

## Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and 'Mixed Race' Identities

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*ABSTRACT: This paper examines the ways 'mixed race' women in Canada contemplate their relationship to national identity. Through qualitative, open-ended interviews, the research demonstrates how some women of 'mixed race' contest ideas of the nation as constituted through the policy of multiculturalism in Canada. To challenge the tropes of the national narrative, some women of 'mixed race' develop nuanced models of cultural citizenship, illustrating that national identities are formed and transformed in relation to representation. Refusing to be positioned outside the nation, they effectively produce their own meanings of identity by working through their own personally identified 'mixed race' bodies to the national body politic, where some of them see their own bodies as intrinsically 'multicultural'. The paper ends by addressing the paradoxes of multiculturalism, emphasising through narratives that the policy produces hierarchical spaces against which some 'mixed race' women imaginatively negotiate, contest and challenge perceptions of their racialised and gendered selves.*

### Introduction

Canada, unhyphenated, held possible in imagination ... (Moss, 1996, p. 136)

Since the inauguration of multicultural policy in Canada in 1971, the notion of the hyphen, employed to articulate the marriage of ethnic and national identity, and witnessed through identifications like 'Italian-Canadian', 'Japanese-Canadian' or 'Somalian-Canadian', has taken on a particular political, and, at the same time, paradoxical, salience in Canada. For some, the hyphen is seen as a byproduct of the implementation of multiculturalism in Canada, a policy that aimed to acknowledge every Canadian's right to identify with the cultural tradition of their choice while retaining Canadian citizenship. For others, however, the hyphen is understood as a 'union of contradictions, each word symbolising the inversion of the 'other'' (Hanchard, 1990), marking places of both ambiguity and multiplicity. This paper explores these differences by examining the understanding of the policy of multiculturalism of some Canadian women of 'mixed race'.

Canadian multicultural policy is important because it has served not only as a guideline for government policy since 1971, but also as a framework for

national discourse on the construction of Canadian society. I propose that multiculturalism produces particular discursive and material social spaces within which 'mixed race' women negotiate not only their 'mixed race' identities, but also their national affiliations. I deliberately write against the claims that the notion of nation is now a 'mere reminder of a vanished body' (Franco, 1997, p. 31). Instead, drawing from the vernacular understandings of nationhood as discussed among participants, I suggest that 'mixed race' women in this study re-appropriate the term 'Canadian', imagining new senses of nationalism as places for creating personal meanings of ethnicity, identity and their relationship to nation among conflicting racial and gendered discourses. Through their voices, I demonstrate the difficulties of speaking of a national or ethnic identity separately in Canada.

The political articulation of citizenship and its relation to nation has been hotly contested among several scholars in Canada (see Bannerji, 2000; Hamilton, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995; Ng, 1993; Taylor, 1992) in light of constitutional and political debates, often in relation to the Canadian government's troubled relationship with Quebec. Canada has often been billed as a country with a unique political configuration — a bilingual nation with '*deux nations*' — English Canada and Quebec (see Makropoulos, 2000). However, the two nations' conceptualisation successfully eclipses the notion of nationhood for those who are not perceived to be members of either of these two groups. The policy and trope of 'multiculturalism' has thus been placed (uneasily) within the context of a bilingual Canada as one way of dealing with Canada's ethnic and racial diversity. The paper begins with a brief overview of the emergence of Canadian multicultural policy. I then explore some 'mixed race' women's readings of the policy. Secondly, I examine the relationship between 'mixed race' identity and Canadian identity by illuminating the ways some 'mixed race' women search out national and ethnic belonging. Thirdly, I point out some of the complexities raised by these narratives, where some women of 'mixed race' actively reconstitute racial and ethnic identity by working through their own personal bodies to contemplate the constitution of the Canadian national body politic.

### **Canadian Multicultural Policy**

Multiculturalism has often been regarded as one of the hallmarks of Canadian identity, given Canada's ethnic and racial diversity (Fleras and Kunz, 2001; Elliott and Fleras, 1992), but it is crucial not to conflate questions of demographic ethnic and racial diversity with issues of cultural representation. At the most basic level, the term multicultural can be used as an adjective to refer to the multiplicity of the world's cultures and the co-existence of these cultures within particular nations. 'Multicultural' as a historical adjective, then, is 'as banal as it is indisputable' (Stam, 1997, p. 188) because virtually all countries and regions are multicultural in some way. What makes Canada different beyond its status as a multicultural country, however, is that the multicultural project has been enshrined in its constitution and through law, reflecting a salient part of the social and political context of Canada. Canadian multicult-

tural policy has defined the government position on cultural diversity since 1971. Now celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, multiculturalism is seen as a mechanism through which to engage cultural diversity (Fleras and Kunz, 2001). The policy can be read as the official, legislative response in Canada to ethnic plurality, or a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism as policy emerged, in part, because of perceived challenges posed by the influx of ethnically diverse immigrants into Canada (Elliott and Fleras, 1992). In light of increased ethnic diversity, and subsequent demands for cultural protection and social equality among ethnic groups, the Canadian government began to rethink its relationship to ethnic minorities. It established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1962 to examine the issue of identity among Canadians. After travelling from coast to coast, the Committee recommended a major extension of bilingualism to help alleviate the disharmony in English/French relations, conceiving of a bilingual framework within which other ethnic groups could prosper. A contentious policy emerged designed to fit minority cultural differences into a workable national framework. In 1971, the Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, gave a speech to Parliament where he outlined the government response to the report. Multiculturalism, within the framework of official bilingualism, accentuated the need to maintain the cultural heritage of all groups within a multicultural population. It also established the right of members of visible minority groups to equality with members of the two charter groups of British and French ancestry. The cornerstone of the 1971 policy was, as Trudeau put it in his speech, multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, essentially what the Royal Commission had advised. The key tenets of multicultural policy were:

1. to assist all Canadian cultural groups that had demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance;
2. to assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society;
3. to promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity;
4. to continue assistance to immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society.

