

**'I Think I'm Canadian': Spatial Un-belonging and Alternative Home Making in
Indigenous and Immigrant Prairie Literature**

By

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Abstract

This thesis questions the connection between Indigenous and immigrant Prairie literature, taking six contemporary texts as a case study. Aboriginal texts include Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, Beatrice Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* and Marilyn Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl*. Immigrant narratives discussed are Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Esi Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, and Madeline Coopsammy's *Prairie Journey*. Read alongside one another, these texts demonstrate that Indigenous and immigrant populations *do* express similar concerns through literature, generally having to do with Canadian multiculturalism. Specifically, this project will discuss bodily and linguistic differences from a white, English-speaking 'norm,' home making on the prairies, and story-telling as an alternative indicator of home. This thesis asserts the importance of studying cross-racial literary engagements as they nuance existing discussions of race and space on the prairies and in Canada.

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Introduction

Popular imaginings picture Canada as a seamlessly multicultural nation. Much of this image can be attributed to John Murray Gibbon's seminal book *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (1938), which describes Canada as a 'cultural mosaic,' in opposition to the assimilationist 'cultural melting pot' structure of American society. Yet, Gibbon was not the first to use this mosaic analogy. American travel writer Victoria Hayward wrote of her admiration for the almost Turkish-looking church architecture found in Manitoba, which was integrated into the landscape of maple trees and riverbank bush. Her account describes the Swedish music and Russian chanting one could hear upon entering these buildings on a Sunday morning, writing, "[i]t is indeed a mosaic of vast dimensions and great breadth, essayed on the Prairie" (Day 150). The title of Hayward's book, *Romantic Canada* (1922), aptly articulates the romanticization the mosaic image would soon earn. Kate A. Foster's *Our Canadian Mosaic* (1926), a review of Canadian immigrants compiled for the Dominion Council of the Young Women's Christian Association, became the first written piece "to invoke the Mosaic metaphor in the context of a discussion of Canadian immigration policy and nation-building" (Day 151). Then came Gibbon whose book popularized the metaphor and brought it into academic discourse.

The Canadian Multicultural Act was passed in 1988, fifty years after Gibbon's publications.¹ This formal acknowledgment of a national multicultural policy "has often been celebrated as a unique 'success' by Canadians themselves and touted, across the world, as Canada's ideological gift to less enlightened liberal democracies" (Chariandy 818). Yet academics have been critical of this national policy, suggesting that Canadian ideals and

¹ Canada adopted a multicultural policy in 1971 but it only became an actual law in 1988.

identities based on Gibbon's principles seem incompatible, both historically and as a contemporary reality. Richard J.F. Day's *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (2000) and Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada* (2003) are just two books that express these concerns.

Day explains that multiculturalist rhetoric indicates that "Canada is attempting to become, not a nation-state, but a self-consciously multinational state, in which all nations can seek their enjoyment in possession of a national Thing," which "is universal, it is every Thing. But, as *everything* it is also *nothing* at all" (Day 9; emphasis in original). He asserts that "Canadian multiculturalism presents itself as a new solution to an ancient problem of diversity [...but] is better seen as the most recent mode of *reproduction* and *proliferation* of that problem" (Day 3; emphasis in original). Day believes that multiculturalism has the potential to be a "radical imaginary" but as a policy, it "tends towards management, discipline, and uniformity" and has thus created more individual minority identities (Day 4). The goal of multiculturalism is unity but it paradoxically creates fragmentation. He writes, "To escape the limitations of the modern-colonial nation-state, those who would be Canadians must traverse the fantasy of unity which underlies both the problem of diversity and its solution via state 'recognition' of a system of official identity categories" (Day 4). By official identity categories, Day refers to the ways the nation-state makes citizens identify their racial background, such as on official government forms. Day recognizes the image of a unified nation as a fantasy and asserts that it is only by abandoning this dream that Canada may actually work towards an organic realization of multiculturalism as a 'radical imaginary.'

Similarly, Manning writes, "It has been argued that, while the land provides food and shelter, the landscape provides ideologies. This is certainly the case in Canada, where the

country's 'true north strong and free' asserts itself in the national imaginary as the link to 'Canadian identity'" (Manning 5). This image of Canada as the 'true north' is connected to multiculturalism when one considers the North American slave trade, in which Canada was "constructed in African American mythology as the 'North Star'" (Davis 39). The fact that Canada was a space of freedom for slaves fleeing the United States has contributed to the belief that Canada is a multicultural haven. Yet Canada's relationship with slavery is much more complicated than what this image provides. Not only did Canadian citizens own slaves themselves but "contrary to popular belief, the first underground railroad between the United States and Canada existed not for the emancipation of African-American slaves, but to free slaves held on Canadian territory: between 1788 and 1792, slaves fled from the Canadian provinces to the free northern American states" (Manning 67). Over the past three years, this particular image of Canada as the 'true north strong and free' has specifically manifested on the prairies with the Winnipeg Jets NHL hockey team. After fifteen years without a National Hockey League franchise in Winnipeg, True North Sports and Entertainment purchased and relocated the Atlanta Thrashers. As an act of thanks, 'True North' is screamed at every home hockey game during the Canadian national anthem. While the shouts are the result of the company that brought the NHL back to Winnipeg, this action also demonstrates how a prevalent image of Canadian identity functions in contemporary society and specifically, on the prairies.

Victoria Hayward's "encounter with the Canadian prairies" (Day 149) *first* roots the national multicultural mosaic analogy in Western Canada. As the Winnipeg Jets example demonstrates, the prairies have repeatedly been figured as a microcosm of the nation since Hayward's comments.² As such, studying the prairies reveals insights about the region *and* the

² Another example would be Travel Manitoba's recent advertising campaign, whose slogan reads: "Manitoba: Canada's Heart...Beats"

nation. In her book *Making it Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (1998), Deborah Keahey argues that “the region actually *produces* the nation” (Keahey 160; emphasis in original). Writing literature is an exercise in nation-building and canon formation certainly plays an editorial part in this process. Prairie writers were anxious about regional inclusion in the Canadian literary canon. In order to prove that Western Canadian writing was worthy of being added to this national canon, early critics argued that Prairie literature was cohesive by primarily addressing settler texts.

Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, editors of *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005), draw attention to the residual effects this thought process, regarding regional writing and national canon formation, has had on Prairie literature. By posing the question, “When is the prairie?” (Calder and Wardhaugh 3), Calder and Wardhaugh point to the ahistorical and timeless depiction of Western Canada. They explain that until recently, “reading available historical and literary sources, it has been possible to believe that the Canadian prairies began in 1850 or so, when the beginnings of intensive agricultural practices came to the West” (Calder and Wardhaugh 3). Based on representations of the prairies, one could also believe that the prairies have ended, “or at least that time has ceased to pass here [...] and that we are permanently frozen in a rural, agricultural scene” (Calder and Wardhaugh 3). The editors attribute part of this static and ‘authentic’ prairie image to the first major studies on Western Canadian literature.³ This critical scholarship attempted to develop prairie writing as a field of study but created a limited scope, canonizing the same story that represents the settler moment (Calder and Wardhaugh 4). As Calder and Wardhaugh put it, “[s]ettlement gives meaning to this place” (Calder and Wardhaugh 7). Their collection urges alternative readings of

³ These being Edward McCourt’s *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949), Henry Kriesel’s “The Prairie: A State of Mind” (1968), Laurie Ricou’s *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973) and Dick Harrison’s *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977).

the prairies that forgo existing models of historical and literary engagement that narrowly define the space by this specific moment, settlement. Calder and Wardhaugh explain that “[f]ocussing on questions of *when* rather than questions of *where* allows a reconfiguration of a region usually thought of as fixed” (Calder and Wardhaugh 17). They note that a space can evolve but the past cannot. The ideas explored in their book are relevant to my thesis as I conduct close readings on prairie texts that are outside of the restrictive canon of settler narratives.

Contemporary critics continue to problematize the way the prairies and its literature have been defined by settlement. For example, S. Leigh Matthews’ *Looking Back: Canadian Women’s Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History, and Identity* (2010) reopens a discussion on prairie settlement by providing a female perspective. Matthews’ book directs attention away from men’s agricultural practices and instead, turns to memoirs from prairie women. Matthews looks at these texts “as points of intersection with idealistic images of white, English-speaking women’s participation in prairie land settlement” (Matthews 14). Jenny Kerber has also contributed to the new prairie criticism through ecocritical readings of this space. Her book *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* (2010) argues that traditional depictions of the prairies can either be categorized as a “lost paradise, a promised land, or an unforgiving wasteland” (Kerber 5). Kerber re-reads classic prairie texts, as well as contemporary writers, creating a new dialogue that focuses on alternative readings of the prairie space. Kerber asserts that “we cannot begin to comprehend the myriad ecological challenges that the prairies face today [...] without first examining the impact that particular environmental stories have had on perception of the region” (Kerber 2). Matthews and Kerber are just two critics who continue to expand the conversation on Prairie literature, re-imagining different ways of representing this

space. In doing so, they prove that Prairie literature and criticism is not complete or static, but evolving.

My project aims to participate in this expansion of the field by examining post-settlement Canadian prairie fiction written from Indigenous and immigrant perspectives.⁴ These voices were originally excluded from the Western Canadian canon as a result of this focus on settlement. There has been an encouraging amount of attention directed towards Indigenous and immigrant authors as of late but the works of these two racialized groups have yet to be put in dialogue with one another.⁵ Instead of focusing on one specific set of representations written by a *particular* ethnic group, I will widen the scope to discuss a larger collection of racialized bodies on the prairies, “a Canadian space historically constructed as imaginatively white” (Davis 33). As such, the space marginalizes bodies marked by race, besides what has been considered ‘whiteness,’ a marking rendered invisible. Yet Indigenous and immigrant populations are marginalized for quite opposite reasons, having seemingly occupied Canada for too short or long a time when compared to the homesteader, and thus, have their own particular experiences. However, both groups ultimately identify similar struggles due to their status outside the white

⁴ One of the texts I do a close reading on is Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* which is based on her life and can thus be categorized as a memoir. Hence, my assertion that I will look at fiction is perhaps more accurately described as ‘fictionalized accounts.’ The narratives addressed in this thesis continually question ideas about truth, fiction and authority, in story-telling specifically and representation more generally. Chapter Three of this thesis will explore these questions and Campbell’s text only nuances this discussion.

⁵ Eric Thompson’s article, “Prairie Mosaic: The Immigrant Novel in the Canadian West” (1980) notes that the stories of “ethnic groups and their settlements in the West has been told often in official histories and personal memoirs. But the immigrant novel, as a genre of Prairie writing, has been either ignored or scantily discussed by critics of Canadian literature” (Thompson 1). Thompson’s article is an attempt to shift the conversation from settlement to immigration but his discussion demonstrates that even immigration on the prairies has been traditionally imagined in terms of whiteness, albeit an ‘ethnic’ whiteness. The immigrant novels he discusses are written by ‘ethnic’ white immigrants, such as those people from Iceland, Germany and Ukraine, because the prairies were mostly settled “by peoples of European and North American descent” (Thompson 1). Hence, his conversation still manages to root ideas of immigration in settlement. Only more recently, with the writings of racialized immigrants, has more criticism on immigrant literature in Canada been produced. In terms of an Indigenous perspective in Canada, Renate Eigenbrod notes that Aboriginal literature “gradually became acknowledged in the publishing industry in the early seventies” and that only recently “an increasing amount of literary criticism on Native literature in Canada has been produced” (Eigenbrod 125, 17).

‘norm.’ Discussing these populations at the same time creates a clearer picture of the state of multiculturalism in Canada, at a regional and literary level.

As the epigraph to this thesis suggests, Murasaki’s unconvincing “I think I’m Canadian” (Goto 122), multiculturalism creates confusion over national citizenship. Murasaki is a character in Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, a novel that critiques Canadian multiculturalism from the immigrant point of view. A similar phrase is uttered in Beatrice Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree*, except that it comes from an Aboriginal perspective. Cheryl’s nationality is being questioned by a white woman who is attempting to get Cheryl to articulate her and her sister’s indigeneity. Understanding that this is not a neutral question, Cheryl says, “Oh, I’m sorry. We’re Canadians” (Mosionier 117). Cheryl is not genuinely apologizing but this passage still indicates how racialized subjects are made to feel apologetic for their Canadian citizenship. Murasaki and Cheryl both demonstrate how difficult it is for Indigenous and immigrant subjects to navigate multiculturalism.

Seeing as the presence of Indigenous and immigrant bodies was problematic for white power controlling the nation-state, it makes sense that literature by these populations has only recently received publishing power and critical attention. Indigenous and immigrant writers are largely left out of the canon because they did not make the prairie space *mean* something through settlement.⁶ As a result of Prairie literature being defined by settlement, it is the white male farmer who has claimed a position in the regional psyche, at times seeming like the only representation of a Western Canadian identity. This agricultural figure is intimately connected to an image and idea of home because he engages in homesteading. As Keahey puts it, “‘The home place’ in Prairie usage is a synonym for ‘homestead.’ It suggests that home is singular and

⁶ Furthermore, early Prairie literature often represents Aboriginals as either obstacles to settlement and thus nation-building, or as vanishing.

locatable – pinpointable – in space” (Keahey 3). The literature has constructed homesteading as a labour-intensive process that makes the individual work against nature and landscape, conquering the prairie space to prove his belonging to the region and nation. Indigenous and immigrant populations have not created a home in this one limited idea of home making.⁷ The writers I look at critique settlement as the only way to create a home on the prairies, articulating alternative ways to feel a sense of regional and national belonging.

The category of ‘the immigrant’ is often conflated with ‘the settler’ and ‘the homesteader,’ as will become evident in Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*. Alison Hopwood tries to clarify this tangled connection in her Introduction to Laura Goodman Salverson’s *The Viking Heart*. She explains that up until the original 1923 publication of Salverson’s novel, literature about Western Canada “had dealt almost exclusively with English-speaking immigrants from Britain, Ontario, or the United States” (Hopwood ix). Hopwood notes the one exception to be Ralph Connor’s *The Foreigner; A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909).⁸ As mentioned before, the prairies have been constructed as a white space and therefore, bodies marked by anything other than ‘whiteness’ are marginalized and confined to certain spaces. Therefore, while these people moving to Western Canada from Britain and the United States are technically immigrants, they do not face the same level of adversity as immigrants from other countries in that their bodies are not racialized.⁹ Madeline Coopsammy’s poem “Invisible Woman,” demonstrates the difference between ‘ethnic’ European immigrants, such as those depicted in Connor and Salverson’s novels, and those immigrants with racialized bodies. She writes:

⁷ In fact, Aboriginal homes prevented national expansion and so, these people had to be displaced in order to construct the nation.

⁸ This novel demonstrates regional and national assimilationist goals in turning Slavic immigrants into English-speaking Canadian citizens.

⁹ Madeline Coopsammy’s poem “Immigrant” specifically addresses the shock of the racialized body to the prairie landscape, describing an immigrant she sees as a “black anomaly within a land of snow” (Coopsammy 26). The blackness of the body is contrasted against the snow but there is also the implication that it is set up as an opposition to the white bodies that make up the national and regional ‘norm.’

did your people homestead here?
 eat the red dust of
 Depression years
 flee from ravaged
 Europe?
 Discard the 'Skis"
 And anglicise their names? (Coopsammy 38)

The poem sets up an opposition between white 'ethnic' immigrants, those not from Britain, and immigrants with racialized bodies. The white 'ethnic' immigrants have to prove their belonging to the prairie space, and the nation, by settling. Newer racialized immigrants cannot prove their belonging in this traditional prairie way, partly because of the time period in which they immigrated. The poem ends with the white 'ethnic' immigrant acknowledging the fact that non-white immigrants face different challenges because of their racialized bodies but asserts that they must still prove their belonging in a different way. Coopsammy writes,

though you cannot buy
 a change of skin
 You have to serve
 your time. (Coopsammy 38)

This notion of serving time on the prairies is a reference to settlers having to break the land and agriculturally establish themselves before being granted a land claim. While Indigenous and immigrant populations do not serve time in this way, they have the less easily reconciled problem of racial discrimination, which does not have a time limit on it as breaking the land does. While whiteness is considered the 'norm' in terms of bodies, English is the 'norm' as far as language goes. All other languages spoken or accents detected indicate Otherness and are often met with racism. Consequently, for the purposes of this project, I will discuss immigrants in terms of racialized bodies with marked linguistic differences from the white, English-speaking norm.

Keahey demonstrates how Western Canadian writing consistently reflects the desire and preoccupation for a personal home space. In the prologue to her book, she writes, “To be at home in a physical sense may involve feelings of safety, of being comfortable and relaxed in your own body, and in the body’s material surroundings” (Keahey ix). While she goes on to discuss the psychological, social, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of feeling at home, it is Keahey’s first definition that points to the problematic reality for the immigrant and Indigenous people of the prairies – the materiality of bodies and spaces. Erin Manning indicates that a discussion about home is often a discussion about the nation, writing, “the image of the home as an extension of the nation surfaces often” (Manning xvii). Later in her book she explains how race is implicated in this idea:

Race as a construct is never peripheral to the discourse of the nation. Race renders the exclusionary discourse of the nation possible, solidifying and edifying the borders of the nation-state through the delineation between who is ‘at home’ and who comes from elsewhere. Often, race signifies the ‘elsewhere.’ This ‘elsewhere’ is defined and coveted by the white supremacy either covertly in the name of such pluralist liberal discourses as multiculturalism or overtly in the blatantly racist discourses that form the vocabulary of nationalism. (Manning 72)

The personal home space is a reflection of regional and national belonging. As previously explained, the white settler proves his belonging to the prairies and Canada through homesteading and agricultural activity. How does a racialized body, one who signifies ‘elsewhere’ and thus does not feel at home, come to belong regionally and nationally?

Exploring literary representations of this space from Indigenous and immigrant perspectives is one way to address this question. My thesis will conduct close readings on three Indigenous and three immigrant narratives from the last fifty years. Indigenous texts include Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1972), Beatrice Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) and Marilyn Dumont’s *A Really Good Brown Girl* (1996). The immigrant texts I will focus on

are Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), Esi Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), and Madeline Coopsammy's *Prairie Journey* (2004). Coopsammy's poetry collection will be referenced throughout the thesis but the bulk of this text's analysis will occur in the conclusion as it represents a new, global and trans-national poetics.

I chose these six particular texts for various reasons. Campbell's *Halfbreed* marks a shift, not only in Prairie literature but Canadian literature as a whole. Before her narrative, Indigenous writing went largely unpublished and so, this text seems an appropriate place to begin a discussion on silenced voices. Despite being considered a pivotal text, there remains relatively little critical work that engages with this narrative. Mosionier's novel and Dumont's poetry collection represent Campbell's literary legacy. All three writers consider themselves to be Métis, which further emphasizes the marginal status of indigeneity in Canada in that Métis characters feel like they do not belong in either white or Aboriginal society. As far as immigrant texts go, I originally wished to discuss works from the same thirty year time frame. However, the 1970s and 80s was not a rich time for immigrant narratives in Canadian Prairie literature that fit my criteria regarding a specifically racialized immigrant body. Furthermore, I wanted to choose three immigrant writers from different home nations and the Japanese, Ghanaian and Trinidadian perspectives of these narratives nuance the conversation. Like the liminal position of the Métis perspective in the Indigenous narratives, Goto and Edugyan's texts have discussions about the second-generation immigrant experience in Canada.¹⁰

First Nations writer Lee Maracle addresses the idea of cross-racial(ized) kinships in Canada between Indigenous and immigrant populations in her short story "Yin Chin" (1990).

¹⁰ I would like to note that gender was not a factor when choosing these narratives but all six texts *happened* to be written by women. While this was not purposeful, it is perhaps fitting that this literary re-claiming of the white, male prairie space is not only done by Indigenous and immigrant writers with racialized bodies but also by women. The female perspectives of these authors are constantly illuminating the ways race and gender function together.

While Maracle is not a prairie writer, her narrative strongly demonstrates the ideas that will be taken up in this thesis at a regional level. Her text describes how different 'ethnic' groups communicate – not by speaking directly to one another but by triangulating themselves with white power structures. When two different racialized groups get together, Indigenous and Chinese in this story, they talk about their mutual experiences with racism and not about themselves outside of that context. In this way, Indigenous and immigrant populations demonstrate their common experiences with racism.

Maracle's story begins with the Aboriginal speaker feeling conflicted about where to sit in a cafeteria, noticing a group of Chinese youth whom she immediately dismisses. Maracle writes, "No place to sit – no place meaning there aren't any Indians in the room. It is a reflexive action on my part to assume that any company that isn't Indian company is generally unacceptable, but there it was, the absence of Indians not chairs determined the absence of a space for me" (Maracle 156). White power has a history of segregating spaces based on race, such as reservations for Indigenous people, and this passage indicates how this history has become internalized by racialized bodies. The narrator then recognizes that her ideas about space have been informed by white power and so, she begins to sit with other visible minorities. Maracle explains that normally, "when people of colour get together" (Maracle 156) the conversation revolves around frustrations with how white power marginalizes and disenfranchises racialized bodies. Distracted by the overwhelming institutionalization of white authority, visible minorities do not focus on the potential they have to create power together. As such, Maracle's story suggests the formation of new relationships among those experiencing the same problems with race. She writes, "We ran on and on about our growth and development and not once did the white man even enter the room. It just seemed all too incredible that a dozen

Hans and Natives could sit and discuss all things under heaven, including racism, and not talk about white people” (Maracle 158). While the triangulation with white power that visible minorities use to relate to one another has little political potential, the formation of cross-racial(ized) kinships can re-imagine *different* power structures.

Chapter One will first explore how Indigenous and immigrant populations are connected to one another in Prairie literature through the triangulation framework with white power that Maracle sets out in her short story. I will first explore various examples of how this triangulation framework is *explicitly* represented in the literature. These are instances when Indigenous and immigrant writers represent *both* Aboriginal and immigrant characters, or at the very least, allude to the other population. Most of these references and encounters demonstrate the triangulation framework while others display a closer Native/newcomer relationship that leads to a cross-racial(ized) kinship. However, the majority of the chapter will focus on how these two populations are more subtly connected through Prairie literature. As I previously mentioned, I will specifically discuss immigration on the prairies in terms of racialized bodies and language differences from the white, English-speaking ‘norm.’ Indigenous populations also identify bodily and linguistic differences from the ‘norm’ as the two primary factors contributing to their marginalization. Hence, the chapter will focus on what each text has to say about racialized bodies and language in terms of Indigenous and immigrant subjects. Both populations describe the racism they encounter as a result of these differences, causing them to feel both voiceless and invisible.

While Western Canadian writing already depicts the prairie space as isolating for the white male farmer, it is even more isolating for those with racialized bodies. The feelings associated with the bodily and linguistic differences identified in Chapter One are often

described by Indigenous and immigrant characters in terms of spatial un-belonging. Chapter Two discusses homelessness as the specific expression of these feelings, manifesting both physically and psychologically. Physical homelessness is represented by a character's lived experience of having no material home. There is also the constant threat of homelessness signified by what I refer to as 'homeless homes.' These are spaces that are supposed to act as a home but ultimately create feelings of homelessness. The texts I explore illustrate these liminal and often racialized spaces but the two most obvious examples are reservations for Indigenous people and segregated ethnic centres for immigrants. While these spaces are productive in the community they provide, they ultimately represent how spaces are created and controlled by white power. Homelessness also manifests psychologically, as a *feeling* of un-belonging in the prairie space. A number of the books have characters that bridge the gap between material and metaphoric homelessness by *choosing* homelessness. The act of choosing homelessness physically fulfills his or her psychological homelessness, reclaiming this state of social marginalization. This chapter also discusses the ways in which mobility functions in the home making process and in representations of homelessness.

The first two chapters describe the ways Indigenous and immigrant populations experience marginalization by white power, which controls the spaces these bodies can occupy. Chapter Three discusses how this same power controls the publishing world, with many of the writers critiquing the white and male-dominated way literature is produced. These writers then go on to demonstrate how story-telling becomes an alternative way of home making for Indigenous and immigrant populations. Since both groups cannot make a home in the traditional prairie way, by settling the land, they attempt to create a home on the prairies and in Canada through story-telling. The telling of traditional legends and myths keeps history and culture

alive, in a sense reclaiming an ancestral home. In another way, story-telling is concerned with constructing present and future feelings of belonging. By questioning the myth of multiculturalism, challenging racism, and exploring the ways their people have been constructed by white power, the Indigenous and immigrant populations are able to navigate new feelings of being at home.

In engaging with the past and imagining a future, story-telling is not only a way to find a home but is also an act of re-defining identity. In fact, all the topics this thesis addresses – bodies, language, home, and regional/national belonging – are connected to identity politics.

Manning explains how identity functions in terms of the nation, writing:

National narratives in Canada are written to support the elusive notion of ‘Canadian identity.’ At the basis of the concept of ‘national identity’ lies the idea that Canada (as long as we occlude the native presence) is a ‘nation of immigrants’ whose separateness can be mapped onto their places of origin. ‘Canadian identity’ thus depends on a mortgaged investment in the specter of identity, where identity is conceptualized as the voice of a singular culture. The idea of a culture that belongs to ‘us’ remains rooted in an essentialism about who ‘we’ are, underscoring a desire to remain rooted even as we speak of transnational and global phenomena, of boundary crossings and social movements. Within such a frame, any discussion of culture is inextricably bound by the limits of identity politics. (Manning 61)

While multiculturalism acknowledges the presence of various cultures within the nation-state, its ultimate goal is unity – the presence of a singular national identity. As a representation of both the region and nation, Prairie literature from Indigenous and immigrant writers questions multiculturalism and the identity politics that accompany this policy.

