

"The Struggle for History:
Historical Narratives and Anti-Racist Pedagogy"

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Presentation to the
Educational Research Association, Singapore,
and the
Australian Association for Research in Education
Joint Conference,
"Educational Research: Building New Partnerships,"
Singapore, November 28, 1996.

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17 November 1996

"History" is an ambiguous term. In its most basic and absolute sense,

history is the sum total of previous human activities and experiences, that which shapes the present and defines its possibilities. However, history, or more properly histories, also refers to the narratives that people construct in order to make meaning of the past. Although commonly confused with history in the first sense, the extent to which historical narratives approximate the past is in fact problematic. They can be entirely fictive, even delusional, or they can meet standards of professional historical criticism. In mass media, historical narratives are often a combination of fact and fantasy, blurred by anachronistic conventions, while the narratives of popular histories, university and high school textbooks are supposedly supported by textual evidence.¹ Everyday historical accounts also cover a range of possibilities with their assessment as truth or as delusion often more a product of the hearer of the anecdote than of the teller.

History in both senses is the stuff of popular racisms. Popular racisms are "rooted in everyday cultural practices" and representations (Rizvi, 1993, p. 131; see also Cohen, 1988, Cashmore, 1987, Anderson, 1991, Frankenburg, 1993). These practices and representations play important roles in what Hannah Arendt has called "the organization of an entire texture of life according to an ideology," (Arendt, 1979, p. 363), i.e. in shaping the social interactions that construct racisms as social and material conditions.² History, understood as the sum total of past human activity and experience, has given rise to the cultural practices of popular racisms and has created the conditions that allow particular representations to be articulated, and others to be silenced. But since historical narratives often provide the raw ingredients of popular racisms, history in its more restricted sense also shapes racisms.

All of this presents an important challenge for the pedagogies associated with what has been variously called "critical multiculturalism" (Goldberg, 1994; McCarthy, 1994) or "anti-racism" (Dei, 1996). If historical narratives help to constitute popular racisms, challenging these racisms requires consideration of history and historical understanding, including its narrative forms.

Historical narratives contribute to popular racism in at least three ways. First, like all narratives, they are selective. Insofar as historical narratives purport to represent the pasts of persons, institutions or territories, they help to constitute and justify the relations acted out within popular racisms. Through their selections, by articulating certain things and being silent on others, they establish relations between persons, their pasts and various territories (physical and institutional). Historical narratives are particularly important in "moral panics of perceived racialized invasion" (Roman and Stanley, forthcoming 1997) since their selections establish the alleged priority of one group's claim to a particular territory over that of another. Because such claims are usually contested, the historical narratives that succeed in establishing popular racisms must be hegemonic, widely reproduced, and taken for

granted. Secondly, historical narratives help to constitute "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). Insofar as a narrative presupposes a subject whose story can be told, individuals in claiming a history as their own also constitute themselves as a fictive community. Yet, at the same time, others are excluded from the narrative and from its community. Thus, by excluding certain people and their real or imagined pasts from the narrative community, historical narratives themselves discursively and culturally construct the exclusions and inclusions of racisms (Goldberg, 1993, esp. 90-116). Thirdly, historical narratives effect racist denial unless they are self-consciously aware of how racisms constitute the categories of the narrative. In the absence of fully historicized understandings of racism, racism can be variously represented as eternal and natural, as the product of recent changes or as belonging to a long distant and dead past. In any case, both the contemporary and historical realities of racisms are underplayed and marginalized.

"Grand narratives" (Megill, 1995) of nationalism, of European modernity and colonialism are the narratives par excellence that meet these criteria. These grand narratives suffuse Western culture generally (Goldberg, 1993; Said, 1993). They naturalize and hence obscure the assumptions of popular racisms. They are selective in their contents, hegemonic, widely-reproduced and taken for granted. They foster imagined community and effect racist denial. Such narratives effect racialization by creating categories of people whose histories count and others whose histories do not, those who have a history and those

who do not, those who can tell their own history and those who have what is alleged to be their history told for them. For example, in the context of English Canadian nationalisms, the European occupation of the Americas is usually represented as an inevitable, lawful and civilized progress that occurred almost without reference to the peoples whose lands were occupied. As nationalist narratives focus almost entirely on the activities of the occupiers, the problematic nature of relations between occupier and occupied are rarely addressed.