(Canada, House of Commons Debates, statement of Pierre Trudeau, 8 October, 1971)

In an effort to put these principles into practice, the government established several programmes during the 1970s. There were courses to teach English and French to newly arrived immigrants, and programmes for Canadian ethnic studies in schools and universities. Multicultural grants were issued to support the development of various cultures and languages. Specific initiatives for language and culture maintenance received substantial government funding — reaching nearly two hundred million dollars between 1971 and 1990. A Multicultural Directorate was established within the Department for the Secretary of State in 1972 to promote social, cultural and racial harmony. To aid

in the elimination of discrimination, the Directorate worked to enhance intercultural and interracial understanding and the cultural integration of immigrants. By 1973, almost ten million dollars had been spent on five hundred ethnic groups — on events like folk festivals — to promote cultural harmony.

In general, multicultural policy encouraged individuals voluntarily to affiliate with the culture and tradition of their choice, supposedly without fear of discrimination or exclusion. Ethnic differences were to be forged into a workable national framework of 'unity within diversity'. This focus upon 'difference through unity' was seen as a remarkable change from the conventional strategies of nation-building.

Despite the proliferation of research on particular ethnic groups in Canada, comparatively little research has been conducted on the Canadian public's perception of the multicultural policy (Kalbach and Kalbach, 1999). This is a serious deficiency because multiculturalism forms the backdrop against which much of the current research in Canadian ethnic studies becomes meaningful. It is also important to note that although there are many theoretical critical readings of multicultural policy, very few studies have anchored these analyses through empirical work. Although some studies have explored the multiple meanings of multicultural policy among particular ethnic groups (Bienvenue and Goldstein, 1985) no-one has examined the meanings of multiculturalism among women of 'mixed race' descent. This is a particularly glaring omission, given that the number of 'mixed race' people is growing steadily in Canada (Kilbride *et al.*, 2001). 'Mixed race' women are in a unique position in relation to multicultural policy, as they are both positioned as 'ethnic' by the rules of the policy, and at the same time, often considered to be of European or French origin by virtue of their own 'mixed race' backgrounds (many — but not all — of the women interviewed were partly European and partly Asian, or Quebecois and West Indian, for example). I was curious to unpack their readings of the policy to explore how it has provided a particular social framework within which individuals contemplate their own ethnic and national allegiances. How has multiculturalism affected their lives? What did they think about the policy? What was their relationship to race, place and nation? Indeed, as many of the women were between the ages of 20 and 30 at the time of the interview, several participants literally grew up alongside the policy that was inaugurated in 1971.

## Methodology

This research draws from 24 qualitative, open-ended interviews with women who identified as 'mixed race' and were living in Toronto, Canada. This study recruited women who chose to identify as 'mixed race'. As a self-identified 'mixed race' woman of Indian and Iranian descent who was born and raised in Toronto, Canada, I was interested in examining how other self-identified women of 'mixed race' contemplate this politicised category of identity.

The category of 'mixed race' identity remains not only nebulous, but also contentious. Definitions of what constitutes the category of 'mixed race' changes in various transnational contexts (Mahtani, forthcoming a; Mahtani

and Moreno, 2001; Ifekwunigwe, 2001; Song and Parker, 2001; Twine, 1998; Goldberg, 1995). I employ the phrase 'mixed race' here to describe women who saw themselves as 'mixed race' — or as multiracial, bicultural, biracial, multi-ethnic, racially mixed, or of mixed ethnic origin or ancestry. Participants in this study rarely employed racial labels to describe themselves — instead, although they identified as 'mixed race' for the purposes of their study, they tended to describe in detail their diverse ethnic backgrounds to illuminate the reasons why they identified as 'mixed race'. I will suggest that this is because, within the Canadian context, the concept of racialised ethnicities (as opposed to race) has figured largely regarding questions of identity for Canadians (see Bannerji, 2001).

While I am wary of employing the phrase 'mixed race' because the word 'race' is, of course, problematic, I have chosen to use the label 'mixed race' to describe participants because the majority of the women in this study employed this identification in part due to its political salience, providing a space from which to mobilise politically and collectively to combat essentialist racial categories (for more about complex ways that the category of 'mixed race' as a definition of ethno-racial identity is negotiated, see Mahtani, forthcoming a).

There are other reasons why I chose to interview women who self-identified as 'mixed race'. Researchers exploring 'mixed race' identity in the last ten years have focused upon specific ethnic compositions of biraciality, like Japanese-European (King and DaCosta, 1996), Korean-European (Standen, 1996), and African-American-Jewish (Azoulay, 1997). Recent work in the field of critical 'mixed race' theory has emphasised the importance of analysing the experiences of those who comprehend, acknowledge and affirm the many racial, cultural and ethnic threads that make up their ethno-racial identity, including those beyond a black/white mix (Mahtani and Moreno, 2001). Following these calls, this study gave women the space to define their ethno-racial identity. Several women who came forward to be interviewed were not just of 'white' and 'black' descent, or of 'white' and something 'other'. They clarified in rich detail their multiple lines of ancestry (for example, one woman identified this way: one grandparent Irish, one grandparent 'First Nations' Native, one grandparent Iranian, and one grandparent Polynesian). Although I used the term 'mixed race' to recruit the population I interviewed, the women did not limit themselves to this phrase to describe their racialised identities. Indeed, they explained that on some days they might also see themselves as biracial, multiethnic, 'mixed race' or multiracial, among a wide array of ethnic options (Mahtani, forthcoming a and b; Song, 2001; Waters, 1990). Their self-definitions of 'mixed race' identity included various ethnic, cultural, national and racial affiliations. If they chose to identify themselves in these ways, I was curious as to when and where they would choose these designations. I deliberately chose such a wide heterogeneous sample in order to explore the ways in which racialised identities are performed and experienced contingent upon a variety of factors, including age, gender, sexual orientation, relationships to nation and geography, among other dynamics. I have prefaced each quote with a brief introduction of each woman — including her age at the time of the interview, her job, and how *she* defined her ethnic background in order to avoid defining

her readings of her ethnic identity myself. All names that follow are pseudonyms to protect the participants' privacy. The majority of participants were recruited through word of mouth and through the posting of signs. The women were between the ages of 20–55. The interviews were carried out in Toronto, Canada from 1996 to 1997. All the women interviewed grew up and were currently living in Toronto at the time of the interview, and were of Canadian citizenship (although some of them did hold dual citizenship with another country).