Chapter One

‘The Great White Way Could Silence Us All’: The Voiceless and Invisible of Western Canada

As was demonstrated by the Introduction to this thesis, Lee Maracle’s short story *explicitly* connects Indigenous people with other racialized bodies. Prairie literature has a history of these sorts of Native/newcomer engagements. For example, Laura Goodman Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* represents the cross-racial(ized) kinship found between an Aboriginal man and an Icelandic immigrant. This chapter will first discuss a number of other examples where Indigenous and immigrant writers *explicitly* address the other population. Some of these explicit connections between the two groups work within the triangulation framework while others represent the formation of a closer cross-racial(ized) kinship. I will then spend the rest of the chapter discussing the subtler literary links made between these two populations – how independent of one another, each group focuses on the same concerns. Both Indigenous and immigrant authors continue to identify two primary factors which allow them to be constructed as an Other to mainstream Canadian culture – linguistic and bodily differences from the white, English-speaking ‘norm.’ The epigraph to this chapter, “the Great White way could silence us all” (Dumont 54), is taken from a poem that largely critiques English, indicating that whiteness is not only connected to the obvious physical marker but also to language. As such, Indigenous and immigrant populations extensively explore how the racialized bodies and linguistic differences of their people have created feelings of both invisibility and voicelessness within the nation.

From an Indigenous perspective, many Aboriginal writers address their feelings of spatial un-belonging in terms of the image of the immigrant body, describing themselves as foreigners in their own land. One example is Marilyn Dumont's poem "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl" in which the speaker describes feeling like a newcomer on the first day of school, asserting, "I am a foreigner" (Dumont 13). This narrative technique is not an attempt for First Nations people to align themselves with immigrants. Instead, it draws attention to the absurd notion that these people feel unwelcome in a country that they have the longest and closest relationship to.¹¹

Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* engages in the same rhetoric, explaining Métis people's dissatisfaction with the system of land distribution. As discussed in the Introduction, ideas about settlers and immigrants are often confused and conflated. Campbell demonstrates just how interchangeable these terms are, connecting the immigrant body to settler culture specifically and whiteness more generally. Here forward, I will use the term 'settler-immigrant' to describe settlers, seeing as Campbell constantly substitutes one term for the other. Campbell explains that the "immigrants who came and homesteaded the land were predominantly Germans and Swedes" (Campbell 28). The Germans' and Swedes' whiteness over-determines their status as immigrants. This is because the Métis people recognize the privilege that comes with whiteness before they recognize the struggles the Germans and Swedes face as immigrants. Campbell writes, "They didn't understand us, just shook their heads and thanked God they were different" (Campbell 28). Since these 'immigrants' really represent settlement and white culture, there is a disconnect between the struggles of the settler-immigrants and the struggles of the Métis. However, the federal government forces a connection between these two groups by making all people equal under the land claims act. Campbell explains that the Métis people "believed the

¹¹ I would like to acknowledge a distinction between the *land* that Indigenous people occupied before contact, which was not imagined in national terms, and Canada as a nation-state.

lands acts discriminated against them, stating that they had to live on the land and wait three years before filing a claim. They had lived on the lands for years before the lands acts had even been thought of, and didn't believe they should be treated like newcomers" (Campbell 10). The Métis have little genuine resentment for the settler-immigrants themselves but are instead dissatisfied by the system which makes them prove belonging to this space through settlement, while their ancestors occupied the land for much longer than three years.

The first two chapters of Campbell's narrative demonstrate the complicated relationship the Métis people have with the settler-immigrants. These chapters are a re-telling of Métis history told to Maria by her Cheechum. Since the settler-immigrants are connected to whiteness, they are constructed as being in opposition to the Métis people throughout the text. However, there also seems to be a realization by the Métis that they are not against the settler-immigrants themselves but the system of white power they embody. After becoming equally disillusioned by the land claims act, the Métis and settler-immigrants work together, sending petitions and resolutions to Ottawa that are ultimately ignored. Campbell explains that the Métis were sure that peaceful methods would not convince the federal government about the urgency of their requests and so, they persuaded the settler-immigrants and treaty Indians to start an armed rebellion under Louis Riel's leadership. Most settler-immigrants pulled their support from the North-West Rebellion after the win at Duck Lake because they did not want violence. Yet, the Treaty Indians were starving and remained an ally to the Métis. This historical example demonstrates the complicated relationship between the settler-immigrants and Métis people. Although they share similar struggles in terms of their discontent with the land claims, the settler-immigrant's position within white culture and their ultimate inaction in the North-West Rebellion represents a diverging from the Aboriginal and Métis people and a default siding with

the federal government. Maria emphasizes the disconnect between the two groups when she explains that the Métis people originally moved to this part of Saskatchewan after the rebellion “because the region was good for hunting and trapping, and there were no settlers” (Campbell 12) and that when the land was “thrown open for homesteading [...] again came the threat of immigrants” (Campbell 12). Immigrants themselves are not threats to the Métis people but their connection to settlement and white power is problematic.

Although the text often conflates immigrants with settlement and whiteness, there are moments when Maria distinctly identifies people as immigrants. These are moments of Indigenous and immigrant solidarity, again proving that settlement is the issue and not immigration. Maria forms a Native/newcomer friendship with an older Swedish couple for whom she used to keep house. Campbell writes, “They told me about Sweden and we talked about the different ways people lived. They were as interested in our people’s old way of life as I was in theirs” (Campbell 95). While Swedish immigrants are still considered ‘ethnic,’ they do not occupy the same position as the immigrants I will be discussing in this project.¹² However, there *is* a mutual understanding that both their ways of life are different from the Canadian ‘norm.’

Perhaps the most significant moment of Indigenous and immigrant solidarity is Maria’s relationship with the Sings, a diner-owning family of Chinese immigrants, as the prairie cliché goes.¹³ The Sing family represents the racialized immigrants who are marginalized in similar ways to Aboriginal people. After finding out that the waitress position advertised on the Sings’

¹² It is important to note that racialization changes over time. For example, in *The Foreigner*, Slavic immigrants are racialized but this would not necessarily be true in contemporary times.

¹³ The stereotypical depiction of the Chinese café is also represented by Goto in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Being a novel about Japanese immigrants on the prairies, Goto’s novel critiques this cliché which often represents the only racialized immigrant population on the prairies. Murasaki says that there are “Chinese-Canadians who’d been around, I was certain, forever” (Goto 125), subtly aligning Chinese immigrants with Aboriginal people who have actually occupied the land ‘forever.’

restaurant window is already filled, Maria begins to cry, desperately in need of a job. Campbell writes, “They didn’t have very much, he said, but they wanted me to know I was welcome. The old woman patted my shoulder and smiled and I started to cry again. I’d thought no one gave a damn, and here they were giving me a home, a job, everything” (Campbell 111). Not only was Maria given a physical home by these people but also a sense of belonging. While Maria may not receive these feelings of belonging from the nation, she does feel them in her familial home and now from the Sing family. Significantly, the feelings of home and belonging Maria experiences with her own race are the same feelings she now receives from a family of immigrants. Even if the struggles between the two groups are not identical, this example represents the shared bond these populations have with one another.

Maria never knew any Chinese people before the Sings, except one man in Kettle River who also owned a café. There were many rumours about this man and while Maria does not question their validity, she also chooses not to project these ideas onto the Sings who are “kind and happy” people that send “money home to relatives in China each month” (Campbell 111). While Maria does not stereotype the Sings, many of the café patrons do, using derogatory terms and making racist remarks. Yet Grandpa Sing provides financial assistance to many of these people, fully realizing that he will never be paid back. Campbell writes, “Many times in my life after I left them, when I was full of hate and bitterness, I’d try to think of Grandpa Sing and make myself remember that there were some good people like him in the world” (Campbell 112). Maria feels a real connection to this racialized immigrant family but more than this, they become a reminder for her that kindness still exists. Upon her second move to British Columbia with her husband, Darrel, Grandpa Sing gives Maria a jade jewellery set, asking her to give it to her daughter Lisa when she grows up and to tell her that “it belonged for generations to my

wife's family in China" (Campbell 113). Passed down as a family heirloom, this gift represents the immigrant and Aboriginal familial connection. While Maria never sees Grandpa Sing again, she finds out years later that he returned to China and died there, a hope he had once shared with Maria. Maria is reassured that Grandpa Sing is able to die in the space that he considered to be his true home, a place where he would be treated with the respect he deserved but did not receive in Canada. The hope is that Maria will find the same kind of peace that comes with finding a true home.

Although I began with Salverson's depiction of a relationship between an Indigenous and immigrant subject, the contemporary immigrant literature I focus on does not explicitly address Indigenous people in the same way. However, Goto and Edugyan's narratives *do* represent a kind of Indigenous/immigrant dialogue through the triangulation framework. One such example occurs in *Chorus of Mushrooms* when Murasaki explains how her Sunday school class was taught the phrase: "Red and Yellow, Black and White / They are precious in His sight / Jesus loves the little children of the world!" (Goto 59). The song boards have corresponding pictures which demonstrate how whiteness has become normalized: "Indians with feathers and black boys with curly hair wearing only shorts and yellow people with skinny eyes. And a blonde girl with long eyelashes with a *normal* dress on" (Goto 59; emphasis added). This quotation not only reveals how whiteness is normalized but also shows the internalization of cultural 'norms,' where white dress is a default and other dress is 'different.' While this example demonstrates a colour-blind ideology, the bodies are ironically first defined *by* colour. After doing this, others are then encouraged to disregard these differences as Jesus does – he "doesn't see any difference at all. He loves you all the same" (Goto 59). Murasaki instantly names and critiques this method of racial ignorance by saying that "Jesus must be pretty blind if he thought everybody was the

same. Because they weren't. They weren't at all" (Goto 59). While colour-blindness is thought by some to combat racism, it actually demonstrates racial ignorance.

In many ways, multiculturalism contributes to this rhetoric of colour-blindness, choosing to define Canada through the lens of culture instead of race. Manning explains that this move diverts "attention from the histories and social effects of racism rather than working as a challenge to politics of race and racial identity within the domain of the nation" (Manning 87). In other words, multiculturalism ignores that race is still a problem, as colour-blindness also does. Murasaki's description of the white girl's 'normal' dress is in keeping with Manning's notion of how whiteness functions in terms of multiculturalism, writing, "multiculturalism follows the trajectory of the nation's white-supremacist agenda, positing whiteness as an invisible norm by which other ethnicities are judged and categorized" (Manning 87). By using terms such as 'diversity,' Manning asserts that multiculturalism "conceal[s] the ideologies of assimilation contained within its very terminology; consequently, ethnic groups are reduced to the status of supplementary to the dominant culture" (Manning 87). This notion is certainly demonstrated by Murasaki's example at Sunday school where the children are equally represented in a one to four ratio but the racialized bodies are only there to supplement and normalize the white body. Only white people have the privilege of being colour blind, since it is a rhetoric that works to privilege them.

The Second Life of Samuel Tyne links Indigenous and immigrant populations when Eudora, the Tynes' white friend in Aster, explains to Maud that Saul Porter's second wife is from India. Yet Maud recognizes the woman's kente headdress, realizing that she is actually from Gold Coast. Maud explains, "Seeing her skin, it was easy to see how Eudora had mistaken her for an Indian. She was the colour of weak tea" (Edugyan 109). Eudora mistakes Akosua

Porter's body for an 'Indian,' paralleling the way European explorers mistook First Nations people for those of East Indian decent. This parodic inversion – where an immigrant is taken to be a person of East Indian descent and not an Aboriginal Canadian – subtly aligns Indigenous and immigrant populations. This example presents many layers of confusion about racialized bodies but ultimately demonstrates how all non-white bodies in Canada are Othered in a similar fashion. Edugyan draws attention to the way racialized identities are defined, constructed and mistaken by white power.

While I have presented various examples of explicit moments of Indigenous and immigrant connection, most of this chapter focuses on how these populations are more subtly connected through their literature. By reading Indigenous and immigrant narratives along side one another, it quickly becomes apparent how these racialized writers similarly represent their experiences in Canada. As with Maracle's short story, these populations are talking about the same things but are not directly speaking to one another. The rest of this chapter will focus on the ways Indigenous and immigrant writers recognize how bodily and linguistic differences, from the white English-speaking 'norm,' contribute to their Othering in Canada. It is empowering when one considers that the differences that alienate Indigenous and immigrant subjects from the 'norm' are also what connect these populations to one another. With this recognition comes an opportunity for both groups to work together to combat the same white power that oppresses them.

Bodily Differences

Halfbreed is specifically invested in the Métis body as a site of confusion, encompassing both whiteness and aboriginality. Maria represents this confusion in particular, growing up self-conscious about her green eyes and dark hair. While Maria's body continues to be a location of

confusion to herself and others, she feels better after attending a Trappers Convention at Montreal Lake with her family. Maria explores the other camp sites with her brother Jamie and Cheechum, only to discover a group of blue-eyed Aboriginal women. Campbell writes, “I thought they were gorgeous, and the fact that many of them were blue-eyed made me feel that I had finally found my kin” (Campbell 41). Yet Maria is only surrounded by these women for the weekend and her own feelings of confusion return when she is back on the settlement. She describes her appearance as a fourteen year old girl and how it did not match up with the physical expectations presented in storybooks. Campbell writes,

Instead of tanning a golden brown my already dark complexion would go almost black during the summer. Black hair was supposed to have, as the storybooks went, snapping black eyes or sparkling brown ones. Mine were green. My aunts, uncles and cousins all had brown or black eyes and used to tease me for having dark hair and skin – ‘like a nigger’ they said – and eyes like a white man. (Campbell 83)

The expectations Maria internalizes about what Indigenous and white bodies should look like come from the books she reads. Maria’s relatives may not necessarily be reading the same books but do hold similar expectations, perhaps derived from a larger collection of cultural representations. While the passage does not specify if the storybook image is of an Aboriginal or white person with black hair, both readings align Maria’s body with un-belonging in that she does not fit with the expectations of either an Indigenous or white body.

Maria’s community is unsure of how to navigate her physical embodiment of both aboriginality and whiteness. To further intensify this anxiety, Maria’s skin and hair also represent blackness. It is important to note that just because the Métis people face racism themselves, does not mean that they are immune from possessing their own racial discrimination. This racism is certainly an obstacle to creating cross-racial(ized) kinships because the two groups would not be able to productively talk to one another. Maria’s blackness is also connected to

literary representation when Maria and her family perform plays in their settlement. Maria has an intense desire to be Cleopatra but is shot down by her brother Jamie who explains that she is “too black” and her “hair is like a nigger’s” (Campbell 18). Jamie and the white neighbours, who are amused by the idea of “Caesar, Rome, and Cleopatra among Halfbreeds in the backwoods of northern Saskatchewan” (Campbell 18), question which racialized bodies are allowed to represent other bodies. Ironically, Maria’s features presumably resemble Cleopatra more closely than the other children’s do, and certainly more than the white Elizabethan actors who originally played her during Shakespeare’s time.

Beatrice Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* presents similar ideas as those represented in *Halfbreed* in that the protagonists struggle with the confusion of racialized bodies in general and the Métis body in particular. While Maria physically embodies both Aboriginal and white features, April and Cheryl visibly represent whiteness and aboriginality respectively. Cheryl has black hair, dark brown eyes and brown skin like their father Henry – “There was no doubt they were both of Indian ancestry” (Mosionier 1). April and their mother, Alice, have pale skin and are easily able to “pass for a pure white person” (Mosionier 44). While April takes comfort in this fact, she realizes that her sister “would never be able to disguise her brown skin as just a tan [as she can]. People would always know that she was part Indian” (Mosionier 44). April decides in this moment that when she stops living in foster care, she will not only look white but will also “live just like a real white person” (Mosionier 44). April does not have the opportunity to act out this fantasy at school when she is living with the DeRosier family because everyone already knows that she is Métis: “Skin colouring didn’t matter in my school. Everyone treated me like a full-blooded Indian” (Mosionier 76). Cheryl occupies a similar position at her school, writing to April that the children would call her names or alternatively, “make like I’m

not there at all” (Mosionier 40). Cheryl’s situation demonstrates how racialized bodies become either increasingly visible, demonstrated by the children teasing her, or invisible. Cheryl’s teacher explains to her that this occurs because she is different from the other kids and has to earn their respect. Cheryl notes the double-standard in that the white children do not have to earn her respect in return. This example is similar to Goto’s critique of colour-blindness in that the white children are ‘normal’ and Cheryl must prove her belonging to them.

After moving to a school in Winnipeg, April takes advantage of the fact that no one knows her racial background and thus pretends that she is white. In order to keep the secret, April physically and emotionally distances herself from Cheryl who not only looks Aboriginal but is proud of her Métis heritage. Each sister’s body physically represses the half of her heritage that is made visible in her sibling’s body. April can hide her Aboriginal ancestry when she is alone but not when she is with her sister. Hiding her race at school is the first step April takes in pretending that she is white but it is when she marries Bob that she thinks she has finally ‘made it’ in white society. Although initially frightened that Bob’s mother dislikes her because of her race, April soon realizes that she has never discussed her “nativeness” (Mosionier 114) with her mother-in-law and that her dislike must be rooted in their elopement. As a result, April fears Cheryl’s impending visit for the racial reveal it could bring. April realizes that she was right to worry, overhearing her mother-in-law explain: “That’s the trouble with mixed races; you never know how they’re going to turn out. And I would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of little half-breeds” (Mosionier 127). Cheryl draws April’s attention to this same concern before she marries Bob, asking her what she would do if her future children “looked like Indians” (Mosionier 110). One of the common anxieties about race is its mysterious physical expression. While there is a fear of the visible racialized body, the invisible racialized body is an

even greater threat because it cannot be traced. The novel's focus on the different expressions of racialized bodies questions how much one's physical appearance matters in terms of a lived experience. For example, Cheryl looks Aboriginal and is invested in the struggles of Indigenous people while April can *pass* as white and is *passive* when it comes to Aboriginal issues. How much did each woman's body have to do with their racial allegiance? Race is a human construct that has been created in order to give different people various levels of power depending on what his or her body looks like. April and Cheryl's actions question if this construct has real effects.

Goto and Mosionier both critique whiteness as the 'norm,' with the song Murasaki learns at Sunday school and Cheryl's teacher's assertion that she must prove her belonging to her white classmates. Dumont also questions whiteness as a norm with the title of her poetry collection, *A Really Good Brown Girl*. The title connects race to gender, age and morality, suggesting that the image of a 'good girl' means different things depending on one's race. The collection's namesake poem, "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl" acts as a contextualizing source for the other poems, discussing the realizations the speaker has at school about her bodily difference. The poem connects whiteness with only positive associations, from confidence, holiness, and light to sinlessness, Christianity and purity. The speaker's brown skin is full of scrapes and dirt and she remembers when her brother's white fiancée "scrubbed the hell" (Dumont 14) out of her. Dumont writes, "When it was over, I felt that / every part of my body had been hounded of dirt and sin and that / now I, like St. Anne, had become a receptacle of light" (Dumont 14). With whiteness described as innately holy, this scrubbing is not only a removal of sin but can also be read as an attempt to scrub the brownness out of the speaker's body. The speaker explains that her "skin always gave [her] away", remembering a day in class when a white girl exclaims, "Are you ever brown!" (Dumont 14). The girl proceeds to ask if she is Indian and the speaker

understands that rejection is inevitable regardless of her response – “If I said yes, she’d reject me: worse, she might / tell the other kids my secret and then they’d laugh and shun me. If I / said no, I’d be lying, and when they found out I was lying, they’d / shun me” (Dumont 15). The speaker’s body represents aboriginality and whiteness and to deal with her own confusion, the speaker compartmentalizes her interactions by living “a dual life; I had white friends and I had Indian friends and / the two never mixed and that was *normal*” (Dumont 15; emphasis added). Again, the speaker draws attention to the concept of ‘normality.’ While the speaker represents both aboriginality and whiteness, she tries to separate the two sides of herself by only interacting with one side at a time. This poem acts as a contextualizing source for the rest of the collection, explaining how the speaker recognizes her bodily difference when exposed to whiteness.

Chorus of Mushrooms also describes the adolescent realization of bodily difference.

Murasaki explains her feelings after this conscious understanding:

It was a time when I came to realize that the shape of my face, my eyes, the colour of my hair affected how people treated me. I never felt different until I saw the look crossing peoples’ faces. I don’t know if it’s better to come to realize, or not realize at all. When I didn’t know, I was happily innocent. When I finally noticed, the measure of my discontent knew no boundaries. (Goto 175)

Despite the unhappiness Murasaki feels as a result of the racism she encounters from her marked physical differences, she does not have the same level of internalized racial shame as her mother. This is most obviously represented when Murasaki earns the role of Alice in her school’s production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Similar to Maria in *Halfbreed*, Murasaki’s experience with theatre reveals insights about how the representation of bodies is regulated. The teacher explains to Murasaki’s mother, Keiko, “Well, Alice is a story about an English girl, you know. An English girl with lovely blonde hair. And strictly for the play, you understand, Muriel will have to have blonde hair or no one will know what part she is playing. You simply cannot have an

Alice with black hair” (Goto 177). The teacher’s implication is absurd – the audience would surely understand who Alice is. However, Keiko enthusiastically agrees to the teacher’s request, even suggesting that Murasaki dye her hair instead of simply wearing a wig. Murasaki insists that she no longer wants the role, saying, “I’ll be the Mad Hatter, that way, I can just wear a hat. Or the Cheshire Cat! Cats have slanted eyes. That would work out” (Goto 177). Instead of hiding her race, Murasaki would rather play a ‘mad’ or non-human animal character, taking advantage of her racialized features. This example demonstrates how Murasaki’s would-be role as a blonde English girl is analogous to her family’s performance as ‘Canadians.’ While the family is legally considered Canadian, Keiko and Shinji have *acted* in certain ways that fulfil the role of a *white* Canadian family, the ‘norm.’ The most notable examples of their acting are their refusal to speak the Japanese language and to eat traditional Japanese food. Keiko, Shinji and Murasaki are also connected with acting because they have two names, one which represents their Japanese heritage and the other that becomes their English ‘stage name.’¹⁴ Just like the speaker of Dumont’s “Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl,” this doubling represents a split identity.

As was discussed before about Indigenous and immigrant bodies being confused for one another, so too are immigrant bodies confused for *other* immigrants, not of their own racial background. Murasaki explains how she is often mistaken as Chinese at the grocery store, with fellow shoppers asking her questions about Chinese produce she knows nothing about. In this way, Goto demonstrates how “Asian cultural distinctions are [easily] obliterated” (Ponce 75). Murasaki humorously places part of the blame for cultural conflation on the only Asian produce her mother will purchase, Japanese oranges. Murasaki muses, “Funny how they’re called Jap

¹⁴ I refer to each character solely by their Japanese name throughout this thesis but in the novel, Murasaki is also called Muriel, Keiko is sometimes Kay and Shinji is often Sam.

oranges. When they are technically called Mandarin oranges and Mandarin isn't even a place but a Chinese language. Funny how words and meaning twist beyond the dimensions of logic" (Goto 91). This example not only comments on cultural conflation and linguistic differences in Canada but also becomes a commentary on racialized bodies. Murasaki eats so many oranges that her skin turns yellow, greatly upsetting Keiko who harshly scrubs her daughter's hands while muttering "Yellow, she's turning yellow she's turning yellow" (Goto 92). The yellow skin caused by the oranges further pronounces Murasaki's bodily difference in a racially stereotypical way. Murasaki then physically reflects Keiko's anxiety about her family's bodily difference in Canada, going against all of her assimilationist efforts. While Keiko is scrubbing Murasaki, Naoe becomes silent for the first time in fourteen years, realizing the extent of her daughter's internalized racial self-hatred. Naoe's silence represents her disapproval and this shocks Keiko into stopping, walking upstairs and not getting out of bed for three days.

Muraskai is often mistaken as being Chinese but the Woo family represents the *real* Chinese immigrants in the novel. Murasaki says she feels bad for Mr. Woo's son, Shane, because he has "to live with his name in a cowboy town. With his Asian face" (Goto 125).¹⁵ Murasaki understands that her chances of being part of the popular group would decrease if she were to associate with him because "Oriental people in single doses were well enough, but any hint of a group and it was all over. I thought I was proud of being Japanese-Canadian, but I was actually a coward" (Goto 125). Murasaki believes that any trace of an Asian community would decrease her chances of being considered in the popular group, which comes to represent the white power of Canada more generally. It is important to note that Murasaki is not *currently* in the popular group but does not want to risk the *opportunity*. This is the same reason why Keiko

¹⁵ Shane is the title of a 1953 Western. Murasaki feels bad for Shane because his name connects him with the image of a cowboy. Murasaki thinks this is absurd because just as 'Indians' must be Aboriginal, cowboys must be white.

wants nothing to do with an Asian-Canadian community, because she thinks the community would compromise her assimilationist efforts to belong in white Canada. Murasaki recognizes that the linking of her racialized body to Shane's would increase the threat her physical appearance poses to white culture at her school. It is only in the dark, after falling off her bicycle, that Murasaki lets Shane walk her home. The two hold hands, walking in darkness and silence the entire way. This image represents their newly formed bond that can never be voiced or become visible. While the multicultural mosaic wishes to have non-white parts, it is when there is a racialized mass that white culture gets anxious and feels threatened.

