

THE MYTHS THAT BIND US:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF
CANADA: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY
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ABSTRACT

The 32- hour documentary series *Canada: A People's History* was aired in 2000-2001 and has been widely disseminated: it is now available as video and DVD sets and has been aired in at least nine languages. In this thesis I examine the packaging of the series, that is, the images and promotional blurbs on the boxed DVD set and the introductory and concluding segments of the series, and I intensively examine Episode 10 "Taking the West" (1873-1896). Through Critical Discourse Analysis, I closely examine the language and other semiotic material used in *Canada: A People's History* to analyse power relationships in the series. As well as paying attention to the overall structure of the verbal and visual text, I am attentive to the way in which grammar and words are used, and the representation that is portrayed through these elements. In this thesis, I find that while the series does include women and Aboriginal people, *Canada: A People's History's* use of language and images portrays a Canadian identity that privileges Whiteness and masculinity and that presents current power imbalances in society as natural and inevitable. By devaluing women and Aboriginal people in its representation, *Canada: A People's History* lends legitimacy to the systemic discrimination against women and Aboriginal people in Canadian society. I find that the series presents past events as inevitable, over which people had no control or influence, and I argue that this presentation encourages people to accept the current situation, rather than challenging it and seeking alternatives.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2000, when CBC announced that it was producing a “history for the television age,” I eagerly anticipated its airing. Being a Social Studies teacher, I was always on the lookout for resources that would connect with the lived experiences of my students while providing them with tools for analysing society. In the adult upgrading program in which I teach, many of the students are Aboriginal, most are female, and most live in poverty while many of the teachers are, like me, White, female, and middle-class. I have been working to construct for myself, and assisting my students to construct for themselves, an understanding of Canada’s history that makes visible and analyses the contemporary and historical issues of power and privilege in our society. This understanding is important, not only as an academic exercise, but also as a theoretical basis for political and social action. Knowledge about oppression and power, according to Paulo Freire (1970), is an important part of praxis, “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 66). This is consistent with the purported theoretical underpinning of the new curricula in the adult upgrading program in which I teach. This underpinning is a transformational approach, drawing on Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1990), among others. As I understand transformative learning, the naming and analysis of power and privilege within society is viewed as a necessary part of social change. In trying to incorporate a transformative approach into my teaching, the critical eye that I cast over the materials that I bring into the classroom has become more acute.

Upon watching the first episode of *Canada: A People’s History*, I found that the presentation did engage me with its anecdotes and compelling visual imagery, yet I was disturbed by the propagation of stereotypes and the sense of inevitability about past events that the narration implied. Being a teacher caught up in the busyness of the academic year, I dismissed the series and moved on to search for other resources to bring into the classroom. As the year went on, I watched the occasional episode, but my

sense of dissatisfaction was more pronounced with later episodes, and it seemed that whenever I did tune in, there was some war going on somewhere between some people, and not much else. When my school librarian inquired whether I wanted to use a hefty portion of our budget for new materials to purchase the series from CBC, I declined. My impression of the series was that, under the guise of documentary filmmaking, *Canada: A People's History* presents a partial view of Canadian history as all that there is to our history, and I didn't recognize myself or my students in this telling.

Through the work that I have done in this study, I have come to understand that identity is a multifaceted and fluid social construct, and while our relative power may vary within specific situations, the relationship between gender, race, and class has considerable impact on the way we are in the world. I am a woman, White, and middle-class with working-class roots. But these descriptors do not completely get at the position that I hold in relation to my reading of *Canada: A People's History*. My reading is one that comes from a concern with social justice, with questioning unearned privilege, and its correlate, unearned "unprivilege." I am concerned with power in societal relationships and the way that language and images constitute and are constituted through power. In this thesis, through critical discourse analysis, I find that *Canada: A People's History's* use of language and images portrays a Canadian identity that privileges Whiteness and masculinity and that presents current power imbalances in society as natural and inevitable.

In the face of this perceived sense of inevitability, it is easy for individuals to disregard the impact that the personal choices they make have on others in our society, on both a local and a global level, or to assert that they just didn't realize the impact of their actions. What we do as individuals, through our acts of commission as well as acts of omission, has a collective impact, and I believe that we have a moral obligation to inform ourselves about our society and use that information to strive for social justice. Trudl Junge, secretary to Adolph Hitler from 1943-1945, in a 2001 interview shown at the end of the film *Downfall*, reflects on the role of personal responsibility for government and military actions in Germany during World War II:

I was satisfied with not having been personally responsible and with not having known about it, not having known of the extent. But one day I walked past the memorial plaque for Sophie Scholl [who was executed by the Third Reich for distributing pamphlets urging resistance to the Nazi regime] in Franz Joseph Street, and then I realised that she had been the same age as I, and that she was executed in the year I joined Hitler. And at that moment I noticed that having been young is no excuse, and that it would have perhaps been possible to find out about things. (Eichinger & Hirschbiegel, 2005)

The process of conducting a critical discourse analysis of *Canada: A People's History* has provided me with a deeper understanding of the nature of representation and the complexity of identity construction and its relation to social power. It is now up to me to employ this understanding in individual and collective actions with others in working towards social justice in the local and global communities of which I am part.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides the purpose and setting, laying out the problem, my standpoint, theoretical influences, and method. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on three topics pertinent to this study: historical representation, particularly as race and gender are portrayed, historiographical debates in Canada, and reviews and analyses of *Canada: A People's History*. Chapter 3 examines the making of the series and its use of language and visuals to present an inevitable story. Chapter 4 examines the representation of gender in *Canada: A People's History*. Chapter 5 takes up the theme of colonisation and White settler mentality as presented the episode "Taking the West." Chapter 6 elaborates on implications and draws conclusions.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE, IMAGES, AND POWER

Problem Statement:

How we see ourselves as Canadians is influenced by the stories we tell ourselves. The language and images selected to tell these stories are not neutral, but are reflective and formative of values and ideology. Without an examination of how power operates within a societal location, the power often remains invisible. The invisibility of power does not mean that it has been neutralized or shared among all interested parties, but rather, it means that the prevailing power structures continue to operate. *Canada: A People's History* presents a particular view of the past in its attempt to bind Canadians together through a shared vision of who we are. The purpose of this thesis is to examine *Canada: A People's History's* portrayal of power through analysis of the interconnected strands of gender, race, and class.

I have chosen these strands to examine because I believe these are particularly significant in the way we are physically in the world and the position of privilege or oppression we hold within our society. I believe that these are not innate constructs, but social ones. Judith Butler writes that gender is not an “interior essence that might be disclosed” (Butler, 1999, xiv), but that it is socially constituted. She also asserts that “gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 2002, p. 423). She goes on to state that as gender is socially constituted, there are social constraints on what is considered appropriate gender behaviour, and punishments for not performing ones' gender correctly. EngenderHealth, an international nonprofit agency concerned with women's health, states that “gender roles and expectations are often identified as factors hindering the equal rights and status of women with adverse consequences that affect life, family, socioeconomic status, and health” (Engenderhealth, 2005).

Just as gender is constructed socially, so is race. In the *Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, Craig Calhoun (2002) points out that prior to the nineteenth century, the term “race,” was used to connote the differences between national and ethnic groups, such as the distinctions between the English and the French. In the nineteenth century, the definition of race took on a more biological meaning, influenced by scientific, historical and anthropological research which used theories of social evolution and differential racial capabilities. Calhoun observes that these theories, and the research they spawned, were consistent with the practice of European imperialism and internal racial hierarchies in countries like the United States. He goes on to state that while many current social scientists and genetic researchers discount the theory of racial divisions, social relations reflect historical thinking. According to Calhoun, while race may not be real in biological terms, it is real in social experience.

I find Calhoun’s (2002) definition of class to be a useful starting point to address the multiple aspects of class. He draws on Max Weber’s notion that class consists of multiple, overlapping criteria: economic consideration, prestige and political power. Rather than focussing solely on the relationship of a group to the means of production, this definition of class considers the group’s status or prestige, its access to the power of large organizations such as governments and corporations, as well as considering the group’s economic access to goods and future prospects.

While gender and race may be social constructs, they are intermeshed with the physical characteristics that people have, so they hold particular significance in how we are treated. Class is significant in that our access to material wealth, and our access to, and influence on, institutions of power have a major impact on our day to day lives. These aspects of identity are interconnected; Sherene Razack (2002) writes that “race, gender, and class hierarchies structure (rather than simply complicate) each other” (p. 15). Roxana Ng states gender, class, and race are relations “discoverable in the everyday world of experience” (Ng, 1993a, p. 50). In her analysis, they are fluid, interactive processes, rather than static categories. Anne Bishop argues that “class is both the result and the foundation of all other forms of oppression” (Bishop, 2000, p. 47). In discussing the complexity of class, Bishop describes the manner in which racism, sexism, and other

forms of oppression cut across economic lines. While these forms of oppression are present across all economic levels, their impact is much more profound for poor people. Bishop goes on to say that class is different from other forms of oppression on a structural level because “class is not just a factor in inequalities of wealth, privilege, and power; it is that inequality” (Bishop, 2000, p. 82).

Gender, race, and class, then, are socially constructed relationships which have considerable impact on our identities. Presently, and historically, in Canada, the social constructs of White and masculine have more economic power, and those with more economic power have influence over the political process and social policy. One influence that is both reflective and constitutive of our identities is the stories available to us in the mass media. *Canada: A People’s History* is not just telling us a story about our past. Through the manner in which it tells this story, it is reinforcing the existing gender, race, and class power imbalances in Canadian society.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Poststructuralism

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall defines the term “discourse” as the production of knowledge through language. He writes that discourse is not limited to just one statement or one source, but is present in many texts and in different institutions in society. Hall states that because discourse determines the manner in which a topic can be talked about as well as influences the way that ideas are acted upon, it is therefore connected to power (Hall, 1997). Chris Weedon observes that while a finite number of discourses exist in a society and compete for meaning, not all discourses carry equal weight, depending on “the range and social power of existing discourse, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent” (Weedon, 1997, p. 26).

The approach that I use to analyse *Canada: A People’s History* is Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), which looks at how language is used in relations between individuals and the social world. Ruth Wodak points out that CDA is not one specific methodology or theory, but that researchers using CDA come from different theoretical backgrounds (Wodak, 2004) . She suggests the notion of a “school” or

programme to describe CDA as, although the approaches used may vary, there are some common features shared by all CDA research. According to Wodak (2004), a fundamental focus of CDA is power, which is about “relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures” (p. 199). Language is viewed as social practice and the context of language use is seen to be crucial. The discursive event is shaped by the situation, institutions, and social structures that frame it, but it shapes them as well. Therefore, CDA is concerned with the connection between discourse and power, examining the ways in which discourse can be used to sustain the status quo of social structures or to contribute to transformation. Wodak (2004) asserts that “an important perspective in CDA related to the notion of power is that it is very rare that a text is the work of any one person....Therefore texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance” (p. 199). Critical Discourse Analysis seems to me to be an apt methodology for my examination of *Canada: A People’s History*. I am concerned with the manner in which the language and images used in the series are both reflective and constitutive of Canadian identity, and I am concerned with the way that the representation of Canadian identity is connected to power in the past and in the present. Critical Discourse Analysis provides me with a perspective through which to examine the language and images of the series and a framework to connect it to power in society.

My analysis is also informed by poststructuralism which, along with Critical Discourse Analysis, theorizes that language is key in analysing individual consciousness, social meanings, and power. According to poststructuralism, it is through language that subjectivity is constructed, which means that it is socially produced, rather than being an innate, genetically determined quality. Weedon (1997) writes that language is not a reflection of a previously existing reality; rather it brings a framework to that reality, and meaning is produced, rather than found, in language. She also states that poststructuralism recognizes that the structural inequities between members of society are based on various subject positions such as gender, race, and class. Poststructural theory recognizes that identity is produced in a wide range of discourse practices and that identity is not unitary and static, but is constituted

continuously in ways that are socially specific (Threadgold, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralism regards the meaning of language and other signs as one that is not fixed, but one that is created by the individual subject within a social context, and it is through language that identities and understandings of the world can be challenged and changed (De Lauretis, 1984; Hall, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Cecilia Morgan writes that a poststructuralist approach is useful in “studying groups – whites, the middle class, men – who have managed to naturalize their position in society, obscuring their access to specific forms of power” (Morgan, 1996, p. 15). I find that the theoretical perspective of poststructuralism complements Critical Discourse Analysis in providing me with a framework with which to examine social power in *Canada: A People’s History*.

Analytical Approach: Fairclough’s Five Stage Framework

My analysis of *Canada: A People’s History* is based on Norman Fairclough’s approach to CDA, which he states is not a method or a “tool in a box of tools,” but is, rather, a theoretical perspective on language and semiosis (any type of material that is used to convey meaning: conversations, written texts, billboards, television programmes, photographs, or any other way of signifying), “which gives rise to ways of analysing language or semiosis within broader analyses of the social process” (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 121). Critical discourse analysis is critical in two ways: it attempts to uncover the manner in which language is involved in ideology, identity formation, and relations of power, and it is committed to a more equitable distribution of social power. Fairclough’s version of CDA draws on the ideas of a number of theorists including Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony; Louis Althusser’s view that ideology is embedded in social institutions; Michel Foucault’s work on discourses as systems of knowledge; and Mikhail Bakhtin’s emphasis on ideology in language and intertextuality, in which any text is linked to other texts (Fairclough, 2001b).

Fairclough (2001b) proposes a five stage analytical framework for CDA. The first stage entails focusing on a social problem (either the practice itself or its representation) that has a discourse-related or semiotic aspect. The social problem that I examine here is gender, race, and class imbalances in Canadian society, particularly the

manner in which *Canada: A People's History*, the televised history series produced by the CBC for the Canadian television audience in 2000, reinforces these societal power imbalances.

The second stage that Fairclough describes is identifying obstacles to the social problem being addressed, in other words, identifying that within the social order which keeps the problem intact. This consists of two parts: an examination of the context within which the problem occurs and an analysis of the semiosis (the language and images used) itself. The way in which *Canada: A People's History* represents the events and individuals of the past is situated within the larger discourse of history and identity within Canada. The second chapter of this thesis elaborates on the context of the problem: empire, gender, and race, and their historical representations.

Fairclough's second stage also includes an analysis of the discourse itself. This includes examination of both paradigmatic aspects – the range of possibilities available and the choices made in particular texts (what has been selected and what has been left out) – and syntagmatic aspects – the chaining together of words or images in texts. The language of the text is analysed by moving through the text at various levels – whole-text language organization, clauses, and words – to determine the way in which the text works on representations of the world, social relations, social identities, and cultural values. As the subject of analysis, *Canada: A People's History*, is made up of visual text, comprised of moving and still images, as well as verbal text, I examine the composition and arrangement of moving and still images as well as the oral text. This is the work of the third, fourth, and fifth chapters of this thesis, and further details of the method of analysis will be elaborated in those chapters.

The third stage is a consideration of how the problem relates to the existing social order. In the case of my study, this is an examination of the manner in which the representation of gender, race, and class in *Canada: A People's History* connects to power in Canadian society. While I discuss this throughout the thesis, it is addressed in more detail in the concluding chapter. Fairclough's fourth stage consists of identifying ways past the obstacles. I address this as well in the concluding chapter. The fifth stage identified by Fairclough is a critical reflection on the researcher's social positioning and

the manner in which the critical analysis can contribute to emancipatory change. Consistent with poststructural theory, I believe that critical reflection on positioning needs to be apparent at all stages of the research project; therefore it is integrated in all sections of this thesis. The manner in which this analysis can contribute to emancipatory social change is proposed in the final chapter.

Evaluation

The conventional criteria for evaluating academic research of reliability, validity, and replicability, according to Stephanie Taylor, come out of a positivist tradition, which also assumes that good research adds to the knowledge about the world through findings that “reveal enduring features and predictable causal relationships” (Taylor, 2001, p. 319). The theorists who I draw on are influenced by critical theory, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, all of which critique the objectivity claim of positivism. I agree with the assumption of poststructural and postmodern approaches that all research is situated, contingent, and reflexive (Taylor, 2001; Weedon, 1997). Situated research makes claims only for the particular circumstance with which the research is concerned; it is contingent in that the claims made by the researcher are not enduring truth claims but apply only to the context. A reflexive approach acknowledges that the researcher approaches the research from a particular world-view and that the texts written up as research results are not a transparent reflection of reality (Taylor, 2001).

This analysis comes from my viewing of *Canada: A People's History*, based on my situation and beliefs. The claims that I make are within the societal context of present day Canada in which I am constructing them. I do not claim to have produced the correct or the only analysis. It is one possible viewing, but it is not a decontextualized or random one. Rather it is based on a critical examination of the society in which the series was produced and aired, a critical analysis of the text itself, and a critical awareness of my viewing position.

Although the results of critical discourse analysis are situated, contingent, and reflexive, this does not preclude these results from evaluation. Taylor (2001) describes

criteria for evaluating qualitative research, five of which I feel are pertinent to my analysis. The first is location of the research in relation to previously published work. In this analysis of *Canada: A People's History*, I connect my research to theory and to other academic analyses of the series. The second point is coherence, or the use of effective argument rather than emotion to make claims. The third criteria is rigour: a systematic approach used to conduct the research, which, according to Taylor is linked to the "richness of detail...[and] the explication of the process of analysis" (Taylor, 2001, p. 321). I believe that I meet the second and third criteria by following the five stages proposed by Fairclough (2001b) detailed above; the claims I make are based on a logical argument, and I have a systematic framework through which to conduct my analysis. The fourth criterion, that of relevance, refers to the manner in which the research is connected to a social issue. My analysis of *Canada: A People's History* connects to the relationship of sexism, racism, and class inequities in Canadian society. The final criterion, the usefulness of the analysis, is described by Taylor as having two aspects: it may add to the academic body of knowledge by generating new explanation or theory, or it may have an application in social practice outside of academia. I believe that this thesis embodies both types of usefulness. Firstly, it provides a new explanation of the way that Canadian identity is reflected and constituted in *Canada: A People's History*. Secondly, it has the potential to be applied in practice outside of academia. The CBC has heavily promoted the use of the series within school history programs. By making my thesis available in electronic format, as well as book format in the University of Saskatchewan library, I am making my analysis part of the discourse of history, identity, and power in Canada. I am providing teachers with a perspective on the series which they may consider in their decision about using *Canada: A People's History* in their classrooms. Although I have been mindful of these criteria while conducting the research, it is up to the reader to determine to what extent I have been successful in meeting them.