It is imperative to note that although the class categories within which these women defined themselves meant different things in different local and national contexts, the majority of the women saw themselves as being part of the 'middle to upper class' segment of society. Although I did try to recruit women of various class backgrounds, I discovered that low to lower-middle class 'mixed race' women's experiences of racialisation were structured differently from the population I interviewed and few women of a lower class status came forward to be interviewed. This became most abundantly clear in relation to education levels and understandings of shared cultural capital. The majority of the women interviewed in this study had access to a university education, wherein many of them began to learn a language to define themselves outside restraining racial labels. Indeed, as the following narratives demonstrate, many of the women employed concepts in cultural studies and critical 'race' theory to describe the shifting and fluid nature of their identity (for more on this particular topic, see Mahtani, forthcoming a). Their education and knowledge of a language to describe their experiences in this fashion affected not only how they 'read their race', but how they explored issues of racialisation and nationalism with me, reflecting the complex ways race and class are co-constructed for multiracial individuals.

The very distinctive educational, socio-economic and cultural privileges of participants cannot be overlooked. The majority of women who were interviewed are members of a distinctive socio-economic service class. These varied professional and academic experiences may make them more confident and assertive, thus they are more able to challenge static racial identifications, unlike, for example, other 'mixed race' women who may be economically disadvantaged. The lively debate that ensued around the discussion of nationalism and multiraciality strikes me as being very specific to this particular population who had studied at university. Clearly, as I have pointed out in other research (Mahtani and Moreno, 2001) disparities in class and education also serve to shape the experience of multiraciality. We need to ask: how might women of a lower class status contemplate multiraciality? Although researchers have insisted upon the importance of unravelling this complex question (Hill, 2001; Mahtani and Moreno, 2001) we have yet to examine the relationship between class and questions of nationalism in any great detail, especially in regards to the multiracial experience in Canada. I flag this area as very important for future debate and discussion.

Identifying as a woman of 'mixed race' identity also complicated the acquisition of narratives. Tizard and Phoenix (1993) suggest that it is helpful when a woman of 'mixed race' identity carries out interviews with multiethnic

respondents. This may diminish the discomfort some interviewees feel, as well as providing a sympathetic ear for discussion. Indeed, these comments reflect Kobayashi's assertion that:

political ends will be achieved only when representation is organised so that those previously disempowered are given voice. In other words, it matters that women of colour speak for and with women of colour. (Kobayashi, 1994, p. 74)

However, it is important to note that as a woman of Indian/Iranian descent, my status as a 'mixed race' woman is always up for debate and scrutiny (Mahtani and Moreno, 2001). In some situations, I may be seen as 'mixed race' — in others, not at all, depending upon time, place, and countless other factors. My own identification as a Canadian 'mixed race' woman creates a set of tensions, definitions of insiders and outsiders, and a series of complex positionings, all of which are accompanied by myriad series of relationships of power, none of which is easy to map. Identifying as 'mixed race' altered the material I gathered from interviewees. For example, peppered through many interviews emerged the phrase, 'You know what I mean, Minelle' accompanied by a knowing glance or smile. As well, participants may well have thought I was expecting specific sorts of answers to my questions to coincide with my own hypothesis, carved from my own experience of multiraciality. Hence, I employed a critical and reflexive questioning on my part during all stages of my research to consider and re-consider again what it was that I was trying to accomplish, as well as continually contemplating my own politics of positionality throughout and remarking upon the performative aspects of the research process — between both interviewer and interviewee (see Mahtani, forthcoming b).

In the next section, I suggest that the policy of multiculturalism produces particular discursive and material social spaces through which informants negotiate both their ethnic and national alliances. Participants provide a re-reading of the social cornerstone of multiculturalism through a creative critique, insisting that the policy compartmentalises what are really fluid and flexible senses of place, nation and identity. I foreground the more 'opaque instances of exclusion' (Sibley, 1995, p. 1) subtly encouraged by the policy. I address how women in this study defined the Canadian multicultural project, demonstrating that while the term connotes nuances of diversity and equality, at the same time, it also carries a series of contradictions about Canadian identity.

### **Canadian 'Mixed Race' Women's Readings of Multicultural Policy**

The fact that existing notions of 'multiculturalism' did not adequately encapsulate the racial/national self-representations of mixed-race women was manifest in interviews where the policy was rarely raised as a topic for discussion. Conspicuously absent from the women's narratives were positive reflections of multicultural policy. Instead, if the policy was discussed at all, it was critiqued and described as an institutional project which funds and promotes staged

ethnic representations, supporting the expression of cultural difference through food, family, personal and religious practices. Many informants indicated that these staged ethnic representations did not communicate much sense of the daily realities of their lives. This perspective resonates with the work of various critical 'race' theorists who point out the deficiencies of multiculturalism (see Parekh, 2000; Bannerji, 2000; Goldberg, 1994), insisting that the policy tends to sanction a policed diversity while veiling Eurocentric values.

Shima, a seventeen year old student of Japanese and European descent, makes the distinction between the multicultural composition of Canada and the multicultural project through her clear distaste for the term:

*Shima:* I hate the word multiculturalism.

*Interviewer:* OK. Tell me why.

*Shima:* Well to me, it's sort of like this government created term to like make Canada into some pathetic attempt at patriotism, a way for people of colour to be able to look at Canada in patriotic ways. All I can see is this cheesy commercial with kids of different colours, holding hands. It just brings up this really kinda fake, superficial, 'let's dance for each other, and make each other spring rolls to show how much we love each other!' sort of idea. It doesn't do anything in terms of racial biases or prejudices. It doesn't break any stereotypes or barriers. If anything it just perpetuates them because it sort of minimalises entire cultures! Into the dance, and the food. So in that sense, I hate it.

Shima emphasises that multicultural policy, driven by an inauthentic celebration of heritage and tradition, is not successful in eradicating racism in Canada. Unequal opportunities continue to be supported and promoted on the basis of ethno-racial origins, through government funded celebrations of cultural traditions. Policies which aim to offer equality 'regardless of race' actively perpetuate the notion of natural 'racial' difference from which racism derives its pervasive strength (Kobayashi, 1993). As Shima suggests, the celebration of particular stereotypical snapshots of ethnic cultures sanitises cultural differences. In other words, some participants explained that the policy essentialised them in racial terms.

Shima's critique is suggestive of Spickard's thoughtful analysis of cultural hybridity (Spickard, 2001). He suggests that the current fascination with the term may be premature. As I have suggested elsewhere (Mahtani, forthcoming a), a vacant celebration of cultural hybridity veils gendered and racialised power dynamics. Shima's emphasis upon the 'cheesy', 'superficial', and 'fake' aspects of multiculturalism hints at the similarities between the two critiques.

