The Canadian discourses of power that flow around race and racism infiltrate texts as diverse as a provincial referendum, the Multiculturalism Act, and prominent newspaper ads, and these discourses, both official and popular, are sources for a much wider public perception and sensibility, ones that foster attitudes intolerant of difference. Classroom study of these texts offers an opportunity to unravel the many unquestioned Canadian assumptions regarding ethnicity, visible minorities, and especially, First Nations identity and status. One of the functions of the university environment is to examine ideologies that have been previously accepted and passively consumed, enabling a rejection of these precepts and forging the possibility of radical changes in thinking.

In classroom explorations of things as specific as pronouns or as expansive as national credos, one can revise and transform a Canadian ethos that has, since its inception, been founded on racist principles. Such a view of national foundations may disturb students, but it seems essential to the kind of social justice that Canada purportedly espouses that we address and reconsider this groundwork. The language of postcolonial study, while often mired in the Canadian tradition of looking elsewhere in the world for injustice, and bound by the academic tendency to distance and generalize, does offer a resource with which to describe the intricacies of racist discourses. Alongside such writers and theorists as Smaro Kam-
bourelly, Fred Wah, Roy Miki, Jeannette Armstrong, and Marlene Nourbese Philip, a postcolonial/cultural studies/Canadian studies unit would chart the various rhetorical configurations of nation, citizenship, democracy, us/them binaries, ethnicity, multiculturalism, and colour in Canada.

Addressing racism in the class always seems a risky venture; it involves self-reflection, vulnerability, and an awareness of one's own conditional/conditioned language. While difficult, it is the ethical ground that writers and readers across the country are asking teachers to enter. What we might first recognize are the multiple ways in which issues of social justice are superseded by something else. To put it simply, social justice often gives way to other interests: White psychic security, "progress" as measured by financial stability or privilege, principles of democracy and "good government," abstract notions of nationhood, moral standards, and a tradition of scholarly discourse and theoretical objectivity. The critical distance that is created by theoretical or policy discourse remains a crucial element in a Canadian racist ethos. Since the signs of multiculturalism and postcolonialism have been misdirected from the outset and so ravaged of their potential for political resistance, might we be forced to re-conceive a theoretical basis? Like the Indian Act and other government and court decisions, issues of efficient management have overshadowed principles of social justice and the adequate recognition of historical violence, so much so that nationhood and citizenship may be too enmeshed in these principles to be disentangled. Might we be led to name a new consciousness of these pervasive ideologies post-Canadianism?

The actual reading and analysis of texts in the postcolonial classroom often involves a stalwart refusal to look at the text and its language. This aversion takes on aspects of defensiveness, distancing, and the safety of certain types of knowledge. The immediate tendency is to look away, to fall back on cliché or learned responses:

- "If they want equality, why are they asking for special status."
- "I am not responsible for my ancestor's sins."
- "It just should be settled, once and for all."
- "Canada is the most tolerant nation in the world, why do they complain?"
- "They are feeding off the system."
We have heard these before. That monumental “they” persists even when there are Aboriginal and other students of colour in the class. It is useful to return to these statements as rhetorical strategies alongside more obviously racist statements and texts because this type of defensiveness appears again, even in more official documents. Race as a linguistic or semiotic structure can be a key to opening up the possibilities of other impressions and expressions of difference.

The exaggerated White supremacist attitudes that are displayed in the ad purchased by the Coalition for a Humanistic British Canada (see Appendix A) offer a specific text to explore in terms of language and rhetorical strategies. Once the context of the substantial cost and large distribution of this ad is highlighted (it was run in 30 Canadian newspapers and magazines including the Toronto Star, Vancouver Sun, Winnipeg Free Press, Edmonton Journal, and Globe and Mail), students become sobered by the implications of what they read. They chuckle at some of the provisions in the ad, especially the bit about “aggressive clothing choices,” but when we begin to go through the points, there is a strange combination of recognition and repulsion in the responses. Sections that garner the most attention initially are the “requirement” for “mainstream cultural assimilation” and the call for an “end to Canada’s multicultural policies and related affirmative action policies.” Other observations that typically emerge are:

- the link between British culture and “morality” or “values”
- the link between an adherence to sexist role models, White supremacy, and a monolithic tradition
- the slippery use of pronouns like “we” (“These are all peoples we share much with”), “all Canadians,” and “our” (“our European heritage”)
- the calculated effort to make the ad look official and government-related through the use of an emblem at the top and the subtitle “Policy Statement”

The fact that the ad ran in so many newspapers (some unapologetically) reveals one of the ways in which freedom of speech and other democratic rights become a tool for the active management of race relations and
cultural hegemony. The "we" becomes a linguistic sign that carries with it the weight of the power of the majority at the expense of justice and, dare I say, humanism. It is this omnipresent and pervasive underpinning of Canadian identity that has guided race relations for hundreds of years. The pronoun reflects a fictional assumption of centrality and community.

