclusionary to particular Aboriginal bodies and assimilatory to others.

Kevin’s coat of arms was designed to illustrate his strong affiliation with the Ojibwa community. In the centre of his shield he had placed an Ojibwa saying to represent his feeling of close ties to the Earth. At the top of the shield, he placed an eagle feather meant to represent love, death, honour, and justice. On either side of the shield were his supporters: figures meant to portray two persons or animals that have contributed to his identity. Each side consisted of a stick figure - one drawn to represent his Canadian side, the other to demonstrate his Aboriginal side. Unlike myself at his age, Kevin could understand himself as a mixed-race Aboriginal person. I found out he had grown up on a reserve for most of his life and held Indian status. He could only conceive

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9 The student’s name has been changed for the purpose of confidentiality
of his dual identities (duals citizenships perhaps even) as being mutually exclusive from one another.

The class required students to identify themselves within a narrative of citizenship and to reproduce symbols affiliated with colonial conquest. Kevin’s portrayal was symbolic of how colonial history has relegated Aboriginal bodies as Other within nationalistic identity. When I asked him what he meant by representing “his two sides” he answered that his “white side” (shown as a white stick figure with bottles of beer in each hand) symbolized his Canadianness while his Aboriginal half (represented by a red stick man with a Mohawk and a bow and arrow) represented his “non-Canadian” self. I would like to suggest that Kevin’s analysis of national belonging demonstrates the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. His representation took place in a classroom dedicated to teaching liberalist notions of democracy and citizenship. His portrayal of dual identity is exemplary of the ways in which Aboriginal history and representation continue to be cast as intrinsically un-Canadian in a masked effort to cement white bodies as fundamentally national bodies.

Although he grew up with close ties to the Ojibwa community and had spent most of his life living on a reserve his Aboriginality could only be conceived apart from the definition of Canadianness as white. I could not fathom myself as a mixed-race person largely because of my appearance. My blue eyes and blond hair, placed alongside my mother’s inability to answer my questions regarding her grandmother’s history and curricular teachings of history, made it so that I easily identified as a white settler subject. Kevin, on the other hand, identified as someone of Aboriginal descent but still placed the essence of being Canadian equivocally to being white. I believe that his tribal
affiliations, knowledge of his Ojibwa community, and physical appearance permitted him this self-identification but that white settler narratives and multicultural inform his assertion of the nation as a white place.

The construction of the Canadian landscape as white land is closely tied to the making of white subjects. The Indian Act articulates the intricacies of the civilizing mission that has historically constructed difference of Aboriginal bodies from white bodies whilst simultaneously imposing Imperial ideals of social order. This has largely been accomplished through the annexation of land reserves. In chapter one I explored how my own family’s white settler narrative largely informed my understanding of myself as a white settler subject. As I listened to my grandmother’s tales of terra nullius I envisioned land as a text affirming my white self as a primary inhabitant of the land. The northern Ontario in which this narrative is situated is not void of Aboriginal peoples but the lay out of the landscape marks the land as primarily white land. It is not that Aboriginal peoples are erased from public memory but that the possession of land by white settlers (gifted by the government) works to solidify the nation as intrinsically white. Land, therefore, makes a foundation from which to uphold the whiteness of the nation. I return to Kevin because, through his close ties to his reserve, land inevitably formed his recognition of himself within his Aboriginal community. It may also be, that these land ties, fashioned his understanding of Canadian identity as white.

Common narratives assert the benevolence of the Canadian nation through discourses of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, in both its lawful and unofficial implementations, informs Canadian white supremacy as it leaves whiteness as an unmarked racial category from which to measure Other racial groups against. As we
understand ourselves as nation of polite, subtle, and generous (white) people the racism upon which Canada has been founded is eased from public memory. This has grave implications for understandings of Aboriginality in Canada. The nation constructs its own benevolence through acts of tolerance to Others. Aboriginal peoples, included in lists of racialized Others in classrooms or common nationalist rhetoric, risk erasure as the original inhabitants of the land. It is in this way that multiculturalism solidifies the whiteness of the Canadian nation: national belonging is rendered as white through the land as Aboriginal peoples are included amongst minority interest groups.

For fair-skinned people of mixed-race like myself this has many consequences. I learned through selective teachings of history and celebrations of nationalism to unimagine the possibility of my own Aboriginal inheritance. This was largely due to particular portrayals of Aboriginality in nationalist narratives that represented little of what I understood of my own inheritance. The placement of Aboriginal peoples as racialized Others within discourses of multiculturalism solidified an understanding of my own mixed-race identity that allowed me to situate Aboriginality as Other to an understanding of myself. Additionally, these discourses permit me, and other white settlers subjects, to disallow the possibility of the racism that founds the Canadian nation. For Kevin, representing his Aboriginal identity as mutually exclusive from his Canadian identity signifies the ways in which white bodies continue to inform national belonging.

As an educator I have taken interest in the intentions of citizenship education for many reasons. Firstly, I take issue with the notion of citizenship. While I have been exposed to much pedagogical theory on the responsibilities of educators to producing socially responsible citizens, I have found no such theories attempting to complicate our
understanding of the concept of citizenship. How, as educators, do we reinscribe white national belonging as we adhere to the requirements of citizenship education? What do we risk in using the voices of Aboriginal Others to invoke empathy in the making of “good” citizens? And finally, how can the experiences of students - of all racial backgrounds - in classrooms be used to fashion understandings of colonialism that grant space for comprehending their complicities in continuing Canadian colonialism? Citizenship education rests on a foundation of inherent racism: it leaves whiteness as an unmarked racial category while promoting acts of tolerance that attempt to perpetuate white domination. In citizenship education, it is always implied that citizenship is white and that in order to be considered a member of the citizenry, (white) traits of good character must be enacted. Citizenship education was not a part of my formal schooling but through instances such as La Journee St. Catherine and other teachings that situated Aboriginality as Other to Canadian identity I learned to cast myself as a white settler subject. Schooling, formal or otherwise, inhibits individuals from recognizing their own mixed-blood identity or - in some cases - an Aboriginal heritage.

This thesis has explored issues of mixed-blood identity through personal narratives that exemplify the solidification of white settler norms of Canada. I have inserted familial stories and my own experiences within schooling in an effort to make familiar the effects of imperial identity making practices. While the Indian Act must always be taken into account in the making of a white nation I wish to situate schooling, and multicultural impositions like citizenship education, as of equal importance to the maintenance of white supremacy in Canada. I have investigated tales and stories of my childhood and my experiences in education to personalize the methodologies behind the
making of “exalted subjects” (Thobani, 2007: 8). Nationalist mythologies may be traced through schooling - recognition of this is essential to disrupting the dissemination of white supremacy. Sharing these national mythologies and the ways in which they permeate schooling and articulations of nationalism is an important step towards forging anti-colonial and decolonizing perspectives. In order for schooling to effectively participate in processes of decolonization pedagogical practices must be informed by such critical methodologies. I believe that an examination of the racism embedded in the nation - masked in our construction of the multicultural “good” nation - is elemental to this endeavour.
Bibliography