Chantal too contends that we are a far cry away from a true multicultural society. Chantal is twenty-four years old, a journalism student, and is of Trinidadian and British descent. She insists we are witnessing a disturbing trend towards ethnic and regional fragmentation in Canada:

I don't see a lot of multiculturalism here. I see a lot of different people

here. But people ultimately gravitate and keep to themselves. So it's kinda fraudulent. I think it's a nice idea, I think it's a theory, I think it's something that is often attached to Canada, but we're not living it. Because I don't socialise with Chinese people, I don't socialise with a lot of different people, even though they're outside my door. You know, that's not multiculturalism. That's segregation. And to me, multiculturalism implies that it's the sharing of information, and that we're all made more aware. Because we live amongst each other. But that presumes that we do in fact live amongst each other. And we don't. We don't socialise that way, we don't ... it's a lie, basically (laughter).

Chantal sees through the superficialities of celebrating cultural diversity, and goes on to argue that multicultural policy can serve to camouflage and veil underlying racial animosities. Both Chantal and Shima argue that the government policy of multiculturalism reinforced crude cultural stereotypes. They doubt that the policy has resulted in a decrease in racism in Canada.

Any question that I posed about multiculturalism invariably led to extended debate around how participants continually find themselves positioned outside national discourse, despite the project of multiculturalism which insists, 'Together, we're better!' (Department of Canadian Heritage, 1997). National and racial discourses were inextricably intertwined in interview transcripts. Women in this study voiced exasperation around the difficulty in identifying as Canadian. In the next section, I argue that this is partly due to the emphasis multicultural policy inevitably places upon their ethnic allegiances. I raise three key points here. Firstly, I underscore how women of 'mixed race' believe that multicultural policy tends to trivialise their ethnic identity. Secondly, I suggest that the policy creates spaces of distance between those considered 'Canadian' and 'not Canadian'. Finally, I examine the problematic nature of the hyphen and the role it plays in articulating ethnic differences in Canada.

### **Ethnicity as the Primary Marker of Identity**

Multicultural policy focuses upon ethnicity as a primary identification. The majority of participants in this study grew up alongside the policy and see ethnicity as only one of many aspects defining their sense of self. Ethnic identity, especially among 'mixed race' women, is complex and incorporates many components such as parental heritage, racial and cultural affiliations and religion, among other factors (Root, 1996). In fact, 'ethnic identity' itself is intrinsically linked to a politics of location (Bondi, 1993), with the women's racialisation shifting in different contexts.

Makeda, a twenty-six year old graduate student of British and Japanese descent, proposes that the ways she is racialised alters over time and space, pointing out that others tend to rely on particular physical markers that are fluid and flexible, like clothes and cosmetics, to classify her ethnic and racial makeup:

It really depends on everything. For me, it depends on the time of year,

where I am, how long my hair is, whether I'm wearing makeup, whether I'm not, what kinds of clothes I'm wearing. I run the gamut of possible ethnicities — people identify me as all sorts of different things.

Gender clearly figures in the ways informants contemplate their own ethno-racial identities, and in turn, how others 'read their race'. Facial features, hair length, combined with the colour and complexion of participants all play a role in the ways these women are racialised in various places. These readings influence not only their perceptions of themselves, but also their responses to what others will be (for more about the sexualised and racialised gaze placed upon the 'mixed race' woman, and their response to that gaze, see Mahtani, forthcoming b). Many 'mixed race' women explained that the places where they live play a role in how they experience their ethnicity in order to point out how their affiliation to culture and ethnicity shifts. Zenia, a twenty-one year old veterinarian assistant of Sri Lankan and Norwegian descent suggests:

I was born in Montreal; therefore, I'm a Montrealer. That's how I look at it. You know, my parents, my mom's from Norway and my dad's from Sri Lanka, and they're 20th generations of Norwegian and Sri Lankan respectively, you know. But that doesn't make a difference because that doesn't ... that's not who I am.

Zenia reads her identity as more than the sum of her ethnic parts. The specifics of her identity do not mold neatly into a form suitable for multicultural display. With its emphasis upon ethnicity, multiculturalism effectively reduces Zenia's identity to her ethnic constituency. Multicultural policy tends to privilege ethnicity or descent over and above other social identities (like gender and class among other factors) thus obscuring the opportunity to envisage these womens' lives on a series of multiple planes. The experience of occupying a doubled space in two ethnic cultures complicates any simplistic reading of ethnicity within multicultural policy, as 'mixed race' women have multiple ethnic allegiances. 'Mixed race' women in this study often shrug off the chain-like restraints of ethnicity as defined by the multicultural policy. Their experiences of ethnicity tell a far more complex story.

Marical, a twenty-six year old television producer whose father is 'Albino' from South Africa, and whose mother is of New Zealand descent, suggests that multicultural policy confuses questions about her many ethnic allegiances, and as such does not allow her the opportunity to display all of her 'gorgeous incongruities' (Domosh, 1998, p. 209):

You know, is your history your family? Or is it, you know, are you a product of your family history or are you just your geography or how you were educated or what your immediate values are? Like how much of your past is part of you?

Multicultural policy's focus on ethnicity emphasises the past, thus defining Marical's identity by her parents' origins, rather than by her own current set of ethnic allegiances. There are myriad factors which contribute to an individual's sense of ethnic identity, and these factors may change over the course of a

lifetime and in different geographical spaces (Parker and Song, 2001; Root, 1996). These identifications are rarely static — but multicultural policy would have us believe that they are.