Analytic Process

The series *Canada: A People's History* comprises 32 hours of television programming, conveyed in short segments of 4-16 minutes, relating the history of Canada in a mainly chronological fashion from the origins up to 1990. As it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do an in-depth analysis of the entire series, I have examined the overall structure of the series and one episode focussing on the way that social power through gender, race, and class are portrayed. I examine the way that images and verbal text are used in this representation. Soundscape is also an element of *Canada: A People's History*, but, due to the amount of data that was generated in my analysis, I do not analyse the texture of sound as part of this thesis. The overall structure of the series is examined through an analysis of the titles and summary statements of the episodes, the images on the DVD cases, and the introductory and concluding segments. I believe that this will provide an analysis of the series' total packaging. I have selected Episode 10: "Taking the West" for in-depth analysis for several reasons. First, as the series was originally broadcast in two-hour episodes, I want to examine a single episode in its entirety. Episode 10 has been selected because it places more emphasis on the prairies than any other episode does. As a Saskatchewanean, this exploration of the history of my region is important for me, as the issues of White settlement and the treaty process between First Nations and White people on the prairies continue to be significant.

When analysing the episode, I delimit my analysis further, focussing on certain sections within the two-hour broadcast. To explore the representation of gender, I examine the portrayal of femininity by analysing all footage of women, and I examine the portrayal of masculinity by examining the series' focus on militarism. In analysing the portrayal of race, I focus on Aboriginal-White relations in the West. "Taking the West" also explores Anglophone-Francophone relations in eastern Canada in the wake of the 1885 Resistance in the Northwest, as well as other aspects of ethnicity. In this thesis, my concern is with past and current power imbalances in Saskatchewan society. In Saskatchewan, and elsewhere, the race marker of Whiteness or Aboriginality has been and continues to be a significant aspect of identity, so that is the aspect of race which is my focus. I approach the representation of class in two ways. Class is made up

of multiple, overlapping criteria, and gender and race are two significant criteria. The representation of gender and race, then, is also the representation of class. The other way that I examine class is by analysing *Canada: A People's History's* portrayal of past events as inevitable. As these events privileged some people and not others, viewing them as inevitable naturalizes that privilege.

If nationhood is, as Anderson (1991) states, an imagined community, the discourse available to people to construct that sense of community is a significant influence on this imagining. The images and dialogue selected to represent the story of Canada in *Canada: A People's History* encourage a particular sense of community which this thesis examines.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

It is difficult to uncover the ‘real’ since we have access to the ‘real’ only through representations. (Carter, 1997, p. 9)

Nation, Empire, Gender, and Race

The television series *Canada: A People’s History* has become part of the discourse of national identity in Canada. It distills the history of Canada into 32 hours of telecasts, selecting certain events and stories as being salient to the project. Prior to its airing, the CBC announced to its viewers what the series entails:

The epic 16-part documentary, created in both English and French, launches simultaneously on CBC Television and Radio-Canada on Sunday, October 22 at 8 p.m. Comprising 30 hours of stunning documentary programming, the series will be broadcast over two years. Charting the country's past, *Canada: A People's History* chronicles the rise and fall of empires, the clash of great armies and epoch-making rebellions. The vibrant story is one of courage, daring and folly, told through the personal testimonies of the everyday men and women who lived it – trappers and traders, pirates and prospectors, soldiers and settlers, saints and shopkeepers. (CBC, n.d.)

This series places the stories of individuals within the “epic” story of “empires” and “epoch-making rebellions,” situating the ordinary men and women of their day within the grand nation-making adventures, thereby inviting its current viewers to see themselves as part of this nation. As Althusser (1971) puts it, the series “hails” people and “recruits” them to share in a sense of national identity. After this initial reflection of the standpoint of *Canada: A People’s History*, I began to read what others have had to say about national identity.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, describes the nation as an imagined community that is both limited and sovereign. Through the shared medium of print, people can think about themselves and relate to themselves in groups larger than the immediate community in which they live. The ways in which languages refer to the nation are those of family or home (e.g. motherland, homeland), both of which are

natural ties. As these ties are not chosen, this makes them “disinterested,” that is, not connected to the interests of specific group, and the same connotation is given to the nation. The nation then can ask for sacrifices because it is disinterested. He contends that the concept of nationality is one that is open and closed at the same time; it is open due to the principle of naturalization, whereby people may become a member of the national community, but in actual practice, naturalization is difficult to achieve. He states that nationalism differs from racism: “nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations” (Anderson, 1991, p. 149). According to Anderson, racism has its roots in classism. The colonial racism of Europeans in the nineteenth century is based on the notion that the upper classes in Europe were naturally superior, a notion that was promulgated by the upper classes through official nationalism. According to this ideology, if English lords were naturally superior to the other English people, then these other English people, due to the vastness of the overseas empire, were naturally superior to the subjected natives in the colonies.

I find that some of Anderson’s ideas are pertinent to my reading of *Canada: A People’s History*. By being telecast into potentially every Canadian home with a television, the series has the potential of all Canadians viewing it and identifying with it as their national story, thus sharing an imagined conception of Canada. The use of family terminology to describe the nation is, in my opinion, a very potent force. As Anderson states, family ties are natural, primeval, and, I believe, as almost any parent will describe of their ties to their children, extremely powerful. As to Anderson’s concept of racism, as I have described in Chapter 1, I agree that classism and racism are intertwined.

Other researchers have provided me with insights about the nature of nationalism. Anne McClintock argues that nationalism often takes form through the ritual organization of fetish objects such as uniforms, maps, national flowers, and anthems, as well as through collective fetish spectacle such as team sports, mass rallies, and military displays (McClintock, 1996). Geoff Eley and Grigor Suny describe the manner in which national identification is fashioned among a disparate population: through a shared geography and the development of common customs, songs, pastimes,

and dialects, as well as fears, anxieties, and resentments. They write that for nationalism to come into effect, “ordinary people need to see themselves as the bearers of an identity centered elsewhere, imagine themselves as an abstract community” (Eley & Suny, 1996, p. 22). Ruth Roach Pierson stresses the emotional, rather than rational, aspect of nationalism, which is “shaped, tapped into and evoked through symbols that have been imprinted deep into our psyches” (Pierson, 2000, p. 42).

While Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* addresses many points related to nationalism, he does not address the gendering of nationality. A number of other writers draw out the significance of gender in the discourse of nationalism. McClintock (1996) writes that while women are portrayed as the symbolic signifiers of the nation and national difference, they are not directly involved in national agency. She argues that women are presented as the natural body of national tradition, providing continuity with the past, whereas men represent the forward-thrusting progressive agent. According to McClintock (1996), national history has often been portrayed as “naturally teleological, an organic process of upward growth, with the European nation as the apogee of world progress” (p. 263). The language of the family was also used to describe European imperialism, with the “childhood” of “primitive” nations to the advanced “adulthood” of European nationalism, and “the merging of the racial evolutionary tree and gendered family into the family tree of man provided scientific racism with a simultaneously gendered and racial image through which it could popularize the idea of linear national progress” (McClintock, 1996, p. 264).

Pierson (2000) reports that in Europe, in the nineteenth century, the strict division of labour and traits between the sexes was viewed as sign of civilization; a society that had a low degree of distinction between females and males was seen as having inferior racial status and lacking in civilization. One way in which this notion of gender order was enacted was in women’s exclusion from military service. Pierson argues that as the concept of citizenship was linked to the presumed capacity to defend one’s country, citizenship was therefore masculinized.

Silke Wenk also finds gender to be an important facet of national identity. Both masculinity and femininity do not simply exist; they need to be constructed. Drawing on

analyses of the relationship between gender and nationalism in Prussia during the Anti-Napoleonic Wars from 1806-1815, and in Latvia during the period of nationalist awakening in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Wenk (2000) concludes that not only are women what the masculine must contrast itself against, but that women represent tradition, thus are representatives of a “timeless national memory,” which supposedly motivates the actions of the members of the national community (p. 66). In her analysis, Wenk finds that women appear in metaphoric and symbolic roles in the national scenario, whereas men are active agents, doing battle and defending the feminine, which can also mean the nation. She writes that the struggle for national independence is synonymous with reaching manhood and “such mature masculinity promises to be able to overlook class allegiance and social difference” (Wenk, 2000, p. 69).

Cynthia Enloe explores the connections between patriarchy, militarism, and nationalism. She defines a patriarchal society as being characterized, not just by “men-on-top,” but rather by men who take on, and are valued for, a certain form of masculinity by which they act as protectors and controllers of those people in the society who do not display this form of masculinity. Enloe writes that in a society where the priorities of military institutions are paramount, masculinity is privileged, and women are valued only for the way that they contribute to the militarized agenda. As well, a militaristic society takes as an assumption that enemies exist and threats against the nation are imminent, so the readiness to use physical force is valued. According to Enloe, violence is therefore both naturalized and legitimized, and, because of the air of professionalism in military institutions – the control, discipline and technological distancing between the perpetrator and victim of violence – the violence inherent in militarism is often camouflaged. Militarization is touted by its adherents as a civilized manner to deal with more blatant forms of violence, which are labelled social upheaval or chaos (Cohen & Enloe, 2003; Enloe, 2002).

I find the accounting for gender in analysing national identity as articulated by McClintock, Pierson, Wenk, and Enloe to be a crucial component for my viewing of *Canada: A People's History*. As I elaborate in Chapter 4, the representation in this series

depicts men as active agents, and the primary role assigned to women is that of narrator, that is keeper of tradition. All four authors discuss the significance of the genderization of militarism – its masculine character in counterpoint to the femininity of home and family. A significant aspect of the portrayal of masculinity in *Canada: A People's History* is that of militarism. Gender roles of masculinity and femininity are a significant part of how social roles are constructed. While in some instances it is less constraining today than it has been historically, particularly for women, gender continues to be a very influential aspect of identity, as I described in Chapter 1. The socially acceptable ways of performing one's gender in our society are proscribed for us throughout our lives, from the pink and blue colour-coding of infants, through the Barbies and GI Joes of childhood, (these were the toys of my childhood; the fads change, but the gender distinctions in children's toys remain constant) to the self-help books for adults such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. These gender roles have material effects as shown by the incidence of violence against women by men – Status of Women Canada reports that “51% of Canadian women have been victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16” (2004) – and the wage gap between men and women in Canada where “women working on a full-year, full-time basis made just over 70 cents for every \$1 earned by their male counterparts” (Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 9).

Another aspect of nationalism not fully addressed in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is the connection between nationalism and racism. Pierson (2000) stresses the discursive generation of national identities through the “embracing of the positive and the rejection of the negative: pure versus impure, normal versus abnormal, healthy versus degenerative, beautiful versus ugly” (p. 43). As well, Pierson sees in the formation and maintenance of nations inherently violent strategies that have resulted in the nearly complete genocide of Aboriginal peoples in Australia and North America.

In *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*, Sarah Carter analyses the portrayal of women on the Canadian Prairies during the last three decades of the nineteenth century: White women were portrayed as pure and virtuous “civilizing” agents who were the “moral and cultural custodians of the new community” (Carter, 1997, p. 6), while Aboriginal women were portrayed as degenerate

and dangerous. Carter questions the accuracy of the portrayal of White women settlers as “the fragile, rarefied, genteel, ‘civilizer’ ideal,” observing that the qualities of “strength, independence, resourcefulness, and resilience” were the qualities that were needed (Carter, 1997, p. 9). As Carter notes, the workload for pioneer women was arduous, comprised of hauling water and fuel, raising children, raising and preparing food, and, in many cases, running the farm alone when husbands and fathers obtained off-farm work. Although the construction of White womanhood did not accurately reflect the lives of settler women, “ideas about the vulnerability of White women helped to create and sustain concepts of racial and cultural difference, to legitimize tough action against indigenous people, and to convey the message of the necessity of policing boundaries between different peoples” (Carter, 1997, xiv).

Enloe (2004) contends that when viewing posed photographs, it is important to ask questions about who is behind the camera doing the posing and what they imagined about masculinity and femininity when they set up the pose. She notes that these questions are relevant in all photos whether they are of mixed groups, or all men or all women. While Enloe’s focus is gender, the questions can be applied to race or class, or any other aspect of identity. Often, people are not consciously aware of “commonsense” assumptions, and they are rarely articulated, examined or questioned. These commonsense assumptions inform what is taken to be a shared understanding of a topic and are part of what shapes the way images are used. Kate Rousmaniere and Kim Greenwell examine the manner in which images are used in written historical narratives.

Rousmaniere (2001) observes that visual images are often inserted into a written history, with no examination of what is being portrayed or excluded from the image. She presents and examines three photographs taken in 1895 of the same group of Norwegian schoolchildren and their teacher. In the first photograph, nobody is smiling, and this depiction of school life is one that is often presented of school of this time period. Rousmaniere writes that the image “speaks to me of long hours crammed into a classroom desk, of required lessons and rules, competition, studying, behaving” (Rousmaniere, 2001, p. 112). In the second photo, the group is laughing and relaxed; in the third, there is no teacher, and the girls shown are cheering and throwing their hands

up in the air, the sense of activity enhanced by the blur of the photograph. The liveliness of the last two images does not fit with the Rousmaniere's preconceived notion of school in the late 1800s, which causes her to question the authenticity of the typical depictions of school in this era. She reflects that the three images viewed together tell a much different story of childhood and the role of the teacher than does the first, formal photograph on its own.

Greenwell (2002), analyses the manner in which White Christian missionaries used photographs to record and report on the life of nineteenth century Aboriginal people on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. She argues that the missionaries inserted photographs into their texts without providing any source information about these images, which served to naturalize the authority and objectivity of photography as well as the manner in which the missionaries made use of the photographs. Omission of any information about when, where, of whom, and by whom the photographs were taken "effectively transformed the photograph into a discursive terra nullus, or 'empty land,' onto which they could map their own desired meanings" (Greenwell, 2002, p. 8). Greenwell finds that the captions that the missionaries wrote to accompany the images and the manner in which the images were placed in relation to each other supported common assumptions about the supposed visibility of White civilization and Aboriginal savagery.

Sherene Razack, in her book *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping and the New Imperialism*, examines the role of mythology in creation of national identity and how it played out in the activities of the Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia in 1993, which resulted in the shooting of two Somalis and the torturing to death of another Somali. She argues that mythologies "help the nation to forget its bloody past and present" (Razack, 2004, p. 9), and that they present a ready-made identity for its citizens. In the Canadian national imagination the "we" are of Anglo-Saxon origin who consider themselves to be innately civil, and, therefore able to teach others – Aboriginals in Canada and Third World Others, through its peacekeeping venture – about civility. She maintains that in Canada, the national mythology is based on a foundation of racism, and continues to perpetuate racism. She cites Mary Louise

Pratt in describing the Canadian national story as an “anticonquest story” that contrasts Canadian innocence to American guilt (as cited in Razack, 2004, p. 145).

Razack (2004) describes what she observes to be the dominant discourse, the mythology, about Canada’s past and its current identity:

The hold that mythologies have should not be underestimated... Mythologies help the nation to forget its bloody past and present.... A Canadian today knows herself or himself as someone who comes from the nicest place on earth, as someone from a peacekeeping nation, and as a modest, self-deprecating individual who is able to gently teach Third World Others about civility....The ‘we’ is a white category and it refers to people who imagine themselves to be the original citizens (Aboriginal peoples are considered dead or dying and people of colour are considered recently arrived). Again, the fault line is a racial one. In the national fantasy, the ‘we’ are of Anglo-Saxon origin, descendants of a Northern people who consider themselves innately given to civility. The instruction of the natives that is so central to peacekeeping is also central to the everyday experiences of immigrants of colour in the North. (pp. 9-13)

For the purposes of my analysis, I find the effects of national mythology posited by Razack to be insightful. In presenting *Canada: A People’s History* as prime time television, the CBC has added it to the discourse about national identity. Having Razack’s interpretation of Canadian mythology to draw on enables me to view the series through the lens of race relations.

Himani Bannerji states that race, class, and gender are all significant political issues and argues against an official multicultural policy, which she finds sets “Canadian” culture (English/ Europeaness, that is, Whiteness), against “multicultures.” She finds that the notion of Canada, then, using Benedict Anderson’s trope, is imagined as Whiteness, based on a settler identity. Bannerji finds that Anderson’s theory of nation as an imagined community ignores aspects of race, class, and gender and leaves her, as a non-White immigrant woman, in the paradoxical position of both belonging and non-belonging simultaneously. She and other non-Whites and women (in particular, non-White women) live, work, and are involved in society, but are not part of its imagined self-definition. Other labels that originate in the apparatus of the state, the media, and the education system are used to mark her as not being Canadian: “visible minorities, immigrants, newcomers, refugees, aliens, illegals, people of colour, multicultural communities, and so on” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 65). Bannerji’s argument that racism is

exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, by the focus on multiculturalism is related to the proposition put forward by others involved in anti-racist work that the invisibility of Whiteness in Canadian society is a major component of racism (Bishop, 2002; Green 1995; Furniss, 1999; Thomas, 1994; Razack, 2004).

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said asserts that Orientalism, or the manner in which the Middle East and Asia is studied and written about, has had a profound impact on colonialism. According to Said, “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society” (Said, 1978, p. 10). Through a discourse analysis, he examines the way in which Orientalism was not, and is not, an objective, disinterested field of study, but has been used to further political ends. By setting itself off against the Orient, which is described as backward, European culture is able to view itself as superior, and imperialism is justified, as the colonized are in need of tutelage from the advanced culture. In his later writing on decolonization, Said (2001) delineates three main areas that he views as necessary cultural aspects of decolonization. The first is the right to view the history of the community in a coherent manner, which requires not only a national language but also the practice of culture through the dissemination of stories. The second is seeing resistance as more than just a reaction to imperialism, but as an alternate way of viewing history. The third is a movement away from separatist nationalism toward a more interconnected notion of human community and liberation. However, he concedes that anti-imperialist nationalism has often been used as a way of not dealing with economic disparities or social injustice, instead creating a nationalist elite that controls the newly independent state. Said claims that this results from a conception of nationalism that is separatist and authoritarian, and that there is another view within nationalist thought that is self-critical and concerned with community among cultures and societies.