Edugyan takes a subtler approach to discussing racialized bodies, with very few mentions of the Tynes' physical difference from the white 'norm.' Perhaps this is representative of the subtler version of racism in Canada that is working under the guise of multiculturalism. For example, Samuel says, "I was born in Ghana, and lived briefly in England, but somehow those countries were not so challenging as here [Canada]" (Edugyan 62). While he does not clarify what challenges he specifically encounters in Canada, this subtler version of racism represented throughout the text is surely one of them. Andrea Davis explains that because "the discussion of racism is only a subtle subtext in this novel, its brief appearances often shock the readers and even the characters themselves" (Davis 44). One such example occurs when Samuel and Ray are watching the fire at Thorpe's diner and Samuel notices a man staring at him. Ray introduces Samuel to this man who is the Mayor of Aster. Samuel tries to make polite conversation about his disbelief over the fire but the mayor simply "assessed him with cold eyes," saying, "I don't have time to stand around chatting about it" (Edugyan 91). There are many moments throughout the novel where various white characters act in an unwarrantedly rude manner towards the Tynes or Porters, indicating the subtle racism that is still present in Aster. A more explicit example

occurs after the twins set fire to the Porters' house and the Tyne family is hazed by the townspeople. Maud is too proud to tell Samuel "about the bag of burning fertilizer thrown at the front door, the desecration of their flower beds, the slurs from passing cars, the refusal of some shopkeepers to accept their money. Everything, in short, that the Porters had endured both in Oklahoma and in Aster's bordering towns and cities" (Edugyan 271). By connecting the hazing to the Porters' experience, Maud demonstrates how this behaviour is not purely rooted in a dislike for the twins but in deeper racial issues. While concerns about race subtly circulate in the town before the twins' arson, Maud's list of racist actions directed towards her family makes this racism obvious.

Another moment where racism becomes apparent is at the outset of the novel when Samuel sees his daughters with tea towels on their heads. Samuel thinks the girls are connecting to their culture by "discovering their likeness to sheiks" (Edugyan 29) but Maud informs him that it is quite the opposite. She says the "headscarves are really an attempt to duplicate the hair of their classmates, and that she'd eavesdropped on a conversation in which Yvette had said she 'got tired of being black.' Tired of the sugary way she had to behave to get people to play with her. Tired of being asked where she was *really* from, tired of being talked to as though she didn't speak English" (Edugyan 29-30; emphasis in original). While concerns about both linguistic and bodily differences are articulated by Yvette, it is by altering their bodies that the girls imagine a solution to their own frustrations about racism. The twins recognize that their bodies are the *real* problem, as opposed to their connection with the English language. While Chloe and Yvette understand that they cannot realistically alter their bodies, they enjoy pretending that they are white. This scene of white performance is in opposition to Murasaki's experience with theatre when she is adamant that she does not want to alter her racialized body

in order to fit the role of Alice. Murasaki then uses language to combat her feelings of cultural displacement in that she begins to learn Japanese.

Davis notes that all the issues with cultural displacement found in *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* are “played out on the teenage bodies of the girls [Yvette and Chloe]” (Davis 44). Maud contributes to her daughter’s “eccentricities by her own cultural confusion, embodied metonymically in her bizzare hairstyle” (Cooper 59-60) in which half is left natural and the other half is straightened. Eventually, Samuel and Maud are forced to put the twins in a mental facility. Davis explains, “Although the girls are only diagnosed with moderate psychosis, the fact that their black bodies are perceived as especially threatening is evidenced by the facility’s insistence on treating them with haloperidol, a high-potent neuroleptic only used to treat acute psychosis or chronic schizophrenia” (Davis 45). Davis also notes that when the Tynes arrive at the facility, the only other couple there is Aboriginal, demonstrating that only “certain bodies, then, get constructed not just as marginal—positioned outside the nation—but also as inimical to the nation’s health” (Davis 45). Edugyan demonstrates how certain bodies are regulated to certain spaces according to race, a concept that Chapter Two will explore in greater detail.

Linguistic Differences

As Shinji explains in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, it is much easier for one to alter his or her relationship to language than it is to the racialized body. The texts this thesis focuses on demonstrate how linguistic differences can manifest in various ways. Oftentimes linguistic difference is expressed by an accent, the trace or residue of a mother tongue other than the English ‘norm.’ While feelings of invisibility are expressed as a result of bodily difference from the standard of whiteness, voicelessness is the analogous feeling articulated for linguistic difference. Sometimes Indigenous and immigrant populations feel directly silenced in that they

speak but are not heard or are told to be quiet. Other times these populations self-silence because they know their words will not be met with approval. Many of the narratives in this project incorporate words and phrases in a language other than English. This literary technique works to make the assumed English readership feel the same kind of linguistic alienation the Indigenous and immigrant characters in the text do. As Eva Pich Ponce writes about *Chorus of Mushrooms*: “The text includes many words in Japanese and does not provide their translation into English. The reader is thus put in the position of an outcast, unable to have access to the content of the words” (Ponce 80). Feeling alienated by this other language, the reader is also silenced to an extent because he or she cannot understand, thus placing a limit on this particular knowledge.

In *Halfbreed*, Maria explains that she and the other Métis children have an accent because they speak both Cree and English. They are often criticized at school for poor pronunciation, which their teacher equates with a lack of intelligence. One of Maria’s teachers insults her younger sister in front of their entire class, saying, “Look at her! She is so stupid she can’t even say ‘this,’ instead of ‘dis’” (Campbell 77). When Maria is at a residential school, she vividly remembers being “pushed into a small closet with no windows or light” (Campbell 44) as punishment for speaking Cree instead of the required English or French.¹⁶ Maria is considered to have deviated from the linguistic image of Canada, speaking an Indigenous language instead of a *national* language. It is interesting that Maria’s punishment is being confined to a small space, representative of the segregated spaces she occupies throughout her life as a result of the white power that controls her racialized body.

¹⁶ The speaker of Coopsammy’s “The Second Migration” explains that Canada’s two official languages seem to falsely represent the nation’s “tolerant humanity” (Coopsammy 28). The false impression of a multicultural nation is emphasized by the fact that English and French are colonizer languages and that no Indigenous or immigrant language represents Canada in an ‘official’ capacity

If anything, the children should be considered *more* intelligent for their fluency in two languages. The Métis people prove their cleverness by using their language difference and perceived lack of intelligence to manipulate systems of white power. In regards to a legal case about the death of a Métis man, those being cross-examined required interpreters. Maria explains that “if an English-French interpreter was called they could say that they talked only Cree and when a Cree speaker was brought in it was vice versa. By the time the stories were translated, they were so mixed up that the case was closed” (Campbell 62). This passage demonstrates how linguistic translation is used by the Métis people to subvert the government’s authority. White power and the institutions it creates are difficult to subvert because of their vast control over the entire nation. By performing an expected role of ignorance and lack of intelligence, the Métis people can finally take advantage of the system that continues to Other them. This scene also speaks to ideas about truth, fiction and the interpretation of story-telling which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

Dumont’s “The Devil’s Language” emphasizes the importance of English, both spoken and written forms, in terms of national belonging. The poem begins: “I have since reconsidered Eliot / and the Great White way of writing English” (Dumont 54), with Eliot’s name acting as a “metonym for the modernist poetics” (Hulan 86). English, with its “lily white words / its picket fence sentences / and manicured paragraphs” has “measured, judged and assessed” (Dumont 54) the speaker her entire life. Dumont connects language to the body by associating English with both whiteness and class. As Renée Hulan puts it, the “literacy traditions of high culture police her [the speaker’s] identity” (Hulan 85). Hence, when the speaker is discussing the English language, she is also discussing white bodies and the power they hold. The English language metonymically represents the entire colonial power structure. Dumont personifies white power,

writing, “the Great White way could silence us all / if we let it / its had its hand over my mouth since my first day of school” (Dumont 54). The poem also implies that language is intimately connected to family and race. The speaker aligns her mother tongue with her real mother, saying to herself:

and she fed you bannock and tea
and syllables
that echo in your mind now, now
that you can't make the sound
of that voice that rocks you and sings you to sleep
in the devil's language. (Dumont 55)

The devil's language refers to Cree, a language obviously not evil by nature but that is seen by white power as lesser than English. As Susan Gingell argues, “to speak Cree in this society is to be voiceless, because Cree is simply not heard” (Hulan 85). The speaker also connects language to food, demonstrating how bannock, tea and syllables all nourish the body culturally.

Questioning this language hierarchy, the speaker says, “my father doesn't read or write / the King's English says he's dumb but he speaks Cree / how many of you speak Cree?” (Dumont 54). Later in the poem, the speaker says that violating “standard English / is like talking back(wards)” (Dumont 55). The following stanza makes the same point but Cree is named instead of English – that “speaking the devil's language is / talking back / back(words)” (Dumont 55). While both stanzas mean the same thing, that speaking a language other than English is an act of talking back, the language named in the particular phrase and the words in brackets are significant. The brackets signify the speaker's intervention and so the shift from ‘wards’ to ‘words’ indicates that the speaker believes English to be *backwards* and her native Cree to be composed of real *words*. Talking ‘backwards’ can also be read as a way of communicating with the devil. Cree is most obviously associated with this idea because it is referred to as the ‘devil's language’ but the speaker implies throughout that poem that *English* is more closely associated

with the devil. In fact, the speaker says that she ‘can’t make the sound’ of her mother’s voice when she spoke to her in Cree, indicating the erasure of that language by English. In this way, English is Satanic because it remains alive while killing off Cree.

Dumont’s commentary on syntactic laws – “use the wrong order or / register and you’re a dumb Indian / dumb, drunk or violent” (Dumont 54) – is reminiscent of her other poem “Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl” where a professor corrects the speaker’s English in front of her university class, asking her if she meant to say ‘really well’ instead of ‘really good.’ The speaker glares at him and emphatically says, “No, I mean really good” (Dumont 15). By asserting that her mistake was purposeful, the speaker claims a position against a standardized way of speech, stressing that her speech – the traces of her Cree language – is worthy and does not require correction. The section of this poem previously mentioned, where the Aboriginal speaker identifies herself as a foreigner, is followed by a discussion about how language differences can contribute to feelings of immobility, invisibility and voicelessness. Dumont writes:

I am a foreigner, I stay in my seat,
frozen, afraid to move, afraid to make a mistake, afraid to speak,
they talk differently than I do, I don’t sound the way they do, but I
don’t know how to sound any different, so I don’t talk, don’t volun-
teer answers to questions the teacher asks. I become invisible. (Dumont 13)

The speaker silences herself because she sounds different, which in turn makes her feel invisible. This passage demonstrates how feelings attached to bodily and linguistic differences – invisibility and silence – are connected to an apprehension about mobility. The speaker is ‘afraid to move’ because she does not want to draw further attention to herself. The racialized body in movement is a greater source of anxiety for white power because it is not confined to a specific space.

Language is certainly a topic of discussion in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. While all primary characters have racialized bodies, they each have a unique connection to English and Japanese, which represents his or her relationship to Canada. Naoe constantly talks to herself in Japanese but knows English, despite her family's belief that she has not learned the language. She remarks, "How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language?" (Goto 4). Keiko and Shinji can *only* speak English, forgetting the Japanese they used to know. Naoe speaks to the erasure of Shinji's Japanese, thinking, "I suppose if a body can learn a new language in twenty years, you could unlearn one as well" (Goto 48). While Naoe seems to accept the fact that her son-in-law has forgotten his Japanese, she does not have the same feelings about her daughter, perhaps as a result of language's connection to the mother, as was previously discussed in Dumont's "The Devil's Language." She says, "you cannot move to a foreign land and call that place home because you parrot the words around you. Find your home inside yourself first, I say. Let your home words grow out from the inside, not the outside in" (Goto 48). Naoe realizes how important language is in connecting to one's family, culture and ancestral home and is concerned that Keiko's adoption of English means her rejection of her Japanese heritage.

Many of the ideas presented in this novel about immigration, language and home are expressed during the first interaction between Naoe and Keiko. Keiko says to Shinji, "I think we should start looking for a h-o-m-e" (Goto 4). Naoe responds: "As if I can't spell. Eighty-five years old and cast from my home. Ahhh, at least the dust here is familiar. Every grain, every mote as familiar as the smell of my body. No time now to learn new dust in a new home" (Goto 4). The spelling of 'home' draws attention to the word for the reader while the purpose of its spelling is to make the word incomprehensible for Naoe, who is thought to not understand

English. The suggestion that Naoe will be cast from her home represents the shame Keiko has for her mother and Japanese culture and the spelling of the word in English only emphasizes this point. By infantilizing her mother, Keiko demonstrates her attempt to sever ties with her mother and by extension, her mother tongue and mother nation.

Before leaving at the end of the novel, Murasaki visits her father in his office and he is finally able to explain to his daughter why he and Keiko have this fraught relationship with their mother tongue. Murasaki sees stacks of Japanese books and gets upset with him for not teaching her Japanese. Shinji says he cannot understand the language and only recently discovered that he could still read it. He explains, “When we moved to Canada, your Mom and I, we decided it would be best for our children if we let them slip in with everybody else. Sure, we couldn’t change the colour of their hair, or the shape of their face, but we could make sure they didn’t stand out. That they could be as Canadian as everyone around them” (Goto 206-207). The concern Murasaki’s parents have is expressed by a quotation from a presumably white Canadian: “Always talking in a foreign language. And even when they do bother talking in English, why their accent is so thick, I can’t make out a single word. If those people want to live in Canada, they’ve got to try a little harder” (Goto 211). Murasaki’s parents recognize the two characteristics that indicate immigrant status, bodily and linguistic difference, and realize what they can realistically do to alter their racialized position in Canada. Of course, their belief does not work because bodily difference trumps linguistic ability.

Keiko and Shinji try to live up to this expectation, to the point that their Japanese culture is entirely replaced by a ‘Canadian’ one. Shinji explains that he and Keiko decided to “put Japan behind us and fit more smoothly with the crowd. And from that day, when we decided, neither of us could speak a word in Japanese. Not a word would pass our lips. We couldn’t even think

it” (Goto 207). Shinji says that ceasing to use the Japanese language made him feel so ashamed that he stopped talking altogether – “after the day I lost my words, my home words, I didn’t have the heart to talk so much” (Goto 207). Forsaking his home words is such an intense loss for Shinji that he can barely speak and feels like “half a person” (Goto 207). Yet Shinji sees the linguistic embodiment of his internalized state of half personhood by *The New Canadian*, a newspaper published half in English and half in Japanese. Shinji realizes that he can still read Japanese, telling Keiko who only says that it is too late for her and Murasaki and that “she didn’t want to stir things up when it was all settled” (Goto 208). The word ‘settled’ points to Keiko’s desire to *settle* on the prairies and the whiteness that accompanies this image.

Murasaki explains how the conversations with her parents in English do not have “the power to linger” (Goto 99) and do not feed her body as they should – being “sad substitutes for [her] malnourished culture” (Goto 99). As with Dumont, Goto brings together language and food, indicating that both are significant indicators of culture. Murasaki connects food to the myth of multiculturalism when she explains that her mother “chose the great Canadian melting pot and I had to live with what was ladled” (Goto 175). Keiko and Shinji take food and language as controllable factors in their assimilation, failing to recognize the ways language is intimately connected to the body, a factor they cannot easily change. Shinji does eventually realize this connection, feeling like his language loss is also a bodily loss in that he is half a person. Although Murasaki and Naoe do not verbally communicate, they do through their bodies in terms of telepathy and body language. For example, Murasaki reads the lines on Naoe’s brow and the creases beside her mouth (Goto 15). Despite not talking, Naoe teaches Murasaki “that words take form and live and breathe among us. Language a living beast” (Goto 99).

As a result of her father's almost constant silence and her mother's act of "hiding behind an adopted language" (Goto 98), Murasaki is initially unclear about language's role, explaining, "I never knew what I should do. If I should tie it up then ignore it, or if I should mould and shape. Manipulate language like everyone else around me. I never understood the words she [Naoe] said, but I watched and learned. And I begin my understanding now. Obāchan took another route, something more harmonious" (Goto 98-99). After Naoe leaves, Murasaki begins to learn Japanese, feeling empowered by the knowledge of two languages. She is glad she learned Japanese because "when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue [Japanese], I'll reach for it in English" (Goto 54).

Keiko resembles Maud in *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* who will only speak English to aid in her family's assimilation, refusing to talk in an 'immigrant' language.¹⁷ As Maud discourages Samuel from speaking to her in her native language, she also puts a stop to his talking Twi with Akosua. Akosua does not agree with Maud's idea of denying language to her family, saying, "When it is a woman herself who wants to kill her heritage, then the children have black days ahead" (Edugyan 188). Although Samuel dislikes Akosua at first, the two eventually begin to speak a mixture of English and Twi to each other. While Samuel does end up seeing Akosua as a romantic partner, these interactions with their native tongue also seem like flirting because there is a different kind of intimacy attached to speaking with someone in your 'home words,' as Goto puts it. Despite "having made a vow almost two decades earlier to forget the tongue of her birth" (Edugyan 281-282), Maud eventually begins to speak Fante with Akosua when the Porters move into their house, perhaps feeling like she no longer has to hide this part of herself when she is surrounded by others of like immigrant status. As Samuel's death brings a

¹⁷ Maud also wants to avoid eating traditional food like Keiko but this is the only food Samuel will eat so Maud is forced to continue making such meals.

return of his former body,¹⁸ it also brings a return of language. Speaking in outbursts, “belting out words, his eyes pleading to be understood” (Edugyan 309), Ama cannot recognize if Samuel speaks English or his ancestral language. She does eventually recognize certain foreign words, demonstrating that his figurative return to his homeland is not only through the body but through language as well.

The notion of ‘the accent’ as the trace of a forgotten language and different culture is also explored by this novel. Samuel marvels at Porter’s unrecognizable accent that is “so filled with contradictions it was impossible to say from which country it originated” (Edugyan 83-84). Later, Porter’s voice is described as having a “strange texture, as though every place he’d ever travelled to, no matter how short the trip or how remotely in his past, had left an imprint on his speech” (Edugyan 138). There is a white anxiety about Porter because he cannot be placed through language, even though his voice represents the multicultural ideal that Canada promotes. This again indicates that the multicultural mosaic is a myth because white power does not really desire the kind of diversity Porter represents. While Porter’s accent makes Samuel feel connected to him as a fellow immigrant, accents are met with adverse reactions by the white, English-speaking Canadians of the novel. At a parent-teacher meeting, the school counsellor tells Maud that the twins’ “speech is pretty sluggish, not very clear. Though I suppose we’re just not used to the accent” (Edugyan 26). Maud greatly surprises the counsellor when she tells her that the twins were born in Canada. Maud believes that “the whole thing was some subtly racist attempt to discredit her daughters” (Edugyan 26), encountering a similar situation herself at the Aster town council meeting when many people fail “to understand her accent, which, in truth, she knew was hardly noticeable” (Edugyan 108). Maud’s accent, however subtle, represents her immigrant status and this foreignness is a threat to white society. Or, perhaps Maud’s accent is a

¹⁸ For example, his tribal scars become more pronounced

construction by the white townspeople in order to silence her. If they project an ‘incomprehensible’ accent onto her body then they do not have to listen to what she says. Maud’s decision to use only English is an attempt to discourage her accent. However, her racialized body clearly predetermines her immigrant status before her voice is ever heard. Or, her accent may be predetermined by the people who expect her to be incomprehensible and as such, find her this way.¹⁹

Indigenous and immigrant populations are connected to one another through a discourse about racism and the limits of multiculturalism. While most of these connections are triangulated through their similar interactions with white power, there are some examples where new kinships form between the two populations. Feelings of invisibility and voicelessness as a result of bodily and linguistic differences from the white English-speaking ‘norm’ exhibits the myth of multiculturalism. While this chapter demonstrates how these differences alter feelings of belonging in Canada, Chapter Two will expand on this notion by specifically showing how these feelings function regionally in terms of space and specifically in terms of constructions of home.

¹⁹ Coopsammy does not critique English as explicitly as some of the other texts but does so subtly in her poem, “Ode to Toronto.” She writes, “the Towers of Babel / rise in the distance / the staples of our culture / The Bay, CIBC, Manulife centre / Rogers” (Coopsammy 84). This poem references the Bible story that explains how the one common human language turned into multiple languages. As a city that holds so many people who speak various languages, Toronto has become one of the representative sites for this story of Babel. While Canada is filled with various languages, capitalism has become the new official language that everyone is forced to speak. Immigrants are part of this system, moving to Canada in order to live a capitalist lifestyle where the language of money and material goods wins out over an ancestral language. Learning English is in many ways the method to speak this greater capitalist language.

Chapter Two

‘We Stand in the Embers of Our Homes’: Physical and Psychological Constructions of Regional and National Un-Belonging

The representation of linguistic and bodily difference that was the focus of Chapter One highlights the ways Indigenous and immigrant subjects on the prairies feel like they do not belong or ‘fit’ in the theoretical cultural mosaic that is Canada. Chapter Two will discuss how these differences function in terms of space. The regulation of space has always been an important concept on the prairies in terms of settlement, with land sectioned off into a grid-like formation. Prairie literature, a genre *defined* by space, has been historically marked by conversations *about* space.²⁰ As mentioned in the Introduction, settlement is what has defined the prairies in terms of literary representation. Yet settlement creates a conversation about space and home making that is limited to white settler subjects. As such, the prairies have “been deeply constructed in a Canadian national consciousness as white” (Davis 40). The Indigenous and immigrant texts I look at point out that the prairies are *not* purely white, and in fact, never were. These narratives explore Erin Manning’s suggestion, that “human spatial relationships are not neutral. Rather, they are the results of influence and power” (Manning xix).

Indigenous and immigrant prairie writers specifically prompt discussions about how institutionalized white power creates racialized spaces and controls the home making process for ‘ethnic’ groups. Davis explains that the idea of the prairies as a white space has “historically exercised various kinds of cultural and political violence in its erasure and management of black [and other racialized] bodies and in its marginalization of indigenous communities. These

²⁰ Deborah Keahey writes, “The notion of place has recently attracted much attention in postcolonial and cultural studies, but it has long played a central role in discussions of Prairie literature, where place has overwhelmingly been defined in narrow, deterministic terms, as ‘the land’ or the natural physical environment” (Keahey 4).

communities and bodies have either been scrupulously contained within carefully delineated reserves and/or deliberately locked outside the national imaginary” (Davis 40). As Davis notes, pretending these bodies do not exist works in terms of imagined spaces, such as the nation, and real spaces, such as reservation for First Nations people or segregated ethnic centres for immigrants.

A conversation about race, space and the feelings of Indigenous and immigrant unbelonging is best articulated in terms of homelessness. The racialized spaces these populations often occupy are symptomatic of the position between having a home and being homeless. While there are many problems with the initial creation and current functioning of reserves, both as a direct result of white power, it is important to remember that these spaces remain a representation of great love and pride for the people who live on them and *are* home in this way. Immigrant communities are also shaped by white power in that they segregate and control racialized bodies. However, these spaces also act as a close community to aid in a newcomer’s transition to Canada, performing the role of a surrogate home nation. This chapter will explore how Indigenous and immigrant writers address this tension inherent within the concept of ‘homeless homes.’ These spaces are constructed by the dominant white culture in an attempt to prove that these populations have a home but ultimately embody how those in power create and control spaces. Yet many of the characters in the texts I will be looking at are linked to homelessness more directly – some are actually homeless, some are constantly on the verge of homelessness and others *choose* to be homeless.

While homelessness is represented in the literature as a physical embodiment, a lived experience, it also manifests in figurative ways. Keahey explains that “[a]ccompanying these forms of physical displacement are associated psychological and cultural displacements”

(Keahey 96).²¹ Métis poet Gregory Scofield perfectly articulates the feeling of psychological homelessness in his poem “1986.” The speaker remembers a woman who tells him of her abuse at a residential school and “how / for years after / she wandered homeless / in her bones” (Scofield 27). The woman’s lived experience of abuse causes her to feel metaphorically homeless. This passage also provides an important reminder that the body is implicated in notions of home, further relating constructions of home to identity politics. As Naoe says in *Chorus of Mushrooms*: “Find your home inside yourself first” (Goto 48). This chapter will demonstrate how spatial representations of un-belonging, be this residing in ‘homeless homes’ or a real, lived experience of homelessness, relate to psychological homelessness. The epigraph to this chapter – Naoe’s “We stand in the embers of our homes” (Goto 51) – is a reminder that material and metaphoric representations of homelessness are a larger comment on regional and national un-belonging. Naoe’s comment is said in response to the United States’ bombing of Japan, clearly demonstrating how nations have the power to both create and destroy homes.

While mobility may seem like an unrelated, even oppositional topic to home making, it is actually an integral part of the process. As mentioned in the Introduction, home is discussed in prairie literature in terms of being easily locatable, ‘pinpointable’ as Keahey puts it. This is how the home is valued in Western Canada – a static, stable and *settled* entity. Manning points out that in fact, “‘home’ is not a stable entity, but rather another of modernity’s constructions” (Manning xvii). She calls attention to this construction of stability later in her book when referencing Freud, writing, “any conceptualization of the home depends on a desire to be blind to the strangeness, the uncanniness, and abject terror of the home as stable entity” (Manning 35). Uncanniness, like mobility, becomes a seeming opposition to the notion of the static home. Indigenous and immigrant home making is *defined* by mobility, immigrants with their movement

²¹ She also refers to this as a “spiritual dislocation” (Keahey 105).

to a new country and Indigenous people with their traditionally nomadic lifestyle.²² The five texts demonstrate how mobility enters into a conversation about space and home making.

Characters are constantly leaving and moving in order to find home. *A Really Good Brown Girl* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* actually represent the physical movement of homes from one place to another.

Halfbreed is first invested in the individual home space through concerns about land claims but quickly widens its scope, demonstrating a larger critique on all constructed spaces that represent institutionalized white power. As a result, Campbell's discussion of homelessness ranges from Maria's life on Crown land as a 'homeless home' to her transient lifestyle prompted by sex work and addiction, nearly choosing homelessness at one point in the text. Chapter One of this project discussed the opening of *Halfbreed* in terms of the Métis relationship with settler-immigrants, whose connection to white culture and settlement over-determines their immigrant status. This chapter will also discuss this part of the narrative but instead, specifically traces the spatial history of the Métis in Saskatchewan.