Only infrequently do nationalist narratives consider the relations between occupiers and occupied, while rarer still do they consider the motivations and activities of the occupied. Thus these narratives effectively racialize aboriginal people as individuals whose motives are unknowable, as irrational or moral outsiders to the nation.

Professional historians might object that the narratives they construct are quite different from popular ones, racist and otherwise.

Certainly, individual historical monographs (and the narratives they contain) texture the inevitable excesses of popular history, but few professional historians, at least among those writing on Canada, have questioned nationalist categories. In effect their work is devoted to fleshing out previously little known aspects of the national past, while historical practice--its study and teaching--remains organized on the lines of nation-states.³ As far as perpetuating nationalist frameworks is concerned, academic history shares much in common with

popular history.

Rather than merely scrapping these narratives, as part of the project of theorizing social change "beyond the boundaries of race, nations and communities" (Dei, 1996, p. 136) anti-racist pedagogy needs to engage with them.⁴ It is not simply that nationalist narratives are wrong, too selective, or need to be replaced by better narratives. First of all, they exist, they are extremely powerful, and their influence insidious. This alone suggests that it is unwise to ignore them. However, they are not the only narratives that exist, nor do they provide the only frameworks for examining the past. In order to be successful in fostering new meanings and possible ways of being, anti-racist pedagogy needs to create conditions that allow for the telling of these other stories and the exploration of non-nationalist historical frameworks.

An example of articulating popular racism through historical narratives can be found in a November 17, 1995, Ottawa Citizen newspaper report, "Students seek end to atmosphere of racism, violence" (p. C1). According to the newspaper, students at a local high school were seeking an end to "racism and violence in their school." The report was generally positive in tone, emphasizing that students, teachers and administrators were working to overcome "the trouble." It reported that a snowball fight had escalated into a "wild mêlée" in which twenty or so students fought and that two youths had been arrested and one charged for assault after an "altercation" in the cafeteria the following day. Half of the report was concerned with reproducing comments from students and school administrators on the need to talk through problems and to settle differences without violence. The report pointed out that the school had been experiencing "tension . . . for some time" and had already begun "a program to increase racial understanding" before the recent "trouble." It concluded by quoting Ottawa Board of Education Superintendent Lorne Rachlis to the effect that this program was working: "This week there were no weapons involved," and "students were grabbing friends, holding them back and telling them not to get involved." (The Ottawa Citizen, 1995)⁵ On first reading, the history being told by this report is as follows: tensions between two distinct groups within the school--"Somalis" and "whites"--erupted in the snowball fight leading to a "real" fight

despite the efforts of students, teachers and administrators to prevent it. The police had to intervene in a second fight the next day. The tensions originated with the arrival of the Somalis in the school since they, in the words of the Citizen are "new to Canada and are learning English as a Second Language." However, since both Somali and white students as well as teachers and administrators are working to overcome the situation, there is hope that it can be positively resolved. This is an essentially redemptive reading of tensions escalating into conflict and their resolution through the good will of all parties

involved. It is supported by the following information: Readers are told that the first incident started when "a snowball was thrown at a student from Somalia" and that "Jamal Ali, 18, a Grade 12 student, said he tossed a soft drink can at his attacker and a fight broke out." The only eye-witness to the event cited in the report as "Tony Walby, 22, a student who watched the incident," is reported to have said that the snowball fight might have started as a "racial thing" and is quoted indirectly as saying, "Somali and other students worked together to stop the fight." Later on we are again told that "both black and white students responded with a chorus of suggestions" to the urging of the vice-principal, Jeff Botting, not to try to rectify wrongs on their own.