Said’s comments about the positionality of the researcher concur with the stance of Critical Discourse Analysis. As a researcher, it is important that I make my stance visible throughout all stages of the research process. I find this statement of positionality

to be almost entirely absent from *Canada: A People's History*. I believe that Said's comments about dissemination of stories being essential to counteract hegemony and to promote an alternative view of history are significant in the context of my analysis as I find *Canada: A People's History* to be a disempowering story for Aboriginal people and women. Nationalism is not necessarily problematic; it is an aspect of identity locating a person within the complexities of identity and relationship to others. It can allow for a situation from which to interact and work in collaboration with others. It is not so much the identification of differences, but the differential valuing of them and the consequent implications and actions that makes nationalism problematic.

Historiographic Debates

Timothy Stanley postulates that the “grand narrative” of Canadian history that places an emphasis on “an inevitable, largely peaceful, and natural progress to the current configurations of the nation-state [has been revealed as] being more of a cultural artifact than a serious history” (as cited in Stanley, 2000, pp. 82-83). Daniel Francis states that the “core myths” of persistent images and stories in Canadian history do not provide a precise record of events, but they do “organize the past into a coherent story, the story of Canada, which simplifies the complex ebb and flow of events” while leaving out many people (Francis, 1997, p. 11). He points out that those people who benefit from the grand narrative cling to it as being the right way of looking at Canada. Social historians have questioned the idea that one grand narrative can reflect the experiences of all Canadians and have brought the stories of women, minorities, workers, and Aboriginal people into public discourse. They name and describe power imbalances in the past, presenting “counter narratives with their own very different reading of the past, one that is far less flattering to the elites” (Francis, 1998, p. 12).

A growing trend away from the grand narrative approach and a move towards social history in academia and in classrooms over the past few decades led Jack Granatstein (1998) to question the content of Canadian history classes. He disagrees that students should learn about “Riel rather than Sir John A. Macdonald,” or the “maltreatment of Japanese Canadians rather than the successful integration of millions of

immigrants” (Granatstein, 1998, xiii), calling these choices political. He derides social historians for recreating history to “serve present purposes” and obscuring or reshaping events to make them fit political agendas but does not acknowledge that the history that he wants in Canadian classrooms – “what men and women, great and ordinary, did to build a successful country” (Granatstein, 1998, p.105) – is also influenced by political agendas.

Alvin Finkel, in his discussion of the polarization in recent Canadian historical writing, dismisses the argument that historians on the left focus on social history while historians on the right focus on elite history. Rather, the polarization arises from the manner in which political structures and the everyday accounts of people’s lives are portrayed. Left-leaning historians “refuse to decouple daily life and political structures” (Finkel, 2000, p. 189), exploring the struggles among social groups, and the effect of these on the lives and choices of elites and ordinary people. Right-leaning historians “seem very good at compartmentalizing social structures” (Finkel, 2000, p. 189), writing about either political policy discussions or about daily life of ordinary people, without making connections between the two. In surveying the recent literature on post-World War II Canada, Finkel finds the “patchwork of stories” interesting, but lacking “master narratives” (Finkel, 2000, p. 204), which he believes are necessary to bring the stories together and demonstrate that they are not isolated from each other, but are rather related accounts.

Ramsay Cook observes that with the demographic changes in terms of class, region, ethnicity, and gender in the researchers and writers of Canadian history, the assumption that all “Canadians shared the same interest, enjoyed the same national triumphs, and celebrated the same national heroes has been left in tatters” (Cook, 2000, p. 264). He observes, however, that identities are not clear categories, but are “multiple, relational, shifting, contingent” (Cook, 2000, p. 266), and that it is important to study the dualities in our society, for example immigrants and the host society, or workers and employers, and to study them not only from a confrontational perspective. He welcomes the shift from nationalism to multiple perspectives, but has two cautions. Just as in the past, where the adherence to a national identity limited analysis, so can a rigid adherence

to other aspects of identity. Focussing only on aspects such as gender, race, or class leads to essentializing people in these categories, thus reducing the complexities of identities and relationships. He also cautions that an emphasis on identity not lead to the claim that only a member of a specific group can study or understand the history of that particular group.

Frits Pannekoek holds that historical truth is an invention. In Canada, history has traditionally been a male-dominated narrative, which the intellectual elites, social elites, and public institutions such as museums have managed in order to reinforce the values of Euro-Canadian culture, by selecting “the threads of its ‘usable’ past to justify a culture of progress that masks Canada’s capitalist and imperialist system of inequity” (Pannekoek, 2000, p. 206). He argues that while women have mostly been absent from the national narrative, they have been active in its creation. Women have served as the keepers of tradition, and have dominated community history, often serving as the driving force behind local museums and local history books. In relation to public history and commemoration, Pannekoek questions the degree to which the government and its agencies are deliberately manufacturing a ‘useful’ past in order to engender a sense of national unity. The interpretations presented at national historic sites reflect a dominant narrative, and the stories of marginalised groups, when included, are subservient to this, as to do otherwise would “diminish current authority” (Pannekoek, 2000, p. 213). I find that the points that Pannekoek make are borne out in my analysis of *Canada: A People’s History*. In Chapter 3, I discuss the making of the series, and the “usable” parts of the past that have been pieced together in this telling of the story. In Chapter 4, I discuss the absence of women from the story on the screen, while the teller of tale is a woman. Chapter 5, I examine the way that the Aboriginal story is represented in the series.

Joan Scott proposes examining identity, not as a static set of attributes, but as being comprised of “multiple and contradictory aspects that are contextually articulated and that change” (Scott, 2001, p. 99). This results in the historicization of identity, and historical inquiry that asks, not how, for example, women were treated at some time in the past, but rather how and under what circumstances their sex became significant in their treatment. Scott argues that historicizing interpretation must recognize that the

“facts” of a previous age occurred within a particular system of knowledge that needs to be analysed to avoid either naturalizing these past ideologies or dehistoricizing them by applying present categories. Bringing forth new material is not just an addition to the record, but is a critical reading that uncovers the terms of inclusion and exclusion of knowledges in the past. Scott observes that through its focus on women’s experience and its analysis of the ways in which gender and politics are mutually constitutive, feminist history is a critique of existing history that provides an “exposure of the often hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies” (cited in Ware, 1992, p. 117). Ware adds that the hidden operations of race and ethnicity are other defining aspects of identity and oppression.

Historically, the representation of Aboriginal people in Canadian textbooks has consisted of many, mostly negative, stereotypes. David Scheffel states that the curriculum revisions that began in the 1980s to eliminate negative stereotypes and create positive awareness of First Nations people have resulted in examples of curriculum that have substituted positive stereotypes, which are also unrealistic. The new imagery of Aboriginals, with respect for the land and egalitarian and conflict-free societies “omits or at least minimizes the reporting of equally real characteristics of traditional Aboriginal societies which modern Canadians would find difficult, if not impossible to approve of” (Scheffel, 2002, p. 177). In the case study he conducted in British Columbia, he found that the materials written in the 1980s and 1990s used ethnographic evidence collected in 1900 when it is positive and ignored this evidence when it is negative according to present Canadian society. He concludes that these deliberate fabrications are part of nation building. Shari Huhndorf provides this explanation for the new stereotype of Aboriginal as spiritually superior being: the New Age movement has appropriated Aboriginal spirituality as an appealing alternative to capitalist materialism. However, as the focus of the New Age movement is individual self-transformation instead of political action, it does nothing to challenge the political and cultural dominance of European America. By idealizing Aboriginal spirituality, the New Age is not concerned with the real life situation of Aboriginal people and sees no need to work to alleviate the problems many face (Huhndorf, 2001). Verna St. Denis also finds the current cultural revitalization

of Aboriginal people problematic. Although she finds that it can be liberating, as it challenges the assimilationist goals of colonialism, the focus of cultural revitalization in Aboriginal education “encourages Aboriginal people to assert their authenticity and to accept cultural nationalism and cultural pride as solutions to systemic inequality: ironically, this helps to keep racial domination intact” (St. Denis, 2004, p. 36). Cultural revitalization is presented as a panacea to social problems which have their roots in poverty and unequal access to political power. This obscuring of the class aspect of Aboriginal-White relations in Canada enables it to remain unnamed, thus unnoticed, and thus unchallenged by the majority of people.

Roxana Ng contends that because gender, race/ethnicity, and class are not fixed entities but are created through productive and reproductive relations, they change over time as productive relations change. She writes that racism, sexism, and classism are built into the societal institutions such as the judicial system and the education system, as well as being embedded in the ways we think, act, and normally conduct ourselves. Ng challenges us to continually examine our history as well as our present actions for two reasons. First, we need to recognize the way in which the state, “as the central constituent of capitalism in Canada” (Ng, 1993b, p. 227), divides people at different historical times in order to maintain its domination. Secondly, we need to examine the way in which our own actions contribute to racism, sexism, and class oppression through “mundane and unconscious ways in what and to whom we give credence, the space we take up in conversations with the result of silencing others, and the space we don’t take up because we have learned to be submissive” (Ng, 1993b, p. 241).

Reviews and Analyses of *Canada: A People’s History*

The CBC’s *Canada: A People’s History* is a massive undertaking. In addition to producing 32 hours of programming for broadcast in both official languages, with the series packaged for sale to the public as DVD or VHS sets, the CBC also published a two-volume book form of the series and established an extensive web site with information about the series and background information. Lyle Dick published an in-depth review of the book version of *Canada: A People’s History* in the *Canadian*

Historical Review in March 2004. He places the book in the current Canadian historiographic debate between social historians and political and military historians as firmly coming down on the side of the latter. Dick comments that the title of the book and television series *Canada: A People's History* uses the word "people" in the singular form, which assumes a common nationality. Both the book and the television series present the past in a straightforward manner with a predetermined beginning and a predetermined outcome: history is shown as an inevitable process, and is even overtly stated in the book's recurrent use of the word "inevitably." The book presents a "nation-building narrative" in which conflict between protagonists and antagonists is presented through a "Euro-Canadian lens" (Dick, 2004, p. 92). With its heavy emphasis on military topics, women are not given much ink, and the images of women that are present are those of determined, cheerful factory workers and housewives supporting the war effort. Overall, the narrative and images emphasize Canadian patriotism. The second half of Dick's article is an analysis of the book's use of myth and biblical motifs of "the Creation, a Fall, struggles of chosen people to reach a promised land, battles with demonic adversaries, parables...Messiah, restoration, and redemption [and] prophecies" (Dick, 2004, p. 95). British Canadians are the chosen people while Aboriginals, from the time of early contact up to the Oka crisis of 1990, and Quebecois nationalists, in the years leading up to and following the Quebec referendum on sovereignty association in 1980, are the enemies of Canada. The book's conclusion uses a quote from Nellie McClung describing the way in which European settlers came to western Canada to "claim it in the name of humanity and press it into humanity's service" (Dick, 2004, p. 105). This justifies European colonization of the land, as it was presumed as not being used prior to Europeans engaging it in productive enterprise. Canadians are presented as all "being in the same boat" and that we all arrived under equal circumstances of "refuge and redemption" (Starowicz cited in Dick, 2004, p. 107). Dick concludes that the series and the book do not raise questions about how we view the past. While the media of print and television are quite different, CBC states that the book is "written in a lively, journalistic style" and "follows the series closely" (CBC, n.d.). The observations that Dick makes about the book version of *Canada: A People's History* also apply to the

television version, as the book was written to provide a print version of the television series.

The medium of television has an impact on the selection of both the subject matter and the manner in which to portray it. Gene Allen, senior producer and director of research for *Canada: A People's History*, keeps the end result in mind: "We're making mass-market TV with strong storytelling values" (Conlogue, 2000). In an interview, Allen, while paying lip service to the social historians, clearly weighs in on the side of the grand narrative: "We have tried to get in as much 'new' history as we can, but our self-imposed mandate of telling the big stories and of keeping the overall narrative moving has made it difficult to follow every social and regional history byway" (Gray, 2000). Virginia Strong-Boag, (cited in Conlogue, 2000) disagrees with the grand narrative approach, and the presumption the series makes that "Canadians are dreadfully ignorant." Her proposal of having historians interviewed as part of the series to show that there is a debate about how to interpret our past was overruled by those who wanted less script and more visuals. In stating that "TV doesn't do nuance, and this series is pretty straightforward," Grazyna Krupa, who produced one episode, echoes Strong-Boag's concern (cited in Conlogue, 2000). Sarah Carter interviewed several University of Calgary graduate students, faculty, and visiting scholars, some of whom defended the producers' choice of one epic story. In order to appeal to a general audience, "the film had to clip along and could not digress to analyse complex historical problems, as viewers would be lost" (Carter, 2002, p. 599).

Glenn Brook's thesis *Canada: A People's History - An Analysis of the Visual Narrative for a Colonial Nation* draws primarily on the work of psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, and cultural theoretician Homi K. Bhabha to analyse eight of the first nine episodes. The thesis' psychoanalytically-based reading of the series describes Canada as moving from prenatal to mature identity (pre-national to Confederation) while Bhabha's insights on colonialism inform the reading of colonial discourse in the series, which presents the colonized populations of, first the Aboriginal peoples and then the French, as both childlike and dangerous, which serves to justify the colonial presence. Although this is the sub-text that he discovers in the series, he finds that in the first nine

episodes the “failure to address the subjugation inherent in its colonialist past determines the narrative form and content as a community in the present” (Brook, 2002, p. 1).

Kerry Abel, in the December 2001 *Canadian Historical Review*, notes that war and discovery are the focus of Parts 1 - 4 of the series and that ordinary people are absent. Also noticeably absent is any mention of historiographic debates, and the producers operate from “an underlying assumption that historical reconstruction is essentially a matter of collecting the facts, understanding them correctly, and presenting them with as little editorial content as possible” (Abel, 2001, p. 747). Audience response to the first four episodes has been favourable, which Abel regards as possibly indicative of many people regarding history as “a form of entertainment, escapism, and even consumerism” (Abel, 2001, p. 748). Abel claims that the purpose of the series goes beyond entertainment, however, as it is an attempt to imbue a sense of nationhood and shared ideas in Canadians facing divisive issues in region, language, ethnicity, and gender. It shows how we, as Canadians, have overcome problems in the past, which shows that we can again.

In the same issue of *The Canadian Historical Review*, E. J. Errington reviews Parts 5 - 9, describing these episodes as a “popular, national story” (Errington, 2001, p. 749) with heroes, villains, battles, and great accomplishments. Errington comments on the manner in which original printed sources are employed in the series: only one source or voice is presented to explain a particular action, so diversity is lost and conflicting points of view are silenced. Overall it is the story of the accomplishment of a few European men with commentary by European women. The documentary re-enactments present an oversimplification of events that appear to have predictable outcomes.

Episodes 10-13 are reviewed by Carter (2002), who commends the series as a broad introduction to Canadian history that appeals to viewers and invokes an interest in Canadian history. She, too, comments on the absence of historiographic debates and the manner in which inevitable progress is portrayed. The use of individual stories based on written records results in only the stories of those who left these written records. Aboriginal stories are filtered through translators, and Aboriginal people are almost entirely absent after Episode 10: “Taking the West.” Complex issues are presented

simplistically in order to maintain the pace of events, and controversial issues are ignored. Another troubling aspect of the series was the portrayal of European women as passive and weak.

While all of the above reviews provide insights into the series, they do not explore the representations in terms of power: power relationships between historical figures portrayed in the series, as well as power relationships in the society in which the series is produced and consumed. My work will build on these analyses as I examine the series' representation of gender, race and class relations in terms of the discourse of Canada's national identity. By performing a Critical Discourse Analysis of a narrow segment of *Canada: A People's History* (one episode and the packaging of the series), I perform an indepth analysis of the manner in which images and languages are connected to power relationships in society.

CHAPTER 3

WHOSE STORY FOR WHOSE PURPOSES?

Making History: Construction of the Series

In the 1990s, internal events in Canada included a referendum in Quebec on separatism that was narrowly defeated, increased pressure by First Nations on the government to uphold treaty commitments, and continued use of the Charter of Rights in the courts by individuals and groups to challenge inequalities that had previously been accepted, condoned, or simply ignored. External pressures came from increased globalization of markets and culture. As Mark Starowicz undertook the making of *Canada: A People's History*, he had “a sense of an eroding country,” which he sought to counteract through the “arteries of communication and art that will allow us to share the extraordinary Canadian experience” (Starowicz, 2003).

Joe Friesen conducted interviews with the senior producers of *Canada: A People's History* during July 2001, speaking with Mark Starowicz, Gene Allen, Gordon Henderson, and others. One topic he explores in these interviews is the role of historians in the making of the series. He writes that while the editorial committee hired dozens of historians to advise on their areas of expertise and that more than fifty historians from across Canada acted as consultants to the series, “the producers of *A People's History* employed historians only in very specific, limited roles and, as a consequence, chose a path that represents a distinctive form of historical narrative (Friesen, 2003, p. 191). Starowicz states that the producers, rather than historians, would have “sign-off.” He relays that, “We [the production team] would show everything to everybody, get everybody's comments, try to incorporate them as much as possible, but in the end we would take responsibility” (as cited in Friesen, 2003, p. 194). One decision that the producers made was to not use historians on-screen but rather to use a narrator to have the episodes flow in a narrative manner. Friesen reports that Allen, who as well as being a journalist holds a doctorate in Canadian history, originally wanted to use historians to provide commentary. However, he became convinced that the narrative form was crucial in presenting a televised history and that historians talking would shatter the narrative. As Gordon Henderson explains, “This is the people's history of Canada, not the

historians' history of Canada" (Friesen, 2003, p. 194). Friesen writes that for many social historians the decisions to use a narrative approach is problematic. He reports that Margaret Conrad is concerned about the lack of context in the series' dramatic portrayal of events, which she finds essentializes people. Groulx finds that although the producers attempt to introduce a multiplicity of voices from the past, by using an oversimplified narration, the result is a very limited kind of history.