The pronoun choice has resonance in that it connects to more official government documents concerning First Nations and multicultural policy. A similar pronoun problem appears in this statement by the Department of Canadian Heritage:

Through multiculturalism, Canada recognizes the potential of all Canadians, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs. (Department of Canadian Heritage)

The chasm between "them" and "their society" is what stands out. Here, "all Canadians" works in a less threatening way, but there remains an invasive sense of "they" and the assumption of a central (absent?) culture, society, and nation. Roy Miki contends that Canadian "multiculturalism" has "proven to be an efficient means of engineering internal inequities in ways that have protected white neo-colonialist cultural representations" (150). The subtle manoeuvres of mainstream culture and dominant ideology create a Canadian race hegemony that takes as its foundation seemingly indisputable values of inclusivity and validation, democracy and progress, harmony and vitality. What is lost is full recognition of historical truths, current inequities, and continuing, hurtful attitudes. The call to "full participation" suggests that this integration into the structures of Canadian culture is the answer to the race "problem." Issues of land claims, redress, institutional racism, police harassment, and immigration discrimination are not on the table as contributing to or hindering a "multicultural" nation. "Full participation" and integration become the whitewashing, the smoothing over, the cultural amnesia that conditions a national consciousness.

The troubled cross of postcolonial thinking in Canada is not so much whether Canada is racist or not, it is how the language of racialized thought can be recognized and translated (as a transformative act) into social justice activism, anti-racist action, and the reformation of
colonially-inscribed institutions. Questions that might be asked by a postcolonial Canadian subject/student are:

- what are the ideological foundations of Canadian culture that prevent a healthy self-identification and autonomy for people of colour?
- what racist residue is still laced into Canadian consciousness, left over from the “discovery” and “settlement” of Canada?
- what links are to be made between a traditionally conceived and analyzed “colonial mentality,” and a more contemporary and fluidly dominant North American racist ideology?
- how are the Canadian government’s policies to be read in terms of their racist overtones/intentions?
- why is theory so disinclined to address specific issues of racism?

This last question has already been asked, but with muted and insufficient answers. Aruna Srivastava discusses this inexplicable exclusion:

A conference on postcolonial pedagogy, followed by another two months later, on gender, colonialism, postcolonialism. A few intrepid souls slither past race. I start getting edgy, worried. Angry, even. What about racism? Power? Abuse? And what about pedagogy? We are teachers, students. I ask a colleague if post-colonialism has room for anti-racism. He’s not sure; his take is anti-colonialism. I meet silence when I ask others. Discomfort perhaps. Or: surely it goes without saying, among us postcolonialists. (46)

Such a lack of real engagement with anti-racist issues raises questions about the function of the whole liberal/multicultural/mosaic conception of a unified Canadian identity.

The call might be for a wholesale rethinking of the Canadian cultural “mosaic” and the “full participation” proclaimed by the Multiculturalism Act. The Ministry of Multiculturalism was established to disperse money rather than to address the endemic racism that haunts this country. Smaro Kamboureli, while exploring Canadian multiculturalism and diasporic literature, describes the nation’s drive to define ethnicity through a policy that “reifies minorities as that which the cohesive nation is not” (92). This reification involves the “preservation” of ethnicity [and]
lodges the ethnic subject within a museum case because of a 'heritage'... that is presumed to be stable and unambiguous, and therefore easily reproducible” (106). The binary bind of colonial/postcolonial neatly packages central Canadian racist ideologies and, more often than not, places the racialized subject safely in the Third World, in the Orient, back overseas, or on the reserve.

Kamboureli points to another, equally persistent, strategy in Canadian public policy concerning ethnicity; rather than reifying there is a tendency to erase difference. In discussing the Multiculturalism Act, she argues that “this legal document seeks to overcome difference rather than to confront incommensurability. Belying its intent to address systemic inequities, it executes an emancipatory gesture in the name of homogeneity and unity” (101). The claim that “we are all immigrants” (Atwood 62) effectively denies difference and, so, regulates its role in the nation-state. Kamboureli uses Walter Benjamin’s sense of *incommensurability* to suggest both the necessary role of difference and the importance of recognizing that these ambivalent identities are continually in flux. Miki identifies this as seeing “race” as a construction, as produced, largely by a dominant anglocentric cultural milieu, and a sign that necessarily calls for troubling ambivalence, a sign under erasure. This indeterminacy would straddle, or better yet, striate, the equally damaging poles of reification and denial. Here and not here. This address of “race” largely comes about through a material/historical recognition of racist acts and rhetoric that both places the racialized subject in a national landscape and displaces him/her from a (fictionalized) national epistemology and ethos.