### **Canadian vs Non-Canadian: the 'True (White) North Strong and Free'**

Multicultural policy states that every ethnic group has the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values within the Canadian context. The phrase 'within the Canadian context' is cause for some concern. How do we define 'the Canadian context'? I suggest that the policy constructs specific socio-spatial boundaries between the identifications of 'Canadian' and 'not-Canadian'. Multicultural policy advocates a strangely paradoxical position. On one hand, it insists that all Canadians supposedly are handed the right to preserve their ethnic heritage. On the other hand, this optimistic liberal notion tends to veil the assumption among citizens that there is such a thing as a discrete and separate 'Canadian' society towards whose development ethnic groups are encouraged to make their multicultural contributions to the nation (Gwyn, 1996). This concept was illuminated through many narratives around the theme of who is considered a 'real' Canadian. If I did ask a question about multiculturalism, it would inevitably lead to discussions about the difficulties others had in identifying the women simply as 'Canadian'. According to the women interviewed, an 'authentic' Canadian is of either British or French blood — those 'real' Canadians who are part of a 'capital-C Canadian' society. Both these identities are read as white, or European. To be a real Canadian, it is assumed that one must be white (Hill, 2001). Subsequently, 'mixed race' women continue to be positioned as outsiders, despite the goals of the multicultural project. Racism and sexism subtly penetrate the national discourse, where those who are positioned as 'ethnic' as designated by the policy are consequently placed 'outside' Canadianness. Julia, a twenty-nine year old filmmaker whose mother is from Hong Kong and whose father is of German ancestry, summarises the issue in this way:

I mean Canadian is very much a white definition. I mean that's why people question me when I say I'm Canadian and they don't see me as being white. If they don't accept that as an answer then they're not seeing me as white and I guess the Canadian definition is very much a white one. Look at who's in power, look at who's running Bay Street [the financial district of Toronto]. It's all white guys. How many people of colour are there in the House of Commons. How many women are there in the House of Commons?

Julia's narrative reveals the ubiquitous nature of racism and sexism, and how it bleeds into dominant readings of the national rhetoric. Eisenstein insists that 'no nationalism can fully include a multiracial/woman-specified democracy' (Eisenstein, 1996, p. 15)<sup>1</sup>. Those with particular phenotypes — or those categorised under the rubric of 'visible minority status' — are excluded from the dominant discourse of Canadianness. In other words, you're 'not quite if you're not white' (Kondo, 1997, p. 93).

Below, Julia explains how the particular underpinnings of the question 'Where are you from?' assume her foreignness. In a country where ethnic differences between citizens are racialised, it becomes increasingly complicated to identify as Canadian:

I've gone to the point where I feel like when people ask me if I'm mixed and they're not happy with the response or they ask me where I'm from and they're not happy with the response, 'I'm Canadian', I feel like turning around and asking them, 'Well, what the hell are you? Are you Canadian? What makes you more Canadian than me that you would question the fact that I'm Canadian?' Because that's obviously not the response they were wanting. But you know it's like, well, you asked me a stupid question, I'll give you a stupid answer.

Julia is understandably resentful because she is excluded from the discourse of the state where forms of national identity are exclusionary, homogeneous and unitary. When Julia tells others, 'I'm Canadian', she discovers that her response is interrogated, her identity distanced, and her phenotype exoticised as different. To identify as Canadian seems insufficient and almost unacceptable because 'at some point, buried in the idea of nation is the idea that there is only one identity that has the legitimate claim' (Appadurai, 1997). In the process of deliberately identifying herself as Canadian to deflect the question, 'Where are you from?' Julia refuses to conform to prescriptive racial categories, creating new meanings of nation during social interactions. However, this still reflects a struggle on Julia's behalf, where her desire to identify as Canadian is vigorously interrogated, frequently challenged and often rejected.

### **The Problematic Nature of the Hyphen**

Ethnic and national positionings in Canada are entangled further through the hyphen, which effectively produces spaces of distance. This 'distance-difference' (Rose, 1995) complicates questions of national identity. As I have mentioned, multicultural policy advocates that immigrants in Canada should position their ethnic identity first and foremost, making their individual contribution to the Canadian 'mosaic'. Gwyn asserts:

The absurdity here is that no one from Italy, say, or Somalia, comes to Canada to be an Italian or Somali. They come here to be Canadian. As soon as they landed, though, their new state in effect tells them that rather than becoming Canadians they must remain Italian-Canadians, Somali-Canadians, and so on. (Gwyn, 1996, p. 234)

These hyphens of multiculturalism in effect operate to produce spaces of distance, in which ethnicity is positioned outside Canadianness — as an addition to it, but also as an exclusion from it. A twenty-two year old student, Zhaleh, who defined herself as 'half Japanese half white', suggests it becomes impossible to position oneself as solely Canadian without announcing one's exoticised ethnic identity:

I wouldn't just say I'm Canadian and that's it. Because I mean just the fact for me to even say when someone's asked me, what are you, the fact that if I say Canadian, that doesn't satisfy them. That just tells you right there like you know what I mean? It's not possible to be just Canadian and no race. Like I couldn't realistically live in Canada and think that way.

Zhaleh finds it difficult to claim a national identity without declaring her ethnic allegiances. The policy of multiculturalism is reassuring to those who vigilantly patrol the borders between ethnic and national belonging. The burden of hyphenation, where one is seen as not solely 'Canadian' but 'Canadian and fill-in-your-ethnic-background' is especially heavy for women of 'mixed race', who further trouble the hyphen by employing and intermingling two or more ethnicities in their own definitions of their identities, through the coining of labels like 'African-Persian-Cherokee-European-Canadian' for example. The 'mixed race' person resists the occupation of a single ethnic space. These 'hyphenated circumlocutions' (Hanchard, 1990, p. 213) also make the process of self-definition lengthy and exhausting, requiring a whole geography and history of explanation. Faith, a twenty-five year old tourist agent of Chinese, Polynesian and British descent, commented:

I think that's why sometimes I hate discussing it when people ask [where are you from]. Because I can't just say one thing. Like you can't just say you're Canadian and have people understand oh you're Canadian, or whatever. I always have to go into this lengthy explanation about Chinese, Polynesian, and then British. Then there's the whole thing about oh well where were your parents born? Which brings me, if I think about it, full space to here. Well, I was born in Canada, so I am Canadian, but what is Canadian? AAARGH! It drives me crazy! And it's just like this whole, long — I'm not just one simple thing.

The hyphen effectively marks a 'distance-difference' (Rose, 1995) from potential claims to nation, a troubling symbol which refuses to admit the possibility of the co-mingling of ethnicities and national citizenship, compounding difference as a 'property marker, a boundary post, a knot, a chain, a bridge, a foreign word, a nomadic, floating magic carpet' (Wah, 1996, p. 60). Participants uncomfortably inhabit that space of the hyphen, where difference is continually appropriated and appropriated within a Eurocentric framework.