There are several disturbing aspects to this reading. One is the exclusion of one side in the dispute from talking. Direct quotes are reproduced from "Grade 11 student Alison Weber," Walby, "student Stephanie Christie" and "Principal Anna Bowles," however no direct quotes are attributed to any one identified as "Somali." Jamal Ali is not quoted directly, and although some of the quotes attributed to "both black and white students" may be from "Somalis," the report does not specify who said what. As is common in popular racisms, the report also conflates national/ethnic, racial and language categories, and signifies differences on the basis of these categories. Thus the report points out that Jamal Ali is "from Somalia," racializes this category as "black" and tells us that the school has "900 students, including a high proportion who are new to Canada and are learning English as a Second Language" only to helpfully tell us in the next sentence that "tension" had been in the school "for some time." The report conflates "racism" and "violence" and implies that Somali difference--blackness, newness in Canada, ESL--is the root cause of this racism. That difference causes racism is further emphasized by the report's claim that many students feel that the school needs "a program to help students understand each other's cultures and control their aggression." (Ottawa Citizen, 1995) According to this reading, the report, for all of its anti-racist intent, ends up acting out the racist exclusion of Somalis and their meanings, while perpetuating racializations and at the same time ascribing racial identities that many Somalis may not accept.

However, when I ask how do I know all this, it seems that the text alone does not support this reading. It does not identify the groups involved in the fight, although we might reasonably assume that the fight involved some people "from Somalia," including Jamal Ali. That the national origins of Jamal Ali are somehow significant is further emphasized by the comments attributed to Tony Walby to the effect that "Somali and other students" tried to end the fight. Beyond this, I have to construct this significance on my own. Was Jamal Ali one of the people who tried to stop the fight? Were Somalis one side of the fight? Who were the other? In this closely textual (but decontextualized) reading, I know that there are people "from Somalia" in the school and "others" but I do not know where these others are from. Similarly I do not know how "black and white" relates to this

"from Somalia"/"other" dichotomy. There are several possibilities in which the black and white students can be from Somalia or not, or some of both. The report tells nothing of the significance for Ottawa of

names like Alison Weber, Tony Walby, Stephanie Christie, Anna Bowles, Lorne Rachlis, or Jamal Ali for that matter. It implies that cultural differences somehow contribute to racism (as suggested by the students' calls for programs to help them understand each others' cultures), but I do not know who these cultural differences involve or what they are about. The only differences, cultural or otherwise, mentioned by the report are being "from Somalia" or "other," "black and white" or being "new in Canada" and speaking English as a Second Language vs., presumably, being old in Canada and speaking English as a First Language (or perhaps even speaking English as a third or fourth language).

In this decontextualized reading, I can even reasonably construe the text as follows:-- There is an anti-racist community of people within the school, including both students "from Somalia" and "other students," both "black and white" students, as well as teachers and administrators whose origins and skin colours we do not know. This community has come to be "troubled" by another group of unnamed racists. The members of the community want this trouble to stop and are taking steps to do so.

If the first reading is not supported by the text alone, where does it come from? It comes from a reading that is informed by the things that the writer of the report and myself as contemporary reader living in Ottawa take for granted, i.e. what historians call context (Marrus, 1987). Context includes such things as the usual etiquette of snowball fights in Canada. It also presupposes knowledge of the existence of Ottawa as a racialized territory in which people "from Somalia" have arrived relatively recently; familiarity with skin colour-based racializations and awareness of racisms built on these racializations; that the racially dominant group in Ottawa is commonly described as "white;" that being "from Somalia" is commonly equated with "being black," with being relatively "new" in Canada and speaking English as a Second Language; and further that this group "from Somalia" stands in relation to another group equated with being "from Canada," "being white" and "speaking English as a First Language." In the context of these popular common sense and thoroughly racialized understandings, the second party to the dispute does not need to be named since it can be taken for granted. Within this context, the text provides sufficient information to establish the first reading.⁶ Even the fact that the incident grew out of a snowball fight takes on a racialized significance. Snowball fights can be little more than a fun way of marking the arrival of winter. They can be remarkably ungendered, and without stable sides. By contrast, they can also be highly structured and even ritualized contests between rival groups. They are further governed by unwritten rules, (e.g., that ganging up on someone or

putting ice in a snowball are not acceptable). In this context Jamal Ali's admission that he threw a coke can establishes him as someone who either does not know or does not respect the etiquette of snowball fights. In either case, the sole Somali mentioned by name in the report is established as an outsider to the moral community implied by the story.