Hall (1980) notes that representations are produced within social systems of unequal power. The people who control the production of images and text create these with the intention that they be read in a particular way in order to advance a particular viewpoint that is in their interest. Hall, however, believes that people have the agency to accept or reject this way of reading. He describes communication as involving two processes, encoding and decoding; therefore, there is a possibility of multiple readings of a text, depending on the subject position and critical literacy of the reader. He writes that a dominant reading is one which reinforces the interests of the hegemonic culture and the ideological intentions of a text. As Fairclough (1989) points out, this ideological intention may be based on deliberation, or it may arise from unexamined "commonsense" assumptions, as many texts which reinforce the hegemonic culture are created, not with malicious intent to do so, but rather through a failure to examine underlying assumptions. In a dominant readings, the reader passively accepts or agrees with the text's intent. A negotiated reading is one where the reader partially accepts what is presented but modifies it for his or her own purposes. In an oppositional reading, the reader understands the preferred, or dominant reading, but approaches the text critically, questioning what is presented. In the case of *Canada: A People's History*, the stated purpose is to "share the extraordinary Canadian experience." According to Hall's description, my reading of *Canada: A People's History* is an oppositional one.

The entire 32 hours of *Canada: A People's History* is available for purchase from the CBC website or retail locations throughout the country. The format that I examine in this thesis is the DVD version. I examine the representation used in the packaging of the series: the images and text on the covers of the twelve DVDs, the four series boxes and the footage of the series introduction and conclusion; I also intensively examine "Taking

the West,” which is the tenth of the seventeen episodes comprising the entire series. In order to perform my analysis of the film section I chose – the introduction, epilogue and “Taking the West” – I first transcribed the oral text. The entire transcript of the introduction and the epilogue appears as Appendix A. As the transcript for “Taking the West” is quite lengthy, I have selected the beginning segment to include as Appendix B. After transcribing the oral text, I carefully observed the visual images that accompany the oral text. As I am particularly interested in exploring how gender, race, and class are connected to each other and connected to power in society, I focussed my analysis on the manner in which *Canada: A People’s History* uses language and images to represent gender and race and the manner in which the series shows them connected to social power. Following Fairclough’s framework of analysis, in undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis of *Canada: A People’s History*, I examine the filmmakers’ language and visual choices at various levels, from what is included and excluded to a careful examination of the images and words that are included.

Before analysing the images and language that make up the segment of the series that I analyse in this thesis, I critique the filmmaking process. The decisions of what to include and what to exclude are multifaceted, but not transparent. Many decisions have been made on many different levels about what to include in the finished representation. To provide context for this, I turn to Trinh T. Minh-Ha (cited in Denzin, 2004), who differentiates between classic documentary films and reflexive documentary films. Some elements of classic documentary film include the filmmaker as a hidden observer, not a person who creates what is being filmed; the film capturing objective reality; a focus on common experience; and the use of various persuasive techniques, including the talk of plain folks and testimonials. The effect of these techniques is to create the illusion that the viewer has access to reality. In contrast to this, Trinh states that a reflexive documentary text would state its own politics; question the reality being presented; use multiple voices; and make the audience responsible for how the film is interpreted. Weedon (1997) concurs with Trinh’s observations, pointing out that “techniques of filming and the immense importance of editing are often forgotten in the authority attributed to the text and the subject positions it offers the viewer” (p. 98).

The series introduction of *Canada: A People's History* opens with the narrator announcing:

Tonight the English and French networks of the CBC launch the first history of Canada for the television age. This series of documentaries will be broadcast on CBC television and Radio Canada over the next two years, covering our history from the First Peoples to the end of the twentieth century.

As she speaks, a montage of images shows the filmmakers engaged in the production of the series: directors are shown in discussion with actors in period costume, camerapeople are shown at work filming scenes, people are shown in the film studio working with archival photographs, maps, and film canisters. While this montage reveals that the series is a construction, it does so in a manner that does not acknowledge what its politics are or what informs the choices that were made (or, indeed, even that choices were made in the construction of the series). The epilogue shows similar images of the series' construction, accompanied by the narrator saying, "There are young people watching now who will retell this story one day, informed by their needs, their perspectives, and their time." This implies that the history people relate is not objective but, rather, is based on needs and perspective, yet *Canada: A People's History* falls short of declaring this about itself, thus obfuscating its power.

In the introduction, the narrator also states that "All the events portrayed in this history actually happened. All the people you see actually lived. All the words they speak were spoken or written by them." This is a misleading statement, as much of the oral text throughout the entire series is commentary which is spoken by a narrator. For example, in "Taking the West," the narrator's commentary makes up 60% of total speech compared to 40% spoken by the people whose stories are being portrayed. This is significant for several reasons. First, the majority of the words used in the episode were written by the producers of the series, hence to suggest that the series embodies an authenticity based on using only firsthand sources is misleading. In addition, as the words left as a record are left in written form, these records exclude the words of people who did not have the literacy skills to write about their experiences. Furthermore, the filmmakers had to cull from the written records that do exist, and no mention is made about how they decided to select what to include and what to exclude.

The use of first-hand writings to tell individual stories is effective in generating audience interest and drawing people into the story. But the different voices represent different times and places, so there are no examples of two individuals presenting differing views of what happened during one particular event. Individuals recounting their experiences is presented as a means to relay the truth of what really happened. Poststructuralist theory challenges the dominant assumption that experience gives access to truth, and suggests that there is no inherent meaning in experience. It is constituted and given meaning through language, and is shaped by the discourses available to describe it, “which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests” (Weedon, 1997, p. 33). Another aspect of using individual stories that Carter (2002) points out is that events are presented as unique and individual rather than being placed in a colonial framework, resulting in a simplified and personified history of Canada.

In “Taking the West,” the visual images are a combination of archival photographs and actors engaged in re-enactments. Some of the photographs are accompanied by oral text that identifies who is being represented, but a great many of them are not. As well, any discussion of where the photographs come from, who took them and why, and how they were composed by the photographer is absent. As Greenwell (2001) and Rousmaniere (2001) point out, when exploration of these points is absent, photographs are readily manipulated to support the author’s text.

So, there are three levels of selection at work here, all of which remain undisclosed. First, these primary sources are partial perspectives. The primary text sources are written remnants left by the portion of people in any given society who were literate and inclined to record their version of events. The images portrayed in paintings and, in later cases, photographs, are also selected by the maker or commissioner of the image, and are also framed (that is, what is included and what is excluded) and in many cases posed. Secondly, the makers of *Canada: A People’s History* have made decisions about what to include and what to exclude when making this 32- hour version of the history of Canada. Thirdly, once the primary sources to be used have been winnowed out of all potential sources, the filmmakers made further decisions about how to interpret

these sources. As can be attested to by any person who has viewed different versions of a play produced by two different companies, or two film versions of the same play (for example, Kenneth Branagh's 1990 version of *Hamlet* and Ferrengheti's 1994 version), from the same original documents, very different portrayals can be presented.

Overall, I find that *Canada: A People's History* exhibits the characteristics identified by Trinh of classic, rather than reflexive documentary film; the talk of plain folks is used, the filmmaker is absent from view, and the focus is on presenting the objective truth – what presumably really happened. The whole series has a unitary narrator, which provides what Donna Haraway refers to as totalization or “a conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 1991, p. 188). The commentary connects the disparate threads, the voices of the individuals, but there is no acknowledgement of where the commentary comes from.

History as Inevitability

In using Critical Discourse Analysis to examine *Canada: A People's History*, I closely examine the language and other semiotic material used in the text. As well as paying attention to the overall structure of the verbal and visual text, I am attentive to the way in which grammar and words are used and the representation that is portrayed through these elements. According to functional linguists, language is a system of meaning potential, and in any situation, there are a number of meanings that a speaker may wish to express and a number of wordings that the speaker may use to express the chosen meaning. Therefore, every speech act consists of choices, although the choices are not necessarily conscious ones. I examine four aspects of language use which are of particular significance in the presentation of *Canada: A People's History*: the use of present and future verb tenses, nominalisation and passive verbs, the use of metaphors, and word choices.

The verb, the grammatical form that conveys action or state of being, can be inflected in different ways to convey various types of information. One of these is tense, the time marker that lets us know when an action occurs – past, present, or future – in other words, for what time period in relation to the time of uttering that the utterance is

valid. The simple present tense has several uses. One is to tell stories (usually informally) in order to make the story more exciting and realistic (Leech, 1989; Swan, 1995). In *Canada: A People's History*, the narrator relates the information in the present tense. While this may be an attempt to convey dramatic tension, it also serves other purposes. The present tense is associated with informal stories, so it reduces the distance between audience and speaker. In listening to the narrator, I have the sense that the narrator is not lecturing the audience, but relaying a story. The present tense is also used to describe states, general facts, habits, and permanent situations. Using the present tense to relate the historic events in *Canada: A People's History* relegates them to what Fairclough (2001a) refers to as “a timeless, ahistoric present” (p. 131).

In my reading of the series, I find that the representation of Canada's history in *Canada: A People's History* is an unfolding of an inevitable series of events leading to the present. This inevitability implies that people's decisions and actions were not significant factors in what happened in the past. It obscures responsibility and accountability for the actions of individuals and groups. Many aspects of the language chosen contribute to this. One grammatical form that contributes to this is the use of the future tense or present tense that points to the future. In “Taking the West,” many segments end with a foreshadowing of events that will come later:

Without their sacred stone, the medicine men predict disasters of pestilence,
famine, and war;
For the young nation of Canada, “Taking the West” is the key to a country that
will stretch from sea to sea. For the Indians, the predictions that followed the loss
of the sacred stone would all come true within 20 years;
The self-proclaimed defender of the Metis people will not see his beloved
Northwest for nearly a decade. When he does, Canada will be thrown into the
greatest political crisis of the young country's history;
From now on, their lives will be controlled by Ottawa. Crowfoot signs Treaty 7.
A year later, and the Blackfoot, like the Cree, will soon learn the real meaning of
the treaties;
The settlers are about to discover that life on the prairies is more difficult than
they ever believed;
What begins as a frustrated attempt by Metis and White settlers to win land rights
and political power will end in rebellion, massacre, and the gravest crisis in the
young country's history;
But Macdonald's dreams of unity will soon evaporate, for even in defeat, Riel has
the power to tear the country apart; and

The settlers will learn to make the fertile land yield the bountiful harvests they have dreamed of. Families will set down roots and prosper; their ranks will soon swell with a tidal wave of immigration that will continue for a generation.

The passive voice of the verb and nominalisation present information without an active doer. An example of the passive form is the sentence “By the early 1870s, more than a dozen whiskey forts have been built on Blackfoot territory” (from “Taking the West”) where the doer of the action is not expressed. The active form of this sentence (which is not used in the episode), “By the early 1870s, White whiskey traders have built more than a dozen whiskey forts on Blackfoot territory” does relay who is performing the action. Nominalisation, a grammatical structure whereby a process is expressed as a noun, as if it were an entity, also presents information where the doer of the action is not expressed. For example, in the sentence “the heartrendering deportation of Acadians is emblematic of the struggle to possess North America,” (part of the blurb on the Volume 2 DVD case of *Canada: A People’s History*), deportation is expressed as a nominalised process. I agree with Fairclough’s (1989) assessment that “one effect of this grammatical form is that crucial aspects of the process are left unspecified: _causality is unspecified” (p. 51). In this example, we, as readers, do not know who did the action of deporting.

Geoff Thompson presents the following perspective on the connection between nominalisation and the ideology of positivism:

One reason why nominalisation is in harmony with the ideology of science, and of academic, formal writing in general, is that it allows processes to be objectified, to be expressed without the human doer_. This is intimately connected with the fact that it is also ‘thingified’ by being expressed as a noun. Science aims to establish not only general truths, but unassailable, certain truths. Our current ideology of science is far happier with a view of the world as a series of fixed constants acting on each other in logically definable ways. (Thompson, 1996, p. 171-172)

Thompson also discusses the connection between nominalisation and persuasive text: “In persuasive text, one common technique is to objectify opinion by nominalising it, so as to make it more difficult for the reader or hearer to disagree with it.

When I examined the text of the boxed set, I found that nominalisation and passive verbs are used extensively. This text provides summary statements for each episode, so it does not provide detail and does not make use of first-hand sources. Its purpose is to capture people’s attention so that they will watch the series. This

promotional genre, then, exerts some influence on the way in which the writers made language choices. One choice that they made was to write three-quarters of the sentences using passive verbs or nominalisations. Here, I will provide a few examples of the way that these structures contribute to the sense of inevitability. In the following two sentences, conflicts and racism are attributed to growth and change, rather than to actions by people: “But fast-paced growth leads to conflicts that threaten the new society” and “The dizzying pace of change also brings ethnic intolerance and racism, particularly against Asian immigrants.” In the following sentence, “After the war ends, labour revolts in Winnipeg and across the country raise fears of a Bolshevik insurrection,” the nominalised structure does not tell us anything about what led to the revolts, or who has the fears, and it manages to combine two negative terms “revolts” and “insurrection” with the word “labour.” These sentences shroud, rather than clarify, the way that power is involved in these struggles. Rather than addressing power imbalances in society and examining how these events either contest or uphold unequal power between social groups – Whites and Asians, capitalists and workers – these sentences imply that these conflicts between social groups just happened. The final episode of the series is entitled “In an Age of Uncertainty” and is described in the following manner: “Free trade, globalization and regionalism converge with the rise of feminism, aboriginal claims, growing multiculturalism, and the explosion of computer technology.” These processes are presented as *faits accomplis*, somehow seemingly causally linked, and beyond the influence of individuals.

Word choices also contribute to this sense of inevitability. The words “fate” and “inevitable” are used in the narrator’s commentary in describing the Northwest Resistance. The following language is used to inform the audience about the actions taken by Riel and the others involved. “In a fateful step, he declares an independent Metis state, its capital an obscure settlement named Batoche...The battle is not planned, but when heavily-armed police and Metis fighters run into each other on the same road, a clash is inevitable....Now fate has intervened.”

Metaphors are an everyday part of language in which we compare one thing to another. The choice of metaphors that we use add much to the message that we are

presenting. *Canada: A People's History* contains many nature metaphors in which historic events are compared to natural phenomena. The commentary on the boxed set refers to immigration as a “tide of Irish immigrants,” “floods of immigration,” and “massive waves of immigration.” Canada is personified and “comes of age in the anguish of the Second World War,” and “negotiates the diverse currents that shape the nation in the modern era.” International affairs are presented as “an increasingly international climate.” In “Taking the West,” homesteaders are also described as a flood, and in the final scene, we are told that “their ranks will soon swell with a tidal wave of immigration that will continue for a generation.” These homesteaders “will set down roots and prosper.” Storm metaphors are used to describe Macdonald’s re-election: “After three summers campaigning around Central Canada by train, Sir John A. Macdonald and his Conservative Party are swept back into power.” They are used as well to describe events on the prairies: “Land fever sweeps through Winnipeg and across the Northwest like a prairie storm” and “In 1884, it was as if a great prairie wind swept across the land, blowing away the promises and dreams of the Canadian West.” These metaphors represent events as being part of the natural world; they are beyond our control. Many of the phrases reinforce the notion that people are caught up in events rather than have the agency to work towards the kind of society they want to create. People act only in reaction to huge events or decisions outside of their influence. The words chosen heighten the sense that the panorama of events sweeping across the screen is as inevitable as the forces of nature.

Another metaphor that recurs throughout the series is that of progress being compared to a train. While the verbal text states the importance of the railway to Canada’s expansion – Macdonald’s National Policy for economic development depends on the railway to link the agricultural prairies with the industrialized east – the railway is used metaphorically as well. Every episode of *Canada: A People's History* begins with a train, with a steam locomotive at the head, rushing towards the camera. In Season Two, when Bell Canada becomes a corporate sponsor, a thirty second advertisement for the company precedes each episode. Within the montage of briefly appearing images is an image of a lone Aboriginal male on a horse silhouetted against the sunset. This image

dissolves into the next one, which is a train rushing towards the viewer. The effect is that the train appears to run over the Aboriginal man, eradicating him from the landscape. When discussing the White settlement on the prairies, the narrator says that the railway “will tame the prairie wilderness,” and the episode concludes with the statement, “Their [the White settlers’] journey is gathering speed, moving swiftly towards the twentieth century and Canada’s destiny.” Again, a sense of inevitability is portrayed.

The train metaphor is particularly poignant when it is used to contrast Macdonald and the Aboriginal leaders Louis Riel and Crowfoot. Accompanying moving footage of a train crossing the prairies is the audio text, “Two Metis guards accompany the casket containing the body of Louis Riel. He is brought back to his family on board the CPR, symbol of the new power in the new West.” Riel is dead, and the Metis have no power in the new society. A few frames later, in the summer of 1886, Macdonald, accompanied by his wife, boards “the CPR’s president’s lavish carriage, taking his first trip to see the territory he and Riel fought over.” Macdonald is presented as the victor touring his realm, and “the new homesteaders flock to the tiny stations along the CPR to catch a glimpse of their famous prime minister.” Crowfoot and other Blackfoot meet the train at Gleichen Station east of Calgary. Crowfoot asks for increased rations; Macdonald gives him gifts, but ignores the request for renegotiation of the treaties. In *Canada: A People’s History*, Macdonald is associated with the train, the new power in the new West, and, now that the treaties have been signed and the Northwest Resistance put down, Aboriginal people are ignored.

Another sustained metaphor that contributes to the sense of inevitability is that of comparing the 1885 Resistance to a play, where the script is written before it is performed. The narration of this segment contains the following sentences.

The stage is set for a showdown with Louis Riel at Batoche....The final act of the Northwest Rebellion is about to begin....Out on the western plains, the final chapter of the rebellion is coming to an end....The massive plains and graceful valleys of the Northwest Territories have been taken at great cost, but now stand ready to play their part in a country that stretches from sea to sea.

The inevitability of events and passivity in the people depicted throughout *Canada: A People’s History* is what makes the series so attractive to some and problematic for others. It is attractive to those who share Starowicz’s assumption that

preserving Canada's grand narrative is important above all else. In interviews and presentations, Starowicz refers to Canadians as "the debris of wars and empires and famines" (2001, p. 9). Ian McKay finds Starowicz' metaphor central to the way the series presents ordinary people as being bewildered by events: "Debris is the perfect word—things acted upon, humbled by nature, reified" (McKay et al, 2002). This notion of a passive citizenry is problematic for those, like me, who envision citizens as actively engaged in understanding their world and acting to make a world where power is more equitably shared. Viewing our foremothers and forefathers as the "debris" of history, buffeted about by forces beyond their control provides fuel to "the dominant rhetoric of inevitability, which robs us of more agency by the day" (Kingwell, 2000, p. 128). I agree with social historian Patrice Groulx's conclusion that *Canada: A People's History* "for all its intentions, is a poor tool for civic instruction because it explains Canadian history not as the unfinished, contingent result of various possible outcomes but as the necessary, predetermined and unquestioned outcome of mysterious geographic and human forces" (as cited in Friesen, 2003, p. 197).