Maria outlines how the Métis originally came from Ontario and Manitoba to Saskatchewan in the 1860s, which was then considered the Northwest Territories. These people partly came because the land was "free of towns, barbed-wire fences and farm-houses" (Campbell 9). From the outset of the narrative, the reader recognizes how important it is for the Métis to occupy spaces where they do not feel confined by divisions and borders. Maria explains that both Métis rebellions led by Louis Riel, the Red River Rebellion of 1869 and the North-West Rebellion of 1884, were over issues of space and land. The Red River Rebellion began because the Métis feared that their "rights would not be respected by the Canadian

²² While not all Indigenous people in Canada are traditionally nomadic, it is important to note that settling was valued more than transience. Renate Eigenbrod notes that twentieth-century anthropologists comparing Indigenous populations "gave the highest ranking to the peoples who appeared most sedentary" (Eigenbrod 22).

government when it acquired the land from the Hudson's Bay Company" (Campbell 9). It is after this rebellion that the Métis move to Saskatchewan, more fully understanding the extent to which white power controls them. Campbell demonstrates how the Métis try to negotiate with the Canadian government, asserting that they see value in the white way of controlling space by emphasizing white governmental superiority, establishing *settlements* over a preferred nomadic lifestyle.²³

Yet 'real' settlers eventually come and so does the railroad, threatening the Métis way of life. Campbell writes, "They were squatters with no title to the land they lived on. They wanted assurance from Ottawa of their right to keep the land before the incoming white settlers encroached on them by using homesteading laws" (Campbell 9-10).²⁴ Campbell demonstrates how the absence of a land title is connected to homelessness in that the Métis people are considered 'squatters.' As previously mentioned in Chapter One, the Métis are put on the same playing field as settlers who must prove their devotion to the land, region and nation through homesteading. Aboriginal people were 'settled' in the sense of *feeling* at home, before white people arrived with their *systems* of settlement. While the Métis are a product of both Indigenous and white people, white power has defined what home making looks like on the prairies.

Not only is the division of land out of Indigenous control, so too are the *ways* they can live on the land. The Métis people wish to hunt and trap and "[u]nlike their Indian brothers, they were not prepared to *settle* down to an existence of continual hardship, scratching out a scanty

²³ Campbell explains that the Métis made it clear that they were not opposed to national authority and that they would abandon their government as soon as a 'true' government was established in the territories.

²⁴ The Métis send petitions and resolutions to Ottawa but these powers continue to "ignore their existence" (Campbell 10), treating them as if they were invisible. Feelings of invisibility are discussed in Chapter One in terms of racialized bodies but this quotation demonstrates how this physical invisibility is connected to the regulation of space.

living from the land” (Campbell 12; emphasis added). However, the traditional way of life becomes increasingly difficult and as a result, the Métis conform to the government’s notion that the only way to live off the land is through farming and many decide “to take homesteads so that the land would belong to them” (Campbell 12). Yet due to the Depression and a shortage of fur, there is no money to buy the implements to break the land and so, it is eventually confiscated by the Land Improvement District authorities. The notion of ‘improving’ land is certainly subjective and is clearly defined here by white governmental power as land ‘made ready to farm.’

Agricultural activity is the expectation of life on the prairies and as previously mentioned, the white male farmer over-determines all other figures in Prairie literature. Aboriginal people do not have an exploitative relationship with the earth, as farming often requires in its ‘breaking’ of the land. Settler narratives depict agricultural activity in these violent terms, often associating farming with *sexual* violence.²⁵ As a result, Campbell continuously describes Métis people as being at odds with this activity. They are ak-ee-top or “(pretend) farmers with great numbers of poor skinny horses and cows,” “failed” farmers and biologically inept – “They just did not have the kind of thing inside them that makes farmers” (Campbell 25, 13, 13).²⁶ Despite this, the boys and men must constantly engage in the activity, with Maria’s father and brother both having to work on farms to make money. Many of the other jobs Maria and her family have are also connected to settlement, such as Jamie’s job as a section man on the railroad and Maria’s perpetual housekeeping, tending to other people’s homes despite being on the brink of

²⁵ There are various examples of prairie writing on settlement that sexualizes the land, describing it in terms of the female body. For example, Caleb Gare, of Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925), intimately strokes his flax field. Modernity brings increasingly violent imagery, with new farming machinery more explicitly raping the land.

²⁶ Sarah Carter’s *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (1990) complicates this idea, explaining that there was Aboriginal farming before contact. However, it is important to note that this farming would have been imagined by Indigenous people themselves and would not be seen as the *only* way to use the land.

homelessness herself. Furthermore, many of the homes she cares for are part of working farms, essentially performing the role of a farmer's wife in her domestic duties.

At one point, Maria's father gets a job working for a farmer he knows who provides a house for the family to live in. Campbell writes, "Jamie and I unpacked our few things and tried to clean that barn of a house, which seemed so desolate and unfriendly compared to our comfortable log home. The only consolation was that the relief man would not find us and we could be together" (Campbell 75). This new home, the result of a forced movement, does not *feel* like home as their old log cabin did. The space further connects the family to a farming lifestyle but only in terms of farm animals in that the house is compared to a barn. The Métis people are also connected to farm animals when they are promised paid relief work from a local politician. Campbell writes, "One of the projects was clearing land for a huge pasture. There was very little money for fancy equipment but plenty of manpower – the Halfbreeds from the MLA's riding" (Campbell 63). She continues to explain: "When we arrived the men were in harness like horses, pulling up stumps and trees. Dad started to laugh when he saw Alex Vandal coming towards us pulling a tree, sweating and panting. He looked at us and said, 'Danny, did you know the new government felt sorry for us because we're called 'Halfbreeds'? They passed a law changing our name and now we're CCF horses'" (Campbell 63). Once again, the Métis people are coerced into agricultural work but it is not the work of a farmer, but instead, the farmer's animals.

The Métis people's traditionally nomadic lifestyle is constructed by a white perspective as being in opposition to settlement, and is thus associated with homelessness. Renate Eigenbrod explains this notion in terms of Canadian conquest. Eigenbrod cites Stephen Greenblatt who says that "the argument in Columbus's time that land could be conquered was 'proven' by the

fact that there were no inhabitants as Europeans knew them, i.e. people living in ‘settled dwellings’” (Eigenbrod 22). In other words, Aboriginal people *occupied* the space but did not *inhabit* it. However, the imposed act of homesteading and the spatial constraints placed on these people expresses a more profound state of homelessness. Campbell concedes to this new version of homelessness, writing, “It was difficult to accept the fact that times were changing, but if there was to be a future for their children, the roaming, free life must be forgotten” (Campbell 12). Removing mobility from the home making process – being able to find a home in multiple places through a transient lifestyle – causes both physical and psychological homelessness.

The physical expression of homelessness is that these people are forced to settle along the road allowance, Crown land on either side of the road. Maria explains that after a failed attempt to homestead, “The Halfbreeds then became squatters on their land and were eventually run off by the new owners. One by one they drifted back to the road lines and crown lands where they built cabins and barns and from then on were known as ‘Road Allowance people’” (Campbell 13). Crown land belongs to the government and not the Métis people, indicating their physical homelessness by the fact that they *occupy* but do not *own* the land. This is essentially how homelessness is defined – *occupying* many spaces but *owning* none.²⁷ The word ‘allowance’ in ‘Road Allowance’ indicates an external force, white power, which regulates the lives of these people in that their occupancy of this space is permitted but not preferred.

Maria’s people often visit the town of St. Michele, which is always exciting for it is a new space of possibility. However, the trips end in disappointment because the white people want them to stay in the segregated and ‘appropriate’ areas they are comfortable with them occupying – the road allowance. When they are off Crown land, they are considered out of

²⁷ While the pre-contact Indigenous nomadic lifestyle can also be imagined in these terms, it was only done through white eyes. Furthermore, this ‘version of homelessness’ is a choice by Aboriginal people instead of the imposed version of homelessness by another governing body.

governmental control. Maria explains that her people were often formally asked to leave, usually by the R.C.M.P., an obvious representation of the federal government reasserting their power in regulating spaces.

The Métis people are psychologically homeless on Crown land because the space represents a government that has a history of making these people *feel* like they do not belong in Canada. Occupying a space beside the roads also emphasizes how these people have lost their mobility. The road taunts them in that they can watch people travel by but cannot move themselves. This lack of real mobility also gestures to the lack of social mobility in terms of making change and reaching potential as a people. Keahey also connects the label of 'Road Allowance People' to identity, explaining that it "encapsulates the strong causal link that Campbell establishes between a diminished sense of identity and a 'placeless' sense of place" (Keahey 103).

Agricultural activity is constructed by white power as an opposition to homelessness – settlement can guarantee one a home while anything else is a homeless existence. One alternative to an agricultural lifestyle or living on Crown land is by *choosing* homelessness. Campbell writes of some men who, "frustrated and discouraged" with their homesteading attempts, choose homeless and everything that comes with it – the "sub-zero weather and all the dangers associated with living in the bush" (Campbell 13). Since farming is entrenched in a system of white power, these men who choose homelessness are denying this power. Maria almost chooses homelessness herself, preferring it to attaining a home through the welfare system. Maria explains to her friend Marion, "I'm not going through that business again. I'll go back on the street – at least there I'm not going to feel guilty about spending government money, and I'll be earning every cent of it" (Campbell 133). Again, choosing homelessness becomes a

form of resistance against white power. It is a way for these Métis people to physically represent their internal feelings of regional and national un-belonging – the ways they feel *psychologically* homeless.

While immigrant literature certainly critiques nationalism, patriarchy and white power more generally, there is not the same level of resistance to specific national and regional institutions that Indigenous writers engage with. *Halfbreed* draws attention to the ways specific institutions marginalize Aboriginal and Métis communities, constantly rooting the narrative in ideas about space and emphasizing the homeless state of Indigenous people. The reader recognizes how the Canadian federal government creates smaller institutions underneath itself that work to serve the same purpose, silencing and confining Aboriginals. These institutions both create and represent physical and psychological manifestations of homelessness for Indigenous people. The text demonstrates how institutions of education, healthcare, religion and security, to name a few, participate in a larger national government system and how the individual spaces which represent these institutions – schools, hospitals, churches and jails – are a reflection of this power.

The opening chapter's explanation about how the Métis people were forced into this homeless state demonstrates the large amount of distrust the Métis people have for the federal government. Cheechum explains to Maria that the federal government has smaller institutions underneath it that all comprise the same system of white power – “the churches, with their talk about God, the devil, heaven and hell, and schools that taught children to be ashamed, were all a part of that government. When I tried to explain to her that our teacher said governments were made by the people, she told me, ‘It only looks like that from the outside, my girl’” (Campbell 137). Cheechum demonstrates how the federal government controls an extensive system of

white power – other institutions underneath this government spatially and ideologically embody white power and work to regulate the spaces, bodies and identities of those not in power. A critique of these institutions translates to a more general critique of white culture and its assimilative forces. Residential schools represent continuing colonialism in that they teach white history, religion and ideology. The local school Maria attends after her time at a residential school is not much better for it is a space physically and figuratively divided along racial lines – the white and Métis sit on opposite sides of the room and the white teachers and students are largely prejudiced towards the Métis children.

The Church is another example of a space regulated by white power. Campbell writes, “The churchyard, which was the graveyard as well, was just down the hill from our house and it had the most luscious strawberries in the country” (Campbell 30).²⁸ Yet the children are not allowed to pick them because the priest said the berries “belonged to the Church, and if we took them it would be stealing from God. This made us very angry. We had seen him many times taking things from the Indians’ Sundance Pole, and that belonged to the Great Spirit” (Campbell 30). The strawberries represent the land and its natural resources while the Church and priest represent the Canadian government and politicians respectively. This example displays the hypocrisy of white ownership – Indigenous people no longer have access to land and resources they never believed humans could own in the first place. White power has made *natural* resources into *national* resources. Yet, these national resources are for those who possess power in the nation-state, not for everyone who lives within its borders.

Keahey demonstrates how land and resources are instrumental to Indigenous survival and success. Paraphrasing Geoffrey York’s argument, she writes, “the loss of land, and hence of the

²⁸ While it is common for graveyards to be located close to the church, it is significant that Maria mentions this for no reason. Therefore, she points to the way that the spatial representation of Christianity indicates a figurative death for the Aboriginal people.

resource base, means the loss of the traditional economy and way of life, which often leads to a life of welfare dependency and a lack of self-determination. This in turn produces stress, anxiety, fear, and depression, which often manifest themselves in crime and alcoholism” (Keahey 103). *Halfbreed* certainly traces this trajectory, demonstrating how welfare is a system of home monitoring and enforced homelessness. The Métis families are constantly supervised, for there are strict regulations on what can be taken from the land and at what times. This not only threatens the traditional way of life by limiting hunting and trapping, but also threatens home life. It is difficult for the children to feel at home when they live in constant fear that their father will be taken to jail and that they will be placed in different foster homes. When Maria’s father does not trap, his family is forced to eat gophers as their meat source. White children make fun of them for this, not realizing that *their* bodies represent the system of white power that makes the Métis children do this.

Due to this fear of losing her family and the physical and further psychological homelessness that would result, Maria marries a wealthy white man named Darrel. She explains, “I knew that if I wanted anything better for myself and family other than an orphanage, foster home, or mud shack, I had to go through with it” (Campbell 105). However, marrying into white power does not change anything – Darrel is abusive and calls the welfare people who take away Maria’s brothers and sisters, placing them in permanent foster homes. Maria’s own child is left with her but has a similar fate, living in various orphanages later in the narrative when Maria cannot care for her due to her substance abuse issues. After seeing her siblings years later, Maria further realizes that the welfare system does not provide *real* homes for these children but instead, intensifies their feelings of homelessness – they “were lonely and wanted so desperately to be loved” (Campbell 150). The other aspect of the welfare system discussed in the text is

financial assistance. Maria gets assistance herself and is urged to find an inexpensive apartment or home as to not waste government money. The system that disenfranchised Indigenous people, taking land, resources and any feeling of belonging or home, is the same system that now makes these people feel guilty about taking money from it.

Maria finally realizes the full extent of Cheechum's teachings about the federal government and the institutions under it that make up the system of white power. These institutions are represented by public spaces but it is the actions done in private that are the real problem. Maria explains "that poor people, both white and Native, who are trapped within a certain kind of life, can never look to the business and political leaders of this country for help. Regardless of what they promise, they'll never change things, because they are involved in and perpetuate in private the very things that they condemn in public" (Campbell 118).²⁹ Manning refers to Samira Kawash's argument about public and private spaces, specifically in reference to homelessness. She writes:

Kawash's argument is centered on the juxtaposition between secured public space and the insecure figure of the homeless who must be removed from the city in order to resecure public space. The public, she claims, is always defined 'as against the visible, street-dwelling homeless,' where 'homelessness is not a problem that occurs within the public but a threat that appears from elsewhere' (320). Consequently, the homeless body cannot be properly identified. Rather, it is an 'emergent and contingent condition that traverses and occludes identity' (324). The homeless is thus recognized not in relation to homeless practices as such, but through the public struggle to define and secure itself as distinct and whole.' (Manning 57)

While Kawash's argument is specifically about physically homeless bodies, the ideas she presents also work in terms of the less obvious and figurative manifestations of homelessness presented in *Halfbreed*. Maria realizes that to start fixing social problems, the private must be made public – Canadians must urge politicians and those in power to be accountable for their

²⁹ Maria's mother not being supportive of her father's politics is another representation of the public/private debate. Here, Campbell suggests a "strong link between public and private concerns, and that the 'inner' home would never be able to be stable and secure until the 'outer' one was made that way too" (Keahey 107).

actions. The narrative also prompts the reader to recognize how the public/private binary must be rectified in terms of those using the welfare system so these people do not become a faceless mass. Maria attempts to do this through her creation of a halfway house for girls. Campbell writes, “I explained that I didn’t believe I could help anyone solve their personal problems, but if I could give them a home and friendship, then they would in turn find their own answers” (Campbell 149). Maria realizes how important a home space is in moving forward, even if that home space is ‘halfway’ between your own space and someone else’s.

The narrative depicts two moments of homecoming for Maria, both of which describe the decaying Métis settlement. Campbell writes, “The old log houses were gone and in their place grew wild rose bushes. The store looked grey and desolate, and the trees that I remembered were all dried up. In the early morning light, our house – the house I had missed so much – looked lonely and dilapidated” (Campbell 147). Although this image is melancholic, Maria’s reunion with her father, who emphatically says, “My girl! You’re home!” (Campbell 147), provides her with the necessary feeling of belonging that the physical home can no longer offer. The second homecoming demonstrates how Maria’s childhood home is in further decay, “tumbled down and overgrown with brush” (Campbell 7). The entire Métis settlement is in the same rundown condition, widening the scope from that of personal homelessness to a collective Métis experience. This image pattern expresses the simultaneous disillusionment and hope the text continues to provide for the Métis people more generally in terms of regional and national belonging. The settlement represents how the Métis people have been abandoned by the Canadian government and by extension, other Canadians. However, hope remains, as demonstrated by the fact that the houses have made their way back to the land and beautiful flowers have come to occupy these once domestic spaces. The painting the inmates give Maria

parallels the image of her settlement – “The painting was of a burnt-out forest, all black, bleak and dismal. In the center was a burnt-out tree stump, and at the roots were little green shoots sprouting up. The forest was like our lives, and the shoots represented hope” (Campbell 147). While the forest image specifically symbolizes Maria and her children, it comes to represent the struggles and hopes of all Métis people.

Campbell concludes her narrative with this kind of optimism, voiced in terms of the national space, saying that she now has new brothers and sisters “all over the country” (Campbell 157). Keahey explains that “the ‘home place,’ rather than simply being lost, is now redefined to extend over the entire country” (Keahey 108). While Keahey notes that this may initially seem to weaken Campbell’s argument for specific land claims, the two versions of home actually complement one another. She writes, “In order to pursue the acquisition of a homeland on the local level, she must first transpose her sense of home and community onto the larger regional or national level where political action can be effected (and effective). Ironically, then, in both the metaphorical and literal senses, Campbell can attempt to go home only by first leaving it” (Keahey 108). Yet this is not ironic when one considers that Maria’s people have been stripped of their mobility – their nomadic lifestyle was *how* they found home. Therefore, it seems only *fitting* that Maria must move in order to find belonging in her own life.

Mobility is cast in a slightly darker light in Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* because movement is controlled by the welfare system, representing the Métis child’s experience of homelessness. April states early in the novel “And of course, we were always on welfare” (Mosionier 2), as if this reality is an expectation of her race. Moving from one rundown house to another, April and Cheryl still feel most at home wherever their parents are – the girls’ idea of a *real* home is connected to biology. April’s mother “kept the cleanest house (except for those

mornings after the medicine days). She would tell her friends that it was because she was raised in a residential school and then worked as a housekeeper for the priest in her hometown”

(Masionier 3). While Alice’s experiences at a residential school and as a housekeeper teach her to become proficient in the material keeping of a house, these experiences are presumably what contribute to her addiction and the eventual disintegration of her home life. Alice takes pride in her house when she is not drinking and April helps in the hopes of prolonging these feelings. Keeping a nice house, despite the space’s representation of her family’s poverty, is a way for Alice to combat alcoholism and the resulting self-hatred. Furthermore, it is a reminder that despite their less than ideal situation, she still has a physical home space for her family.

This reality does not last long, with April and Cheryl eventually taken away from their parents and brought to an orphanage, a home for homeless children. Mother Superior greets the girls and takes them to bed where they feel “all alone in that pitch-black space” (Masionier 11). April constantly looks for her parents, one day noticing her father outside the building. April calls to him but he does not see her and she sobs because she “had been so close to going home again” (Masionier 12). A few days later, April falls ill and dreams of not being able to find her home – “I was very hot, and I walked and walked, but our house was no longer where it should have been. I woke up and called for Mom and Dad” (Masionier 13). This dream demonstrates the link April makes between her physical home, feelings of being at home, and her parents. April’s dream reveals her fear that she will no longer be able to reconcile these three indicators of belonging.

April and Cheryl are eventually separated into different foster homes and while April learns to love the Dions, they are not her biological family and as such, can never truly be her home. April explains, “I had settled in at school, and I had found that this home could be as safe

and secure as the tiny one on Jarvis Avenue. Sometimes, when it was windy, cold, and grey outside, I even enjoyed the cozy feeling of being with a family. At the same time, I still yearned to be with my own” (Mosionier 18). April knows the difference between *a* home and her *own* home. The feelings April has, of truly belonging in another home, are amplified when she returns to the Dions after her first family visit with Cheryl and her parents. She says, “I felt like an outsider. I felt that I didn’t belong to this family – they were being nice to me; that’s all – and I didn’t have my own real family. I wondered again how long it would be before I could go home” (Mosionier 23). While April eventually calls her foster parents ‘Maman’ and ‘Papa,’ making her “feel more comfortable in their home” (Mosionier 28), she still realizes that this is not her true home. The welfare system is about finding homes for ‘homeless’ children but April indicates from the beginning that a *real* home is not possible in these artificial situations.

When Maman gets sick, April is placed with a different foster family who live on a farm. As demonstrated in *Halfbreed*, the farm is a space representative of the Métis hardships that came with settlement. The DeRosier farm becomes a microcosm of the nation, with April’s displacement a reflection of the Aboriginal experience with contact and settlement. As is the case with her own mother and Maria from *Halfbreed*, April becomes the housekeeper for the DeRosiers, expected to *keep* the house while essentially homeless herself. In fact, the DeRosiers make April feel bad about taking up any space in their home and she is left alone in an awful room at the back of the house. Maggie, Mrs. DeRosier’s daughter, trespasses in April’s room, again representative of the Indigenous experience with European contact. Maggie explains that she can intrude whenever she wants, saying, “You live in *my* house” (Mosionier 46; emphasis added). Maggie’s assertion clarifies that this space *fronts* as April’s home but is in no way a real home. Maggie also takes April’s new suitcases from the Dions, representative of the

thoughtfulness of her previous foster family, as well as April's transient status. April's transience is generally problematic for her because she desires a stable home space that the welfare system cannot provide. However, in this particular situation, mobility is April's only hope in leaving the DeRosier farm. By taking the suitcases away, Maggie is taking away any hope April has to move to a new space and as a result, confirms her homeless status. This incident further demonstrates how the DeRosier farm is a microcosm of Canada in that national powers took mobility away from the Aboriginal people as part of their home making process. Maggie does not give April her suitcases back, instead defacing them by writing "Ape, the bitch" (Mosionier 46) in red fingernail polish. Maggie further aggravates the situation by telling her mother that April ransacked her room and stole *her* belongings. Maggie is similar to the priest in *Halfbreed* who warned the children against taking the strawberries from the churchyard while he himself took items from the Sundance Pole, reversing the roles of infringement. Both of these interactions represent how land and resources were taken from Indigenous people, yet it is the Indigenous people that are constantly made to seem at fault for issues concerning space.³⁰

April fantasizes about running away, seriously considering it after walking into the woods one day. April would rather choose to experience real homelessness than continue to live in a 'homeless home.' When Cheryl comes to live with the DeRosiers, the girls actually attempt this, travelling through the grain fields at night while following the roads to Winnipeg. After being discovered, Mrs. Semple, April's social worker, tells the girls that their behaviour will cause them to 'live off society' like their parents. She continues, "If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place they do: skid row" (Mosionier 64). April contemplates leaving the farm again when Cheryl no longer lives with her, pondering, "I bet all those girls who ended up on

³⁰ For example, Indigenous people are stereotyped as 'savages' for defending their space and Louis Riel is characterized as 'crazy' for defending Métis land claims.

skid row just wanted freedom and peace in the first place. Just like me. I'd had good intentions about my life, but here I was, forced to go out into that world, unprepared and alone, with only a Grade 10 education, and no money" (Mosionier 83-84). April imagines homelessness as freedom but also realistically sees the limits of this lifestyle. As demonstrated in *Halfbreed*, these expectations of what an Aboriginal person will become are largely projected by white society and are realized by the systems white power controls. While the girls do not encounter life at a residential school or reserve, welfare is part of the same structure of white power. April connects welfare to jail, saying that she felt like a criminal when Cheryl and she "sat alone in one room while they [their social workers] discussed our futures in another" (Mosionier 65). This image spatially demonstrates the power the social workers have over the two silenced girls. Like European colonizers who control the spaces of Indigenous people, the social workers decide which spaces the girls can occupy.

After gaining independence from the welfare system, April searches for her parents with a list of addresses provided by Mr. Wendell, her second social worker. April first discovers that her childhood home has "been torn down and replaced by a government building" (Mosionier 97). It is only fitting that the system of white power which caused April to feel homeless most of her life has now physically taken over the one place she ever felt at home. April continues her search by visiting many dirty and rundown houses. She realizes that if she had not lived in foster homes, she "would most likely have been brought up in those slums" (Mosionier 99). She further articulates her feelings later in the novel about the people she met when trying to find her parents – "All I felt was contempt. They are a disgusting people. And maybe, just maybe, our parents are part of that. And if that's where we came from, I sure don't want to go back [...] I vowed to myself then that no way was I ever going to end up like them, or live in places like

theirs” (Mosionier 121). Now having her own place, April spends a lot of time studying home décor and fashion magazines as well as books on proper etiquette, preparing herself for a “promising future in white society” (Mosionier 107). The actual dream April has in the orphanage of reconnecting with her family in her childhood home has been replaced by a day dream of the fancy houses of white society depicted in magazines. April’s childhood home no longer exists physically and April’s discovery of the ‘slums’ her parents occupied cause her further detachment from her family and the idea of a biological home she once relied on. By reading home décor magazines, April comes to more fully desire an assimilated idea of a white, domestic space.