Kiirti, herself twenty-six, a waitress, whose mother is Irish and English, and whose father is a combination of French, Caribbean-Indian and African descent, further demonstrates the frustrations and paradoxes inherent in her desire to identify as Canadian, pointing out the problematic nature of attempts to do so:

I mean I hate the fact that people ask me where I'm from. And I'll say I'm Canadian. And they say, 'No no no no no, but where are you FROM?' 'I'm from HERE'. 'No no no, but where are you FROM?' And I'll say, 'Fine, you want to know? I'll tell you'. And I'll tell them ALL the

different places my parents are from, And then they'll say, 'Oh, so you're Canadian'. They DO! And it's like, 'GO AWAY!'

Kiirti's comment neatly encapsulates the messy contradictions of assuming a Canadian identity. The very constituency of the social fabric of Canada is a reflection of its diverse ethnic population, which has been read as intrinsically 'Canadian' outside the country. However, it becomes impossible to identify as Canadian within the country, in spite of the country's diversity, given that when one questions national borders, one also questions the boundary markers of race and ethnicity. As such, it is repeatedly revealed that hegemonic national discourses are not kind to those who live within marginal spaces — especially 'mixed race' women, who might be seen as 'the double foreigner, the double stranger ... held up to the phantasmic and found doubly wanting' (Eisenstein, 1996, p. 41; see also Okin, 1999).

Participants explored how the widely disparate circumstances of ethnic allegiances are formed and transformed over time, where dominant discourses of racial and national meanings do not reflect their interpretations of their ethnicities. Racist ideologies underlying dominant discourses about the nation further confuse ideas around the nebulous nature of Canadian identity. Indeed, reverberating through many of my interviews are inquiries into who Canadians 'really' are. Who is a 'real' Canadian? The conception of citizenship suggested by multicultural policy demands a model of homogeneous people which is not representative of the complex and diverse ethnic composition of the country. In the next section, I show how informants challenge and contest socially constructed categories of Canadian identity outside of 'the two solitudes' (Taylor, 1993, p. 1) by developing new reconstitutions of cultural citizenship.

### **Developing New Reconstitutions of Cultural Citizenship**

This section addresses how 'mixed race' women in this study imagine themselves as part of the nation. I propose that women of 'mixed race' are transforming traditional definitions of what it means to be Canadian and I contemplate the new kinds of citizenship they construct outside of the 'two solitudes' model — kinds of citizenship which both take into consideration and transcend racialised elements. These new models create, as Kaplan puts it,

a space in the imagination which allows for the inside, the outside, and the liminal elements in between ... [not] a romanticised pastoral nor a modernist urban utopia. (Kaplan, 1987, p. 187)

or what Gillian Rose might call 'a paradoxical space' (Rose, 1993; Mahtani, 2001).

Many cultural theorists have insisted that the nation is an invention (Eisenstein, 1996, p. 43). Hall insists that the relationship between a national-cultural identity and a nation-state is now beginning to disappear (Hall, 1993) and Mohanty declares, 'the nation-state is no longer an appropriate socio-economic unit for analysis' (Mohanty, 1991, p. 2). But questions of national

belonging still figure predominantly in my informants' minds, as they are grounded and racialised in particular ways in real time and space in the Canadian landscape, thus re-asserting national identity's place on the research agenda. George reminds us that it is important to acknowledge

the seductive pleasure of belonging ... in nations ... while working toward changing the governing principles of exclusions and inclusions. (George, 1996, p. 200).

and in what follows I unravel how informants 'think affectionately' (Said, 1991, p. 116) about the politics of national allegiances in their daily lives. Indeed, exploring what it means to be Canadian was a subject of much discussion in interviews. By drawing upon these narratives, I illustrate how different subject-positions are transformed or produced by different conceptions of nationalism.

There are moments when the everyday experience of living in Canada as a 'mixed race' person challenges the dominant definition of any fixed notion of a Canadian identity. Informants offered flexible alternatives to overarching national constructions that are anchored through whiteness.

Women in this study not only provide an opportunity to racialise the nation, but also intervene in its engendering as well. Gender explicitly figures into respondents' sense of identification with the nation-state. As researchers have effectively pointed out, women have traditionally been excluded from the nation (Eisenstein, 1996). Some women of 'mixed race' present their personal temporalities of struggle which disrupt the traditional masculinist and racialised hallmarks of Canadian identity. The very experience of growing up in Canada gives rise to other modes of belonging and alternative national ways of being. I would categorise many of the following as 'scattered belongings' (a phrase coined by Ifekwunigwe, 1999). I explore these new formulations where ethnic and national allegiances intermingle in particular ways, reflecting re-imaginings and reframings away from definitions of national identity dictated solely by ethnicity, towards self-definitions based upon a series of multiple identifications. Finally, I will show how women of 'mixed race' read their own 'mixed race' status as compatible with national identity.

### **The Relationship Between 'Mixed Race' and Canadian Identity**

'Is there a love of the nation which is emancipatory?' (Appadurai, 1997)

For some 'mixed race' women, a futuristic reading of Canadian identity would move beyond the '*deux nations*' model as imagined through the grid of multicultural policy. They challenge the ways they are othered by the unitary notions of national identity and assert that being different by no means equates with being un-Canadian. This version of national identity displaces and shifts the terms of a British/French linked nationalism. By opening up the term 'Canadian' to scrutiny, participants reformulate the conventional meanings associated with the phrase as Makeda suggests wistfully:

I think that Canadian, as a term, has a certain reference to a certain kinda person. And I'd LOVE to have that category opened up. So that

people can say, Canadian, and imagine all sorts of different people. I'm not making a bid for an amnesiac Canada that can suddenly embrace its own diversity and forget its past transgressions, like the building of the railway by the Chinese, for example. I think they both have to occur. Canada has to come to terms with all those things that comprise Canada, the stories have to be able to address all those people, and those histories. I would like to be part of redefining Canada. I think Canada is a country that can continually open itself up to new people.

As Makeda explains, the act of claiming a Canadian identity would mean the occupation of a distinctly contradictory space, where one can both embrace a sense of country and still unveil the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance. This transformation of the term 'Canadian' would include unpacking the embedded racist history of the country. This might include contemplating uncomfortable questions regarding the First Nations peoples' broken and rightful place in the Canadian polity, and acknowledging the work army of Chinese immigrants who painstakingly built the Canadian railroad. Makeda suggests that appropriating the term would include unmasking the hidden histories of the majority, in an attempt to 'snatch from the hidden histories another place to stand in, another place to speak from' (Hall, 1990, p. 236). Thus, this tortured past would become part of the present, informing and playing a part in the creation of Makeda's sense of national identity. In reading the present in terms of the past, Makeda proposes the occupation of a space where she can finally be proud to belong. The stories of those who have been continually placed on the outside would become an integral part of this portrait. In doing so, the voices of the marginalised are actively centred as part of a re-imagined citizenship.