Context is established by comparing one text to others, i.e. by examining one narrative in relation to others. These other narratives constitute Somalis and the unnamed group as distinct. In doing so they also relate the pasts of these groups to the territory of Ottawa, and by implication to that of Canada as a whole. Being labelled "Somali" is significant. This label exists in relation to "others" who are not "from Somalia." Who else lives in Ottawa and does not need to be named? "Canadians." How can I know this? The narratives of hundreds of history textbooks, public monuments, and the utterances of people from cabinet ministers to school children tells me this. By definition "Canadians," unlike those "from Somalia," are "from Ottawa" as well.

I.E. nationalist narratives that establish Ottawa as peopled by "Canadians" effectively deny that it is also peopled by "Somalis."

Thus the report articulates a received nationalist history of Canada as a community of people whose roots in the country go back centuries, who speak English as their first language, who are moral because they respect the rules of snowball fights and oppose violence. In so doing it constitutes people "from Somalia" as outsiders to the imagined community of Canada, while all the time silencing them and their accounts of their past. By the same token, I can only know the significance of "both black and white students" denouncing the conflict if I am familiar with historical narratives that represent racism as previously involving conflict between "blacks" and "whites." (Consider how to evaluate a statement that both tall and short people, or Grade 9s and 10s, denounced the fighting.) Again, this implies historical narratives, this time ones that represent racisms and their pasts.

But how is it that the report can take for granted the unnamed group, but it cannot take for granted being "from Somalia"? I.E. within the grammar of popular racism why must this particular point be emphasized?

The reason is that popular racism is suffused by another set of powerful historical narratives which together mean that the identities of this other group do not need to be named, because they are already well established. It is part of the privilege of the members of this unnamed group that they do not have to be named in racialized terms (Roman, 1993; Frankenberg, 1993). Indeed, since they are the ones most often privileged by racisms, they are the ones whose identities are constructed by these narratives that articulate exclusions.⁷

The historical narratives in question do not talk about Somalis as also being "from Ottawa" or "Canadian." They also construct racism as conflict, lack of understanding or "prejudice" between groups whose boundaries are assumed to be fixed and who are often alleged to be

contesting control over a territory. They ignore racisms as central to European modernity and its projects including the construction of Ottawa as a society. They take for granted the existence of racially dominant groups and yet avoid acknowledging racialization as constitutive of these identities.

The narratives that do all of this are familiar. They usually begin with the alleged "discovery" of the Americas by Europeans, continue with the story of the progress of European "settlement" and trace the development of their politics and institutions. These narratives focus on the conflicts between various groups of Europeans. In Canada they are especially concerned with "the English" and "the French," and are often reproduced in books that take the 1867 federation of four British North American colonies as their central turning points. Together they constitute a "grand narrative" of Canada as nation.⁸

These narratives suffuse popular culture. They are the stuff of government-funded heritage minutes, beer commercials, high school and first year university history texts, and countless historic plaques in Ottawa. As narratives of the nations, they are one of the most important ways of establishing the "imagined community" of Canada, fictively linking the living and the dead, those who live in Ottawa with those who live in Vancouver or Yellowknife, but not with those who live in Mogadishu or the United States. They are also the stuff of popular racisms since they claim to tell the stories of how some people came to live in Ottawa, while ignoring the stories of others. To be labelled "from Somalia" has so far been to be excluded from these narratives.

One should note that this same grand narrative is also articulated by the second, more closely textual reading. The report itself is after all a text written in English, and not in Somali, or in Ojibwa for that matter, and is aimed at an audience of English-speakers. The second reading too implies a history in which racisms do not shape the past or

the present. Rather they are transient aberrations in the communal progress. Since racisms do not construct the nation, this grand narrative allows representation of racism as exceptional, as "trouble," "violence" and "fighting," induced by a lack of "cultural understanding."

Grand narratives also suffuse the work of professional historians, even if in a more textured way. Certainly, there have been significant studies of racist events in Canada's past (e.g., Sunahara, 1981; Johnston, 1984; Abella and Troper, 1982; Walker, 1989; Strange, 1992). These studies, however, have remained marginal to the enduring themes of survey history. Survey histories still devote far more space to the few hundred French men of the heroic age, than they do to the Iroquoian civilizations of the Great Lakes basin and fail to mention the racial basis of the 1885 Dominion Franchise Act, the "greatest triumph" of Sir John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada (Stewart, 1982).