It is obvious to me whose interests are served by a citizenry who feel that there is nothing that can be done; this shores up the existing economic and political power structures within Canada and on a global level in which a small minority of people control the vast majority of the world's wealth. In Canada, in 1999, this polarization of wealth was apparent through the wealthiest 10 per cent of family units holding 53 per cent of the wealth, and the wealthiest 50 per cent controlling 94.4 per cent of the wealth. This left 5.6 percent for the other 50 per cent of Canadian family units (Kerstetter, 2002).

CHAPTER 4

GENDER IN CANADA: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY

Where Are the Women?

No representations in the written and visual media are gender-neutral. They either confirm or challenge the status quo through the ways they construct or fail to construct images of femininity and masculinity. (Weedon, 1997, p. 97)

In examining the portrayal of gender in the packaging of the DVD version of the series, I was immediately struck by the gender imbalance: of the 16 images, only 3 have women in them, while 15 contain images of men. The introduction and epilogue are presented as a montage of images with accompanying narration, each lasting only a few seconds. Women appear in 30% of these images, while men are in 70%; this ratio, however, is not indicative of the coverage in the series proper. In the episode "Taking the West," there is little coverage of women, as they appear in only 12% of the images, mostly in group photographs or crowd scenes where they are not identified. As Butler (1999; 2002) reminds us, gender is not essentially connected to a person's biological sex, so the mere counting of images does not address how gender is construed in the series. What it does reflect, however, is the absence of women from this representation of Canada's history, and, therefore, the devaluing of women's experience.

An interesting gender twist in *Canada: A People's History* is the use of a female narrator, Maggie Hucaluk. While her voice is present throughout the entire 32 hours, viewers see her only for a few seconds in the epilogue. She is presented as an unidentified White woman sitting on a stool speaking into a microphone. Although there is very little coverage of the lived experiences of women in this history, there is the presence of a female voice throughout the entire 32 hours. In the introduction, the narrator tells the audience that all the people shown in the series actually lived and that "all the words they speak were spoken or written by them," implying that primary sources underpin the narrative. However, more than half of the oral text of the episode "Taking the West" is explanatory in nature: of the 208 speech acts, the narrator performs

113 (54%) compared to the 95 (46%) extracted from primary sources. Very few of the speech acts pertain to women, but the audience hears the female voice of the narrator speaking more than half the time. While women's stories are barely represented in the history portrayed here, employing a women's voice to tell the story provides an illusion of inclusion of women. The individual and collective stories of women are almost totally absent, but, perversely, it is a woman's voice that is constantly heard throughout the series. In a 2001 interview, Mark Starowicz relays that he and the other makers of the series decided to have a female narrator in order to appeal to female viewers as "a history of men told by men seemed an unlikely winner with female audiences" (Friesen, 2003, p. 191). In analysing the relationship between gender and national identity, Wenk (2000) and McClintock (1996) write that women are symbolic signifiers of the nation and that they represent tradition and continuity with the past. The use of a female voice to narrate the nation's past reflects both these points.

Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice report that during the twentieth century, most academic historians, both men and women, focussed on political and economic development; therefore, a problem women historians in Canada have faced is the disconnection between "their own lived experience and much of the content of history" (Boutilier & Prentice, 1997, p. 6). While Boutilier and Prentice's concern is with women historians, the point that they make about historical texts not connecting to women's lives describes my experience as a viewer of *Canada: A People's History*. The absence of female historical agents is not discussed in the commentary of the boxed set; the phrase "Canada as you've never seen it: a riveting account of our history through the eyes of the people who lived it" presents the history, "our history" contained in the series as one that is shared by the viewers – as long as the viewer is male.

Aboriginal Women

Another significant aspect of the portrayal of women in *Canada: A People's History* is the manner in which it is racialized as well as gendered. My reading of race in *Canada: A People's History* is based on the verbal text of the series as well as the visual markers in the images which accompany the text. The visual markers of skin colour,

clothing, and hair styles are the cues which I use, along with the verbal text, to denote race. The only women on the covers of the DVDs appear to be White. In the series introduction and epilogue there are three images containing Inuit women dressed in sealskin clothing involved in traditional activities – sitting in a cave, walking across the snow carrying bundles, and throat singing. The only other image of a non-White woman is a shot of an Asian woman in a pointed sun hat in a boat. There are no images of identifiable First Nations or Metis women.

In the episode “Taking the West,” the only representation of First Nation women is group shots in three archival photographs and one re-enactment. We are not told these women’s names. The accompanying text is not the women’s voices but the voices of the narrator or men describing the events depicted. In one of these, the camera moves across a photograph of women and children outside a tepee, panning in to a close shot of one woman with a distressed expression holding a child. This image is accompanied by a voiceover of Crowfoot’s comments about the disastrous effects of whiskey on the Blackfoot people. The words accompanying this image of Aboriginal women convey that they are “powerless” and “unable to resist the temptation to drink.” In addition, it is not the words of the Aboriginal women that are spoken; they have no voice in *Canada: A People’s History*.

There are seven images of Metis women; none of the names of the women in the photographs or re-enactments are ever used. Three photographs shown at different times throughout the episode are group shots of similar composition: a group of Metis men and women are depicted in a posed outdoor photograph in front of a building. The text accompanying each of these does not shed much light on the lived realities of Metis women of the time; rather, generalizations about Metis are provided. The four re-enactments containing Metis women are all brief, each appearing on screen for only a few seconds. In the first, we know that the woman is a member of Louis Riel’s family, but there is no mention of her name or even her relationship to Riel. The other three re-enactments depict events at Batoche: women are shown helping Riel hold his arms in the shape of a cross; three women and one man are looking out over the battlefield as Father Fomont comments that “We experienced pangs of anguish. Sadness overcomes all of us

at the thought of our dear Metis perhaps being decimated by the enemy's grapeshot and hail of bullets"; and the last re-enactment shows a woman bending over the coffin of "a child killed, the only victim of the famous gattling gun." In these re-enactments, women are shown either in passive roles or nurturing supportive roles, and in all cases they remain nameless. In *Canada: A People's History's* representation, the only agency Aboriginal women have is to nurture.

The voices of Aboriginal women are silent, and the visual representation is almost exclusively of unidentified people shown in groups. The group shots of Aboriginal people reflect Hall's (2003) observation that the presentation of the natives contrasts with the portrayal of the White figure where the natives are shown collectively as a mass while the White figure is depicted in isolation, taking action to confront destiny. bell hooks writes of the violence the mass media does to black women. For the most part, they are absent in the media, and, when they are present, their role is to "enhance and maintain White womanhood as object of the phallogentric gaze"; this effects a "violent erasure of black womanhood" (hooks, 2000, p. 126) A similar violent erasure of Aboriginal womanhood occurs in *Canada: A People's History*.

White Women

For the most part, *Canada: A People's History* presents White femininity in very prescribed ways: the traits associated with femininity are emotionality and vulnerability. While this is the representation that occurs most frequently in the episode "Taking the West," there are a few brief images in the second season opening montage that present women as strong and independent. Photographs of Wilfred Laurier, Louis Riel, Nellie McClung, and Norman Bethune flow across the screen as the narrator says, "It's a story of dreamers and prophets, reformers and revolutionaries." While names are not mentioned during this introduction, the image of McClung appears in conjunction with the word "reformer," so even if viewers are not familiar with her image or her work, they are informed that she acted in some way to reform something. The final 14 images in this montage are accompanied by the musical score of the series rather than narration. There

are several brief images of confident-looking non-White women in this clip, and the final image is that of a young White woman turning to look directly into the camera.

The other female image which presents a sense of strength, although I find it to be qualified, is the DVD cover for Volume 2, which contains the episode “Battle for a Continent.” A young White woman is in the foreground, while in the background a man watches her. The caption reads, “A young American girl, taken captive in the conflicts between the French/Indian alliance and American settlers in 1750s, will soon escape with her French lover to Louisiana.” Although the text does not state the combat status of the young woman, I believe it is probable that she is a non-combatant in the conflict. This woman demonstrates agency and courage as she “will soon escape” and travel to Louisiana. However, I find other aspects of the text problematic. The passive use of the verb “taken captive” removes the doer of this action and sanitizes the violence that was done to the woman. The people who captured her, forced her to leave her home, and then held her against her will are not named and thus are not held accountable for their actions. This minimizes the violence of war and normalizes the violence done to non-combatants such as this young woman.

The series introduction and epilogue, which are each about five minutes in length, act as bookends for the series. While there are women in about one-third of the images shown in these montages, many of the images of women are still close-ups of individual women not involved in any activity, while in most images of men, there are many men involved in some sort of activity, often of a combative nature. In one example from the introduction, a close-up visual of a young White female in seventeenth century attire is accompanied by the voice-over “I was chosen to join a number of others to take a perilous voyage to a new world. I resigned myself to silence, far from my own country.” The woman is looking into the camera, and, while the accompanying soundtrack carries what is presumably her voice speaking, her lips do not move, and she looks silently at the viewer. The voice-over is the actual words of a woman who came to Canada as a *fille à marier*. However, the excerpt that the makers of *Canada: A People’s History* selected to air, with the use of the passive tense of the verb “I was chosen” and the phrase “I resigned myself to silence,” presents the young woman as someone with little agency

who passively accepts her fate. That the filmmakers did not have the actor portraying her actually speak her lines to the audience silences her even further.

A similar reference to women comes in the introduction when a White male is shown in a close-up shot, saying, “The bombardment and gunfire terrorized the whole town. The women and children in great numbers near the citadel were continually in tears, wailing and praying.” In this case, the historic figure speaks to the audience directly, on behalf of the women in his community. The bombardment and gunfire are presented as nominalisations. There is no one identified as being responsible for this violence; rather it appears to have just occurred of its own agency. As the introduction continues, the narrator remarks that this is “the story of ordinary people caught up in the great currents of history.” The image that accompanies this a White woman and child running through smoke, relaying the message that women do not have the agency to direct their lives, but rather react or are caught up in events.

This same contrast between gender behaviour is shown in the next images as well. As the narration of the introduction continues – “But the battlefields of empire become the shores of hope – hope for the adventurous” – we see a photograph of a White man sitting next to a river with a dog and a gun; it appears that it is a male trait to be adventurous. The next two images appear on the screen while the narrator continues, “and the dispossessed, driven by dreams, carried on feverships”; one is a photograph of a what appears to be a family and the other is a photograph of a White girl sitting on a trunk; it appears that it is a female trait to be dispossessed. In the epilogue, while the images on the screen are of ships at sea, a woman’s voice (a different voice from that of the narrator) says, “I climbed to the top of Chipman’s Hill and watched the sails disappear. Although I had not shed a tear throughout all the war, I sat down on the damp moss with my baby in my lap and cried.” These words and images about women are both reflective and constitutive of the myth that they are weak, emotional, unable to act on their own, and in need of male protection, while men are active agents in their own and their nation’s destiny.

In “Taking the West,” four White women speak about their arrival in the West, and we hear about a fifth through a letter written to her by her fiancé. These

homesteading women relaying these short snippets present the only voices of women in the episode, and they are the only women who are identified by name. The other images in which women appear are photographs of unidentified families, photographs of crowded streets or gatherings, and photographs of workplaces. As the recounting of history in *Canada: A People's History* is done chronologically (“Taking the West” covers the period 1873-1896), historic figures appear at more than one point in the two-hour episode; this is the case with Jenny Plaxton, Lovisa McDougall and Mary Louisa Cummins.

The first mention of these pioneer women is with the narrator's statement that “Pamphlets sent by the millions throughout Canada and Europe declare the opening of the Canadian West and promise unlimited opportunity. To Jenny Plaxton's family, it is an irresistible proposition.” Jenny Plaxton's voice then states, “We farmed in London for three years and then went to Ottawa. We lived there nine years, and then the Manitoba Fever came, and my husband caught it badly. He pulled up his stakes and came out west.” As she speaks, an archival pamphlet is shown. The camera starts with a close shot of a White woman standing at the edge of a field. Her hands are empty and she gazes out across the field where six men are shown working, stooking grain or driving horses and equipment. Later in the episode, Jenny Plaxton describes her journey to the homestead: “We traveled quite a distance when we met another couple, a bride and bridegroom. The bride was in torment with mosquitoes, just nearly crazed with them. She asked her husband to shoot her. He merely laughed. One morning the young wife found his revolver and shot herself. The poor woman was buried on the top of a hill where a cross marks her grave.” Accompanying this is a re-enactment with Jenny Plaxton riding in an ox-cart covered with a blanket, swatting at mosquitoes while her husband walks alongside the cart. The cart is the only thing visible in the landscape except for a wooden cross that the cart passes by. The two scenes with Jenny Plaxton demonstrate the contrast between genders. In the first scene, a poster shows woman and a man out in a field. The woman's hands are empty; she is not shown to be working, and she is looking out at the man who is shown working. In the second scene, the woman is riding in the cart covered by a blanket, trying to find relief from mosquitoes, while the man walks along, appearing

to be undisturbed by the insects. The woman is in a passive role, while the man is active. The contrast between genders is even more pronounced by the voice-over relaying the story of the other woman who was so weak and fragile that she could not withstand the conditions and ended her life.

Another settler woman is Lovisa McDougall, whom we meet through the letter her sweetheart writes to her. Johnnie McDougall “runs a lucrative business hauling trade goods along the Carlton Trail from Winnipeg to Edmonton” and “spends the long winter nights writing love letters to his sweetheart back home in Ontario.” He writes to her that he would like to “be with you for one evening to hear you play and sing some of the old songs and have a quiet talk with you.” We see him sitting at a table in a shack writing a letter, and as his voice speaks, the camera moves over the letter he is composing and the picture of his fiancé, which is also on the table. The narrator then informs us that his sweetheart, Lovisa, agrees to marry him, and that “before leaving Ontario, Lovisa prepares for her life as a pioneer. She has all her teeth pulled and a complete set of dentures made. There are plenty of dreams in the great Northwest but no dentists.” While the narrator speaks, the screen is filled with the photograph of Lovisa, but we see her involved in no action at all. The segment of the letter to Lovisa McDougall that the filmmakers use in this clip focuses on music and song, which in Carter’s (1997) analysis are aspects of culture and gentility that White women would purportedly bring to the West.

Later in the episode the narrator informs us that “Johnnie McDougall and his new wife Lovisa have just opened a store in Edmonton.” During the Northwest Resistance, they and other settlers go to the old Hudson’s Bay fort where “they find some old guns but no ammunition. The men set to work making their own” and “Lovisa McDougall finds herself with the other women fashioning crude cartridges out of cloth.” When the settlers go to the Hudson’s Bay fort, the men “set to work making” their own guns. The phrase “set to work” shows decisiveness on the part of the men. In contrast, Lovisa McDougall “finds herself with the women fashioning cartridges.” “Finds herself” implies a lack of agency, a sense of bewilderment at what is happening and that Lovisa McDougall did not choose to act in that manner.

When discussing the aftermath of the 1885 Resistance, the narrator asserts that “life is returning to normal in the settlements. Johnnie McDougall’s store in Edmonton does a brisk business resupplying homesteaders who had spent many anxious weeks waiting for the Indian uprising.” Accompanying this are two photographs. The first is a street scene showing people and wagons and horses; all the people depicted are men. In the second, the camera pans across a photo of six men, three horses, and one dog outside of a rough building. The use of the words “normal” and “homesteaders” to describe these two all-male images suggest that women were absent from the homesteading experience. This contradicts the inclusion of the women’s voices earlier. I also find it quite interesting that the first reference to the McDougall store states that “Johnnie McDougall and his new wife Lovisa have just opened a store in Edmonton” while in this reference it has become “Johnnie McDougall’s” store.

The two scenes that Mary Louisa Cummins appear also portray strict division of gender roles. Cummins and her husband are another couple who pull up stakes to move west as they were facing economic hardship in Eastern Canada. Cummins explains:

At the time, the CPR was plastering the country with fascinating pictures of glorious wheatfields on the great western prairies. There was a fortune for everyone in three years, not to mention glittering promises of practically free land. Hopes were high, so we, poor fools, fell into the trap.

As she relays this, the camera pans across the domestic scene of White people depicted in a poster. In the background a woman works at a stove; in the foreground a woman stands, a child in her arms and another at her skirts, and looks at a man engaged in writing. Out the window is a man driving some horse-drawn equipment. In the poster, the two women portrayed are cooking and child minding, while the two men are engaged in operating equipment and writing. While this scene may be reflective of women and men’s material reality at the time, I find the manner in which it ties in to the next scene to be problematic.

We re-encounter Cummins later when she tells of her reaction upon reaching the family homestead to which her husband preceded her:

I was about all in when we arrived at the homestead, and at the sight of it – the home I had come to – I burst into tears. ‘Am I to live in that?’ I cried, forgetting how hard Colin must have worked to build that little box. So, there we were.

As she speaks, a photograph of Mary Louisa Cummins changes to a photograph of a homestead with rough log buildings. Of all the things that Cummins wrote in her life, the three sentences culled by the filmmakers show her as fragile, bursting into tears when she realizes what her new home is like. Interestingly, the three sentences selected do manage to contrast the genders in a manner similar to the previous example: while the woman cries, we are reminded of how hard the man has been working.

In another scene, the following words of Hilda Kirklands are heard as the camera pans across the snow-covered prairie:

I think the two words, silence and whiteness, will ever be associated in my mind. In those dreary winter months when almost all life had deserted the prairie, often the horizon was indistinguishable, and one could not see where snow ended and the sky began. It seemed as if there could be nothing but silence and whiteness in all the world.

The loneliness experienced by Hilda Kirklands was something that men experienced as well, and for single male homesteaders it was especially acute. However, it is a woman who describes the loneliness to the viewers.

Harriet Neville is also a White settler, and, according to the narrator, she and her husband are nearly bankrupt. Harriet Neville relates, “He only had enough for next year’s seed and the oats for feed. Now we were almost at the end of our resources. We believed part of what the settlers’ pamphlets told us, and as yet had no returns from the land.” Accompanying this monologue is, first, a photograph of her and her husband and then a re-enactment of a man operating a horse-drawn plough. Again, the image of the woman is static, while the image of the man is dynamic.

