

TABLE RONDE / ROUND TABLE

Rewriting the Modern: Reflections on Race, Nation, and the Death of a Department Store

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ON FEBRUARY 27, 1997, Eaton's department store — “a Canadian shopping institution” for over 125 years — dropped a bombshell on the nation. Store president George Eaton announced that the retailer was seeking bankruptcy protection. The story was front-page news everywhere in the country and generated rivers of sentimental and nostalgic stories complete with crying customers recalling the good old days of Christmas windows, enormous catalogues, and full dinners that could be had for a buck in the Eaton's College Street dining room.¹ Shoppers, meanwhile, were voting with their feet. They may have been tearful about Eaton's when journalists were around, but they were buying elsewhere, most likely in the American retailing successes like The Gap, Wal-Mart, and Banana Republic that have invaded Canada in the last several years.

The final collapse of the Eaton empire in the fall of 1999 generated another round of newspaper commentary on the causes of the store's demise, much sharing of heartwarming personal anecdote, and a deluge of letters to editors everywhere. One traumatized *Toronto Star* reader, upset about a feature on sex aids that appeared about the same time, wrote:

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¹ “Bombshell: Eaton's Seeks Bankruptcy Protection”, *The Toronto Star*, February 28, 1997, p. 1. For a representative sample of the nostalgic story, see “We're Called to the Bedside of Dear Old Timothy”, *The Toronto Star*, March 2, 1997, p. F1. Although Eaton's had long been an intensely private and family-owned company, close observers of the business scene were not entirely surprised. In fact, rumours that the company might be in financial trouble had already been published in sources such as the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. The first book published on the Eaton debacle is by Rod McQueen, *The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Royal Family* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998).

Right on the heels of Eaton's demise comes *The Star's* bold in-your-face news story on sexual appliances with photos of same.... What's left? We've lost our national department store, are on the verge of losing our national airlines and appear to have lost what was once a reliable, first-class newspaper that reported the news with sensitivity, integrity and virtue.... When will this madness stop?²

While this particular letter writer's narrative of moral, sexual, and national decay seems overwrought, it does share a theme common to much of the death-of-Eaton's commentary. The closing of the store was typically represented as a national loss, one shared equally by the nation as a whole, and evidence of a further decline in a sense of Canadian national identity.

Strikingly, however, not long before the store went under, Eaton's tried to counter its image as "an old dowager"³ with an unprecedented advertising strategy designed to draw on young urban sexual and racial identity formations, rather than on national ones. The campaign slogan, "Diversity", marked an attempt to appropriate and recontextualize the language of anti-racist and anti-homophobia movements to sell clothes and promote the store to communities with which it was profoundly out of touch.⁴ Gone were the maple leaves in pictorial advertising, as well as references to Canada's national history and to the general uprightness of Timothy Eaton, the store's Irish Protestant founder. Instead, Eaton's hired young rappers to appear in its television commercials, and the flagship retail outlet, Toronto's Eaton Centre, even displayed the rainbow flag of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement during Pride Day in June 1998.⁵ It all marked a distinct departure from the slogans of a decade ago when Eaton's was insisting, "WE ARE. CANADA'S DEPARTMENT STORE."

What does this shift mean for department stores, which have historically been so heavily identified as national institutions central to the creation of a national middle class? Do department stores need the nation? What happens to them, and to mass consumption more generally, in an era when integrated

2 "In-your-face Sexual Article Belongs in *Cosmopolitan*, not in a Daily Newspaper", *The Toronto Star*, September 1, 1999, p. A17.

3 Historically, Eaton's has been symbolically represented by the figure of the long-dead founder, Timothy Eaton, whose statue was located in a prominent place in the flagship Eaton Centre in Toronto. References to "the old dowager", on the other hand, arose when the store ran into trouble. See, for example, John Lorinc, "The Dowager Gets Down", *Report on Business Magazine* (November 1998), pp. 55–59.