Even studies of Canadian state formation (Curtis, 1988 and 1992; Greer and Radforth, 1992), noted for their theoretical vigour and

rootedness in the primary sources, seem unaware of the racisms that have suffused Western modernity. Thus, in Canada at least, racisms remain of marginal interest in professional history.

The same grand narratives underlie common justifications of anti-racist and multicultural education on the grounds of increasing cultural diversity. These justifications are put forward from a variety of ideological perspectives, in academic, official and popular discourse. They echo the claim that "the growing diversity of society beckons . . ." (Pavel, 1995, p. 1) or that diversity is one of the dimensions of change that educational policy must address (Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, 1995). This argument claims that modern society is in the midst of an historical progress from a less diverse to a more diverse society. "Diversity" is a code word for "ethnic and racial diversity." This is rarely made explicit in official documents, although often strongly implied. For example, the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (1994) reported, "A Climate of Uncertainty" in which "The composition of Canada's population is changing dramatically, not least in Ontario, and above all, in southern Ontario. Each year, we have become an increasingly diverse nation, but our institutions often fail to reflect that diversity" (p. 1). That this refers to racial and ethnic diversity is only evident several pages later when the commission discusses "demographic changes." The only changes described that could increase diversity are the shift in immigration patterns away from European origins and the concentration of "visible minorities" in Metropolitan Toronto, i.e. Southern Ontario (pp. 27-9). This notion of growing ethnic and racial diversity is consistent with the telling of the national past as a more or less continuous progress towards "the best country in the world." That Canada is the "best country in the world" according to the United Nations Human Development Index is a widely and casually repeated claim (see, for example, "A World of Trivia," *The Ottawa Citizen*, September 28, 1996, B1). In narratives of national progress, multicultural acceptance of diversity is represented as the pinnacle of civilized development. This representation in turn allows the re-articulation of racist exclusions in popular discourse, only now multiculturalism becomes one of the markers for racialized exclusions. For example, in popular discourse, it is not unusual to hear the claim, "We're multicultural, but they're not," when the alleged characteristics of certain ethnic groups are discussed. Inevitably, even though the terminology has changed, the groups represented by the "we" and the "they" remain the same, thus preserving the same grammar of exclusion.

At the same time, the hegemonic position of nationalist narratives as the only narratives that count effectively precludes other narratives. For example, in multicultural nationalist histories, groups of people

only enter into the grand narrative once the people of the group become significant in terms of the nation. Based on the experiences of other groups in nationalist histories of Canada, one might imagine that

Somali history is of interest to the specialist, but within the confines of nationalist imaginings there is no particular reason to widely reproduce Somali history until Somalis themselves are a sizable ethnic market in Canada. Even then, what tends to be told is the group's experiences in Canada. For example, in Ontario public schools, students are exposed to histories of the European middle ages and classical civilizations. If questioned, the teaching of these histories are justified in terms of the influence on Canada's current institutions and official culture, i.e. on nationalist grounds. These grounds do not allow that these histories might be less significant (in terms of the number of people affected), or at least no more significant, than ancient Chinese or Indian history, or the histories of the Mayans or of Zimbabwe or of the Iroquoian civilizations.

The problematic nature of the assumption of growing diversity is demonstrated by the justifications for revamping education advanced by the 1988 British Columbia Royal Commission on Education. Among these was the claim that the culture of Canada's westernmost province has "become more diverse and pluralistic than at any time in the past" (British Columbia, Royal Commission on Education, 1988, p. 5). The implications of this statement are quite clear. By any index, British Columbia has never experienced such cultural diversity. However, this statement is simply untrue. In 1988 British Columbia was a territory where most people spoke English as their first and only language, were immersed in American mass culture and participated in a hegemonic capitalist economy. In the same territory, a little more than one hundred years earlier, English was spoken by a tiny minority making up less than 15% of the population. An aboriginal majority spoke over two dozen languages and lived in societies ranging from hunter-gathering to commercial ranching. There was also a significant "Chinese" population which spoke several mutually unintelligible dialects of Cantonese as well as Hakka (Lai, 1974; Galois and Harris, 1994). One measure of this diversity was that until the early twentieth century, the language of work in coastal British Columbia had to be Chinook jargon. I.E. the commission's claim is extremely problematic in a territory where not so long ago, many distinct cultural groups had existed without any single one being dominant. Nor, given the homogenizing pressure of global media, is it likely that the claim of unprecedented diversity is true on a global scale. The world as a whole is not growing more diverse culturally. If anything, (certainly following the triumph of capitalism over the former Soviet Block), it would seem to be growing less diverse.