These representations of White settler women portray them in the manner identified by Carter (1997): civilizing agents who are fragile, weak and in need of male protection. These language and image choices also conform to the notion of the gendering of nationality whereby men are active agents, doing battle, and defending the feminine while women are not directly involved in national agency (McClintock, 1996; Wenk, 2000). These stories of settler women seem to be grafted onto a military/political history. The reference to women is how social history is incorporated, but their stories are treated as “fluff.”

Masculinity and Militarism

Masculinities are as myriad as feminities,...[but, the dominant form of masculinity is shaped by] the phallogocentric institutions of the military, cultural myths, fables, narratives and literary texts that construct masculine heroes who pay the price of death for their quest of love (Threadgold, 1997, p. 117).

When examining the male images on the DVD and volume covers, I found that the majority of male images, nine of the fifteen, are of White soldiers. Three of the other images are of individual men holding guns; one is of a White male while two of these are of Aboriginal males. These are the only images of Aboriginal people that appear in the boxed set – men with guns. The Aboriginal men appear as individual figures on separate DVD covers. Both have long braided hair, and one of them has his face painted black and red. One man is clothed in buckskin, and the other is wrapped in a wool blanket.

In all of the military images on the DVD covers, the military is presented in a glorified, romanticized way. In the three military images depicting soldiers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these soldiers wear shiny and clean uniforms: hats and trim are spotless, the metal trim is shiny, and the white of the shirts, pants, and braid trim is brilliant. Guns are prominent in all three photos, either being discharged or at the ready. The soldiers are lined up in straight rows. The sense of control and discipline portrayed in these images reflect what Enloe (2002) refers to as the “aura of professionalism” common to representations of militarism. While the camera provides a different angle in each of the three images, the viewer does not see who the soldiers are firing upon. The perspective provided is only that of the protagonist, the soldier(s), with no accounting for the results of this violence or victims of this violence. The messiness, ugliness, and carnage of war are missing from these images; the violence is masked.

In the four group shots of twentieth century soldiers on the DVD covers, comradery between the soldiers is prominent. In one, a soldier carries another soldier who is wounded on his back. In another, in a group of soldiers walking toward the camera, the focal point is one soldier with his arm around the shoulders of another. Another image depicts a group of soldiers posing in a trench, holding guns, smiling at the camera, and the last image is of a group of soldiers relaxing atop a tank, smiling. These

images portray White men working together with other White men to achieve a common goal. The support that they provide for each other is tangibly portrayed.

I perform a close analysis of the language used in the blurbs on the DVD covers of episode 8, “Ordeal by Fire” (1915- 1929), and episode 14, “The Crucible” (1940-1946). The former states that “Canada’s heavy military role in World War I (60, 000 dead in a population of 8 million) transforms its society, its politics, and its place in the world. The horror, bravery and sacrifice of trench warfare are evoked in Canada’s great battles.” The blurb for “The Crucible” is as follows:

Canada comes of age in the anguish of World War II, with soldiers on the beaches at Dieppe and women in the industrial work force back home. The country’s military role and domestic, social and political consequences of the war are traced through poignant stories of Canadians on both sides of the Atlantic. The horrific global conflict steals the innocence of a generation but brings hope for a new future.

The clauses “Canada’s heavy military role in World War I transforms its society, its politics, and its place in the world” and “the horrific conflict steals the innocence of a generation but brings hope for the future” are examples of nominalisation. They obscure the decisions and actions that were made by individuals. War is presented as something that just happens; human agency and responsibility are absent from this account.

Two metaphors run through the two passages. The first of these appears in the titles for the two episodes: “Ordeal by Fire” and “The Crucible.” Both refer to a severe test, which the blurb tell us we (Canadians) passed, as, in the first case, our “society, politics and place in the world” were transformed, and in the second case, although the war stole Canadians’ innocence, it brought “hope for the future.” The second metaphor, coming of age, is used extensively: World War I “transforms” Canada, and Canada is then able to take its “place in the world”; “Canada comes of age in the anguish of World War Two” and the nation matures losing its “innocence” but is given “hope for the future.” This coming of age metaphor naturalizes war, presenting it to be as inevitable as moving from childhood to adulthood is.

The vocabulary used in these two passages – “heavy military,” “horror, bravery, and sacrifice,” “great battles,” “anguish,” “poignant stories,” “horrific global conflict,” “innocence,” “hope,” “transforms” “are evoked” “comes of age,” “are traced,”

“steals_but brings”– does acknowledge the destructive nature of war, but counterpoises it with positive outcomes. The nominalisation and metaphors used in these passages present war as agentless, inevitable events, which contribute to the maturation of the nation.

In the episode “Taking the West,” the language used to narrate the armed conflict between the Metis and the Canadian army 1885 at Batoche glorifies war as well. The narrator informs us that “from Halifax to Winnipeg, young men, eager to defend their country, rush to the drill halls. The volunteer soldiers of Canada’s first national army march to the railway stations, anticipating epic battles and great victories.” While no first hand sources are provided for this, the representation provides the viewer with the thoughts and motivations of the volunteer soldiers. The language presents war as a heroic endeavour with its “epic battles and great victories.” Later these same volunteer “return home to a hero’s welcome.” In this segment, the photographs and re-enactments are of White soldiers outside the recruitment offices, riding in the troop trains, and in battle. Earlier in the episode, White men were identified as such, but now the marker is no longer used. White has become normalized, the invisible norm against which others are marked.

In this battle, the soldiers on both sides of the conflict are presented as honourable, engaged in defending their country. It is the voice, not of a Metis soldier, but of a Canadian army soldier, Sargent Walter Stewart, which is used to show the courage of the Metis. Stewart says that “the Indians and half-breeds put up their real fighting, running from rifle pit to rifle pit, firing as they went, stubbornly contesting every foot of ground.” The narrator’s commentary also extols the Metis’ military skill, relaying that the Metis are able to hold off Middleton’s troops, despite the army’s “superior fire power,” and “superior numbers.” I find this account problematic for two reasons. First, I find the representation in this segment to be racist. The Metis do not have their own voice as it is a White man who describes their exploits. As well, the narrator uses the word “superior” twice while describing the White soldiers of the Canadian army, first referring to their “superior fire power” and then to their “superior numbers.” The word “superior” was not used as part of a quote from a primary source which would

be using the parlance of the time, but was part of the commentary that was written at the time that the series was produced. Instead of just saying that the Canadian army had more soldiers and more and bigger guns, the word “superior” was selected to be used, not once, but twice, when contrasting the Canadian army of White soldiers to the Metis army. Secondly, this segment glorifies militarism and warfare, naturalizing and normalizing violence.

The Significance of Gender in *Canada: A People’s History*

According to Weedon (1997), one way in which gendered subject positions are constituted is the “absence of any possibility of negotiating the nature of femininity and masculinity” (p. 95) within particular discourses. While there are some exceptions, the discourse of *Canada: A People’s History* situates femininity and masculinity as very distinct gender categories. The privileged positions in this construct are the masculine military and political leaders who, through their success in the “professionalized, institutionalized violence” (Enloe, 2002) of warfare, display the valued traits of acting decisively and aggressively to achieve dominance over others. Also valued and valorized in this construct are the ordinary heroes – the masculine soldiers who follow orders and carry out the many small acts of violence that add up to the overall violence of a militarized state. The nature of masculinity is represented as being aggressive, taking by force what it claims as its own, but also loyal and obedient to the chain of command in a disciplined military way. At issue is the way that power in Canadian society operates, and as Foucault points out, the way in which bodies are perceived and given value in society involves “the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested” (as cited in Weedon, 1997, p. 115). By glorifying war and honouring those who partake in it, *Canada: A People’s History* privileges those who donate their masculine bodies to the military machine to uphold the power structures in place in the past and the present. The series presents Canada as a militarized state.

Enloe states that in order “to make sense of any militarized social system, you *always* have to ask about women. They’re not a minor sidebar interest” (Cohen & Enloe, 2003). Women are underrepresented in *Canada: A People’s History*, and the manner in

which they are included reinforces militaristic values. The lack of representation of women's experiences places little value on femininity. The footage of women that is present portrays women as passive, weak and in need of male (militarized) protection. I find the gender imbalance of representation is exacerbated rather than counterbalanced by the prevalence of the unitary female narrator throughout the entire 32 hours. Her narration of masculine exploits is reminiscent of cheerleaders at a football game – while the males engage in battle on the field, the females cheer them on. The traits and values that have been masculinized – competition and aggression – are given extensive favourable coverage while the traits that have been feminized – cooperation and nurturing – are given little coverage. The coverage that has been given to women emphasizes passivity and devalues emotionality.

Morgan (1996) examines the discourse of gender in Upper Canada from 1791-1850. In her research on gender representations in the War of 1812, she finds that documents such as military dispatches and letters present a “greater complexity around gender relations and the conduct of the war than those of the public pronouncements of the press or the governments” (p. 41). She describes how the active exploits of women involved in skirmishes are detailed and praised in military correspondence, but are omitted in newspaper accounts of the skirmishes. With other contributions that women made, such as making banners and clothing, the physical labour that women invested is downplayed in the press accounts of the time, and it is the emotional bonds that the objects represent that are emphasized.

According to Morgan (1996), gender categories were contested in Upper Canada. The press accounts of the 1840s display the fluidity of the categories of public and private spheres, with men and women present in both spheres. Women were involved in charitable work, religious institutions, and temperance organizations, and “women's work and women's presence, in a variety of places other than the home, were far from ignored in accounts of these activities” (p. 202). Morgan's research emphasizes the historic accounts of women's work that do exist, and, like other feminist historians, she brings to light the historical experiences of women. However, *Canada: A People's History* reflects little of women's experiences. While women were obviously part of

Canadian society in the time period covered in “Taking the West,” very little of their experiences appears in the episode. As I have shown in this chapter, the language that accompanies the images of women that are included minimizes their experiences and contributions.

The representation of masculinity and femininity in *Canada: A People’s History* reflects and constitutes commonsense assumptions of masculine and feminine identities. It perpetuates gender stereotypes that first wave, second wave, and, now, third wave feminists have worked to uncover as part of their struggle for gender justice. Along with these gender stereotypes, *Canada: A People’s History* also promulgates racial stereotypes. The next chapter examines the manner in which Whiteness and Aboriginality is represented in the episode “Taking the West.”

CHAPTER 5

AND THE SETTLERS SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH - WHITENESS AND ABORIGINALITY IN “TAKING THE WEST”

Mythologies or national stories are about a nation's origins and history. They enable citizens to think of themselves as part of a community, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation. The story of the land as shared and as developed by enterprising settlers is manifestly a racial story. Through claims to reciprocity and equality, the story produces European settlers as the bearers of civilization while simultaneously trapping Aboriginal people in the pre-modern, that is, before civilization has occurred. (Razack, 2002, p. 2)

The Frontier Myth

I concur with Joyce Green's comments that we need to own all of our history instead of “perpetuating the myth of White settlers creating civilization in uncharted wilderness” (Green, 1995, p. 98) and that we need to understand the wealth of Canada has been accumulated at the expense of Aboriginal people, through governments acting on non-Aboriginal people's behalf. *Canada: A People's History* avoids directly naming colonization of the Aboriginal people by White people and their government. While the series does not use the term colonialism to refer to White-Aboriginal relations, the term is used, disparagingly, when referring to the way the British government, and later the Canadian government, treated White settlers. The boxed set, when referring to the events leading up to the Rebellion of 1837, has the following text: “Fired with a passion for justice and liberty, Canadian reformers take on their colonial masters.” In “Taking the West,” the White settlers on the prairies in the 1880s are aggrieved because “the West is treated like a colony by distant Ottawa.” But nowhere is this term used to describe the British and Canadian governments' treatment of Aboriginal people. By not doing this, *Canada: A People's History* does not allow Canadians to own all of our history.

While the series does present a more sympathetic view of Aboriginal people than histories of the past, in my reading, the portrayal is that of the frontier myth described by

Elizabeth Furniss. She argues that the frontier myth involves using mythic icons such as the “pioneers” or the “empty wilderness” and is relayed through “the standard narrative structure, the binary encounter of opposites on the frontier, and the outcome of absolute conquest” (Furniss, 1999, p. 19). Furniss writes that while the frontier myth is more frequently used to affirm colonial expansion, it is flexible, and can be used to contest the practices of colonial expansion. These latter formulations often “romanticize the noble savage and lament his or her total destruction by the forces of European expansion and settlement” (Furniss, 1999, p. 19). In both cases, the result is the same: absolute conquest. I find that *Canada: A People’s History* vacillates between these two tellings of the myth.

While *Canada: A People’s History* does not avoid the horrendous impact that the actions of government and its representatives had on Aboriginal people, I find that it relays it in a manner that lessens the culpability of White people. One example is the way that the handling of rations for the starving Aboriginal people on the prairies in the 1880s is portrayed. The narrator says that “Rations are continually reduced, and are distributed every other day, a policy the Indian agents call feed them one day, starve them the next. Sir John A. Macdonald approves.” The phrase “rations are continually reduced” is presented in the passive form, which removes the doer of this action. There is no indication of who reduced the rations. The next sentence tells us that Macdonald approved of this policy, but, again, there is no one identified actually making the decision or acting to carry it out. This is in contrast to Macdonald’s own words which follow: “I have reason to believe that, as a whole, the agents are doing all that they can by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation to reduce the expense.” In Macdonald’s words, the agents are identified as the ones who are refusing to give food to the Aboriginals, and he identifies the reason. Through the language choices the makers of *Canada: A People’s History* have made here, the actions of the White government officials are obscured, and the harshness softened. The result of these actions, however, are that “between 1880 and 1885, an estimated 10% of the Plains Indians die of malnutrition and disease,” and a Winnipeg reporter writes that “the bodies of the dead were strung up in trees as is the Indian custom. Spring found some 50 or more ghastly

corpses dangling from trees.” It seems to me that the government’s actions are what should be described as ghastly.

Battle for the West: Crowfoot, Riel and Macdonald

Crowfoot is presented as a man who once had power, but now does not. The portrayal of Crowfoot is unidimensional; all the words selected to be those spoken by him in the episode are related to being powerless in the face of the influx of White people. The first time that the narrator mentions him, he is referred to as “a powerful Blackfoot chief” but this is qualified later in the same sentence when he is described as now facing “an enemy he could not defeat”: whiskey. When his words are presented, it is to say how “powerless before this evil” the Blackfoot are, and that they are “unable to resist the temptation to drink.” The next few times he speaks, it is about the “poor Blackfeet starving” and their need of farm implements in order to make the transition to agriculture. In keeping with the frontier myth, he is presented as the antagonist “the main threat” to Macdonald, the protagonist. The narrator says that the government brings Crowfoot to Winnipeg “in an effort to intimidate him.” It works, as Crowfoot says, “It is useless to rise up against the Whites. They are as plentiful as the flies in the summertime.” A short time later, after rations are increased, Crowfoot pledges loyalty to the Canadian government, thus “a full-scale Indian uprising has been avoided.” This feeds into the myth that Canada was settled peaceably through agreements with the First Nations people rather than by military conquest.

Although *Canada: A People’s History* relays that “conditions are ripe for an explosion in the Northwest: dashed hopes of the settlers, starvation and desperation among the Indians, the 1885 Rebellion, as the series calls it, is presented as being the fault of Louis Riel. To start with, referring to it as “rebellion” is a language choice made by the makers of *Canada: A People’s History*, and they use the word 24 times in the “Taking the West” episode. The Northwest Resistance is the term used by many other sources, including Darren Prefontaine and Leah Dorion. In a footnote to their article “The Metis and the Spirit of Resistance” they discuss the terms “resistance” and “rebellion”:

Resistance: “The act or an instance of resisting; refusal to comply.” (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998). Resistance is a term, which has positive connotations. One needs only think of the Free French Forces under General Charles DeGaulle

during the Second World War to appreciate this fact. Because this term is positive, Aboriginal people in North America and throughout the World, have begun to describe their ancestors' struggles against Europeans as just "resistances" against genocidal or near genocidal policies. For instance, the Metis of Western Canada refer to the North-West Resistance rather than "Rebellion," and First Nations groups across the continent refer to Pontiac's, Tecumseh's or Sitting Bull's Resistances.

Rebellion: "Open resistance to authority, esp. organized armed resistance to an established government" (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998). For instance, in Canadian history, there were events, which have been called the Upper and Lower Canadian Rebellions (1837-38) and the Metis-led Red River (1869-70) and Northwest Rebellions (1885). In all these cases, groups of people "rebelled" against distant government authority in London and Ottawa. Rebellion is a term, which generally has negative connotations in that these uprisings are almost always put down, and the insurgents, marginal people, are usually depicted as pawns, and exploited by a group of elites for less than altruistic ends. (Prefontaine & Dorion, 2003, pp. 2-3)

In keeping with the argument put forward by Prefontaine and Dorion, I will use the term resistance.

The narrator in *Canada: A People's History* makes several references to Riel being the central reason for the resistance. Referring to Riel's exile to the United States, the narrator says that "the self-proclaimed defender of the Metis people will not see his beloved Northwest for nearly a decade. When he does, Canada will be thrown into the greatest political crisis of the young country's history." Riel is referred to as being "the catalyst that will transform discontent into rebellion" and "the catalyst uniting all the dissident groups in Saskatchewan," and the resistance is called "Riel's rebellion." In reference to the uproar caused in Quebec and Ontario over the trial of Riel, the narrator says that "even in defeat, Riel has the power to tear the country apart," and after Riel is hanged, "Macdonald now realizes that Riel will continue to haunt him." The statements imply that without Riel, no resistance would have occurred, and that he alone is responsible for the political crisis.

Macdonald is the protagonist in this version of the frontier myth. His first appearance in the story is when he responds to "reports of Americans streaming into his new territory." The language the narrator and Macdonald use to describe his actions regarding this are strong and decisive. Macdonald says that "we must take immediate and vigorous steps to counteract them," and the narrator tells us that he "orders" the North

West Mounted Police to march west as he “intends to keep the Americans out.” In order to let the audience know that Macdonald is elected into office after “scandal had toppled his government,” a snippet of a song praising Macdonald is played: “The man we honour sails the ship, the staunch and noble ship of state. His name is on the nation’s lip and all who know him call him great.” The narrator then says that “the old chieftain is back...swept back into power.” Throughout the episode, Macdonald’s viewpoint continues. Things are presented as belonging to him: “his new territory,” “Macdonald’s uneasy elements,” “Macdonald’s railway,” and “Sir John A. Macdonald’s dream of a Canadian railway stretching from sea to sea,” which in the final segment is changed to “the great dream,” which implies that now everyone shares this dream.