Yet April realizes that her ideas are not realistic, saying, “with all my planning and everything, I’d probably end up falling in love with a poor farmer or something. And I’d have to work for the rest of my life” (Mosionier 108). While farming is the traditional depiction of a successful home making on the prairies, it is certainly not for the Métis people and is a horrible reminder for April of her life with the DeRosiers. April does not marry a farmer, instead opting for Bob Radcliff, a Torontonion who comes to Winnipeg to “purchase land for expansion” (Mosionier 109). Bob represents eastern powers coming to the West to attain land and wealth. While he is not a man of agriculture, Bob’s purchasing of land remains an indicator of success. Bob purchases April in a similar way and when the marriage ends up failing, the rhetoric of homesteading is used, for Bob gives April a large *settlement* in the divorce.

Bob’s mansion is “located on a sprawling estate” (Mosionier 113) and despite being graciously welcomed by him and his mother, April feels like she “had landed in another foster home” (Mosionier 113). Like Maria from *Halfbreed*, April marries into a white family in order to secure a home. Maria chooses to marry Darrel because she knows how to play the system that

will keep her familial home together. Alternatively, April really believes that her marriage to Bob and his large house is a way to fit into white society and by extension, a personal and national *feeling* of home. April's notion of a biological home has fallen apart and her move to Toronto further alienates her from her only remaining family member, Cheryl. When Cheryl comes to visit, April accidentally tells her that she had looked for their parents. April does not want Cheryl to continue the search for fear that she will find out the truth about their addiction. Cheryl's fond memories of their family and her "too idealistic outlook for the future of Native people: those things helped her, and gave her something to live for" (Mosionier 120). In an attempt to disconnect Cheryl from the idea of a 'biological home,' April urges Cheryl to pretend like she is an orphan instead of looking for her parents. Once Cheryl leaves, April fully realizes that her attempt to find home through white society have ultimately failed – "comfortable and surrounded by socially prominent people. But I felt that I really didn't belong" (Mosionier 124).

The girls initially connect their idea of home to biology – to their parents and the small house in which they grew up. Cheryl holds onto this idea longer than April but eventually faces the same disillusionment, referring to her father and the other transient, homeless people she finds in her search as 'gutter creatures.' She questions if April is correct, maybe it is better "to live that empty life than live out on the streets" (Mosionier 221). However, both lives are only different manifestations of homelessness. April connects the notion of a biological home first to her parents and then to her sister but never in terms of *racial* biology, spending the majority of the novel denying her Métis ancestry. April's nephew, Henry Lee, becomes her second chance to reconcile the idea of a biological home, imagining it in terms of family *and* race. With her parents and sister no longer there to represent a familial home, Henry Lee becomes a representation of both April's family, the next generation, and her Métis heritage. After

integrating notions of family and race into her idea of a biological home, April can now begin to *feel* at home in this world.

Like *In Search of April Raintree*, Marilyn Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* begins with the image of a familial home as the *true* representation of home. Also similar to Mosionier's narrative, the home of Dumont's speaker is judged by white outsiders. In fact, in all three Indigenous texts, judging is done by white outsiders regarding the 'fitness' of a home space, reminiscent of the judging done by white Europeans upon contact. The poem "The White Judges" begins by extensively describing the speaker's small but loving childhood home, where 'white judges' sit encircling the house. While the white judges are not identified as belonging to any one institution, they can easily represent the welfare or judicial systems. Again, family and home structures are how the nation is often represented in literature. Hence, the Aboriginal family in this poem symbolizes all Canadian Indigenous people, their house is Canada, and the white judges are colonizers. It is important to note that this family home is actually an old schoolhouse. Thus, the speaker's feeling of being a 'foreigner' at school in "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl," previously discussed in Chapter One, can be transferred to her home. Therefore, her home comes to represent a space of white power and un-belonging, a 'homeless home.'

"The Halfbreed Parade" is also about this family home, beginning with a reference to the white judges. The house is "'skid' into town with a team of horses and a / parade of snotty-nosed, home-haircut, patched halfbreeds / trailing behind it" (Dumont 16). Skid refers to both the action of moving the house and also to skid row, "a run-down part of a town frequented by vagrants and alcoholics" ("skid row," def. 1). In this poem, homelessness is also associated with skid row in that this 'homeless home' comes to represent this space. The Métis people are

further connected with homelessness through the home's mobility, which is taken off the land and transplanted in town. The house is aligned with homelessness from a white perspective because its mobility represents the traditionally nomadic lifestyle of Indigenous people. Yet, the poem's opening reference to the white judges indicates that the house is being moved in order to avoid white power. The real homelessness of Indigenous people comes from white culture in that settlement displaced Aboriginal people. Keeping the home enables the family to remain 'settled' in terms of a white construction of the word but the house's movement enables the family to reclaim a kind of nomadic lifestyle, however fleeting it may be. This representation of Métis homelessness becomes a spectacle, with the speaker saying, "The only thing missing was a mariachi band / and a crown of pilgrims stretching / miles down the gravel road / which offered passage to our grand mansion / of clapboard" (Dumont 16). While the house symbolizes the national un-belonging of Métis people, it also comes to specifically represent a regional displacement of Aboriginal people in that the home is referred to as a "Floating prairie structure" (Dumont 16).

"Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald" is an explicitly national depiction of homelessness, demonstrating how Canada is the ultimate 'homeless home.' Specifically addressing the first Prime Minister of Canada, Dumont draws attention to the construction of Canada as a new nation-state, defined by settlement and the railroad that stretches "from sea to shining sea" (Dumont 52). The poem demonstrates how both settlement and the railway have acted as systems of displacement for Indigenous people. Aligning these two forces as contributing to colonization she writes, "we were railroaded / by some steel tracks that didn't last / and some settlers who wouldn't settle / and it's funny we're still here and callin ourselves halfbreed" (Dumont 52). Canonized prairie texts depict settlement and the railway as romantic images, two

factors that have contributed to Canada's nation-building. However, these are actually indicators of exploitation and oppression, causing Indigenous people to become physically homeless through their displacement and in turn, psychologically homeless. The legacy of settlement and the railway are valued by white power as image-making. In this way, settlement and the railway belong to the national imaginary while an Indigenous presence is left outside this imaginary. Dumont writes, "that goddammed railroad never made this a great nation, / cause the railway shut down / and this country is still quarrelling over unity" (Dumont 52). The railroad, like multiculturalism, is supposed to act as a unifying force for the nation but instead, divides. While the speaker calls herself Métis halfway through the poem – "after all that shuffling us around to suit the settlers, / we're still here and Metis" (Dumont 52) – the poem is framed by the word 'halfbreed,' used in the first and last line. While the word 'Halfbreed' traditionally represents a fractured identity, Dumont is re-appropriating the word by connecting it to an image of a strong Métis presence in Canada. In this way, Dumont is dispelling the 'disappearing Indian' myth through the re-appropriation of this word, asserting that an Indigenous presence remains in Canada.

"It Crosses My Mind" discusses how physical spaces allotted for Aboriginal people are connected to symbolic and literary spaces. By symbolic spaces, I mean the idea that the nation is an imaginary construction that is conceptualized in terms of the mosaic. Race is explicitly connected to this imaginary when Dumont writes, "It crosses my mind to wonder where we fit in this 'vertical mosaic,' / this colour colony; the urban pariah, the displaced and surrendered / to apartment blocks, shopping malls, superstores and giant screens" (Dumont 59). The idea of a vertical mosaic critiques the notion that Canadian multiculturalism is a mosaic where different

pieces of glass, or races, fit together nicely to form one cohesive piece, the nation.³¹ Instead, the mosaic is a hierarchy of races where some pieces are valued over others. The concept of verticality is used again lines later when the speaker questions, “will sovereignty matter or will we just slide off the level / playing field turned on its side while the provincial flags slap / confidently before me, echoing their self-absorbed anthem in the / wind” (Dumont 59). This passage also demonstrates how not all people are considered equal, this time connecting the nation, represented by the anthem, to the region, represented by the provincial flags. At the same time as this questioning of regional and national belonging, there is also a questioning of physical belonging in that Aboriginal people are assigned to occupy certain spaces. In the urban space, they are ‘displaced and surrendered’ to apartments, malls and grocery stores but also to giant screens, perhaps indicating the false Hollywood representations of Indigenous people. The speaker continues to question, “are we distinct ‘survivors of white noise,’ or merely hostages in the / enemy camp” (Dumont 59). Here, Canada is imagined as a possible enemy camp, certainly not representative of a space where ideas about home are rooted. The speaker compares this continuing regulation of space between white and Aboriginal people to a game of ‘finders keepers/loser weepers,’ an amusement, she asserts, that has been played for long enough.

These ideas about racialized spaces and physical homes are addressed in terms of citizenship by questioning job applications which ask the speaker if she is a Canadian citizen. The speaker does not want to belong to a nation-state constructed by white power yet she is expected to “mindlessly check ‘yes,’ indifferent to skin / colour and the deaths of 1885” (Dumont 59). She ironically uses the national anthem as a representation of how Canada has been constructed through narrative, saying, “am I actually free to check ‘no,’ / like the true north

³¹ Vertical mosaic is a reference to John Porter’s book *Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (1965).

strong and free” (Dumont 59). The speaker notes that the application only offers two simplistic options – yes or no, providing no option to nuance the response. Checking ‘yes’ for belonging to Canada is like checking ‘no’ for being Indigenous because of the nation’s construction as a white space.³² The speaker imagines what she would like to write on the application form:

yes, by coercion, yes, but no ...
there’s more, but no space provided to write my historical inter-
pretation here, that yes but no, really only means yes because there
are no lines for the stories between yes and no. (Dumont 59; emphasis in original)

This poem demonstrates how physical spaces and imagined spaces, in terms of the multicultural mosaic, are controlled by white power. Dumont asserts in this poem that new spaces must be made through literary means, with the speaker imagining an application that has a space to tell her people’s history as well as her own, personal story. This imagined solution will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, which focuses on story-telling spaces.

Campbell, Mosionier and Dumont’s texts have demonstrated how white power has constructed segregated spaces for Indigenous people. The immigrant texts I look at in this project are also deeply invested in ideas about how space and race are connected. This notion has been traditionally depicted in prairie literature by the representation of both rural and urban ‘ethnic centres’ for immigrants. Two of the first immigrant novels on the prairies depict these segregated spaces. Ralph Connor’s *The Foreigner; A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909) extensively describes ‘Little Russia,’ a community for Galician immigrants in Winnipeg. This space is representative of the marginalization the Galician immigrants face when compared to the rest of the ‘non-ethnic’ people in the city. Laura Goodman Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* (1923) primarily takes place in Gimli, a settlement area specifically set aside for Icelandic immigrants to

³² This erasure of aboriginality is again connected to the mosaic. The speaker questions how she will know her kin in her old age, saying, “what name will I know them by in / these multicultural intentions, how will I know other than by / shape of nose and cheekbone, colour of eyes and hair” (Dumont 59).

Manitoba. These two examples represent both urban and rural ethnic spaces that have distinct boundaries. The immigrant narratives explored by this project do not explicitly engage with these traditionally depicted immigrant communities but do have similar conversations about racialized spaces and how they relate to physical and psychological constructions of homelessness. Earlier immigrant texts, like Connor's and Salverson's, do not explicitly challenge the boundaries of these racialized spaces but contemporary immigrant writers on the prairies are more willing to offer a critique. Like the Indigenous texts, these narratives are also concerned with how mobility is part of the home making process and demonstrate how choosing homelessness becomes an act of resistance against the nation-state.

Like the speaker's family house in Dumont's "Halfbreed Parade," the Tonkatsu family home in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is also physically relocated. Murasaki says that "the house wasn't always here. It was originally built in High River and someone had had the whole creaking mess hauled on a flatbed truck in the middle of the night" (Goto 164). The home, like its inhabitants, is not 'native' to the land, immigrating to its current location. This movement placed great stress on the house, as it did with the Tonkatsus' migration to Canada, producing fractures and wrinkles that let the wind constantly blow through. The wind is constructed by the novel as a representation of the harsh immigrant experience in Canada and specifically, on the prairies. Naoe says that the wind hurls "insults at this house, my home" (Goto 11), indicating that she is in direct opposition with this Western Canadian force. Occasionally, the wind would shake the house so hard that "books in the attic, and sometimes strange photos would fall out of the walls" (Goto 164). While the Tonkatsus makes the house their own by living in it, they must constantly deal with the previous owners, whose personal documents represent a history of Canada that these immigrants have no access to. While we have seen various examples of

homes representing the nation, the Tonkatsus home is symbolic of both Canada and Japan. The family's mushroom farm only emphasizes this fact. On one hand, the farm represents the traditional depiction of settler culture on the prairies because the family participates in rural life and commerce. However, by harvesting a non-normative prairie crop, the family farm still holds ties to Japan.

Before living in this displaced house representative of the homeless immigrant, Naoe has other encounters with homelessness. When she is a child, Naoe loses her childhood home in Japan because of a trick played on her rich father by poor villagers who “worked [the land] for fourteen generations but never owned for their labours” (Goto 10). She explains, “I am not bitter for losing something that was unevenly divided. The things I missed, the things gone forever, were the sweet smile on my Okāsan’s face, the silly stories Otōsan made for me” (Goto 10). Naoe proves from the beginning that it is not the physical home that is important to her but the intangible things one loses with the loss of space. The stories Naoe loses through this experience are what she is constantly trying to reclaim through her own story-telling, a topic further explored in Chapter Three. Naoe’s experience is reminiscent of Aboriginal populations, whose loss of land also causes them to lose resources, traditions and culture.

Naoe then moves from Japan to China, which in many ways, can be compared to her eventual migration to the Canadian prairies. While Naoe learns English in Canada, she does not learn the language during her ten years in China, explaining, “I stayed behind the walls they built around the cities, the towns, to protect the people who lived there from the people who lived without” (Goto 45). Naoe is naïve, understanding now that she was foolish not to question why the schools were made separate for Chinese and Japanese students and why Chinese students learned to speak Japanese despite living in China. Furthermore, bridges are built all across the

country, reminiscent of Canada's colonizing railway system. Goto writes, "The words of one woman would not have turned the marching boots of men, but the pain of not having spoken, of not bothering to ask questions, still aches inside me now" (Goto 46). Upon returning to Japan, Naoe's house is bombed by the Americans during the war. When the fire dies, Naoe and Keiko leave the bomb shelter they had run to and then "stand in the embers of [their] homes" (Goto 51). Naoe has lost her home twice and been a part of the Japanese colonial enterprise in China as an ignorantly complicit colonizer. She brings this unique perspective to her life in Canada, understanding how homes are connected to power, being both a victim and oppressor of enforced homelessness.

Naoe and Murasaki's narrations revolve around their psychological homelessness in Nanton specifically and Canada more generally. Both end up choosing homelessness as a way of physically living out this feeling of un-belonging. I've already discussed how Maria contemplates choosing homelessness at the welfare office and how April and Cheryl have a short stint as voluntarily homeless youth but these characters do not commit to the choice in the same way that Naoe and Murasaki do. As previously mentioned, home making is connected to mobility but choosing homelessness is a purposeful way of incorporating movement into a search for home. The rhetoric of homelessness reflects this – 'living on the *streets*' is a daily reminder of the mobility involved in this state. When one is homeless, one is *not* settled. Therefore, choosing homelessness is empowering because it goes against everything that settlement represents – white power controlling spaces and feelings of un-belonging. Murasaki validates her feelings of homelessness and finally puts her constant talking into action, saying, "Good to leave that house of dusty words. Too easy to sit and talk and talk when I can walk and talk instead" (Goto 81).

Before leaving for good, Naoe goes to the family mushroom farm, a space she has never occupied before, a space “much warmer than the house she had lived in” (Goto 84). As a representation of the Japanese land and its resources, her time there provides her with energy from her homeland to find a new home in Canada. Dried out from many years of prairie wind and dust, Naoe is given warmth and moisture and is ready to face the harsh Canadian climate. Naoe has spent all her time in Canada in a home that defined her as an immigrant, in that the space was an immigrant itself. Naoe is now ready to move out of this space and discover what Canada means to her. She explains, “Funny how it takes twenty long years to take one step outside, then, you manage to take more steps than you ever have in your life. That *all you have to do is move* your body from one place to another and everything around you changes so much, you have to grow new eyes, new ears. To see and hear. You have to grow a new mouth. I’m not too old to change” (Goto 113; emphasis added). Again, movement becomes an integral part of the home making process. Naoe reclaims homelessness as a state of social marginalization, demonstrating how it is a pathway to freedom, no longer confined by the nation-state.

Naoe realizes that Murasaki will be next in recognizing her spatial plan. When Naoe leaves on her nomadic adventure, she says, “I leave Murasaki behind, but she must shape her own location. And our stories entwine and loop around and this will never change. She lingers here, with me, even now” (Goto 113). Murasaki’s departure seems to be much more of a migration than Naoe’s transient homelessness. For Murasaki is not an immigrant, having been born in Canada. While this chapter demonstrates how homelessness can be thought of in terms of entire groups of marginalized and racialized people, Murasaki’s departure becomes a reminder that the search for a physical and psychological home space is also a *personal* struggle. Explaining to her mother why her boyfriend is not going with her, Murasaki says, “He just got

here, but he has to arrive. You can't move on until you've arrived. I've finally arrived and now I can go" (Goto 198). 'Arriving' in Canada does not necessarily mean feeling at home but instead, knowing what you believe about your position in this place. Keiko says that she arrived over thirty years ago but Muraskai says that she is still arriving, not having worked out her *real* feelings about Canada. Instead, Keiko has pretended to be white in order to 'fit' into the mosaic, never questioning what this white privilege might mean. For one, it places value in whiteness over anything else and discredits the struggles of immigrants in Canada. Keiko adamantly refuses any connection to a Japanese-Canadian community, explaining that she would never retire in Vancouver because there were too many Japanese people "who wished they were in Japan" (Goto 189). Contributing to an article called "The Multicultural Voices of Alberta," Keiko explains, "When I decided to immigrate, I decided to be at home in my new country" (Goto 189). Yet Murasaki tries to explain to Keiko that she cannot just say she is at home, she has to actively question space and nation in order to *feel* at home.

Shinji is more understanding of Murasaki's departure to find a home space, saying, "Your mother and I, we left Japan and came to be in Nanton. I suppose it's reasonable that you need to find elsewhere. Whatever or wherever it happens to be" (Goto 209). Shinji then asks if she will be going to Japan, a reverse migration from his own. Murasaki says that this is "too literal a translation" (Goto 209), indicating that her only requirement of a home is space where one *feels* belonging. This means that home is not limited to a space where people look like you or even where your family is, a much more inclusive notion of home than many definitions which intimately connect an idea of home to family and a physical space.

Like *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* explores interactions between space and race. Erin Manning writes, "In Canada, blackness functions as the signifier

of disappearance – that which is always out of sight, out of history, and out of circulation. By placing blackness ‘elsewhere,’ Canadian history has and continues to obfuscate the black presence in Canada” (Manning 67). Edugyan’s novel attempts to reconfigure Canadian geography and re-inscribe “blackness on the prairies – a Canadian space historically written as alien and antithetical to blackness” (Davis 39). Aster, the town the Tynes move to after Samuel inherits his Uncle Jacob’s house, is the first black hamlet in Alberta.³³ Yet the myth of the town’s creation demonstrate how this racial history is not rooted in acceptance – “As more blacks migrated from Oklahoma to set up lives on the prairie, the locals, folk who had themselves migrated little earlier, took action. Everything from petitions to newspapers to name-calling was used to cure the province of newcomers” (Edugyan 35). The locals were white settlers who used their slight advantage in timing to cause a fuss about the ‘newcomers.’ Hence, immigration itself is not problematic but the immigration of racialized bodies is. This becomes all the more evident in the government’s ruling that “no other foreigners of *this class* would be allowed into the *country*” (Edugyan 35; emphasis added). It is also important to note that while this migration of black bodies seems to be localized to Aster, it becomes an issue of *national* concern.

While the government promised that no other black bodies would enter the country, the new problem becomes: “what to do with the ones who’d already claimed land? Not a single local paper didn’t fatten with advice on how to cope with the strange pilgrims, this epidemic of filth and sloth that would soften Alberta’s morals” (Edugyan 35). This passage indicates that it is not only problematic that these bodies occupy this space but also that they claim land that is meant to be white. The softening of Alberta’s morals is predicted as a result of the black

³³ Edugyan based Aster on the real town of Amber Valley where, between 1908 and 1911, blacks from Oklahoma relocated to Alberta “in response to advertising campaigns by the Canadian government [about the space being a site of economic possibility] and increasing racism in the United States” (Davis 39).

immigrants but is actually the result of the white settlers. Edugyan writes, “During the next few months the surrounding homesteads lost their morals to the cold pleasure of sabotage. Never had they felt so futile as when the blacks accepted these offences as just another facet of Canadian life, no more trying than dry fields or mean spruce roots” (Edugyan 36). As town mythology goes, the white families decide “to pitch up their fear in the form of a wall” (Edugyan 36), physically representing the racial divide. The description of the wall’s formation uses the same kind of rhetoric as Canadian multiculturalism. Like the multicultural mosaic analogy, the wall is made of patches created by individual families. While all the patches of the “stone quilt” (Edugyan 36) work together to form the larger whole, each patch is made by a *white* family. The wall’s formation indicates how a symbol of unity can actually divide people instead of bringing them together, as is the case with the multicultural mosaic. When the Tynes arrive, the wall has been broken down from its original ten inches to two and is now referred to as the ‘stone road,’ shifting from a symbol of division to one of mobility. However, this symbolic move from division to mobility is not played out by the town’s people. For example, Yvette says that even though “this town used to be all black, everywhere you go they stare at you” (Edugyan 96). Another myth contributes to the idea that this racial divide still remains in Aster. Legend goes that one day, a five foot tall black shadow appeared, “tracing the proper side [of the wall] with no seen object to put it there” (Edugyan 37). Despite the wall’s worn physical embodiment of racial segregation, this incident demonstrates how the racial divide still exists.

Samuel moves to Aster in the hopes that this space will fulfil his notions about an idealized black hamlet. While he does not move to the rural in order to farm, he does wish to *settle* here. Davis calls Samuel’s movement from urban Calgary to rural Aster a kind of ‘contemporary pioneering.’ She writes:

his movement across the prairies not just to (re)settle, but to conquer, to achieve greatness – reveals the extent to which he understands his own search for self-fulfilment and national acceptance as dependent on a certain historical narrative of what it means to be a ‘real’ Canadian, an ‘ideal’ citizen. His relationship with the land, his struggle with the terrain, marks for him a movement away from passive citizenship (an immigrant economist in a Calgary office) toward national desire and political ownership of the nation and its land (a black settler on the Canadian prairies). (Davis 41)

Samuel hopes that this modern and alternative mode of settlement “will be enough to prove his desire and secure his right to belong” (Davis 42). Ray’s explanation to Samuel about his goal to “come up with the perfect blade of wheat” (Edugyan 122) reveals the unrealistic nature of Samuel’s expectations. Demonstrating how the Canadian multicultural myth functions in general and specifically in this novel, Ray says, “if you grow one plot of just one kind of crop, and you grow another plot with all sorts of different crops, the one with different crops yields a bigger, stronger and healthier harvest. So the idea is to take the best of all wheat and try to grow just those together. After a while you get to know what the strongest kind is, and there’s your formula” (Edugyan 122). With the prairies constantly figured as a microcosm of the nation by this novel, the different kinds of wheat represent the different races in Canada. While the beginning of Ray’s explanation seems promising as a multicultural analogy, he soon demonstrates how the end goal is to create the *best* wheat. Like the image of Canada’s multicultural mosaic, Ray’s goal for a homogeneous wheat field is unity but this unity is defined by a norm.

Samuel believes that his movement to a town with a long racial history in Canada will be empowering but he does not realize that the ideology that created this segregated space is still working today, perhaps most notable in Ray and Eudora. Ray and Eudora represent white power and constantly remind Samuel and Maud “of the incongruity of their physical and historical presence in Western Canada. Far from being understood as contributing to a Canadian national

narrative, Samuel and Maud are fixed permanently as immigrants. Seen as outsiders who threaten the nation's development, they and their daughters are always suspect" (Davis 42). By condemning *other* racialized bodies and assuring the Tynes that they are 'model immigrants,' Ray attempts to disguise his racism. Yet Ray continues to strongly assert to the Tynes that immigration policies must become stricter, saying, "if we keep on like this, we don't risk just our culture, but bankrupting ourselves" (Edugyan 149).³⁴ Connecting the abstract concept of 'Canadian culture' to economy, Ray expresses his concerns about the fate of farming. Ray benefited from the disintegration of the last Canadian 'cultural cornerstone,' ranching, when the government sold off the land it had been leasing to ranchers and gave it to new farmers. Accompanying Ray's anxiety about an agricultural shift is a more general concern that the rural will no longer exist. Ray fears that the current growth in cities, because of newcomer's demands, will cause Alberta to become completely urbanized. Ray embodies the concerns of white power – that by continuing to increase immigration in Canada, the traditional white and rural way of life is threatened. It will then become increasingly difficult to imagine Canada, and the prairies, as a white space.

Ray essentially blames the Depression on the immigrant population, explaining that North America "was trying to support the new rush of people. Fact is, newcomers weigh hard on our social system" (Edugyan 151). Besides the economy and image of Canada as an agricultural centre, Ray also expresses concern about the 'practical' issue of overpopulation. Maud retorts, "There was obviously space if all these people are still here" (Edugyan 150). Ray's 'real'

³⁴ Ray is concerned about the number of immigrants coming to Canada but Coopsammy's poem "Recession and the Third World Immigrant" is a reminder that the history of immigration in Canada is largely the result of an invitation. She writes, "the natives sang a song of welcome / as moving over gently, they swore / there's room for all" (Coopsammy 53). Reminiscent of past advertising campaigns which encouraged prairie immigration, the white 'native' Canadians assert that there is space for these immigrant bodies while completely disregarding the displacement and redistribution of Aboriginal people that make this possible.

concerns about immigration are full of inconsistencies and hypocrisy, perhaps best expressed when Maud questions, “Aren’t your ancestors foreigners, if you go way back?” (Edugyan 151).