Informants read their own 'mixed race' identity as a model for an optimistic Canadian citizenship where their ethnicities are not necessarily compartmentalised, and belonging is forged through difference — but not through the lip service that multicultural policy offers. As I have previously discussed, multiculturalism in Canada confuses issues of ethnicity and nationalism by treating ethnicity as clearly divisible and dichotomous categories outside Canadianness. However, 'mixed race' women continually experience ethnicity as overlapping layers. They are in a unique position to consider the additional challenges of developing a real 'multicultural' identity compatible with Canadianness by challenging assumptions about racial and ethnic purity.

For Darius, a thirty-two year old actress whose mother is third generation Japanese Canadian, and whose father is French Canadian, Ojibway First Nations and Irish descent, questions about her 'mixed race' were influenced largely by her own sense of nationalism and vice versa, where her own 'mixed race' is read as a positive stance to experience the nation:

I think Canada is really on this frontier of racial miscegenation, so I don't really separate my ethnic and national identity. I see myself as being Canadian and being mixed race. Maybe even more than someone who sees themselves as monoracial, someone who was full blooded Korean, and their parents were from Korea, and they lived in Canada,

but they grew up speaking English all the time, I think it's probably even more of a challenge for them. To me, for me, being Canadian and being mixed race and the issues around identity there, are not at odds with each other. They are related.

'Mixed race' women in this study emphasised the impossibility of being divided along the lines of ethnic origins. Maribel, a twenty-five year old graduate student of a Swedish mother and a Bangladeshi father, reads her 'mixed race' identity as harmonious with her national ties and insists on calling herself mixed, which encapsulates not only her ethnic identity, but also her sense of citizenship:

I think mixed is a flexible enough word. That it can catch a lot of people in its net. Mixed background, mixed heritage. I find most useful. I don't know why. But it is my heritage. And it's more than just ethnicity. It's the fact that I'm Canadian too. It's all mixed up. Together.

Women of 'mixed race' are used to names, labels and categories imposed upon them by others. However, as Trinh reminds us, 'despite our desperate attempts to mend and maintain, categories always leak' (Trinh, 1989, p. 141). To counteract this compulsion of classification, many 'mixed race' women take on the identification of Canadian as an empowering label. However, it does not necessarily follow that in choosing this identification, they blindly follow the rules advocated by multicultural policy. Instead, their use of 'Canadian' reflects their very real experience of growing up in Canada. Some 'mixed race' women I talked to did not feel any particular kinship with either of their ethnicities, and many of their parents were second or third generation Canadian, so their parents were born in Canada as well. Participants exercise their right to choose their own ethnic allegiances. Of course, it is important to note that despite this desire to choose, their assertions of ethnic identity are often constrained by the discourses and imagery of racial categorisation (Mahtani, 2001; Waters, 1990). Identifying as Canadian reflects particular social decisions on their part through a clear re-definition of their own allegiances to nationhood.

For Emma, a thirty-three year old journalist of Malaysian and British descent, this would mean delineating her own definition of Canadian identity. This sense of national allegiance is rife with paradox. Emma reveals the constant ephemeral and shifting senses of both national and various ethnic selves she experiences on a day-to-day basis, depending upon her location:

I was born in England and then we moved to Canada, which added a whole new layer of mixed race on it. So I always sort of like to quote a friend, who described herself as a salad of racial genes you know because she's just a little bit of everything. And in a way, that's maybe uniquely Canadian. There are so many people here that come from so many different cultures and especially in Toronto, which is where I grew up, that it's just it's kind of typical of who we are. We're an immigrant country with an immigrant culture. [In Canada] you can define yourself

however you want in a way that isn't necessarily associated with a certain set of cultural values. So my [national] identity has been just a mixture of all those factors.

Emma compounds questions of race and nation by insisting that moving from England as a 'mixed race' immigrant imposed another layer of 'mixed race' upon her identity. Women of 'mixed race' are active participants in shaping their own identities by altering others' perception of their place in Canada. Emma writes herself into the national discourse in particular ways, recalling another story where she deliberately chose to identify herself as Canadian in order to defy existing stereotypes related to her phenotype, reflecting a defiant re-appropriation of national identity:

I remember in Washington a cab driver saying: 'So where are you from?' 'Oh I'm Canadian' I said, and then it went, 'where are you really from?' 'Well, I was born in England' I said, just to stymie him further because what he wanted to hear me say was: 'Yeah my father's half Chinese'. He wanted to be able to identify me with a racial group. Which I just refuse to be identified with, like either/or, you know. The closest I want to be identified to these kinds of cultural stereotypes is to say I'm Canadian, which defies pretty much all stereotypes because there's nothing really identifiable about it.

Emma employs the term 'Canadian' to describe herself in this situation as a foil, forcing another to think about his racist assumptions about what is a real Canadian. By refusing to be identified with a racial group, Emma resists definitions of ethnic identity which reinscribe conventional notions of traditional culture. Her version of national allegiance refigures Canada as a more useful 'catch-all' phrase because it is nebulous, recognising that one need not be European to be Canadian. To be Canadian, for many 'mixed race' women in Canada, is to question any notion of a coherent, stable and autonomous identity — either national or ethnic, as Sara, a twenty-four year old student of Filipina and Irish descent, suggests:

I think [being mixed race] is very typically Canadian. I mean, all I've seen of Canadians are different racial groups. So I think that it's only natural that there would be a very big mixed population. So I think it typifies being Canadian. That's perfectly in tune with that.