Macdonald is clearly the winner in this recounting of the battle for the West. But, in order to accomplish this, Macdonald wields his power in a ruthless manner. In 1884, before Riel’s return to the Northwest, Macdonald approves the withholding of rations to the Aboriginals on the prairies to, in his words, “reduce the expense.” In 1886, when Crowfoot meets his train near Calgary to ask for food, Macdonald “refers all questions about rations to the territory’s lieutenant governor....There will be no renegotiations of the treaties.” Referring to the Northwest Resistance, Macdonald says, “With respect to the character given to the outbreak, we have certainly made it assume large proportions in the public eye. This has been done, however, for our own purposes, and I think wisely done.” After Riel surrenders, and the trial for Riel is being planned, Macdonald takes two actions to ensure that Riel will hang. This “cannot be guaranteed under Canadian law, so he resorts to an ancient British charge of high treason. It proscribes only one penalty: death.” His other action is to move the trial from Winnipeg, where half the jury could be composed of Metis, to Regina, where no such provision exists. While this portrayal of Macdonald’s use of power shows Macdonald to be a ruthless manipulator of the political and legal systems, I also see this ruthlessness as presenting a chilling message: if you go up against the prevailing power structure, you will pay with your life. By the conclusion to the “Taking the West,” this manipulation of power is forgotten, and the narration pays homage to Macdonald’s greatness: “Canada’s founding prime minister helped forge a country from a continent-sized wilderness and a handful of disparate colonies.”

The Ordinary People in *Canada: A People's History*: Portraits of Aboriginals and Settlers

The series contains the stories of ordinary Canadians. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, this is accomplished by grafting these stories onto the traditional story of the big name stars of history. At times, the representation of Metis people presents them in a sympathetic way and shows how some White settlers agreed with their cause. The only ordinary Aboriginal person mentioned by name is a Metis man, Louis Goulet, who grew up in a Metis community on the Red River. He appears four times throughout the episode, and his story is first presented in the context of Winnipeg being the gateway to the western frontier for English-speaking Protestant pioneers. In Goulet's words, "Newcomers were eagerly sowing racial and religious conflict. These emigres from Ontario looked as if their one dream in life was to make war on the Catholic Church and anyone who spoke French. The latest arrivals were looking to control everything." Later in the episode, the narrator relays that the federal government issued the Metis scrip coupons for 160 acres when Manitoba joined Confederation, but that the "impoverished Metis sell much of the land to speculators for a fraction of its value." Goulet's story does not directly refer to this, but the next time that he appears in the storyline, it is several years later and he is living in Saskatchewan. He speaks about attending a meeting where Metis and White settlers agree to unite in their struggle with the federal government.

Goulet's involvement in the Resistance is not made clear in this representation. He speaks about witnessing the attack at Frog Lake, but his voice does not present any further comments about the Resistance. The narrator says, "After the fall of Batoche, police and militia round up anyone suspected of taking part in the rebellion, including Will Jackson and Louis Goulet." The narrator informs the audience what happens to the others rounded up. Riel and was found guilty and hanged. Eight Indians were hanged and another 50 Indians were sentenced to prison terms. Will Jackson, a White supporter of Riel, was found not guilty due to insanity. Even though we have been following Louis Goulet's story throughout the episode, we do not hear what happens to him. He and Will Jackson are the only two people mentioned by name as being "rounded up" by the police

and the militia because they were “suspected of taking part in the rebellion.” Will Jackson’s trial is given considerable coverage, but Goulet’s story is left dangling, and he is forgotten in this representation, in much the same way as the Metis were forgotten by others after their defeat at Batoche.

While the ordinary White people have names and use their own voices to tell their stories, this is not the case, with the exception of Louis Goulet, for Aboriginal people. In the only re-enactment with ordinary Aboriginal people, other than battle scenes, six Aboriginal people huddle in the cold outside a building, and then enter to receive rations from a White man. They do not speak, as, presumably, they left no record of their version of events. Instead, it is the voices of the narrator and John A. Macdonald, who did write down his thoughts on the matter, which accompany the images:

Narrator: Rations are continually reduced, and are distributed every other day. A policy the Indian agents call “feed them one day, starve them the next.” Sir John A. Macdonald approves.

Macdonald: I have reason to believe that, as a whole, the agents are doing all that they can by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation to reduce the expense.

In discussing the portrayal of the native, Hall (2003) argues that this is a double, contradictory process, with a good and bad side, reflective of the ambivalent “double vision of the White eye through which they are seen” (p. 92). The good side is represented as being noble and dignified (in a primitive way); the bad side is represented as being dishonest and cunning, and at times, savage and barbaric. Both of these representations reflect the native as being defined by a closeness to nature. Weedon (1997) concurs that primitivism fixes the nature of the White world’s Other, presenting non-Whites as closer to nature, more authentic, more intuitive, or more physical.

In “Taking the West,” the “good” side of Aboriginal people is portrayed through their spirituality and their closeness to nature. Throughout the episode, they receive signs from the natural world about their relations with White people. In the episode’s beginning, in 1863, White missionaries remove a sacred stone that the Blackfoot, the Blood, and the Cree worship and through which, a male voice tells us, they “relay messages to the Creator.” The narrator tells us that “without their sacred stone, the medicine men predict disasters of pestilence, famine, and war. The apocalypse begins

three years later.” In 1876, just before Treaty 6 negotiations, the narrator tells us that “a meteor was seen passing through the sky. Many see this as a warning not to take gifts in exchange for land given to them by the Creator.” In 1885, just prior to the battle at Duck Lake, an unusual display of northern lights appeared. Starblanket, a Cree chief interprets this: “Look, the light is red. Prepare to learn of pestilence and the shedding of blood when the ghost dance is red. Misery is at hand.” These examples all represent Aboriginal people as being close to nature and reading the signs that nature discloses. However, the only examples of Aboriginal people’s closeness to nature shown in “Taking the West” reinforce the inevitability that Aboriginal people will be a defeated people, and White people will prevail.

The language used in presenting violence perpetrated by White people against Aboriginal people and violence perpetrated by Aboriginal people against White people minimizes the violence of White people and presents the bad side of the “Other” as described by Hall and Weedon. “Taking the West” begins with discussion of the American whiskey traders and other Americans moving north from Montana onto the Canadian prairies in the early 1870s. Conspicuously absent is any mention of the Cypress Hills Massacre in which a group of American wolf hunters, searching for the people who had stolen some horses, attacked an Assiniboine encampment, killing at least twenty men, women, and children (Goldring, 1973). Later in the episode, in describing the Frog Lake Massacre, the narrator states, “The warriors loot the settlement. Ignoring Big Bear’s pleas, they murder nine settlers, including two priests.” Active verbs are used to indicate that it was the warriors who carried out the looting and murdering. In contrast, passive verbs are used when the narrator describes what happens to these warriors: “Another gallows is erected. Eight Indians, six of them warriors from Big Bear’s band are executed for murders committed during the rebellion. They are hanged at Fort Battleford.” There are no people presented as being responsible for causing these deaths.

The portrayal of Canadian troops sent out to put down the rebellion is evocative of Victorian adventure stories described by Razack, which were tales of White male heroes’ journeys to nineteenth century Canada and their adventures in the Canadian wilderness and with the “wild Indians.” They partake in the rough life of the frontier, but

return home to civilization and their women. By moving between his own “civilized” space and the space of the racialized Other, the hero engages in a “risky venture from which he returns unscathed” (Razack, 2002, p. 14), and is assured of his relative power over those who are not able to move between spaces. In *Canada: A People’s History*, young men in Ontario “eager to defend their country, rush to the drill halls” in anticipation of “epic battles and great victories.” They are feted as heroes upon their return, and, in Macdonald’s words, “Canada is delirious with enthusiasm upon the return of our volunteers.”

While the White settlers face natural hardships – “plagues of grasshoppers, devastating prairie fires, unexpected killing frosts” – these are presented as “almost impossible hardships,” and the settlers are disappointed, frustrated, but not defeated by a lack of responsiveness from the government. The ordinary person whose story is presented, Harriet Neville, and her husband are “nearly bankrupt,” and she says that “now we were “almost at the end of our resources.” These qualifiers present their situation as difficult, but they are not without hope for improved circumstances. This portrayal contrasts with that of the First Nations people who are presented as being completely defeated.

Canada: A People’s History’s portrayal does present some of the complexities of race relations in the Northwest. In 1884, the Settlers’ Union, made up of White settlers with grievances against the government in Ottawa, “invites the Metis to join them in a united front” drafting “resolutions outlining their common grievances.” They agree to work together in dealing with the federal government, an alliance that lasts as long as the negotiations with the government are non-violent. The alliance ends when violence erupts between the Metis and police. Near the end of the episode, after the Resistance has been put down, Johnny McDougall, a White settler and merchant says “The Hudson’s Bay Company had no right to sell this country. It belonged to the Indians, and the government, since getting their country, has not treated them right.” While *Canada: A People’s History* includes mention of the alliances and sympathies between White and Aboriginal people in the Northwest, the language that it uses to describe different groups of people privileges White people. Throughout the episode, traders, settlers, and

homesteaders are often marked by the adjective White (used 22 times), but in the last segment, the race marker is removed, and they are referred to as “new homesteaders” or “the settlers” who establish “pioneering towns” while “Plains Indians,” “Indians,” “Blackfoot,” and “Metis” are the terms used to describe Aboriginal people. White has become invisible, what Weedon describes as “an unmarked neutral category, a norm which is equivalent to being human” (1999, p. 54), invisible as a race on the prairies, and the marked bodies, the “Others” are the Aboriginal people.

In the final segment, White settlers are presented as being victorious. The ordinary settler/merchant, Johnny McDougall, whose story is traced throughout the episode, “becomes mayor of Edmonton and one of its earliest millionaires.” The other White settlers “set down roots and prosper.” In contrast, Aboriginal people are portrayed as the losers in the frontier myth. Crowfoot and his children die, and the Metis “fare no better. They bury their dead and their hopes at the Batoche cemetery.” In the introduction to the episode, the narrator describes Canada as “a country which will become the shores of hope for millions.” According to *Canada: A People’s History*, hope is available only to settlers, and not to the displaced Aboriginal people.

Portrayal of the Land: Representing Entitlement

The title of the episode, “Taking the West,” comes from the line: “For the young nation of Canada, taking the West is the key to a country that will stretch from sea to sea.” I am intrigued by the choice of this phrase for the title. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998) has 64 entries for the verb “take,” and the connotations in the definitions vary widely. One meaning presents the action of taking the land in rather neutral terms – “gather into one’s hands or possession,”– which in this context implies that the land was just lying there available for the taking while another meaning – “deprive or rid a person of a thing; steal, seize, carry away”– implies that the land was taken through force. While many people would argue that the last meaning more accurately describes the land transfer from Aboriginal to White control in Canada, I find that the first definition presented here describes *Canada: A People’s History’s* representation as, from the outset, “Taking the West” presents Europeans as entitled to

the land in Canada. “Taking the West” is the first episode of the second season of broadcast, so it begins with a second season special opening. The narrator states, “Tonight the English and French networks of the CBC continue the first history of Canada for the television age. It is a story which has seen a vast continent of First Nations become the battlefield of rival empires.” According to this narration, First Nations people are swept aside and their claim to the land is ignored as rival European empires – French and English – battle over the right to the land.

One way that European claim to the land is made in *Canada: A People’s History* is the portrayal of the Canadian flag which, until 1965, was the Union Jack or the Red Ensign. The flag is used selectively in “Taking the West,” appearing only when ownership of land is being discussed. Accompanying the oral text describing American whiskey traders building forts in “Blackfoot territory,” is an image of a fort with an American flag flying atop it. A few sentences later, this land is now described as “Macdonald’s new territory,” and he sends out police and an emissary, who travels in a wagon with a Union Jack prominently displayed. When the narrator discusses the use of promotional posters to encourage eastern Canadians to take up homesteading on the prairies, the camera pans across the poster and zooms in on the Union Jack drawn on the poster, giving it a full-screen viewing. In the representation of treaty negotiations between First Nations and Canadian government officials, two Union Jacks are given a predominant place in the frame. When the government troops arrive in the West to put down the Metis, a full-screen Union Jack is displayed just before the images of soldiers, horses, and carts are shown. In scenes in eastern Canada, the flag is shown only outside a recruitment hall for soldiers and in street demonstrations supporting the hanging of Riel. In the series epilogue, accompanying the narrator’s words “the homelands of the First Peoples” is an image of Aboriginal people around a drum. Predominately displayed are the Union Jack and the Maple Leaf; two other flags in the background are obscured. While the words “legacy and land” are spoken, the camera pans in to a close up shot of the leaves of a maple tree, which is evocative of the image on the Canadian flag. The flag is representative of European presence and their right to control the land.

Participants in the Carlton symposium on *Canada: A People's History* (McKay et al, 2002) discuss the significance of the portrayal of the land in the series. Kristina Guiguet notes that the representation contains epic images which “carry the idea of ‘Canada – the Land.’” The series is full of landscapes with huge wide horizontal lines, very often with a train on it, under an immense sky.” I see this as certainly true of the “Taking the West” episode. In using these images as the iconic landscape of Canada, Ian McKay argues that Euro-Canadians are symbolically claiming the land. I find that the boxed set contains a similar image staking a similar symbolic claim. At the bottom of each of the 16 images is the same image: a black silhouette of an evergreen forest upon which the title of the series is superimposed. The word “Canada” is four times as large as the words “A People’s History,” connecting the iconic landscape image with the notion of Canada and the myth that Canada was an empty wilderness prior to European settlement.

In “Taking the West,” this myth is reinforced through a number of examples. Macdonald is reportedly concerned when he receives reports of Americans “streaming into his new territory” as he had “seen the Americans take land from Mexico and Great Britain.” Macdonald has an “ambitious plan to populate the West with White settlers.” Johnnie McDougall is one such settler, and he writes that he looks forward to the time when “those vacant, fertile lands will be settled upon, producing the crops they were capable of yielding.” The narrator informs us that “Pamphlets sent by the millions throughout Canada and Europe declare the opening of the Canadian West and promise unlimited opportunity.” The narration further promulgates the notion of a vast unpopulated prairie with the following: “In 1881, the Canadian West is still one of the most isolated places to live in North America,” but “the railway promises to make travelling in the West easy; it will tame the prairie wilderness.”

Canada: A People's History portrays only a partial picture of treaty negotiations and the subsequent treaty relationship between Aboriginal people and the government of Canada. Missing from this picture is any motivation of the Canadian government to acquire land or any direct reference to what the Canadian government received through the treaties. The treaties are presented as something that were unilaterally requested by

Aboriginals: the narrator says that “The Blackfoot, Blood, and Peigan plead for a treaty to protect them from the intruding settlers.” While “Taking the West” does mention the government’s National Policy – its three-pronged approach to prosperity through a protective tariff on imports, a transcontinental railway, and western settlement – there is no mention of the government’s need to acquire title to the land in order to pursue this. As Green (1995) points out:

The National Policy could not have been conceived or implemented without some official, high-level political consideration of the fact that the lands in question were controlled by Aboriginal nations, including the Metis. The railway would go through Aboriginal lands; the consortium building the railway would be given Aboriginal land not only for right-of-way but as payment for their endeavour; and the settlers would be given Aboriginal land to homestead. (p. 91)
The Canadian government’s approach to treaty making in this telling of the myth

is one of benevolence. In 1876, Lieutenant Governor Alexander Morris is dispatched to negotiate Treaty Number 6 in order to prevent “unrest among the Indians.” Morris says that he sees the Indians “receiving money from the Queen’s commissioners to purchase clothing for their children....and retaining their old mode of living with the Queen’s gift in addition.” The narrator then says that “the promises of money and gifts are enticing.” Food is presented as a key issue, with the promise of food in times of famine and assistance in the transition to agriculture as significant points.

The only mention of specific amounts of land in “Taking the West” is when Poundmaker, during the negotiation of Treaty 6, says that the governor’s offer to the Cree is that 640 acres, one mile square, will be given for each family. The amount of land transferred to the Canadian government through Treaty 6 is “an area of 121,000 square miles, be the same more or less, to have and to hold the same to Her Majesty the Queen and Her successors forever” (Treaty no. 6, n.d.), but this is not stated in the episode. What is discussed is only what the Aboriginal people got from the treaties – food, assistance and reserves. Thus, in this portrayal, treaty benefits appear to accrue only to First Nations people, and not to the Canadian government who gained the peace and goodwill of the First Nations in addition to control of the land, and to the White settlers who received access to farmland and resources.

The oral text in “Taking the West” states that “they sealed the agreement with a prayer to the Creator, promising to honour the treaty and share the land and their future with the White man.” Accompanying this, the camera pans across the text of the treaty containing the phrase “signed by the chiefs” and their names. The White people’s sealing of the agreement or promise to honour the treaty is not in this story. According to the narrator, the chiefs believe that “they have signed the treaty as equals, but they are wrong” as the government has passed the Indian Act, which will control their lives, and that they “will soon learn the real meaning of the treaties.” The use of absolutes in the phrases “they are wrong” and the “real meaning” presents the Canadian government’s view of the treaties as the only valid one, and implies that the First Nations chiefs were naive to believe that their viewpoint had any merit.

The conclusion of “Taking the West” states that “the massive plains and graceful valleys of the Northwest Territories have been taken at great cost, but now stand ready to play their part in a nation that stretches from sea to sea.” The passive construction “have been taken at great cost” does not describe who took what from whom, nor does it describe what the cost was to whom. It alludes to the fact that someone lost or paid in some way, but it glosses over the taking of the land. The oral text of the conclusion goes on to say that “the Northwest, which only 20 years ago belonged to the Prairie Indians, is now home to a new people.” According to this, Indians belong in the past; no mention is made that the old people – the Indians – are still in the Northwest. The Prairie Indians are discounted as insignificant now that the land is under the control of the Canadian government. They have become invisible in the present, a romantic part of the past. *Canada: A People’s History* is part of the discourse of “colonial violence that has not only enabled White settlers to secure the land but to come to know themselves as entitled to it” (Razack, 2002, p. 129).