4 Ali Sharrif, "I'm from the Projects and I Shop Eaton's", *NOW* [Toronto's weekly newspaper], September 3–9, 1998.

5 Urban gay men in particular have important histories with department stores. Historically and in the present, the washrooms in stores like Eaton's have functioned as prime cruising spots. A recent article examines gossip surrounding gay men at Simpson's in the 1950s. See Eric Setliff, "Sex Fiends or Swish Kids? Gay Men in *Hush Free Press*, 1946–1956", in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a bibliography on sexuality and consumption, see Victoria de Grazia, ed., with Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 405–406.

national economies and nation-states are being superseded?⁶ Who will be the consumers under these conditions, where will they be located, and through what discourses will they be addressed?⁷ Finally, what becomes of what Victoria de Grazia describes as “the relationship of consumption to citizenship and more generally to collective identities” in such a context? These questions strike me as particularly interesting at a time when, as Cora Kaplan points out in a recent analysis of *The Body Shop*, we are everywhere confronted by the commodification of difference and tempted by visions of a “world without borders”.⁸

Such questions arising out of contemporary conditions can also inspire new lines of inquiry about the recent past, specifically the early post-World-War-II arrangements with respect to production, consumption, and nation. Here, I address the theme of this round table through a reconsideration of my own preliminary research on Eaton’s and consumption in postwar Canada. Much of this rethinking was occasioned by Kristin Ross’s recent cultural history of postwar France, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*. Building on Henri Lefebvre’s classic text, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, Ross develops a wide-ranging analysis of French everyday life for the period “after electricity but before electronics”.⁹ Her return to Lefebvre invites comparison with the intellectual trajectory of the French Marxist’s famous student, Jean Baudrillard. As is well known, Baudrillard would take the problematic of everyday life in very different directions; he broke with his own early Marxist-influenced work on consumption to advance radical claims for a postmodern society marked by the death of the social, the loss of historical depth, and the futility of resistance.¹⁰ Ross,

6 There is now a very large literature on the contemporary internationalization of capital. For one lucid but deeply pessimistic account, see Gary Teeple, *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform* (Toronto: Garamond, 1995). For a very different perspective on globalization, also within a Marxist framework, see J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

7 For reflections on some of these questions from an historian of department stores, see the conclusion to William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

8 Cora Kaplan, “‘A World Without Boundaries’: The Body Shop’s Trans/National Geographics”, *Social Text*, vol. 43 (1995), pp. 45–66. For a look at globalization, the garment industry and big retailers in Toronto, including Eaton’s, see Jan Borowy, Shelly Gordon, and Gayle Lebars, “Are These Clothes Clean? The Campaign for Fair Wages and Working Conditions for Homeworkers”, in Linda Carty, ed., *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1993).

9 Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 2. Much of Lefebvre’s *Critique* remains untranslated, but see John Moore’s translation of volume 1, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991).

10 For discussion, see Mark Gottdiener, “The System of Objects and the Commodification of Everyday Life: The Early Baudrillard”, and Steven Best, “The Commodification of Reality and the Reality of Commodification: Baudrillard, Debord, and Postmodern Theory”, in Douglas Kellner, ed., *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994). See also Marytn J. Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1993); Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996).

however, challenges what she takes to be the effacement of history within French structuralism and (later) postmodernism and argues that that erasure has its roots in this era marked by extremely rapid modernization, the events of 1968, and the trauma of Algeria. *Fast Cars* is, then, an excursion into what Ross calls the “critical prehistory of postmodernism”;¹¹ her strategy is to historicize French everyday life with a view to opening up some provocative questions about the dominant direction of French intellectual and political life since the war.