The social and ethnic constituency of Canada parallels Sara's own 'mixed race' identity. Identifying with nationalism does not necessarily mean the subsequent adherence to ethnic stereotypes as dictated by the policy of multiculturalism. These women's interpretations of what constitutes difference are constantly shifting, socially constructed and geographically diverse. They point out the popular misconception that to be Canadian means to be solely of either British or French descent by designating it a site for the recognition of complex national and ethnic allegiances, acknowledging the wide variance within ethnic groups. To claim Canadian status for Faith means to go beyond the legalistic

definition of possessing a Canadian passport. It is to experience a sense of home:

I have a very weird hang-up about [being asked, 'Where are you from?'] When they ask, it's like, I'm from Canada. Like, where was I born, where do I fit, what is my country of affiliation. It's Canada. Absolutely. And that's another thing that really irritates me about the whole thing about Canada, when people say where we're from, people respond, 'I'm from Czechoslovakia'. Well, no you're not! You have a Canadian passport, you're Canadian, with Czechoslovakian heritage. Like I HATE that. Like I'M Canadian. Yes, I have, a variety of roots! But like my, experience is Canada. Like I HATE this whole thing, all these people who think they're other things. Especially if you're born here. I'm sorry, but you're Canadian.

Faith has a clear sense of home and belonging in Canada and her identity is closely linked to questions of national identity, marking the connection between geography and culture. This connection between home and identity is not just an attachment to the abstract concept of nation. Choosing to identify as Canadian reflects these womens' desires to develop a new vision of Canadian identity, where they continually renegotiate the tropes that assert nationhood as a static entity.

In the narrative below, Kiirti, who was adopted, reveals how she felt when she discovered her parents' individual ethnic identities. Kiirti expresses how that had an impact upon her own sense of country:

I mean once I knew, once I knew where my parents were from, and there was this massive mix, I was such a mixture that truly I had to ask: Who was I? And the answer came: I am Canadian, this is where I am born, this is the culture that I know, and my mother forever and my father forever telling me how CANADIAN I am, and my accent, and, my Canadian-isms, and God forbid, I say eh?! I mean, they're ON me! (chuckle) I am ... It's like that commercial!<sup>2</sup> I-AM-A-CANADIAN. That's what I am. I should be the new symbol for Canada! I am one big melting pot of stuff! (laughter) I'm a stew! (laughter) A big Canadian stew! (laughter).

Kiirti reads her 'mixed race' identity as a model for Canadian citizenship. She explains how her body is marked by her own sense of Canadianness, reflected in her accent and her 'Canadian-isms'. She refuses to renounce her Canadian identity in the name of a compartmentalised ethnic identity, given the variety of her ethnic mixes, and emphasises the salience of her own experiences growing up in Canada. Women of 'mixed race' challenge not only the social construction of race, but also the social construction of Canadian citizenship, by proposing a connection between their own 'mixed race' status and their sense of nationalism. They are articulating for themselves something that exceeds previous categories of race and nation, writing themselves into existence.

## Conclusion

[Multicultural policy] entertain[s] and encourage[s] ... cultural diversity, [while correspondingly] containing it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid'. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 208)

The policy of multiculturalism has both impeded and facilitated senses of belonging for 'mixed race' women in this study. While many may still read multicultural policy as an inclusive vision of humanity, the narratives of Canadian 'mixed race' women suggest a more critical reading of the policy's goals and aspirations. Their stories offer new framings of national identity in response to complex processes of social interaction, where they are constantly defining, redefining, playing and merging with ethnic and national identities. They actively reconstitute and re-present the idea of the nation as represented in Canadian culture by adopting various allegiances.

The voices of these women raise questions about the stark contrast between multiculturalism as a way of life for participants versus its status as a policy for Canadian citizens. Many 'mixed race' women did not look positively upon multicultural policy as an effective strategy to fight racism, suggesting that efforts to combat discrimination need to be further problematised in relation to power. Instead, many women in this study argued that multicultural policy has acted to reinforce stereotypical views of people of colour. I suggest that part of the problem is multicultural policy's steadfast refusal to discuss race as a socially constructed social divide, where seemingly 'real' biological differences are used to justify social and economic inequalities and injustice (see Kobayashi, 1993). Some women of 'mixed race' find it difficult to identify as 'Canadian' despite their desire to do so because of systematic racism and dominant definitions of the national narrative as 'white' (Hill, 2001).

I have also suggested that some participants claimed a Canadian identity as a potentially productive identification linked to their own multiraciality. Conventional definitions of race, gender and nation are negotiated and contested among participants. Clearly, issues of race are inextricably intertwined with class, age, sexual orientation, gender and nation among other salient factors. I suggest further research examines the legislation which configures particular racial and sexist dynamics inherent in the policy of multiculturalism, as well as explores the ways the tensions pulling on these dynamics are spatialised. This would acknowledge how individuals are raced, classed and gendered in particular spaces. The present debate over multicultural policy should be extended to encompass the vernacular understandings of these women's discursive and material practices with the engagement of national and ethnic alliances in Canada.

Multicultural policy can frame identity through a formalised temporality, placing emphasis upon roots and origins rather than the complicated identity routes of the individual (Gilroy, 1993). I propose that 'mixed race' women offer new models of citizenship, working out from the individually identified body

to the national body politic. Some participants claimed a Canadian identity as a potentially productive identification linked to their own multiraciality, in the process negotiating and contesting conventional definitions of race, gender and nation.

*Acknowledgements: I want to warmly thank Miri Song and Sylvia Fuller. They both provided insightful comments and critiques on an earlier draft. I also owe an enormous debt to the women who shared their thoughts with me during the interview process. I am immensely grateful for their enthusiastic candour with which they approached this project. I would like to thank France Winddance Twine for constructive discussions on 'mixed race' identity in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe in London for her thoughtful guidance and critiques of the research during the writing up process. Finally, my thanks to Larry Hill for his illuminating perspective on race in Canada as well as his enduring friendship.*

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## Notes

1. The inextricability of gender and nation does not elude me and I acknowledge that it has elicited commentary from a variety of sources, although I do not discuss it here in great detail. I refer the reader to Radcliffe (1999) and Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989)
2. Kiirti is referring to a series of Canadian beer commercials, where the viewer is bombarded with numerous Canadian icons, including the maple leaf and prominent Canadian road signs, over a soundtrack of Canadian rock music. At the time of the interview, these commercials were inundating the airwaves continually. I draw the reader's attention to the words of Mukherjee who insists that 'when we non-white Canadians watch beer commercials, we never fail to notice our absence there' (Mukherjee, 1994, p. 72). However, Kiirti draws a comparison between her own sense of nationalism and these commercials, despite the non-white presence in the advertisements.

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