The various epistemological activities that the Multiculturalism Act initiates are reproduced in the types of rhetorical strategies taken on by the literary theorist. Here is how this apparatus might break down:

- assimilation through denial of systemic racism
- creation of economic dependence on a central and traditionally structured institution
- naming and categorization of difference that “serves to re-repress the already repressed” (Kamboureli 167)
- rendering of the “founding” nations an invisible/absent centre (much in the same way Rushdie sees “Commonwealth” fiction)
- monumentalization of history and “heritage” so as to clearly place
the hyphenated homeland (i.e., Japanese-Canadian, etc.), so you have Brian Mulroney calling to extend condolences to Rajiv Gandhi following the Air India crash even though most of the passengers were Canadian citizens

- claiming of a “multicultural” environment through a “universalizing rhetoric,” which erases “ethnicity” and its “differential role” (Kamboureli 100) as a resistance to dominant racist and colonial ideologies

It would be foolish, I think, to separate mainstream academic and centralized government institutions in terms of their functioning ideologies. As such idealism might suggest, the status quo rests firmly in the hands of Canadian academia. A postcolonial pedagogy, in order to address social injustice and racist ideology, has the daunting task of working against its own context and traditions along with those assumptions being carried into the class by instructors and students.

The landmark Nisga’a treaty in 2000 performs a mobility that calls into question citizenship, authority, reliance, and jurisdiction in a way that unsettles the status quo of race politics in this nation. The Nass Valley is now here and not here; it re-articulates colonial contact space. For Gloria Anzaldúa, this kind of motility as “home” is a hazardous yet freeing border space for the New Mestiza who occupy the borders of race, nation, and language in the southern United States:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (3)

This unsettled but potentially powerful border existence holds both pain and joy for the trans-border/nomadic/hybrid/racialized subject. This shifting liminal space is a site of deterritorialization, a border existence, outside of traditional jurisdiction divisions, where something as apparently basic as citizenship breaks down as a referent and becomes a floating signifier. Without the unhinging of race as a referent, race talk threatens to become a symbolic “reserve” or “internment camp” where difference may be kept at bay.
One of the responses to the Nisga'a agreement has been the Campbell government's controversial referendum on treaty negotiations. The contexts for this referendum are many and complex. British Columbia is unique in Canada because it does not have ratified treaties like the rest of the country. Treaty attempts have been blocked by a series of provincial governments so that most BC First Nations do not have those agreements that are held sacred in other parts of the country. The NDP Clarke government that preceded this Liberal government forged ahead and signed the Nisga'a Treaty that returned to the Nisga'a 19,000 hectares (an area less than at least two ranches in south-central BC), a cash settlement, and an unprecedented amount of autonomy in terms of self-government. Panic ensued and, in part, a change of government was the result.

The referendum itself has some caveats to it. It is clear that a majority yes vote would support the already established approach to treaty negotiations as outlined by the government, whereas a no vote would not be binding whatsoever and easily ignored. The referendum is designed to manufacture support for a previously articulated position, not, as referenda traditionally do, to gauge public opinion on a particular issue. This is a clear example of the ways in which government can create public opinion and further propagate Canadian racist ideals. In the referendum text (see Appendix B), all the questions have been arranged (in some remarkable syntactic twists) so that the "yes" option is the government's desired option. The text of the referendum raises many questions about motivation, impact, and an apparent amplification of alarming trends in race relations and rhetoric. The questions are simplistic and meant to solicit a kind of gut reaction by the voting public. Of course, I want parks maintained. But this is not the whole story. It seems to me that most answers would have to be "it depends." The first five questions (and possibly number 7 depending on what "harmony" means) are intent on defending against possible treaty-land awards in the future, regardless of legitimacy. Question number 6 is to defend against the type of autonomy that the Nisga'a have won, especially in its assertion of the federal and provincial power to "delegate." The last question has been vociferously defended as installing full equality to First Nations by disavowing preferential treatment and reducing a welfare-state dependency. In the "whereas" at the top the principle of the policy is outlined: workable, affordable, certainty, finality, and equality. All of these terms, except perhaps equality, are specifi-
cally geared to create economic stability for corporate investment and activity. It is clear here that the issues of justice are taking a back seat to the bottom line of provincial finance and economic growth. History, ethics, and identity are not in the equation. The first question raises a further question about what “private property” entails. In recent Supreme Court decisions there has been a growing recognition of a non-Western definition of property and the cultural vibrancy that preceded colonization in Canada. Why could this question not replace “expropriated” with “reclaimed”?