My own investigation into the postwar period in Canada had a very different origin and a far less ambitious theoretical framework. Several years ago, I wrote a doctoral thesis on Eaton’s former flagship store in Toronto, Eaton’s College Street, focusing largely on gender, class, and the organization of shopping in the interwar period. My last chapter, however, took a somewhat different direction. Here I attempted to stretch not only the chronological boundaries of the thesis by examining post-WWII Toronto, but also part of my conceptual framework by exploring the class, gender, and racial/ethnic organization of constructions of “the customer”. I was interested in the “border cases”, all those who did not fit the profile of what I understood to be the store’s primary clientele: the well-heeled, urban, Anglo-Celtic woman. These “border cases” were mainly the large numbers of European immigrants who came to inner-city Toronto after the war and who posed a dilemma for urban retailers such as Eaton’s, which feared the loss of their traditional clientele to the suburbs — where they had no department stores. Along with many social historians of immigration, I saw part of these processes through the frame of “Canadianization”. Simply put, I conceived the department store as a giant settlement house whose chief point was to turn Europeans, often constructed as peasants, into Canadians. This perception was not entirely wrong, but even at the time I knew there was more at work, or rather that perhaps “Canadianization” was not something I understood in a broad perspective. I did have a sense that the remaking of Toronto in the early postwar years was connected to the story of European immigration, but I could only gesture to some of the links among immigration, consumption, urban renewal, and nation.

Ross’s *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* provided me with some of the conceptual tools to open up these questions in a new way. Her main argument is that two central stories about post-WWII French history have been told separately: one is the shock of France’s very rapid modernization and attendant Americanization; the other is the dismantling of the French Empire. She wants to establish that these two narratives, so often separated, are in fact inherently related and must be theorized together: “Keeping the two stories apart is usually another name for forgetting one of the stories or for relegating it to another time frame.” Of course, the forgotten story is typically that of colonialism, which was “made to seem like a dusty archaism, as though it had

11 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 13.

not transpired in the twentieth century ... as though it played only a tiny role in France's national history and no role in its modern identity".¹²

In company with scholars such as Antoinette Burton and Anne McClintock, Ross wants to challenge fundamentally "the persistent conviction that home and empire were separate spheres".¹³ Ross, too, is interested in the racial organization of "discourses of hygiene" and in processes of what she calls "interior colonialism", or the ways in which France deployed techniques of colonial rule in the metropolitan context to consolidate postwar modernization. One of the key sites for this activity was Paris itself, as "speculative capital, no longer drawn to foraging abroad, was increasingly directed toward investment in the built environment". Of course, immigrants from France's former colonies also frequently provided the labour that made modernization possible, even as these same working-class immigrants found themselves banished to the suburbs of Paris as the city's social demarcations were redrawn.¹⁴

Ross's work also struck me because it has a political project: she is interested in excavating some of the historical logic behind the neo-racist and exclusionist discourses around immigration within France today.¹⁵ Ross looks at how modernization, with its ideology of progress and an end to class struggle because class no longer exists, actually supports new racial and national discourses: "The logic of exclusion has its origins in the ideology of capitalist modernization, an ideology that presents the West as a model of completion, thus relegating the contingent and the accidental — the historical, in a word — to the exterior."¹⁶ As I had conducted my post-doctoral research on consumption in early postwar Canada while participating in an anti-racist group whose main political focus was precisely contesting the recent onslaught of exclusionist immigration policy, I was immediately interested in her argument. It linked two areas of work that I had kept largely as separate stories.¹⁷

What follows, then, is a kind of translation project. What might emerge if we thought through Ross's argument for early postwar Canada? How might an analysis of race, colonialism, and nation stimulate a rethinking of categories within histories of consumption, including my own? On the face of it, much of Ross's argument seems difficult to translate from French into Cana-

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 9.

13 Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating 'British' History", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 3 (September 1997), p. 231; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995). It should be noted that, while sympathetic to her project, Burton offers a critique of some of McClintock's conceptual framework.

14 Ross, *Fast Cars*, pp. 7, 8, 9, 11.

15 Ann Laura Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995) similarly works with historical materials to elucidate the dynamics of contemporary French racism.

16 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 196. For an evocative and visually stunning critique of this ideology, see the Malian film *Life on Earth* (1998).