The claim that society is growing more diverse only makes sense from within the narratives of European settlement and from the points of view of socially-dominant groups. In these narratives Anglo-Europeans arrived, established the hegemony of their institutions and cultural practices, and "assimilated" other cultures and their practices. It is European cultural practices that are more diverse now than they were in 1888, something that should not be surprising since their conquest and colonization of the rest of world has allowed them to appropriate so much of colonized cultures.

The point here is not to substitute grand narratives of Canada's past with equally grand anti-nationalist narratives, stories of how Canada is not really "the best country in the world according to the United Nations." Anti-nationalist narratives simply stand the same categories and exclusions on their heads. Rather nationalist narratives need to be seen relationally; the construction of the nation needs to be placed in relation to the experiences of many groups, including those outside the national borders. This in turn requires recognizing racisms as constitutive of the nation and its categories, central to its imagining

and actively involved in its construction.

The gaze constructed through the nationalist narratives tends to obscure these relational views. For those located at the centre of a nationalist history, i.e. for those whose history it claims to represent, the gaze is outward toward those who don't belong. In Canada, the choices visible are belonging or exclusion, Canadianness or alienness. The alien, the subaltern, do not have their stories included, since they, by definition are not of the nation. Nor is past diversity visible within this binary because those beyond the gaze are ignored. Built into the gaze is a denial of the experiences and realities of many people who live in Canada. This in turn inhibits the questioning of the categories that constitute the nation. For example, that it might have been Europeans who were uncivilized and savage (see Wickwire, 1994; Mcleod, 1994). That these experiences might involve other identities and other choices than the simple binary of belonging or exclusion is unimagined.

This gaze is evident in the claim that the pace of change today is unprecedented. The validity of this claim entirely depends upon one's location with respect to the nationalist gaze. For those at the centre of the imagined community, it may be unprecedented, for others it is not. For example, within a little more than fifty years, between 1835 and 1885, the Nlaka'pamux people of the lower Fraser Canyon in British Columbia moved from living in one of the most densely populated non-agricultural human communities ever to have existed, in many locations in densities much greater than today, to a remnant clinging to a few outcrops of rock. Not only did their world-view collapse as they experienced in a generation the forces of modernity that Europe experienced in 500 years, their population declined by 95% and the ground beneath their feet was literally dug out from underneath them. This culminated in the introduction of a physical barrier cutting their surviving communities in two (Harris, 1992). Grand nationalist narratives represent the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line as a landmark, the fulfilment of the "national dream" (Burton, [1970]) while for the Nlaka'pamux it was just one more in a chain a disasters. The same history treats the spread of Europeans, their technologies and institutions, as a process of "settlement," while for the truly settled people of the Fraser Canyon, "settlement" meant rapid depopulation. Furthermore, as far as the experiences of colonized peoples are concerned, theirs were not unusual.

The role of nationalist historical narratives in silencing other possibilities, in denying their centrality, is ultimately an exercise in power. A case in point is provided by the 1991 decision of Chief Justice Allan McEachern, then of the British Columbia Supreme Court, in the land claims case of the hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples in central British Columbia. To make their case, the chiefs introduced genealogical, archaeological, anthropological and historical evidence to show that they had never surrendered jurisdiction and control over the land, that the land was still theirs, and wrongfully claimed by British Columbia. They introduced their oral histories, stories which the chiefs claim establish their authority over specific territories. These stories are integral to the Gitksan feast system, a system of government which may be as old as three thousand years. (Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw, 1992; McEachern, 1991; see also Miller (ed.), 1992).

In his decision, the Chief Justice not only rejected the claim, he denied the existence of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples before the arrival of Europeans, and asserted that British sovereignty over the chief's territories was magically created sometime before the creation of the colony of Vancouver Island in 1849. While the white supremacist nature of the Chief Justice's decision is striking, what is also striking is the way in which it re-asserts the categories of the European occupation. Aboriginal title, after all, is not a traditional

Gitksan or Wet'suwet'en concept. Written records are not necessarily more authoritative than the ritual public retelling of oral traditions. If the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en were not colonized in the nineteenth century, they were in 1991.