Understanding my own Whiteness

The portrayal of settler entitlement to the land and the invisibility of Whiteness in *Canada: A People’s History* is certainly reflective of my experience growing up in Saskatchewan. All four of my grandparents were Saskatchewan homesteaders, who

arrived during and shortly after the time period portrayed in “Taking the West.” My paternal grandmother arrived with members of her family in 1885, and family lore has it that the train they were on was put on a siding as the train carrying Louis Riel passed by. My early understanding of Saskatchewan history was based on stories of White pioneer struggles to tame the wild prairies and convert it to an agricultural land. While I was growing up, I lived in an area of Saskatchewan not close to any reserves, so Aboriginal people were almost absent from my community. I grew up without being conscious of the White privilege that my place in my society afforded me.

I did not learn about any of the government’s assimilationist policies towards Aboriginal people in school. I first heard about the pass system that the Canadian government used for First Nations peoples from a co-worker, an English immigrant who had spent time in South Africa. I was appalled that the Canadian government would so mistreat a group of people on the basis of race, but I didn’t connect it to the tales of my pioneering ancestors or my place in Saskatchewan society. In the early 1990s, when I instructed an employment preparation program for women in conflict with the law, all but one of my students were Aboriginal. When they discussed where they were from, and they mentioned their home reserve (most of which I was not familiar with at the time), I realized that there were two maps of Saskatchewan: the one that I had grown up with towns named after White men, and the one that my students knew, dotted with the reserves that were created as part of the treaty process. I started wondering what other unexamined assumptions I held and what else I couldn’t see. Over the last 15 years, the discourse about Aboriginal-White relations in Canada has expanded considerably and there are now many published accounts of the collective and personal effects of the Canadian government’s Indian Act and policies of implementing it. As well, Whiteness as a construct has become part of the discourse of race. I have begun to understand that racism is relational; if one group is discriminated against, another group is privileged. In Saskatchewan, as a White person, I am afforded privileges that Aboriginal people are not.

In coming to terms with my own White privilege, I find the words that Barb Thomas, a White woman involved in anti-racist work, writes in a letter to her daughter to

be useful: “You are not responsible for wrongs committed before you were born, but you can’t escape the legacy of those wrongs...You are responsible for what you do now. In this regard, there’s no such thing as ‘doing nothing’”(Thomas, 1994, p. 171). As an educator, I believe that I have a responsibility to address this both in the classroom, through the content and processes that I use with the students I work with, and through my input into institutional policies and procedures of the institution where I work, examining them for racial bias and working for change.

This thesis grew out of my search for suitable content to use in teaching Social Studies to adult learners. My initial dissatisfaction with *Canada: A People’s History* has been deepened and broadened by the Critical Discourse Analysis that I performed and by the reading of the series that this analysis provided me. The next chapter examines the connection between the representation of Canadian identity that the series offers to viewers and the society in which it is constructed and consumed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Discourse in Society

Discourses are neither simply a product or side-effect of social structure nor one of individuals. They are embedded in that structure and are part of it, and at the same time serve to structure our identity and personal experience (Burr, 1995, p. 111).

Canada: A People's History has become part of the prevailing discourse of Canada's history. According to a CBC press release from September 1, 2001, it was a broadcast success, with a viewership of approximately two million Canadians for each episode. The series is available to the public as VHS and DVD sets, and by September, 2001, the original run of 20,000 boxed sets of the first five episodes had sold out. The English edition of the first volume of the companion book was on the Canadian best-seller list for more than 20 weeks. The CBC projected that by the end of 2001, more than 85% of all Canadian schools will be able to access the series for classroom use. In addition to its original airing in 2000-2001, episodes from the series continue to be shown on CBC Newsworld, and "beginning in February of 2004, *Canada: A People's History* will deliver the Canadian story to Omni viewers in their language of comfort including Chinese, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Russian" (New Audience, 2004). The series has won numerous awards, including the Gemini Award from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television for Best Documentary Series. For his work in communications, including his role as executive producer of *Canada: A People's History*, Mark Starowicz was named Canadian of the Year by the Canadian Club in June 2001 (CBC, n.d.) and was appointed officer of the Order of Canada in July 2004 (Order of Canada, 2004).

As Foucault (1980) points out, power is dispersed throughout many sites. The makers of *Canada: A People's History* have exercised their power in the making and marketing of the series. The series does attempt to include the stories of people who were

previously left out of the national story, and I commend the filmmakers for their attempt to create a more inclusive story. However, as Anne Bishop (2005) writes, there are two assumptions which are often present when people are dealing with oppressive behaviour: the dualistic notion that oppression is either present or it is not, and the idea that, when one is deciding whether or not oppression is present, intention counts more than impact” (p. 120). In regard to the second of these, I do not believe that producers, writers, historians, and others who were involved in the making of the series deliberately intended to produce a television series that is sexist and racist. However, the assumption that oppression cannot be present where people do not intend to discriminate is a false assumption. Fairclough (1989) argues that many texts which reinforce hegemonic culture are created through a failure to examine the assumptions which underlie this culture. I suggest that this may be what underlies *Canada: A Peoples's History's* representation of gender, race, and class.

It presents commonsense assumptions about gender roles through its emphasis on passivity and emotions in its portrayal of femininity, and through its emphasis on conquest, both over nature and over other men and women, in its portrayal of masculinity. The series presents commonsense assumptions about race through its portrayal of Aboriginal people as a doomed people subject to government cruelty, and its portrayal of White people, through their enterprise, as being entitled to the land. The relationship of gender, race and class as represented in *Canada: A People's History* portrays power relationships. In this representation, men are more valued than women, and, therefore, men have more social power than women; ordinary White people and the White leader Macdonald are stronger and more resilient than ordinary Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal leaders Crowfoot and Riel, and therefore, White people have more social power than Aboriginal people.

Canada: A People's History presents itself to Canadians as our story. Although it has incorporated some viewpoints and voices which have been historically absent from the history studied in schools and the history of which we have built our national mythology, this inclusiveness is heavily outweighed by the relentless sense of authoritative inevitability, imbued through the events and the first-hand sources selected

and the pervasive all-seeing, all-knowing narrator. The series, using Althusser's (1971) analysis of ideology, "hails" people and "recruits" subjects. By supposedly relaying the ordinary stories of ordinary Canadians, the audience of ordinary Canadians is invited to see themselves in this history. Men are hailed through the use of masculinized stories and images, and women are hailed through the voice of the female narrator. In "Taking the West," Aboriginal people are hailed through the inclusion of First Nations and Metis people in the story line.

Antonio Gramsci uses the term hegemony to describe the way in which social groups struggle to obtain the consent of other groups in both thought and practice:

Hegemony... is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations....The State does have and request consent, but it also 'educates' this consent" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 80 & p. 259).

Canada: A People's History is part of educating consent to which Gramsci and Althusser refer. Through the language and images that the filmmakers have chosen to portray Canada's history, part of which I have analysed in this thesis, commonsense assumptions and myths which serve the interests of patriarchy, capitalism, and White privilege are presented as "our" history. To purport this to be all there is to our story as Canadians is to misrepresent the complexity of our past, and to encourage viewers to accept society as it is because it could be no other way. Because the overarching structure of the series presents the past as something that just happened to people, it discourages its viewers from considering the idea put forward by Kingwell (2000), that the "future is created, bit by bit, out of our political desires and choices" (p. 221).

Canada: A People's History is connected to power in the society in which it is produced and consumed: present day Canada. By devaluing women and Aboriginal people in its representation, *Canada: A People's History* lends legitimacy to the systemic discrimination against women and Aboriginal people in Canadian society. Gender and race are two of the components of class formation which have real, material effects for people; as Kirat Kaur (2005) points out, "class is lived through race and gender" (Kaur, 2005, p. 5). Access to corporate and government power as well as income are indicators

of class. While women are almost half of the Canadian workforce, they hold only 14% of senior management positions, and 2% of CEO positions in Canada's 560 largest corporations (Gender and Poverty Project, 2004). As of November 28, 2005, women made up less than one-quarter of the Members of Parliament in Canada, and less than one-fifth of the members in Saskatchewan's legislature (Nova Scotia Advisory Council, 2005). The relation between gender, race and class in Canada is made concrete through the incomes of people. As previously mentioned, in Canada, women's incomes are only about two-thirds of men's incomes, but Aboriginal women's incomes are only about two-thirds of non-Aboriginal women's (Amnesty International, 2004).

The other role that *Canada: A People's History* plays in power relations is the manner in which it unquestioningly presents the status quo. It presents past events as inevitable, which people had no control or influence over. Seeing our past portrayed in this manner does not encourage an active citizenry; I would argue that it does the opposite. It encourages people to accept the current situation, rather than challenging it and seeking alternatives.

Resistance

Weedon (1997) writes that "every act of reading is a new production of meaning" (p. 134). My reading of *Canada: A People's History* is, in Hall's terms, an oppositional one. While the makers of the series have the power to create their representation of Canadian identity, this is subject to resistance and contestation. The prevailing discourse is not the only discourse about Canadian identity, and, as elaborated in Chapter 2, many people have challenged the dominant common sense representations of gender, race, and class. As Weedon (1997) points out, "even where feminist discourses lack the social power to realize their versions of knowledge in institutional practices, they can offer the discursive space from which the individual can resist dominant subject positions" (p. 107). My reading of *Canada: A People's History* offers resistance to the subject positions and myths put forward by the series. While the series presents as natural the power imbalances in Canada's past, and by extension, its present, the Critical Discourse Analysis that I have performed has made visible the banal, everyday manner through

which language and images constitute and are constituted through this power. Resistance is a form of power; as Burr (1995) puts it, “power is not a property of any person or group, but is something that you (in theory anybody) can exercise through discourse (p. 71). Through my oppositional reading of *Canada: A People’s History*, I am exercising my agency to analyse it critically and the society in which it is embedded. Just as *Canada: A People’s History* has joined the discourse of Canadian identity, my reading of it has also joined the discourse of Canadian identity. It is a reading influenced by my subject position, and other people from other subject positions will read the series from their standpoint. I do not claim that I have the “true” reading, but rather, using Haraway’s (1991) terminology, it is a “situated knowledge claim” that I make with this thesis. It is “partial, locatable, critical knowledge” (p. 190) which I offer as part of the conversation about national identity.

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APPENDIX A - AUDIO TRANSCRIPT *OF CANADA: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY*
INTRODUCTION AND EPILOGUE

Series Introduction

[Musical background throughout introduction]

Train whistle and train noise

M Voice: Canada: A People's History – proudly presented with the corporate partnership of Sun Life Financial and by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

M Director: Action!

Narrator: Tonight the English and French networks of the CBC launch the first history of Canada for the television age. [Explosion noise]

Narrator: This series of documentaries will be broadcast on CBC television and Radio Canada over the next two years, covering our history from the first peoples to the end of the twentieth century. All the events portrayed in this history actually happened. All the people you see actually lived. All the words they speak were spoken or written by them.

F Voice: I was chosen to join a number of others to take a perilous voyage to a new world. I resigned myself to silence, far from my own country.

Narrator: This is the story of thousands like her who found much more than exile. A land of mystery and adventure, [Drums]a story of madmen and visionaries, saints and pirates in a landscape of terrifying beauty. It is the story of the clash of empires, [Cannon boom] of battles to possess a continent. [Explosion noises]

M Voice: Fire!

M Voice: The bombardment and gunfire terrorized the whole town. The women and children in great numbers near the citadel were continually in tears, wailing and praying.

Narrator: It is a land swept by great political movements

M voice: [Gunshot] Would you live and die a slave?

Narrator: forged in the heat of rebellion.[Gunshots and cannon boom]
The story of ordinary people caught up in the great currents of history. But the battlefields of empire become the shores of hope, hope for the adventurous, for the dispossessed, driven by dreams, carried on feverships.

F Voice: My father built a cave in a riverbank, covered it with turf, and there was our apartment. Oh, how fortunate we felt. We would not have traded that root cellar for a royal palace.

Narrator: And it's the story of millions who followed: the families fleeing persecution, the landless seeking land, the abandoned seeking anything. This is the story of how they built a nation that came of age and grew into the world.[Cannon boom] It is the testament of our fathers and mothers. The story that shaped who we are. A dramatic and extraordinary story. Our own.

Series Epilogue

Narrator: The future is not a place. It is not a fixed point on a navigation chart. It is instead an ever-shifting destination constantly changed by the journey itself and by the people who make it. 15,000 years ago the first travellers came to this continent which became the destination for countless generations.

The place where a million epic journeys ended and a million new stories began. Before there was Rome, before Babylon, this land became home to more than 50 nations: peoples with their own languages, laws and gods.

F. Voice: There's a giant who lives in the north. When he blows his breath, violent snowstorms occur. Other spirits live to the east and west. The thunder is the noise of them running across the sky.

Narrator: Four hundred years ago carried by billowing sails from France came the next journey of the adventurers: the landless and the dreamers who would unlock a continent and forge a new world people.

M.Voice Anyone who considers to what extent the Canadiens are alert, joyful, courageous, able to withstand any hardship, that person must also perceive Canada will soon become an extremely powerful country.

[Canon boom]

Narrator: Canada became the battlefield of empires.

M.Voice: Fire!

[Gunshots]

Narrator: It was pulled into a decade of revolution, which unleashed the largest human journey in the continent's history.

F.Voice: I climbed to the top of Chipman's Hill and watched the sails disappear. Although I had not shed a tear throughout all the war, I sat down on the damp moss with my baby in my lap and cried.

[Bagpipes]

Narrator: And they kept coming. The jobless from Scotland. The landless from Ireland. The dispossessed of Europe. And they have been followed ever since by families searching for opportunity and sanctuary. Every strand is still here. This history is still in play. The homelands of the first peoples. The future of the French and the English. The newcomers who have shaped our century. The eternal dynamic with the United States. Language and culture. Legacy and land. Political power and identity. Confederation or secession. Our place in the emerging global constellations. Every story you have seen is still evolving. You are creating it now. There are young people watching now who will retell this story one day informed by their needs, their perspectives and their time. When they do, the voices and the images will be of men, women, and children who are among you now. Whether you know it or not, you are all living an epic drama.

APPENDIX B - AUDIO TRANSCRIPT OF "TAKING THE WEST" EPISODE
BEGINNING

- Narrator: In 1863, Methodist missionaries set out to find an ancient, sacred stone on the vast western plains. The stone is worshiped by the people who live here, the Blackfoot, the Blood, and the Cree. Legends claim it came to earth in a blazing fireball.
- Male Voice: The stone wasn't made by an earth human. It came from the sky. It brought a message from the creator to the people.
- Narrator: The Blackfoot call the land Metawassanane— all that is important to us – and believe that the stone had been sent to protect it. To the missionaries, it is simply a heathen idol to be destroyed.
- Male Voice: The White man said we prayed to false gods. The removal stripped away everything that identified us to Mother Earth. We couldn't relay messages to the Creator anymore. Removal of the stone was a sign of the coming of the White man.
- Narrator: Without their sacred stone, the medicine men predict disasters of pestilence, famine, and war. The apocalypse begins three years later. White traders begin appearing in numbers never seen before, Americans moving north from Montana. At first, their wagon trains bring guns, blankets and cooking utensils to trade for buffalo robes, but soon the trading forts stock mainly whiskey. It is an evil mixture of grain alcohol, chewing tobacco, hot pepper, soap, molasses, and red ink. For whiskey traders like W. C. Gladstone, it is ideal: cheap, addictive, and endlessly profitable.
- Male Voice: Each of us was in charge of a kettle mixed with rum, and every Indian was given a dram of fire water by way of a starter. Speech making followed, washed down by another dram, then another dram, till every man [1 unintelligible syllable] had absorbed five drams and was ripe for business. The week's trade left us with 600 horses and our warehouses very nearly filled. A powerful Blackfoot chief named Crowfoot had fought many battles for his people. But this is an enemy he could not defeat.
- Narrator: A powerful Blackfoot chief named Crowfoot had fought many battles for his people. But this is an enemy he could not defeat.
- Crowfoot: The whiskey brought among us by the traders is fast killing us off. We are powerless before this evil. We are unable to resist the temptation to drink when brought in contact with the White man's water. Our horses, buffalo robes, and other articles of trade go for whiskey.
- Narrator: By the early 1870s, more than a dozen whiskey forts have been built on Blackfoot territory, and that poses a problem not only for Crowfoot. The new Dominion of Canada has just taken control of the vast Northwest, millions of acres stretching from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains. In Ottawa, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald is alarmed by reports of Americans streaming into his new territory.

Macdonald: It is quite evident to me that the United States will do all they can short of war to get possession of the western territory, and we must take immediate and vigorous steps to counteract them.

Narrator: He orders 300 men of the newly- formed North West Mounted Police to march west. Macdonald had seen the Americans take land from Mexico and Great Britain and intends to keep them out of the Canadian Northwest. He also sends a Methodist missionary, Reverend John McDougall to assure Crowfoot that the police come as friends.

McDougall: I told them of the purpose of their coming. Tribal war was to be suppressed, whiskey trading and horse stealing of all kinds were to be done away with. I exhorted British justice and made much of the equality of men in the eyes of the law.

Narrator: Though weakened by alcohol and disease, the Blackfoot are still a powerful military force, but Crowfoot decides that he needs an ally, not a war. He accepts the hand of friendship.

Crowfoot: My brother, your words make me glad. We want peace. What you tell us about this strong power which will govern with good law and treat the Indian the same as the White man makes us glad to hear. My brother, I believe you and am thankful.

Narrator: The North West Mounted Police quickly chased the whiskey traders back to Montana. It is only then that a Mounted Police commander Colonel James MacLeod suggests the government has other intentions.

MacLeod: Today, a very fine old Indian, Crowfoot of the Blackfoot, paid me a visit, and [unintelligible syllable] I shall explain to them general ideas of laws for Whites and Indians and that we do not come to take land. The government will speak to them about the matter first.

Narrator: The arrival of the police is the first step of an ambitious plan to populate the West with White settlers. Soon the first pioneers are moving across the land. There are young men like Johnny McDougall, eager to make the West their home.

McDougall: Often, when lying under the carts during the night as we were camped, we wondered if that day would come in our lifetime when those prairies would be dotted with towns and villages, and those vacant, fertile lands will be settled upon, producing the crops they were capable of yielding.

Narrator: For the young nation of Canada, taking the West is the key to a country that will stretch from sea to sea. For the Indians, the predictions that followed the loss of the sacred stone would all come true within 20 years.