Ray’s vague reasoning for stricter immigration policies is demonstrated by his following comment:

It’s not my intent to say these people shouldn’t be here, or even don’t have the right to be here. That’s not for me to choose. I only mean to point out that if they’re going to be here, they’ve got to accept not only the benefits but the responsibilities of being Canadian. A country’s not just a piece of land. What makes a nation a nation is when a group of like-minded people decide to work towards common causes, common goals. (Edugyan 150)

Ray sees himself as being able to define what these common cause and goals should be. While he is attuned to the ‘immigrant issue’ in Canada, his commentary clearly ignores an Indigenous presence. Canada, in its very formation, was not a group of like-minded people in that the space’s original inhabitants were silenced and segregated. Ray’s sole focus is on the ‘hardships’ of the white Canadian experience of dealing with immigration, having no real concern for the very real struggles of immigrants in this country. Again, Ray’s concern about the Canadian space is defined in terms of whiteness.

Davis notes that the characters in this novel “could be read not just as hopeless but also as homeless” (Davis 45). The house that the Tynes move into has a history of homelessness, being a boarding house before Samuel’s uncle took it over. Porter explains to Samuel that the people were ‘bums’ and treated it as a ‘slum.’ Brenda Cooper refers to Freud when describing the new Tyne residence, calling it an “uncanny house of homelessness” (Cooper 62), reminiscent not only of another era but of another world. The house occupies an ambiguous position in relation to the town of Aster and the country. As discussed before, the prairies are often figured as a

microcosm of the nation, with regional concerns becoming national problems.³⁵ This is certainly the case in this novel, with references to ‘the country’ directly meaning the rural prairies and indirectly indicating the country of Canada. Eudora tells Maud that she and Ray live in the country – “Stone Road divides us. This is still Aster, and we live on the other side of the road from you, so we live in the country” (Edugyan 57). By living in the ‘prairie’ country, Eudora and Ray also live in the ‘nation’ country. As a representation of a white farming family, it only makes sense that Eudora and Ray would occupy a space that symbolizes the entire nation, imagined as white and strongly linked to the agricultural practices of settlement.³⁶ Samuel clarifies his home’s position, saying to Ray, “I was told some time ago that the boundary between Aster and the country starts behind our house, and that in reality our home is in the country” (Edugyan 61). Ray says that he is mistaken and that his house is “practically in Aster proper” (Edugyan 61). Living in Aster means that the Tynes live outside of both the regional and national imaginary indicated by ‘the country.’ With its roots as a black town, Aster becomes a space outside the traditionally white nation, historically containing black bodies that were not considered to belong on the prairies or in Canada.

This notion of segregated racialized spaces becomes even clearer at the end of the novel when the Porters move in with Samuel and Maud, creating a smaller black community within Aster. When Maud dies, Samuel buries her beside Jacob, just outside of Aster, a space that figuratively represents Canada. Edugyan writes, “Their citizenship had been finalized; their flesh, his kin, cold in the ground, were now inseverable from Alberta” (Edugyan 296). Their birth place no longer defines them but their death place does. While Akosua returns to Ghana,

³⁵ This is made clear by Aster’s town hall – “A Canadian flag gleamed underneath it, impervious to the rain and wind that had so aged the hall,” as well as the Frank’s barn which held a similar image of a “frayed Union Jack and a Canadian flag” (Edugyan 105, 119). What happens in these small towns is a reflection of what happens in Canada.

³⁶ Ray tells Samuel that “Farming, and *harvesting* for that matter, are as old as Canada” (Edugyan 119; emphasis in original), demonstrating how integral farming is to the regional *and* national image.

Samuel knows that he will not because his kin are buried here and he now is also, “tied irrevocably to a Canadian landscape” (Davis 46). Furthermore, Samuel and his uncle had “a silent agreement that neither would return to Gold Coast. Exile is hard to overcome. Aster, with its black origins, became a surrogate homeland, a way of returning without returning” (Edugyan 306). Aster becomes a space for Samuel to navigate the Canadian immigrant experience. Not only does it act as a surrogate homeland but also as an opportunity for him to ‘settle’ on the prairies, thus becoming Canadian.

Having been born in Canada, the twins are not exiles like their parents. However, all the issues with displacement Samuel and Maud struggle with are *displaced* onto their daughters. Davis notes that Chloe and Yvette “mark the degree of trauma that results from the (dis)location of African diasporic families in the Americas, permanently estranged from space and place, from history and memory. But she also uses the twins’ growing psychosis to mark their necessary transgression and disobedience to the nation” (Davis 42-43). As such, Ray’s suggestion that the girls not simply be relocated to the city but taken out of society entirely makes sense. Ray’s suggestion is fulfilled in that Samuel and Maud send the girls to a mental facility, giving them over to the state – it is Canada who now owns the twins. While never even visiting Africa, the twins’ position as second-generation immigrants more fully represents the emotional trauma associated in navigating between the home country and new country. In the end, only Yvette lives, demonstrating the harsh reality of Canada and how these two ways of life may ultimately be incompatible. While the twins may never have had an ‘African’ way of life, their racialized bodies represent their parents home nation, often mistaken as immigrants themselves. Yvette returns to “reclaim the home where all had changed for her” (Edugyan 310) and has to figure out how to now be alone in this nation. Yvette’s “quiet quest for calm and home in the Diaspora into

which she was born is an appropriate note on which to conclude” (Cooper 64). Edugyan ends the novel: “It will not be an easy road, but many have worse, and her only obligation amidst all the pain and occasional pleasure is to live in the best way she is capable of. That is all we have” (Edugyan 311).

Edugyan’s novel challenges the notion that blackness “remains an absented presence (a visible invisibility) in the imagined community and landscape of Canada” (Manning 69). By writing blackness onto the ‘white’ Canadian prairies, Edugyan “allows us to explore a political reworking of the question of nation” (Davis 33). Davis explains that the novel “must first lay bare the historical and personal trauma inflicted on the lives and bodies of black people, violently inserted in and then wrenched from the Canadian heartland” (Davis 40). She continues, “The novel helps us to interrogate the specific kind of trauma that results from the insertion of blackness on to certain kinds of geographies, as well the fragmentation that occurs in the (dis)location of African diasporic families across differing national spaces” (Davis 40). The novel then “allows spaces for more radical and redemptive definitions of nation and national identity” (Davis 45).

It may initially seem like the Indigenous and immigrant relationships to the Canadian space have little in common due to the disparity of time occupying this land. Aboriginal people are born in this place and possess a deep ancestral history with the *physical* space but their relationship with Canada as a nation-state constructed by colonizers is fraught. Immigrants, while not born in this place, have similar feelings of un-belonging in the Canadian nation-state. The texts demonstrate how the feelings of these two marginalized groups of people are represented in prairie literature in terms of homelessness, both physical and psychological constructions. Physical homelessness is often represented by ‘homeless homes,’ spaces that

signify the liminal position between having a home and being homeless. Many of these spaces are segregated according to race – places where racialized bodies, rendered invisible, are put so that white power can more fully ignore their existence. Many characters choose homelessness in an attempt to make their psychological feelings of homelessness match their lived experience.

Chapter Three

‘Peeling Back Words From Spines’: Story-telling as an Alternative Prairie Home Making

As previously demonstrated, Aboriginal and immigrant subjects have been seen to occupy the prairie space for too long or short a time when compared to the settler. While the settler creates a home through homesteading, Indigenous and immigrant populations cannot make a home in this conventional prairie manner. Chapter Three will focus on how story-telling becomes an alternative way of home making for these populations. Story-telling becomes a new space – a literary space – for discovery and questioning. Keahey writes, “Literature takes on a performative homemaking function, and poets (and novelists, and dramatists) become literary homemakers” (Keahey 4). This literary home making is a self-conscious project, with these narratives becoming meta-textual in their discussion of literary tradition and culture. Many of the references to other writers and books are made to critique white publishing powers. The whiteness that has been associated with the prairies is the result of those controlling the representation of this space. Traditionally, white literary power has largely erased racialized bodies from prairie writing – white writers did not represent these bodies and when they did, the depictions were generally stereotypical and prejudiced. Furthermore, racialized voices were not as readily published in Canada. How can readers imagine a space to be home if representations of this place do not include bodies that look like them or voices that sound like them? As such, the narratives discussed in this project try to re-inscribe racialized bodies and voices onto the prairies and in so doing, find home in this space.

The literary space enables an active historical engagement, with Indigenous and immigrant literature often embedding traditional legends and myths throughout the narrative.

Myths and legends are used in Indigenous and immigrant texts as a way to connect and compare past and present experiences. For Aboriginal people, it is a way to compare the land they occupied pre-contact with Canada as a nation-state and for immigrants, to compare their birth country to their adopted one. Many immigrant writers can make comparisons based on lived experiences, whereas Aboriginal authors have a different way of knowing the pre-colonial past. Incorporating myth works to ensure that the culture of these populations is kept alive but also indicates community. As Keahey notes, “myth is that through which the world makes itself known. Neither dialogue nor monologue, myth is the unique speech of the many who come thereby to recognize one another, communicating and communing through the telling of their story. In this regard, myth is always the myth of community” (Keahey 112). Where unbelonging is a constant threat in these texts, myth acts as a reminder of this alternate community – other Indigenous people for Aboriginal characters and the home nation for immigrants.³⁷

The literary space is also forward thinking, providing an opportunity for these people to explain how they have been constructed by a dominant culture and then re-define this perceived identity for themselves. Keahey writes, “In part to escape the limitations of equating home with place, critics interested in issues of immigration, exile, diaspora, and displacement have pried apart and problematized the concept of ‘the home place’” (Keahey 6). Keahey notes Edward Said and John Berger as two such critics who have conceptualized the home as more than a single, physical place. The quotation Keahey uses of Berger’s connects home to story-telling – “To the underprivileged, home is represented, not by a house, but by a practise or set of practises. Everyone has his own. These practises, chosen and not imposed, offer in their reception, transient as they may be in themselves, more permanence, more shelter than any

³⁷ I recognize the importance of having Indigenous and immigrant communities in Canada but also assert the importance of other communities not defined by a common race or ethnic identity. These other communities have the potential to move Canada away from the problematic multiculturalism it is associated with.

lodging. Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived” (Keahey 6). Berger connects home to mobility and story-telling, indicating that the stories of the ‘underprivileged’ go untold. The narratives discussed in this project draw attention to Berger’s point, that psychological constructions of home are managed by story-telling. These writers aim to tell the ‘untold stories’ of Indigenous and immigrant lives in order to create a home for themselves and for their people.³⁸

A search for home is *always* a search for identity and doing this through story-telling is no different. As a self-conscious project for these two groups, much of the literature discusses the challenges in creating story-telling spaces but also the immense importance of this undertaking as an alternative indicator of home. One of the tensions in these texts is navigating between truth, fiction, productive and unproductive stories. Unproductive stories are those that purposefully perpetuate racial stereotypes and prejudice. Chapter One demonstrates how much of this racism functions in terms of linguistic and bodily difference while Chapter Two explores how these differences create both physical and psychological homelessness. Productive stories navigate and reconcile feelings of homelessness and are often an attempt to create alternative feelings of home. Chapter Three will explore how the writers of these Indigenous and immigrant texts critique unproductive story-telling that falsely represent Indigenous and immigrant populations. These false representations can be taken as truth, by a larger public and oftentimes, by the very people these hurtful depictions are about. This argument is nuanced by Goto’s text, which deconstructs the simple true/false binary, consciously creating fiction that still holds truth.

Gregory Scofield’s poem “1986,” about a woman who wanders homeless in her bones, is used in Chapter Two to demonstrate how psychological homelessness manifests in one’s body

³⁸ While Berger has gendered his argument by using the pronoun ‘his,’ the six female writers discussed in this project not only reclaim a racialized subjectivity on the prairies but a specifically female one as well.

and identity. Story-telling relates to body and identity politics in a similar way. The epigraph to this chapter – “peeling back words from spines” (Dumont 60) – suggests that stories are connected to bodies via material book culture.³⁹ Thomas King’s *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003), makes the same correlation, indicating that people – their bodies, souls and identities – are simply a collection of stories. He constantly repeats, “The truth about stories is that’s all we are” (King 2). King’s book demonstrates how stories clarify personal, collective and cultural identities.

Many Aboriginal authors have discussed how the preservation of Indigenous culture depends on story-telling. However, stories do more than simply preserve culture. They also create identities and home spaces as well as produce change. King emphasizes this very point at the close of each chapter by addressing the reader – “don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story” (King 29). Neal McLeod also discusses the transformative power of words in his book *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (2007). McLeod writes, “Words are like arrows that can be shot at the narratives of the colonial power. Word-arrows have transformative power and can help Indigenous people come home. They help to establish a new discursive space. Every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, we are resisting the destruction of our collective memory” (McLeod 67). This is what the Indigenous *and* immigrant

³⁹ While the notion of ‘peeling back words from spines’ is used in Dumont’s poem to discuss white scholars interpreting books “that vault into theories as ornate as rococo / and as cluttered as a bad relationship” (Dumont 60), the image also prompts the reader think about ‘spineless’ stories in terms of those not bound by a book – unpublished narratives and oral stories. The material book culture and education system referenced in this passage is connected to the written and published word while oral story-telling is not studied, valued or provided the same authority. Yet spineless or oral stories can also be imagined as more powerful than the written word in that they are mobile and have a freedom in that they are not bound by pages. Without a book to hold them, their constant retelling to remain in the communal memory is also an indicator of power. Furthermore, unpublished and oral stories have the same potential to productively or unproductively contribute to society. For example, stereotypes about Indigenous and immigrant populations circulate whether they are published or not.

texts discussed in this project do – they themselves act as word-arrows against colonial powers and colonial narratives.

Aboriginal texts are particularly interested in critiquing colonial narratives by re-writing Canadian history. As Manning points out, “history functions as a revisionist practise that reinforces the power of the hegemony” (Manning 67). She continues pages later, “any writing of history is complicit in evoking a hierarchy of events that prioritizes not only certain peoples, but also certain chronologies” (Manning 122). This is certainly true of Indigenous history in Canada, which is at times falsely represented and at others, completely erased. There are now examples of texts that aim at accurate representation and the first two chapters of *Halfbreed*, which has been discussed extensively by this project, is one example. If identity is partly formed through story-telling, what can we make of Canadian identity in regards to history as a specific kind of story-telling? Manning notes that all people are taught to appropriate the historical past as their own in order to come to an understanding of who they are. She writes,

To appropriate that past, we have been taught to conceive of history as the mechanism that guarantees both our identity and our culture. History, understood in these terms, is theorized as the construct that forms the basis for the narration of the national imaginary, operating through a translation of the past into the present with an emphasis on a certain order of narration that prioritizes the events of the center. (Manning 62)

The Indigenous texts explored by this project recognize how historical narratives construct national identity. By re-writing Canadian history, these texts attempt to re-define national identity and thus, find a home for Aboriginal people in this space.

Halfbreed was one of the first published Indigenous ‘word-arrows’ against colonial narratives in Canada, producing a strong voice about what life is *really* like for Indigenous people in Canada, and on the prairies more specifically. Campbell’s psychological feeling of ‘being at home’ is connected to her family and is associated with her physical childhood home in

the Métis settlement. Seeing it gone, Campbell realizes that she must reclaim her psychological feeling of home through story-telling, writing:

Going home after so long a time, I thought that I might find again the happiness and beauty I had known as a child. But as I walked down the rough dirt road, poked through the broken old buildings and thought back over the years, I realized that I could never find that here. Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. That is when I decided to write about my life. (Campbell 7-8)

No longer able to look to the physical home for a *feeling* of home and sense of belonging, story-telling becomes an important part of the lifelong process of home making. Home is again connected to the body and identity – Campbell must search inside herself to find home and then write of this struggle.

Throughout the narrative, Maria and her siblings are told many stories that are instrumental in developing a Métis identity. While Maria's Métis identity becomes fractured, these stories create a base that she can return to. The parents in the Métis settlement spend a lot of time with the children, teaching them traditional Aboriginal practices and telling stories. Maria remembers: "We were taught to weave baskets from the red willow, and while we did these things together we were told the stories of our people – who they were, where they came from, and what they had done. Many were legends handed down from father to son. Many of them had a lesson but mostly they were fun stories about funny people" (Campbell 20). While these stories do provide teachable moments, the most important thing the children gain from them is an appreciation of their people. This is an important lesson because the Indigenous people are constantly caused to feel shame outside their settlement.

The oral stories Maria hears about Aboriginal people are complemented by the white written word. Being of mixed race, it is only fitting that Maria is also exposed to white narratives. Maria's mother loved books and "spent many hours reading to us [Maria and her

siblings] from a collection of books her father gave her. I grew up on Shakespeare, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and Longfellow” (Campbell 17). While the children are told stories about their own people and culture, it is the words of these canonized British male writers that stir their imagination. Maria, with her siblings and cousins, would act out these stories – “shouts of ‘Hail Caesar!’ would ring throughout our settlement” (Campbell 18). The reason Maria loves reading her mother’s books and acting out their stories is the same reason Maria loves attending school – they become an escape for her from her Métis home life. Campbell writes, “I could forget the cooking and cleaning at home and there was time to read. I read everything I could find and thought about the big cities I had read about with good food and beautiful clothes, where there was no poverty and everyone was happy. I would go to these cities someday and lead a gay, rich, exciting life” (Campbell 77). While Maria encounters prejudice at school, her time in the classroom still acts as an escape from hardships at home. Literature provides an even deeper escape than school in that she can figuratively leave her race behind and imagine a different, symbolically white future.

Grandparents are also figured as influential story-telling sources in this text. Campbell recounts the summer months when many Métis families would go on overnight berry picking trips together. After the children would be put to bed, “the grown-ups would gather outside and an old grandpa or grannie would tell a story while someone built up the fire. Soon everyone was taking turns telling stories, and one by one we would creep out to it in the background and listen” (Campbell 34). The children’s appetite for story-telling from their elders remains when Grannie Dubuque visits. Grannie Dubuque is “a combination of a very strict Catholic and a superstitious Indian, which made her the greatest storyteller in the world. Every evening, after work was done, she made each of us a cup of cocoa and some popcorn, and then gathered us around her

and told stories of the northern lights (ghost dancers), of Almighty Voice, Poundmaker and other famous Indians” (Campbell 80). These stories are entertainment for the children but also provide many teachable moments. Again, the stories teach the children at a young age to love their people, history and culture. This is an important lesson because white power teaches them to be ashamed of their ancestry. As previously noted, cultural and racial identity is connected to home making so in creating a strong Métis identity, these stories also connect the children to an idea of home.

The stories told by Maria’s parents and grandparents are productive, forming proud cultural and racial identities and with that, a notion of home. Stories can also be unproductive, creating false and hurtful representations of people that have the potential to harm. One such example is when the Métis people go to St. Michele to see a film about the North-West Rebellion that is not only historically inaccurate but also insulting to the Métis. Riel and Dumont are Métis heroes but the movie makes them “look like such fools that it left you wondering how they ever organized a rebellion [...] Of course the NWMP and General Middleton did all the heroic things. Everyone around us was laughing hysterically, including Halfbreeds, but Cheechum walked out in disgust. Many years later I saw the movie again and it made me realize that it’s no wonder my people are so fucked up” (Campbell 97). The film is a stark contrast to the beginning of the narrative that provides a clear account of both Rebellions from a Métis perspective. This explanation is based on what Cheechum tells Maria about the reasoning and action behind the conflicts with the federal government. Maria explicitly critiques white constructions of history when discussing the film screening in St. Michele but the account at the text’s outset also problematizes the production of historical narratives, yet in a subtler way. The first chapter concludes with the line, “The history books say that the Halfbreeds were defeated at Batoche in

1884” (Campbell 11), followed by a list of ‘historical facts.’ While the chapter provides appropriate context to the events, the list of ‘historical facts’ demonstrates how history, written from a white perspective, does not provide the same background information. For example, the final point reads: “The total cost to the federal government to stop the Rebellions was \$5,000,000” (Campbell 11). The reader recognizes, from Maria’s previous explanation, that there would have been no rebellion in the first place if a *fraction* of this money had been used by the federal government to fulfill their promises to Indigenous peoples. Those reading history books written by white men are not provided with the same information and therefore see the Métis Rebellions as *only* a financial strain on the Canadian economy. Both the cinematic representation of the Rebellion in St. Michele and the narrative’s opening comments demonstrate the malleability of history depending on the story-teller.

Cheechum, representing the personal and Indigenous story, is set up in opposition to the white ‘historical’ narrative that is adopted by the nation. While white history books assert that ‘the Halfbreeds were defeated at Batoche in 1884,’ Cheechum is said to have “never accepted defeat at Batoche” (Campbell 15). By beginning the text with Cheechum’s personal historical account, Maria’s own story becomes a resistance to white power by extension. The narrative makes it clear how important it is that Indigenous stories are not only told to Aboriginal people but also get passed along to the greater public. In this way, white narratives do not possess *complete* power in representing history and ‘Canadian culture.’ Cheechum continues to contextualize history for Maria throughout the narrative, explaining that the Métis people “never wanted to fight because that was not our way. We never wanted anything except to be left alone to live as we pleased” (Campbell 15). She also explains that because white men “killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different” (Campbell 15). In

perpetuating the narrative of white victory over Indigenous people, the Métis identity is reduced and figuratively killed. By re-writing history from an Indigenous perspective, Aboriginal people are also re-claiming their identity and in so doing, their home. Privileging white history is resigning to a white construction of home and home making. The telling of Indigenous history and stories *claims* a home on this land in a different way than land *claims* regulated by the nation-state.

Maria first begins to share her own story by writing to AA inmates at Prince Albert Penitentiary. Her letters revolve around her search for identity and home, something that the inmates can relate to, for they have neither in their confinement outside the national imaginary. She writes,

It was hard to know what to write about, so I wrote about the children, my job and my problems, my frustrations and hopes. They answered every week, and soon it was as if we had known each other all our lives. They blasted me, gave me advice and encouragement, and the concerns of my home and children became theirs. When I wrote to tell them that the children had come to live with me again, they had a celebration. (Campbell 146)

This process of story-telling not only helps Maria but her listeners as well. Instead of a one-sided exchange, Maria creates an important *dialogue* that invites more stories. Maria is eventually asked to attend a conference at the prison where she has the opportunity to listen to everyone's stories more fully. Many "spoke about the home and families they had lost, and how they hoped they would be able to go straight outside and rebuild their lives" (Campbell 146). Before addressing the crowd, Maria is given a touching introduction. Having largely lost track of their own families, the inmates would look forward to hearing her stories because they became *their* stories by extension. As Keahey notes, *Halfbreed* is "an example of literary homemaking, as it accomplishes 'in language' many of the liberatory effects it aspires to 'in life'" (Campbell 101).

Like *Halfbreed*, *In Search of April Raintree* discusses the importance of story-telling in terms of identity formation, which is always linked to home making. April's search for her identity, as the title suggests, is also a search for home. April explains on the first page, "I always felt most of my memories were better avoided, but now I think it's best to go back in my life before I go forward" (Mosionier 1). April's movement from space to space is what causes her to constantly think about what it means to have a home and to be at home. Mosionier's Author's Note expresses the same sentiment, explaining her intentions for writing the text twenty-five years prior. She writes, "my aim was to find answers only for myself. Out of that writing, I came to the conclusion that I needed to reclaim my heritage. I needed to value the honour of being Métis. Otherwise, the suicides of both of my sisters would have just been added to the emotionless statistics. And I might have lived the rest of my life with self-pity and hatred and resentment – a living death" (Mosionier 237). While the answers writing brings to Mosionier are personal, her comments demonstrate the potential writing has to make larger changes.

Story-telling has always been connected to April's family and therefore, to a construction of home. Mosionier writes, "I liked all of Dad's stories, even the scary ones, because I knew that Cheryl and I were always safe in the house" (Mosionier 3). Yet the girls' movement to other homes means that these stories leave as well. April tries to keep this positive image of her parents as story-tellers, and therefore home-makers, alive for Cheryl. When her parents do not show up at a scheduled family visit, April reminds Cheryl that "Dad always laughed and joked and played with us for hours, telling us lots of stories" (Mosionier 47). April is also associated with story-telling at the beginning of the novel, receiving a book as a birthday present that she takes everywhere with her. She even pretends to read to Cheryl, explaining, "as I turned the

pages of my book like Mom did, I would make up stories to match the pictures in the book” (Mosionier 6). Stories continue to connect the girls with their ideas of family and home. Cheryl’s first foster family would read her stories but she tells April that “no one reads good stories like you, Apple. Cindy always reads the same story. You used to read me lots of different stories” (Mosionier 20). In this way, the foster home represents *a* home but not her familial home because the stories are not the same. When April and Cheryl live together at the DeRosiers, they spent a lot of time reading in their room. They especially enjoy looking at geography books, dreaming of the mobility that would take them away from the ‘homeless home’ they occupy.