In fostering new possibilities and ways of being, anti-racist pedagogies need to explore nationalist narratives and to seek ways of escaping their categorizations. When viewed relationally and historically, nationalist narratives become merely some of many possible stories of the past, and their claims to generality become particular to specific times and places. The ability of these narratives to colonize people and their meanings, and hence to continue to act out the imperialism that gave rise to countries like Canada in the first place, is minimized. Unchallenged, nationalist historical narratives create a binary in terms of possible (read acceptable) identities. One can either belong to this place (in which case where one is from requires no label) or one is "from" somewhere else. One is either included by the story or one is inexorably excluded. Binaries become the stuff of racializations, their silences the stuff of exclusion. As Chief Justice McEachern (1991) put it, misquoting Hobbes, one can either exist as an aboriginal people for whom life is "nasty, brutish and short" (p.13), or one cannot exist at all.

Among the many things unallowed for in nationalist historical narratives are the multiple, even contradictory, identities that shape people's lives. Taking for granted nationalist categories and failing

to take lived multiplicities into account almost inevitably falls into the assumptions of popular racisms. As the Citizen report demonstrates, these assumptions silence other possibilities. These other possibilities include that all the students in the story were "from Ottawa," that people "from Ottawa" have been born in many different places, that people born in Somalia might have something to say about racism in Ottawa today, that "black" is a racialized imposition which people born in Somalia might not accept. In other words, in imposing certain identities while denying others, the Citizen report unwittingly continues the same imperialist project that built the CPR line through the villages of the Nlaka'pamux. Engaging nationalist narratives allows these other possibilities to be voiced.

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1. The nature of historical narratives and of history has received much attention in philosophy of history and in cultural studies (e.g., Jenkins, 1995; Ankersmit and Kellner 1995). Much of this literature focuses on "History" and historiography, rather than on the writings of actual historians. The distinction between "fact" and "fiction" in academic history is less clear than many historians might like (Partner, 1995). For an interesting, and apparently unconscious, blurring of this distinction by a professional historian, see Spence

(1978).

2. The point here is not to deny that racisms are ideologies as commonly represented, but that they are not "merely" so. This follows from Goldberg (1993) and earlier from Delacampagne (1983).

3. Nationalist historians pursue this project unapologetically, but more radical historians have also devoted themselves to adding a Canadian women's, or Canadian working class, or Canadian family, history to that of the great white dead men. See, respectively, Alison Prentice, et al, (1988); Bryan Palmer, (1992); or Bettina Bradbury (1992). One should note that despite his early optimism, Bruce Trigger's (1988) call for "ethnohistory," i.e. an amalgam of history and anthropology, so as to incorporate aboriginal "pre-history" with history, has largely fallen on deaf ears within Canadian history departments.

4. My concept of education as "engagement" originally comes from Oakshott (1989) as reworked by Greene (1995). The notion of "contrapuntal perspective" in Said (1993), p. 32, is also suggestive of engagement.

5. Unless specified to the contrary all quotations from the Citizen come from this report.

6. I am not arguing that there is a single definitive reading of the text. Readers will fill in the details with the contexts that they bring to their readings. I am arguing, however, that it is probable that most adult readers in present day Ottawa will develop readings similar to the one I have suggested.

7. The role of racism in the construction of dominant identities in Canada is generally ignored. Instead, racism is often represented as a product of regional or biological pathologies (e.g., Ward, 1978; Roy 1989). Creese (1988) is one of the few efforts that takes the role of racism in the construction of dominant identities seriously.

8. A case in point is provided by the otherwise excellent Finkel, et al, (1993). A conscious attempt to integrate political and social history, it discusses racism in the context of relations between fixed groups, ("pioneers" and "aboriginal peoples", "Asians" and "colonists," immigrants and "nativists."), does not discuss racism as central to the building of Canada, and, doubtless due to its date of publication, does not mention Somalis. See, for example, the discussion in Volume 1, pp. 497-502.

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