As in the Coalition ad, the phrase “all British Columbians” has curious implications. If, and it is fairly clear this is the case, these provisions are to protect against treaty claims, then it is clear that “all British Columbians” means non-Aboriginal. In this instance, even a no answer would buy into a rhetorically charged ethos that reaffirms a colonial premise. This enveloping “hailing” gesture left the voter no choice but to not participate, even at the expense of enabling a yes vote. All aboriginal organizations in BC advised disregard for the referendum or an officially spoiled ballot. Not here, not there. This entails an important refusal to acknowledge Canadian White supremacist interpellation even when it is lodged firmly within principles of democracy and free speech. There was less than a 40 per cent response to the referendum, indicating a clear aversion to its founding principles. However, of the participants, 90 to 95 per cent voted yes to the government-mandated provisions. How the province uses this dangerously manufactured mandate is yet to be seen.

The politics of land claims, redress, anti-racism, and class equality have been effectively quarantined by government, academia, and media. One of the dictates of any regime is to effectively silence and quarantine any resistance to dominant ideological state apparatuses. This manoeuvre can be accomplished through physical displacement but also through a type of language effect (via parts of speech like pronouns) that symbolically displaces. What a Canadian ethos has failed to address are the complex issues of diaspora, First Nations, and the displaced or racialized experience that makes up Canada at a basic level. This is not that same argument that we are all raced and immigrant and different; this is an argument that racial conflict, inequity, toxicity, and systematically damaging discrimination is a foundation of this nation. Race theory is not a fringe issue raised by a special interest group but fundamental, central to Canadian identity.
APPENDIX A

Coalition for a Humanistic British Canada
Policy Statement

The coalition believes it is crucial that the British and French roots of Canada be recognized and respected by all Canadians. We are calling for a recognition of the very special status of Quebec as Canada's French province, and for the recognition of the British system of government, and British institutions for all Canadians not living in the province of Quebec.

British culture must be enhanced, protected and preserved in the same manner as French culture has been protected by recent administrations in the province of Quebec. In this respect, the coalition is calling specifically for:

a) School uniforms for all children attending Canadian schools
b) An emphasis on early teaching of English literature and moral values
c) A massive increase in immigration, most especially from the U.K., France, Italy, Germany and other such countries including The Ukraine, Russia and Kossova. These are all peoples we share much with now.
d) A substantial increase for Arts funding in Canada for traditional British theatre and music
e) A preservation and enhancement of architecture which best reflects our European heritage
f) A requirement that mainstream cultural assimilation be carried as a matter of course, for all Canadians.
g) An end to Canada's multicultural policies and related affirmative action policies and initiatives for all

We are as well calling for a return to traditional values and recognition of the traditional roles provided in the support of families. Specific changes we seek include:

a) An end to equal rights treatment in such areas as war combat, etc. as to men and women
b) A revision of marital awards on divorce to encourage better motivated, longer marriages
We would like to encourage a return to traditional modes of dress as well. We think that women should avoid too much exposure from aggressive clothing choices. Men should wear trousers rather than jean clothing substitutes, while women should likewise return to skirts and dresses. A great example for the children.

Finally, we think the CBC in particular has been quite negligent in carrying out its responsibilities to help raise responsible thinking children by providing too much trash on television rather than the more edifying programs available on Public television. In particular, shows such as Upstairs Downstairs from the BBC provide a much better role model environment for our children we believe, over many of the choices currently being made by the state owned broadcaster.

If you are concerned with the preservation of traditional family values in Canada, we ask that you write your member of parliament. Its postage free when you indicate the letters MP on the envelope addressed to parliament hill. You might also wish to include a copy of this advertisement.

When you write, we hope you will also express your support for FREE TRADE with Britain NOW, as well as a BLANKET PASSPORT offer to British citizens of tenure.

You may reach us at:
Coalition for a Humanistic British Canada
Michael E. Chessman, Founder
255 Wellesley Street east #2 Toronto, M4X 1G8
Toll Free: (800) 961-2678 Fax: (416) 929-4658
Website: www.geocities.com/britishcanada
Email: britishcanada@sprint.ca

APPENDIX B

Whereas the Government of British Columbia is committed to negotiating workable, affordable treaty settlements that will provide certainty, finality and equality;

Do you agree that the Provincial Government should adopt the following principles to guide its participation in treaty negotiations?
1. Private property should not be expropriated for treaty settlements.

2. The terms and conditions of leases and licences should be respected; fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured.

3. Hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities on Crown land should be ensured for all British Columbians.

4. Parks and protected areas should be maintained for the use and benefit of all British Columbians.

5. Province-wide standards of resource management and environmental protection should continue to apply.

6. Aboriginal self-government should have the characteristics of local government, with powers delegated from Canada and British Columbia.

7. Treaties should include mechanisms for harmonizing land use planning between Aboriginal governments and neighbouring local governments.

8. The existing tax exemptions for Aboriginal people should be phased out.

WORKS CITED