Like *Halfbreed*, *In Search of April Raintree* presents an alternative version of Canadian history. Cheryl becomes invested in this venture, writing to her sister, “history should be an unbiased representation of the facts. And if they show one side, they ought to show the other side equally. Anyways, that’s why I’m writing the Métis side of things. I don’t know what I’m going to do with it, but it makes me feel good” (Mosionier 82). One of Cheryl’s teachers first prompts her interest in Métis history by giving her books on ‘ancient Indian tribes.’ Cheryl explains to April that “Mrs. MacAdams gave them to me to read because no one at school would talk to me or play with me” (Mosionier 40). Books become Cheryl’s real friends, for they empower her with knowledge about her differences from the white norm. In opposition, the school children take away Cheryl’s power by making her feel bad about her differences. Cheryl becomes increasingly vocal about this alternative history, getting into an argument with her teacher who was “reading to the class about how the Indians scalped, tortured, and massacred brave white explorers and missionaries” (Mosionier 54). Cheryl exclaims that this is all lies but the teacher simply retorts, “They’re not lies; this is history. These things happened, whether you

like it or not” (Mosionier 54). Like Maria, Cheryl points to the fictionalization of history. Cheryl’s questioning of the construction of historical narratives continues in the principal’s office, where she exclaims, “If this is history, how come so many Indian tribes were wiped out? How come they haven’t got their land anymore? How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don’t say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That’s all you white people can do, is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks” (Mosionier 54). The principal cannot believe Cheryl’s questioning of historical authority but Cheryl asserts, “It was written by white men who had a lot to cover up. And I’m not going to learn a bunch of lies” (Campbell 55). For denying white, male power, Mrs. DeRosier choppily cuts off Cheryl’s hair and April asks, “Why did you scalp my sister?” (Mosionier 56). April’s diction demonstrates the hypocrisy of this situation – the teacher says that the Aboriginal people were savages and scalped white colonizers. However, white violence was not only erased from the history books but is still at work in the present day, with Mrs. DeRosier ‘scalping’ Cheryl.

Cheryl continues to be invested in the white construction of Canadian history throughout her time at high school and university. She constantly sends April the speeches on Métis topics she prepares for class, explaining how important she thinks it is for Métis people to know their short but interesting history. While in university, Cheryl writes a piece for the paper but it is denied publication because it is ‘too controversial.’ The article begins, “White Man, to you my voice is like the unheard call in the wilderness. It is there, though you do not hear. But, this once, take the time to listen to what I have to say” (Mosionier 172). Cheryl’s article about the voicelessness of Indigenous people ends up being silenced itself as it goes unpublished. Her article critiques white history, questioning everything from white violence and treaties to reservations and the compromised environment. Cheryl draws attention to the ways land, space

and home have been controlled by white power since contact. While Cheryl understands that physical spaces cannot be re-claimed simply through writing, she does hope that telling the alternative Indigenous history will be a move in the direction of home making for her people.

Cheryl continues to turn to writing as a way of exploring questions of truth and fiction, not just in term of historical narratives but also in regards to her personal life. April finds Cheryl's journals at the end of the novel and she is able to live Cheryl's experiences through her reading of them. April continues to shelter Cheryl from the truth about her parent's alcoholism, explaining to Roger, "I wanted her to have all these good memories of our parents. I always told her only the good things that happened when we lived with them" (Mosionier 208). By reading Cheryl's journals, April discovers that her sister had done the same thing to her, saying, "I'm sure she never told me all the things she discovered because she felt she had to protect me from the truth [...] So many lies to protect, and in the end, they destroy anyway" (Mosionier 208). Both April and Cheryl lie to protect one another but in the end, it backfires. Just as the lies of history protect white men but destroy Indigenous identity, so too do April and Cheryl's lies damage their relationship with one another. The one symbol of the sister's continual kinship is a typewriter April buys for Cheryl. Cheryl makes sure to hide the typewriter when living with her boyfriend so he does not sell it. Despite her poverty, Cheryl's friend Nancy also never sells the typewriter when they live together, understanding how much it means to her. While the typewriter represents Cheryl's relationship with April, it equally represents the power Cheryl sees in words and story-telling. Interestingly, Cheryl's typewriter represents a specific investment in the power of the *written* word. While oral story-telling is important to Cheryl in her work at the Friendship Centre, all of her attempts to reclaim Canadian Indigenous history are done through writing.

April actually participates in a re-writing of history herself – not in terms of the history found in textbooks but of a personal history. While at the DeRosiers, a rumour begins that she lets the other foster boys fondle her and that she flirts with Mr. DeRosier. The white history that Cheryl is critical of, the one that informs stereotypes about Indigenous people in the present is at work here. Mrs. Semple articulates this set of stereotypes to April and Cheryl after they run away, warning them that their behaviour is reminiscent of what she calls ‘Native girl syndrome.’ This pattern of behaviours begins with running away, lying, accusations and self pity and ends in pregnancy, substance abuse, poverty and prostitution. Knowing that April is of Aboriginal descent, the teacher, guidance counsellor and other school children believe the rumours. Despite her adamant denial and her past behaviour not warranting this level of suspicion, April’s race ultimately over-determines people’s opinions of her. Interestingly, April’s spoken refusals are not believed but when she *writes* down her alternative history, she is believed. April’s English teacher tells her class that there is a Christmas story competition and so April writes about what her life is really like at the DeRosiers, ending the piece, “What I want for Christmas is for somebody to listen to me and to believe me” (Masionier 80). Through writing, and as a possible fiction, April’s truth is believed. It is encouraging that this ‘fiction’ can make a change but it also indicates a bias for written over oral story-telling.⁴⁰ April’s story-telling is directly linked to home making in that she gets a new social worker who believes her instead of Mrs. DeRosier and she leaves this ‘homeless home.’ While the story is powerful enough to change her home life, her teachers ultimately decide to *not* enter it in the competition, urging her to write something

⁴⁰ While there seems to be a bias for the *written* word over oral story-telling, April eventually recognizes the importance of *hearing* stories. When discussing Cheryl’s friend Nancy, April says, “How Cheryl could stand to hear those kinds of stories all the time was beyond me. That she wanted to make a lifelong career out of it was impossible for me to understand. It was depressing, especially when I knew that Nancy and the other strays came from the same places we came from” (Masionier 107). April acknowledges that she could not do the kind of work Cheryl does, listening to the heart-breaking oral stories of others. Being a child of the welfare system, April must recognize how important it is for people to listen to these stories and to believe them. For, April would not have left the DeRosiers if it was not for people finally listening to her.

else. While April's story contributes to an alternative home making for her on a personal level, it cannot run the risk of being published widely. For, this would threaten the larger historical narrative of Canada that indicates that whites were *only* wronged by Indigenous people, having no part in the conflict themselves. Mosionier's novel continues to question the construction of history that has defined Canada as a nation. Cheryl's more obvious re-writing of Indigenous history and April's subtler attempts to re-write her personal history as a Métis girl, demonstrate the importance of non-white voices in constructing a national identity.

Dumont's *A Really Good Brown Girl* also demonstrates how white power controls history, national narratives and the image of Indigenous people in Canada. The poem "A[^]cimowina," Cree for 'everyday stories,' speaks to the importance of story-telling in the daily lives of Aboriginal people. Dumont writes, "my grandmother stories follow me, / spill out of their bulging suitcases / get left under beds, hung on doorknobs" (Dumont 70). The everyday stories of the speaker's grandmother represent the everyday stories of all Aboriginal people. These stories contribute to an image of home in that they are like clothing, left everywhere in the speaker's home. The poem "Horse-Fly Blue" demonstrates how these everyday stories can do extraordinary things. Dumont writes,

'Doesn't this light remind you of all those other times
you looked up from your reading
and weren't expecting to see
change and nothing
did change except the way
you looked, the way you met the light. (Dumont 30)

This passage expresses how reading does not alter the physical world but can change how the physical world is seen. Looking at the world differently, as initiated by reading, is the first step in creating real change.

Dumont discusses the multiple meanings of change at the end of her poem “Spineless,” where the Aboriginal speaker wants to ask for monetary change but also social change. The poem begins, “the welcome image of you / is gone; the unwelcome / image of me is still here / big, loud and bitching” (Dumont 32). Dumont sets up a seeming opposition between the speaker, ‘me,’ and addressee, ‘you.’ However, because the ‘you’ is not welcome *anymore* and the ‘me’ *remains* unwelcome, the two subjects are actually connected from the start. The speaker continues, “bigger still are my myths, / the ones I threaten your small frightened frame / of mind with” (Dumont 32). While the myths associated with Indigenous populations are usually traditional legends, the speaker is referring to the stereotypes of Aboriginal people here. In this way, the speaker demonstrates the tension between myths as productive and unproductive stories. These myths are also connected to both the speaker’s and addressee’s bodies in that they are bigger than the speaker’s image and threaten the frame of the addressee. Frame does not just refer to the physical body but also to the object’s frame of mind, demonstrating how myths are associated with both the physical and psychological aspects of a person. Hence, the myths not only threaten the addressee’s body but also the ways she thinks. The second stanza emphasizes the idea that the myths about Aboriginal people are not rooted in truth – “all you’ve heard are lies” (Dumont 32). The final stanza reads:

and hear me
 bigger than life
 too damn wise and smiling
 bitch of the north
 colder than Jasper and 101st.
 in a minus forty wind
 waiting for a bus
 nose dripping
 short a quarter
 and too mute to ask for change. (Dumont 32)

The poem begins with the speaker described as loud and bitchy but the poem ends with the final image of her silent and spineless, not asking for change. In connection to people, being spineless refers to weakness and a lack of resolution. There is also the implication that the poem's addressee is spineless in that she silenced the begging woman. 'Change' is a pun, referring to both monetary and social change. Fittingly, money is what is often needed for social change. Both the speaker and object are considered part of the problem – the speaker is too mute to ask for change but the object is the one that makes her voiceless, only hearing the *lies* while she asks her to 'hear *me*.'

Bodies and myths are intricately linked in "Spineless." "The Sound of One Hand Drumming" also makes this connection, associating bodies with material book culture through the same image of the spine. The speaker says, "waving goodbye / to good fellows who trod off to loftier things / in *the big house of knowing*, / peeling back words from spines" (Dumont 60; emphasis in original). The 'good fellows' are presumably white men who have the opportunity for higher education. It is these men who 'peel back words from spines,' separating the material structure of the book from the ideas inside. Since spines are associated with bodies, this passage can also be read as the men de-contextualizing the information in the books from the bodies which wrote them. It is noteworthy that this space of education and literary interpretation is figured as a house, connecting bodies and books with home making. The fact that only 'good fellows' can forge this connection between stories and home making through education demonstrates an oversight. The poem goes on to clarify the absence of opportunities for Aboriginal, and specifically female subjects. Dumont writes,

the small single words
of brown women hang on
clotheslines stiff in winter and
thaw only in early spring but

no one takes them off the line because
 no one wants last year's clothes,
 they're the wrong colour and out of fashion and
 if dead-white-men stopped writing for one thousand years and
 only brown women wrote
 that wouldn't be enough. (Dumont 60-61)

The poem "A[^]cimowina" figures the everyday stories of the speaker's grandmother as important to the home making process, describing these stories as clothing left all over the house. The above passage makes the same point, also associating the stories of Aboriginal women with clothing. Yet these women's stories are not being published – they remain on the clothesline instead of being transcribed onto *lines* of paper. The speaker says that she continues to talk about these issues "when all well-mannered and sophisticated Indian types / would have reasonably dropped it long ago / because it's just rhetoric" (Dumont 61). Yet the speaker is not willing to stop because rhetoric perpetuates inequality and affects real bodies.

When Aboriginal writing *is* published, there are certain expectations that accompany it from white publishing powers and readers. Dumont's "Circle the Wagons" discusses these expectations in terms of the prevalent image of the circle in Indigenous narratives. The speaker says the circle has come to represent all Aboriginal literature and by extension, white power has also associated Indigenous people with the circle. Dumont repeatedly jokes, "Are my eyes circles yet?" (Dumont 57). The circle is no more than an idea connected to Indigenous people and in listing different examples of circles association with aboriginality, the speaker questions, "you'd think we were one big tribe, is there nothing more than the circle in the deep structure of native literature?" (Dumont 57). Despite her ambivalence towards this symbol in Indigenous writing, the speaker notes her desire to include this image in her poetry, saying, "Yet I feel compelled to incorporate something / circular into the text, plot, or narrative structure because if it's lin- / ear then that proves that I'm a ghost and that native culture really / has vanished and

what is all this fuss about appropriation anyway?” (Dumont 57). She reiterates her concern about disappearance later in the poem, that without the circle she is just a “fading urban Indian” (Dumont 57). The speaker calls attention to the affect of these expectations, concluding, “but there it is again orbiting, / lunar, hoops encompassing *your* thoughts and colonizing *mine*, / there it is again, circle the wagons...” (Dumont 57; emphasis added). As in the poem “Spineless,” ‘your’ refers to a white reader and ‘mine’ refers to an Indigenous speaker. In some respects, the circle remains a genuine symbol of aboriginality but as a white expectation, it also becomes a stereotype and thus, a colonizing force. ‘Circle the wagons’ is a reference to the strategy Western settlers had of parking their wagons in a circle to defend themselves more easily from attack (Hulan 87). Therefore, this poem turns the idea of the circle back on white expectations – the circle is not only a symbol of indigeneity but of colonization as well. Dumont’s discussion about the circle enables the symbol to simultaneously exist and remain absent in her poetry. The image exists by virtue of the fact that the speaker names it – the Native narrative tool is used in this poem, articulating and fulfilling reader’s expectations. However, the circle is also absent because it is not organically ‘hidden’ within the text. While Dumont’s poetry collection questions the system of white power more generally, she specifically addresses the ways this power has silenced Aboriginal voices in the publishing industry.

As Neal McLeod explains, “Stories act as foundations on which we can live our lives” (McLeod 69). While he is specifically discussing Indigenous stories and people, his point remains true for any story-teller. Like Aboriginal people, immigrant populations feel physically and figuratively homeless in Canada as a result of white power. Story-telling also becomes an alternative indicator of home, working to counteract the feelings associated with homelessness. As with the Indigenous texts discussed, the immigrant writers also speak of the tension between

productive stories that empower marginalized groups and unproductive stories that are constructed by white narrative power, perpetuating stereotypes and racism. Naoe articulates this anxiety in *Chorus of Mushrooms* when she addresses Yuki-Onna, a spirit of Japanese folklore, as being “trapped in a story not of your creation” (Goto 82).

Chorus of Mushrooms expresses many post-modern concerns with language and story-telling, constantly deconstructing simple binaries associated with these topics such as truth/fiction and beginnings/endings. The wind is strongly linked to speech and story-telling through the novel. The wind has a literary reputation of destructiveness on the prairies, often associated with the harsh weather that strands characters in blizzards or ruins farmer’s crops, coming to represent the unsympathetic Canadian climate. In Goto’s novel, the wind is depicted as equally constant and destructive, analogous to the racism that immigrants encounter on the Canadian prairies. It is also important to note that the wind is invisible, perhaps indicating the subtler version of racism at work in Canada. As such, Naoe feels like she must assert herself, constantly speaking against the sounds the wind makes. By doing so, Naoe stands up against white Canada, making sure that her immigrant voice is also heard. In this way, the wind becomes a story-telling space, prompting a voice of opposition.

As a common environmental factor around the world, the wind is always interacting with space and therefore, works to bridge the distance between nations. Naoe not only mentions the Canadian prairie wind but also the winds in Japan. The wind of Naoe’s childhood was as “Gentle as wish, as thought and certainly no need to challenge it with my voice” (Goto 5). As a soft breeze symbolic of the safety she feels in her home nation, the wind gives Naoe no reason to feel threatened. Yet there is also a sly and clever Japanese wind, the *kama itachi* or ‘scythe weasel,’ which hurts Naoe as a young girl. Naoe says that the prairie wind “will wear away at

soil, paint, skin, but he will never blow with guile” (Goto 74) as this wind does. While the prairie wind is destructive to spaces and bodies, representing the harshness of the Canadian immigrant experience, Naoe’s reference to the *kama itachi* indicates that the immigrant’s home nation can also be damaging. This complicates any simplistic notions that the home nation is connected to belonging while the adopted nation is associated with un-belonging. Further nuance derives from the wind as an empowering story-telling space that encourages mobility.

Naoe speaks against the wind to ensure that her immigrant voice is heard in Canada but ultimately realizes that this is not enough, explaining, “When the words have run their course there comes a time of change. I cannot stay in this chair forever” (Goto 73). Naoe then chooses homelessness, predicting a different relationship with the wind. She explains, “I’ll walk and walk and the wind will serenade me. I’ll walk and sing and laugh and shout. I’ll scrape my heel into the black ice on the highway and inscribe my name across this country” (Goto 108). Instead of having to constantly talk against the threatening wind to make her presence in Canada known, Naoe predicts that the wind will sing to her as she writes her name onto the highway. While this new version of story-telling is empowering in its difference and mobility, Naoe’s mention of how the drivers “either did not see her or chose not to” (Goto 108) reveals why she must *still* assert her existence in Canada. While Naoe is not actively hitch-hiking, and therefore not trying to be seen, she is still ignored and ultimately invisible to those driving by her. It therefore becomes clear why Naoe has to write her name across the land, because if she does not do it then her racialized body will remain invisible and her immigrant story will never be told.

When Naoe is eventually picked up by Tengu, a truck driver, she describes the safety she now feels from the prairie wind – “Funny how I hated the wind so much when I was sitting still. I guess it is an easy thing to read what you will when you can see from only one side of your

face. But a body can never be objective. There's always too much at stake. Easy now, to admire the wind, sitting inside a warm cab of a truck" (Goto 140). Naoe reminds the reader that bodies are always physical indicators of difference and that they can never be objective because they are always contextualized by what spaces they occupy – her body will always be racialized on the 'white' prairies. As a representation of the harsh Canadian immigrant experience, the wind must be read, spoken against and then acted against. Naoe demonstrates this *real* action by leaving her house and choosing homelessness. One might expect the wind to become even harsher outside the home space but by symbolically living outside the nation-state, Naoe is freed from what the wind represents.

Many of Naoe's stories are rooted in traditional Japanese legends and myths. The epigraph to the novel is taken from *Folk Legends of Japan* and states, "The legend is believed, it is remarkable, and also it is local," stressing the regional importance of myth. The telling of these traditional Japanese stories is constructed by the novel as life affirming. Naoe's brother and sister-in-law are said to "tell each other legends, myths. They re-create together" (Goto 20). Murasaki asserts that there is nothing "like a good folk legend to warm up one's belly and fill the emptiness inside you. Why a good folk tale can keep you going for at least a month" (Goto 203). The legends that Naoe shares with Murasaki contribute to a conversation on race and immigration. One legend is a re-imagining of the creation story, where the creators of the world are immigrants. This story indicates that an immigrant's search for home also involves the creation of a new world. Naoe also discusses the yamanba who demonstrates how words and stories can shape the earth, saying, "I will speak my words aloud and shape the earth again. If you choose to listen, I will tell you stories" (Goto 116). This quotation is certainly relatable to Naoe's attempts at story-telling with Murasaki.

While the traditional legends and myths embedded in the novel connect to Japan, the rest of the text is invested in the personal stories of Naoe and Murasaki, rooting the women and their experiences in Canada. This becomes a self-conscious project halfway through the novel, with Murasaki's comment that there "are a lot of sad immigrant stories" (Goto 102). Part three of the novel suggests the possibility of an immigrant story with a happy ending, asserting, "Nothing is impossible. Within reason, of course" (Goto 159). Yet only a single page long, Part three is called "The missing part," indicating the absence of a happy immigrant story. Goto writes, "Part three. Everything that is missing or lost or caught between memory and make believe or forgotten or hidden or sliced from the body like an unwanted tumour" (Goto 159). Murasaki further confuses this possibility of a happy immigrant story later in the novel when she says that her story is a happy one. She says,

People always want to hear a happy story. Something with a warm-hearted ending with maybe a touch of a lesson that makes you think, yes, that was meaningful but very positive. Let's be more careful. People say this and that. Why can't you tell a story with a happy ending? Why do you have to be so sarcastic and depressing? It just depends on how you hear it. This is a happy story. Can't you tell? I've been smiling all along. (Goto 197)

The end of Part four also discusses the immigrant story with a happy ending and is composed of different quotations from unidentified sources. Each passage is indicative of the stereotypes and racism still present in Canada. After these passages, the phrase "When does it end?" (Goto 212) is repeated until the words blend together to form a string of letters. The reader is then implicated in the immigrant story, with the speaker of the passage saying, "You tell me" (Goto 212). This call to change the immigrant story to a happy ending is explicitly addressed with the final line of the novel – "*You know you can change the story*" (Goto 220; emphasis in original).

Despite not speaking the same language, Murasaki craves Naoe's words because they linger inside her body. She explains, "It's easy to travel distances if you fly on beds of stories.

My Mom didn't tell tales at all. And the only make-believe she knew was thinking that she was as white as her neighbour. I wanted to hear bedtime stories, hear lies and truth dissembled. I wanted to fill the hollow with sound and pain. Roar like the prairie wind. Roar, like Obāchan” (Goto 29). Naoe is depicted by Murasaki as a powerful story-teller in her ability to challenge the wind. Furthermore, her story-telling creates mobility, causing them to ‘travel distances.’ Naoe’s purposeful confusion of truth and fiction works to destabilize this binary and her story-telling is productive for this reason. On the other hand, Keiko tells lies in order to pretend she is white and therefore, this story-telling is unproductive.

Like Maria, whose story-telling with the inmates in *Halfbreed* is a dialogue, Murasaki emphasizes the notion that stories are about sharing. The listener is just as important in the partnership as the speaker and these roles must always be shifting. Naoe indicates that like home making, story-telling must be a movement – “We must both be able to tell. We must both be able to listen. If the positions become static, there can never be stories. Stories grow out of stories grow out of stories. Listening becomes telling, telling listening” (Goto 172). Naoe and Murasaki are always connected through story-telling, eventually having telepathic conversations once Naoe leaves the house. Murasaki explains the first time she felt this connection with Naoe, when she stopped pretending to understand her and just focused on listening. Murasaki then begins speaking herself and cannot stop, explaining how her words “swept outside to be tugged and tossed by the prairie-shaping wind. Like a chain of seeds they lifted, then scattered. Obāchan and I, our voices lingered, reverberated off hollow walls and stretched across the land with streamers of silken thread” (Goto 21). Intermingling, Naoe and Murasaki’s voices become one, moved by the wind all across Canada.

Murasaki's hesitation with story-telling seems to stem from a concern that she cannot tell a traditionally linear story with a resolution, telling Naoe that she cannot *finish* the stories. Naoe sees no problem in this, saying, "No need to tie them up. There is always room for beginnings" (Goto 63). Naoe's reminder that stories do not have to end is also a reminder that all stories have the potential to be a beginning – what prompts action in many cases. This idea relates back to the beginning of the novel when Naoe says to Murasaki: "Child, here is a story for you. Somewhere to begin" (Goto 29). Murasaki feels more confident in her story-telling abilities when she learns that her name, chosen by Naoe, could be in reference to Murasaki Shikibu, the first person to write a novel.

The body is also implicated in story-telling in that words control bodies in their desire to be spoken. Naoe says that she sews her lips together but the words continue to seep from her body and that "words grow heavier every day, upon my bony back" (Goto 21). Naoe recognizes the same bodily burden untold stories have on Tengu, noticing, "He is so tired, he must be shouldering his own weight of stories untold and so back-breakingly heavy" (Goto 149). Naoe initially doubts the power her words have, saying that the "words of an old woman can change little in this world and nothing of the past so why this torrent of words, this tumble of sounds roaring, sweeping, chanting, sighing" (Goto 21). Yet Naoe does not seem to truly believe this, asserting only pages later that listening *also* changes bodies. She explains, "If an old woman sits in a chair and never gets out and talks and talks and talks, don't ignore her. She might be saying something that will change the colour of your eyes" (Goto 37). This is Naoe's deepest desire, for her words and stories to create change, saying, "If a few words I uttered were to echo in someone's mind, then that is enough" (Goto 38).

As Thomas King asserts, “[t]he truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King 2). Murasaki certainly believes this, placing immense power in story-telling practises. Her boyfriend is frustrated by this, saying, “Everything you think of, you have to interpret as story. I’m not just a story. You’re not just a story. We feel and think and age and learn. If you hit me, it will hurt. If you leave me, I will cry. You can’t just erase those things” (Goto 185). Murasaki explains that she is not erasing these things but re-telling and re-creating. Murasaki’s boyfriend also does not like that bodies and stories become interchangeable entities, desiring a real difference between the two. He says, “*I want to be able to separate the stories from our real lives. What we’re living right now*” (Goto 186; emphasis in original). Murasaki explains that this is not possible because “*words give the shape to what will happen. What can happen. I’m telling our future before it ever does*” (Goto 186; emphasis in original). While her boyfriend relies on fate, Murasaki asserts that people have the power to write the stories of their own lives.

Naoe and Murasaki’s narration deconstructs the simplistic truth/fiction binary. As a result, Murasaki’s boyfriend continually questions the authenticity of Murasaki’s narrative. He asks Murasaki for a ‘true’ story about her Obāchan and she says that a lot of people have this desire for ‘truth’ and will not put value in a story unless it is ‘true’ – “*It’s like people want to hear a story, and then, after they’re done with it, they can stick the story back to where it came from*” (Goto 1; emphasis in original). The fact that a story is rooted in events that actually happened, enables people to categorize the story and put it in the right place – spatially on a book shelf and categorically in a genre. As a child, Murasaki wonders about the same kind of questions, asking Naoe if particular stories were ‘real.’ However, she soon realizes that there is always some level of truth present during story-telling and that is enough. She explains, “It’s funny how you can sift your memories, braid them with other stories. Come up with a single

strand and call it truth” (Goto 93). People often think that truth is only accessed through reality but it is also accessible through the fictional. Post-modern prairie writer Robert Kroetsch says it best – “the fiction makes us real” (Kroetsch 30). Goto’s novel asserts that just because something is not true, does not make it a lie. Naoe points to the power stories have over the story-teller to be told in that they weigh heavily on a body. Story-tellers then assume a power in their telling of the story. Yet the reader, through listening to Naoe and Murasaki’s immigrant stories, are granted ultimate power with the final line of the novel – “*You know you can change the story*” (Goto 220; emphasis in original). In this way, Goto stresses how influential story-telling is to the construction of people’s futures, particularly the immigrant’s future. Story-telling is figured as not only creatively but politically productive.

The Second Life of Samuel Tyne focuses more on literacy than story-telling but still critiques the same system of white, male power. Mrs. Porter questions Samuel on his English education, thinking that he “should have been more indebted to the country that raised him and taken his knowledge back [to Ghana]” (Edugyan 135). Samuel’s sister wishes the same thing, writing letters to him “stating that only thirty per cent of Ghana was literate, that the dearth of teachers was killing the country, that Ghana had exported its finest non-renewable resource – its sharpest students” (Edugyan 136). The students that did return no longer shared a common culture with their people – “It was a paradox: the necessary modern education was killing off traditional tribal life” (Edugyan 136). Yet Samuel does not locate his home in Ghana anymore, hoping that he can find home in Canada. Hence, England becomes a necessary stopover in Samuel’s migratory preparation, immersed in the white power that colonized Canada at its source.

Connected to the British education system is the literature studied. When the Porters come over for dinner, it is the twins' entrance holding alternate volumes of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that ironically creates real animosity between the two families. Akosua says, "Eh, they think they are big big? They think they are whites or what?" (Edugyan 182). Samuel becomes frustrated by the number of times he has been made to feel guilty about his British education. So Samuel retorts, questioning, "Since when, [...] has literacy altered the colour of one's skin?" (Edugyan 182). He continues to ponder out loud why his fellow people are not happy that he and his family are educated, questioning, "You say only big big man should concern himself with these things. But does this attitude not contribute to uneducation and poverty in our country? The state of things in the world is such that you must immerse yourself or perish. Even now I do not say it is the British system, but an inherited set of ideas, of customs we must somehow integrate better with our own traditions" (Edugyan 182). Samuel seems to miss Akosua's point, for she is not critiquing his education in and of itself, nor is she upset that the twins are reading. She *is* problematizing the white system of power that this education and reading is a reflection of. Samuel continues, "Perhaps if I lived back home, at this time now, now that we have seen independence, I should never say these things. But I have always thought that a black can, and should, define himself beyond being black. Black, white, Chinese, Arabian – life is much more than that. Egyptian, Senegalese, French – never, never, never accept the limits another wants to give you" (Edugyan 183). Again, Samuel thinks the Porters are criticizing his education but they really find the British system through which he has been educated problematic. Samuel does not wish to find a home in Ghana anymore but does wish to find home in Canada. Therefore, Samuel looks to colonial education and story-telling as a way to find this home, reading and perpetuating white stories.

Porter is disillusioned by Canada and does not think that feelings of home are located here. His criticism of white literature and story-telling reflects his beliefs and he refuses to perpetuate these representations. Clarifying his wife's comment, Porter says, "If you don't love another's limits, why love their education?" (Edugyan 183). Porter understands that reading is the root of any education and that the literature one reads either perpetuates or negates colonizing powers. He explains,

Reading's made all the difference, at least for my part. It was not being able to read that kept the vote from us in Oklahoma, sent us north in the first place. We always been the bottom of the pecking order. No respect. Not once, in all those books you reading, are we presented as decent, intelligent men. We ain't *even* men. Minstrels, animals but never upright men. And I'd know, I read all those things once I learned to – self-educated. Won't read them again. We're the absolute last in this world with nothing to be done of it but keep on living. I'm a black man, wouldn't want to be nothing else, and it makes me cry to see one who does. (Edugyan 183)

Saul does not dismiss Samuel's education in and of itself as problematic, understanding how crucial literacy is when fighting for equality. However, he does explain that the white system that Samuel is immersed in is counterproductive to his goals of liberation. Education does not stop when one learns to read but continues in the decisions one makes for further education and reading.

For the twins, reading allows them to imagine a life outside the nation-state. Not only do they love to read but they are taken by an entire literary culture, fascinated by the personal lives of writers. They are constantly reading, reciting Shakespeare passages or writing poetry themselves. In fact, their punishment at one point in the novel is having their books taken away. Davis notes that Yvette and Chloe "increasingly retreat into an internal, fictionalized world in search of protection from the exclusion they feel from the external world. But their growing psychosis is also a refusal to conform, to be obedient, to accept without challenge the place carved out for them in Canadian society" (Davis 44). Feeling like they do not belong in Canada,

the twins escape the nation-state through these story-telling spaces, reminiscent of Maria's reading of canonical British texts. Ironically, the twins must create this alternative home through the literature of white writers.⁴¹ Besides some obscure poetry, the other document the girls write is a history of the Calgary Stampede, looking to this spectacle for the most obvious representation of Western Canadian culture. The novel's conversation about education and literature is one way ideas about colonialism, immigration and belonging in Canada can be worked out for various characters.

Each narrative in this thesis is meta-textual, critiquing the privilege afforded to white, mostly male writers. Yet the very writing done by these Indigenous and immigrant female authors is a stand against this system they critique. Just as white, male power regulates home making on the prairies, it also regulates the literary world. Therefore, these writers' critique of white, male literature is an extended critique of the entire system of white power. The narratives also discuss how literary spaces are a way for Indigenous and immigrant writers on the prairies to navigate physical and psychological constructions of home – story-telling becomes an alternative version of home making. The Afterword to Louise Bernice Halfe's poetry collection *Bear Bones and Feathers* (1994) discusses this notion. Halfe writes, "I had a dream many years ago that I was repairing the cabin I grew up in with paper and books. I had entered this ceremony, the stirring of my marrow, a living prayer of building and healing, feeding my soul" (Halfe 127). This image emphasizes the connections this thesis attempts to make between bodies, language, home, stories and identity. Halfe's dream is of her childhood home, significant

⁴¹ Many of the texts look to canonical British writers as a source of authority. For example, Naoe says, "I could stand on my head and quote Shakespeare until I had a nosebleed, but to no avail, no one hears my language. So I sit and say the words and will, until the wind or I shall die. Someone, something must stand against this wind and I will. I am" (Goto 5). Naoe feels like she would need to use the English words of a British male canonical writer in order to even have a chance of being heard. Furthermore, Coopsammy continually inscribes the British literary canon onto Western Canada in order to provide it with legitimacy. As a legitimate space of representation, the speaker can then tell her stories in an attempt to make home in this space.

in that it represents how home is initially constructed to a child. Over time, these notions about home alter and repairs must be done in order to keep an image of home. This struggle for a continuing image of home is more pronounced for Indigenous and immigrant populations who are physically and/or psychologically displaced from their original construction of home. Halfe demonstrates how this fixing is done through story-telling. For, it is the material culture of stories – paper and books – that repairs the physical home. This dream of repairing a home with literary items represents how the metaphoric home, the concept of *feeling* at home, is altered by narratives. Bodies and identities, the marrow and soul respectively, are also implicated in this process.

Conclusion

Canada is strongly associated with multiculturalism, both as an ideology and policy. Yet the nation has historically been imagined in terms of whiteness. Consequently, Canadian multiculturalism takes whiteness as the ‘norm’ and any other body becomes racialized. The prairies are a microcosm of the nation and as a result, are also an imaginatively white space. Much of this whiteness can be attributed to the fact that the prairies are constantly represented in terms of settlement. Prairie literature is one form of representation that incessantly depicts this settler moment, largely canonizing narratives that are about a white male farmer who engages in homesteading. This agricultural figure finds home on the prairies by breaking the land and building a house. As such, home has been constructed in terms of this single, locatable space – the homestead. Indigenous and immigrant populations have occupied Canada for too long or short a time when compared to the homesteader, having little opportunity to find home in this way. In fact, these groups often ran counter to settlement and home making and had to be displaced and segregated into racialized spaces. My project questions if the literature produced by Indigenous and immigrant writers on the prairies is connected. The three chapters explore just some of the ways contemporary writing by these populations is thematically linked.

Chapter One discusses how Indigenous and immigrant populations are connected to one another through literature by a triangulation framework. This means that these groups do not directly talk to one another but are linked by their similar oppression as a result of white power. While I discuss explicit moments of Native/newcomer connections found in the literature, the majority of the chapter is interested in the more subtle ways these populations are aligned. Both groups identify their bodily and linguistic differences from the white, English-speaking ‘norm’ to

be the primary factors contributing to their marginalization, causing them to feel both voiceless and invisible.

Chapter Two discusses how race and space function in prairie literature. The racism Indigenous and immigrant populations feel as a result of their bodily and linguistic differences is often described in terms of spatial un-belonging. Homelessness is the specific expression of these feelings, manifesting both physically and psychologically. Physical homelessness is represented by a character's lived experience of having no material home. There is also the constant threat of homelessness signified by 'homeless homes,' spaces that are supposed to act as a home but ultimately create feelings of homelessness. Homelessness also manifests psychologically, as a *feeling* of un-belonging in the prairie space. Many characters choose to live a real homeless existence in an attempt to physically live out the psychological homelessness they feel, reclaiming this state of social marginalization. This chapter also discusses how mobility functions in the home making process and in representations of homelessness.

Chapter Three demonstrates how white power not only controls bodies and spaces but also the publishing world, with many of the writers critiquing the white and male-dominated way literature is produced. These writers then go on to demonstrate how story-telling becomes an alternative way of home making for Indigenous and immigrant populations. Since both groups cannot make a home in the traditional prairie way, by settling the land, they attempt to create a home in Western Canada through story-telling. The telling of traditional legends and myths keeps history and culture alive, in a sense, reclaiming an ancestral home. In another way, story-telling is concerned with constructing present and future feelings of belonging. By questioning how their people have been constructed by white power through narrative, Indigenous and immigrant populations are able to navigate new feelings of home and belonging.

Now established as a genre and field of study, contemporary Prairie literature and criticism is working to accurately represent this space. Traditionally, 'home' has been imagined on the prairies as a singular and specific space. While the other five writers expand this simplistic definition, Coopsammy's collection completely re-imagines home making as not only trans-national but also a *global* search. In this way, Coopsammy's work "encourages readers to understand the local by branching outward" (Kerber 85). Coopsammy's use of travel "unsettles fixed notions of the regional 'home place' and allows the contemporary prairie dweller to see him or herself as part of a community of contingency that encompasses different regional places and times" (Kerber 87). Kerber explains that Coopsammy's global poetry brings a new excitement to regional literature. She writes, "to see the prairies as a set of places profoundly interconnected with the well-being of other places therefore has profound implications not only for how prairie poetry will be defined in the future, but also for the kinds of environmental solidarities that might be formed in the here and now" (Kerber 88). Coopsammy also connects Indigenous and immigrant populations to one another, demonstrating how these two populations are exploited by the same system of colonization. While more Indigenous and immigrant writers are being published and more criticism is being written on their literature, these populations are not put in dialogue with one another. Literary critics must continue to explore these cross-racial moments and connections in order to gain a better understanding of the condition of Canadian multiculturalism.

While the other five texts largely critique homesteading as the only way to find home on the prairies, they still largely manage to construct home in the traditional prairie way – as a *locatable* space or *singular* idea. For example, home is often the childhood home or intimately connected to an idea of family or biology. Coopsammy's poetics counters this construction by

finding home in Manitoba, Trinidad and to some extent, India. As such, her collection critiques “the idea that ‘home’ can only ever be located in one place” (Kerber 80). In fact, the speaker’s prairie and island homes often overlap. The collection’s namesake poem, “Prairie Journey” figures the agricultural landscape of the Canadian West as the Caribbean:

Sometimes
 through the windows of the bus
 those shimmering fields of white
 assume a new dimension
 and deceive me into thinking
 that I am once more
 on the verandah of my uncle’s house
 dreaming hourly
 as I gaze upon the sea
 and the flickering beacons of the distant farms
 are really only
 twinkling lights
 of ships on the horizon
 stars which beckoned us
 in all their wonder and their beauty
 to the worlds beyond the seas. (Coopsammy 48)

Jenny Kerber notes the significance of the phrase ‘new dimension’ – “neither wholly prairie nor wholly Caribbean, the ‘place’ it produces is in motion, situated somewhere between points of arrival and return” (Kerber 81). Mobility is integral to Coopsammy’s collection and it becomes tempting to identify the speaker as an exile, stuck in a liminal and homeless state. Instead, her mobility insists on an alternative way of imagining space, creating “a hybrid vision of place to emerge [...that] is at once local *and* transnational” (Kerber 80-81). Coopsammy’s constant switching of locations produces connections between people and spaces initially seen as different. As Kerber explains, Coopsammy “chooses to traffic back and forth between the Canadian prairie and the Caribbean in order to better understand each place through its relation to the other” (Kerber 80). In this way, she “expands the meaning of ‘home place’ by situating regional experience within a larger diasporic context” (Kerber 75).

The collection's first section, "Roots" begins in Trinidad. The speaker has a knowledge of and connection to immigration before becoming a migrant herself in that Trinidad is a former colony where the population is largely comprised of the descendants of African slaves and East Indian indentured servants. These exploitative migrations resulted in Trinidad becoming a nation that possesses many races of people. As a result, Coopsammy's speaker calls Trinidad "the original multicultural nation" (Coopsammy 102), demonstrating how multiculturalism, in both Canada and Trinidad, is the result of a colonial enterprise. "Naomi: Woman Lost" is one of Coopsammy's poems about a woman of African descent who lives in a hut on a hill in Trinidad. Naomi is not actually an immigrant herself but is certainly connected to the forced migration and resulting homelessness of her descendants, for the poem begins, "Ancestral voices called to her / across Atlantic waters" (Coopsammy 21). Aligned with immigration and homelessness because of her exploited ancestors, Naomi chooses to live in a way that will not *emphasize* her homelessness. Coopsammy writes, "no bag-burdened lady / of the streets she'd be / in dignity and emptiness / she found another way" (Coopsammy 22). While Naomi inherits her ancestor's struggles, she chooses an alternative way to live out her psychological homelessness. Instead of becoming a 'bag lady' that lives on the streets, Naomi resides "Deep within the forest's silences" (Coopsammy 21). While other characters have *chosen* homelessness, Naomi makes a conscious effort to live outside of society in a different way, removing herself from the urban and from noise.⁴²

Coopsammy's speaker is most obviously aligned with an immigrant perspective in her Manitoba migration but she is also connected to indigeneity in terms of the re-colonization of Trinidad to become a tourist destination, saying, "this is still / frontier country" (Coopsammy

⁴² "Daybassie" is another poem where the speaker discusses a specific person who represents Trinidad's position as an immigrant nation. Originally from India, Daybassie's spirit gives the speaker advice about being an immigrant, how "to reconcile two worlds" (Coopsammy 23).

101). While she is not aligned with *Canadian* aboriginality, her experience with her homeland's on-going colonization is analogous to the *original* colonization of Canada and Trinidad. The speaker even says, "the conqueror's skin / is still the same / Europe and North America's / sun-starved citizens" (Coopsammy 90). Her uncle's "little patch of earth" was once uninhabited but "now shimmers with a hundred pinpricks of light / proclaiming our burgeoning nation's / frantic search for shelter" (Coopsammy 89).⁴³ The Indigenous texts discussed in this project demonstrate how Canadian colonization caused various manifestations of homelessness. Just as Indigenous homes were displaced for colonizer and settler homes, so too is this currently happening in Trinidad, where the entire nation is searching for shelter and thus, is now homeless. In this way, Coopsammy's text becomes an important link between the Indigenous and immigrant point of view in Canada, demonstrating how these populations are exploited and marginalized by the same system of colonialism.

Although the speaker has this ancestral history and knowledge of immigration, the reality of Canadian life is still different than her expectations. "The Second Migration" discusses how the move "to Manitoba's alien corn" (Coopsammy 28) is one of hope, that the immigrants will fit into the multicultural mosaic and with this, find a home space in Canada.⁴⁴ Coopsammy writes,

⁴³ This concern with re-colonization is found in various poems, including "Prairie Journey," where Coopsammy implicates the speaker and the other migrants in Trinidad's problems with re-colonization. She asserts at the end of the poem, "we are the new colonials" (Coopsammy 49). She also writes, "we only have ourselves to blame / for while our children pursued / the North American dream / we left our borders / undefended / the stranger at the Gate has entered / and raped and pillaged" (Coopsammy 48-49). 'The stranger at the Gate' is an ironic reference to Manitoba writer J.S. Woodsworth's book called *Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians* (1909) which "sought to reduce the anxiety of people alarmed by the flood of non-British immigrants into the Canadian prairies in the early twentieth century, focusing on how best to assimilate (and if possible, Christianize) them into the existing social fabric of prairie society" (Kerber 84).

⁴⁴ The speaker and her fellow immigrants have great expectations about coming to Canada because of the image of multiculturalism. This notion is presented in a number of other poems. In "Immigrant," Canada is the "land of silver dreams, / refuge of slave, reject and persecuted" (Coopsammy 26) and in "Recession and the Third World Immigrant," Canada is a "honey-flowing milk and maple-syrup land" which "promised a new beginning" (Coopsammy 53). "Happy Days" discusses how the speaker and her fellow immigrants were "Seduced by images, mythologies / of our multi-cultured / conquistadores" (Coopsammy 34) and in "The Second Migration," Coopsammy writes, "Images of a just society dangled / tantalizingly before our eyes / we thought that here at last

“that in the many-faceted mosaic, we - / angled and trimmed to fit - / were sure to find ourselves / our corner of earth” (Coopsammy 28). The fact that these immigrants must be altered in order to fit into the mosaic indicates that Canadian multiculturalism is a myth. Kerber notes, “the way in which their cultural identity must be tailored to fit into the Canadian idea of multiculturalism is paralleled by their similarly regulated experience of prairie space” (Kerber 80). While Canada and the prairies are both known for their spaciousness, the immigrants are confined to “bite-sized backyards” (Coopsammy 29) and are left pondering their distance from the Caribbean. Kerber explains that by “invoking the Caribbean environment as a means of comprehending her present surrounding in Winnipeg, the narrator resists the idea that adopting a Canadian identity means forgetting her pre-Canadian identity, and challenges the notion that a journey from the global South to the global North must necessarily be interpreted as ‘progress’” (Kerber 80). This tactic of connecting and comparing the prairies with the Caribbean is continuously used throughout the rest of the collection.

Coopsammy’s poem “Family is Now” demonstrates that immigrants who have severed “bonds of / family and home” must now find these connections elsewhere, realizing “that family is now / an ethnic group / the immigrant connection” (Coopsammy 46). This immigrant connection is reminiscent of Maracle’s “Yin Chin” where cross-racial(ized) kinships begin to form as the result of a triangulated experience with white power. Yet family and home is not connected to any particular race for the immigrant but is instead “wherever we can find it / under these Prairie skies” (Coopsammy 46). The speaker further expands the narrow definition of family, explaining,

family for us
are all who welcome

and now at last / the spectres of colour / would never haunt / our work, our children’s lives, our play” (Coopsammy 28).

our Summer skins
 our scented foods
 and inviting us
 to the harvest and the toil
 share with us
 the bounty of the table. (Coopsammy 47)

While immigrants are excluded from some visions of the nation because they lack a history with settlement and agriculture, it is significant that they are now invited to the ‘harvest,’ indicating that they are now welcomed into this agricultural scene. Thus, family evolves from being one’s relatives and those of one’s race, to fellow immigrants and racialized bodies, to anyone who contributes to a feeling of belonging in the prairies space, regardless of race.

This expansive definition of family and home is complicated by the collection’s final poem, “Song of the Prodigal.” As with “Family in Now,” fellow immigrants become family in that they only have each other to help “weave the fabric of our lives / to shield us from the crimes of social ills / unemployment, welfare, cutbacks / homelessness” (Coopsammy 111). While this is the reality of life on the prairies for these immigrants, they expected their physical migration movement to result in “upward mobility” (Coopsammy 112) and wealth. Having “scorned family, clan, kinship” for the dream of another lifestyle, they now hope to be welcomed back, “for smarting from the wounds / inflicted by an alien land / battered and bruised we seek a refuge / the faces of home” (Coopsammy 113). Coopsammy demonstrates that home can be found in multiple sites, simultaneously, but the final line of the collection, ‘the faces of home’ indicates that there may be a home hierarchy. She asserts here that biological family, race and one’s native land remains more influential when constructing ideas of home.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Kerber writes, “She may experience nostalgia in its original sense as a ‘longing for home,’ but also recognizes that a return to the homeland she once knew will always necessarily be a return with a difference, altered by time, experience, and shifting material circumstance” (Kerber 81).

I have previously discussed how mobility complicates the notion that home is a single and fixed place. The speaker's concern for winter driving on the prairies represents how this mobility is empowering, being able to find home in multiple places, but also anxiety ridden. "Subject to Icing" demonstrates how mobility comes to represent the unrealized expectations of the migrant.⁴⁶ The poem's speaker is concerned with how the warning sign, "Bridge subject to Icing" (Coopsammy 40), can be read in terms of sweetness – wedding cakes and memories of children's birthday parties – but means something entirely different. Her comment, "this is no time / for nostalgic thoughts" (Coopsammy 39) indicates that her initial imaginings are connected to her expectations about migrating to the prairies. The bridge physically links two spaces that were not connected before, like the migration from a home land to an adopted land.

Coopsammy writes:

And I prefer it as it was before
 before I took my heart in my hand
 venturing across the bridges
 preferred it
 when I did not know
 such portents of impending doom existed
 liked to think
 the care was only mine
 in all my epic journeys
 across this polar land. (Coopsammy 40)

Until the final line, this quotation can be read as the immigrant's physical movement to Canada. However, the final line demonstrates that mobility does not end with the arrival in a new space but one must continue to move, in search of home. The speaker likes to think that her mobility is only controlled by her and that there were no external forces. She also addresses the gendered system of expectations and realities, that it must have been a man who had made this sign

⁴⁶ Winter is constantly depicted as a harsh experience that accompanies life in Canada but in this collection, the climate shock is specifically aligned with immigration. See "The Passing Show" for more evidence of this anxiety about winter driving.

because a woman would understand that it “would only make one wonder / about consistency and texture / and even / will it ever dry?” (Coopsammy 40). This questioning about the drying potential of icing also begs the question about how long the immigrant’s struggles will last. In this way, the poem is largely about the romantic expectations and realized realities that accompany migration to a new space.⁴⁷

Coopsammy’s collection critiques *global* systems of colonialism, capitalism and multiculturalism but she seems to be especially critical of how these systems work on the prairies. Coopsammy is certainly nuanced in her argument, demonstrating the positive and negative aspects of each place she visits and calls home, Western Canada being no exception. “Ode to Toronto” connects the city to its “Capitalist crimes” (Coopsammy 85) but ultimately praises it for being a safe space for immigrants. Coopsammy writes:

daily the displaced masses of the world
flock through her gates
fleeing fascism, torture
fundamentalism, ethnic cleansing
chauvinism
this secular city-state
a beacon promising
humanism, multiculturalism
freedom, equality
a haven for
the dispossessed
the driven, the homeless
the persecuted.

Toronto The Good. (Coopsammy 85)

Coopsammy never explicitly directs the same kind of love towards the prairies. Perhaps this is because the prairies have been *specifically* constructed in terms of whiteness, causing the

⁴⁷ Mobility comes to represent the false expectations and struggles of life in a new country. Coopsammy writes in “Prairie Journey,” “those seas we’ve travelled since / while the wonder and the beauty / that we sought / have brought us to / apartment blocks in / decaying inner-cities / suburban ghettos / where the new west begins / and some of us / to traverse fruitlessly / the unrelenting highways / between our Prairie towns” (Coopsammy 48).

immigrant to constantly fight against further displacement and homelessness.⁴⁸ Toronto is constructed in this poem as a space *for* the displaced and homeless. Kerber notes that in some ways, Coopsammy shares Jon Paul Fiorentino's concerns about the prairies, addressing the "ways in which the regionalist vernacular tradition tended to define prairie culture and prairie landscape: as rural, as agricultural, as white, and, very often, as male" (Kerber 87).⁴⁹ Coopsammy certainly constructs Toronto in opposition to the prairies, being that it is a non-agricultural, urban, multiracial and female space.⁵⁰

Coopsammy's poetry invites an alternative reading of immigration and the prairie space. Her text, like the other five narratives discussed throughout the chapters, forges important connections between Indigenous and immigrants writers on the prairies. Both Indigenous and immigrant voices have been more widely published in the past fifty years. Furthermore, contemporary prairie critics are increasingly interested in moving beyond the restrictive prairie canon, engaging with alternative readings of the prairies beyond the settler moment. My project asks if there is a connection in the writing of these two racialized populations in Canada. The six narratives I chose to discuss provide a case study that demonstrates that there is indeed a thematic link, generally in terms of a critique of Canadian multiculturalism and specifically in terms of language and bodily differences, home making on the prairies, and story-telling. Not only do these texts discuss similar concerns but by reading these narratives together, the resulting conversations become increasingly nuanced.

Some suggestions for further study would include the re-reading of older settler texts to explore the representation of Indigenous and immigrant bodies on the prairies. My thesis

⁴⁸ As mentioned previously, Canada as a whole is constructed in terms of a white 'norm' but this is even more pronounced on the prairies.

⁴⁹ Fiorentino coined the term 'post-prairie' "to describe works that reflect an increasingly urban, fragmented, cosmopolitan prairie identity, rather than one rooted in predominantly rural or historical settings" (Kerber 75).

⁵⁰ Toronto is a female space because it is referred to as "she."

provided a limited definition of 'the immigrant' in terms of a racialized body so it would be interesting to trace the racialization of different 'ethnic' groups throughout Prairie literature. Furthermore, this thesis only discusses six narratives but there are many more literary examples of both explicit cross-racial moments and subtler ways Indigenous and immigrant populations are connected by reading their literature together. This conversation could become further nuanced with more specific connections to other social factors beyond race, such as gender and class. For example, each text this project focused on was heavily invested in a feminist critique of white power. In any case, I hope my project invites more of these cross-racial literary engagements to gain a more nuanced understanding about race on the prairies.

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