17 See my "Nowhere at Home: Gender, Race and the Making of Anti-Immigrant Discourse in Canada", *Atlantis*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 2000).

dian context, even though the historical period in question is constant. Three immediate problems come to mind. In the first place, France's history with very rapid modernization is distinct — a process described by Ross, following Lefebvre, as “the almost cargo-cult-like, sudden descent of large appliances into war-torn French households and streets in the wake of the Marshall Plan”.¹⁸ A different, slower process occurred in North America, and Canada and the United States also differed from each other.¹⁹ Secondly, Canada's history with colonialism, and therefore with decolonization and immigration, is clearly different from the French experience, although it would be a serious mistake to construct Canada as a nation without a colonial project.²⁰ Thirdly, Canada's contrasting experience with colonialism and immigration suggests that contemporary exclusionist discourses here surrounding race, nation, and immigration might have a different historical logic than those currently circulating in France.

While Canada's modernization was slower and therefore perhaps lacked some of the drama of the French experience, both nations enjoyed an unprecedented economic boom during the 1950s and especially into the 1960s. While no appliances dropped from the sky, they nonetheless figured prominently in the lives of the Canadian women described by Joy Parr, who involved themselves in designing and merchandising stoves or who, for a variety of complex and interesting reasons, preferred the “less developed” Canadian wringer washer to the more “modern” American automatic washing machine introduced to Canada after the war.²¹ Of course, as is well known, not everyone benefitted from the postwar boom. Clear inequalities of class, race, and region remained, perhaps most dramatically evidenced in the United States.²²

18 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

19 There is, of course, a long literature on these questions. One influential source is David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), especially chap. 8, “Fordism”.

20 Critical interrogations of Canada's history with colonialism from within feminist scholarship include: *Resources for Feminist Research*, vol. 22, nos. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1993), special issue on “Colonialism, Imperialism and Gender”; Himani Bannerji, ed., *Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1993); Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998); Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996); Himani Bannerji, *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995).

21 Joy Parr, “Introduction” and “Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market”, in Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). See also her “What Makes Washday Less Blue? Gender, Nation, and Technology Choice in Postwar Canada”, *Technology and Culture*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1997), pp. 153–186. For a fascinating look at a Toronto appliance factory, see David Sobel and Susan Meurer, *Working at Inglis: The Life and Death of a Canadian Factory* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1994).

22 There is a large literature on this well-known aspect of American life, but see Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 137–140. For a contemporary Canadian account, see the discussion of class inequality in John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), chap. 4.

As in France, however, modernization in Canada and the United States involved ideologies of progress and an end to class difference. In his landmark sociological text, *The Vertical Mosaic*, John Porter remarked in 1962 on the popular representation of Canada as a classless society as evidenced by the general level of material welfare. That representation “becomes translated into the assertion that Canadians are all relatively equal in their possessions, in the amount of money they earn, and in the opportunities which they and their children have to get on in the world”.²³ Such visions of “modern life”, so heavily bound up with domestic commodities, also meant an intensification of the private sphere and of gender distinctions.

As Lefebvre argued and Ross elaborates, a central strategy in the modernization of French middle-class daily life was that of privatization and domestication. As work and economic life became more bureaucratic, technocratic, complex, and seemingly out of the control of individuals, the middle class increasingly withdrew into the world of the private home and car and into celebration of the life of the heterosexual couple.²⁴ In both France and Canada, the ability to afford privacy, especially in the form of independent home ownership, emerges as one of the most central markers of class difference; as Porter comments, “It is perhaps the value of privacy and the capacity to afford it which has become the dividing line between the real and the apparent middle class.”²⁵ Yet, as Canadian feminist scholars of the period have demonstrated, one of the many ironies of this construction of “privacy” is that it depended in many cases on the culturally unacknowledged participation of middle-class women in the paid labour force, in addition of course to their unpaid labour in the home.²⁶

Myths of modernization and prosperity, then, flattened out class differ-

23 Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 3.

24 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 106. Of course, as Ross is aware, privatization was by no means invented in this period. What she emphasizes, then, is a particular speeding-up of this process in the fifties in France. On privacy and consumption among working-class people in an earlier period and in Canada, see Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). Ross has some fascinating things to say about constructions of the heterosexual couple; unlike many scholars of this period, she focuses more on marriage than on “the family” as the foundation of consumer life. For an intriguing window into the contradictions of consumption and coupled life in Canada in the same era, see the 1957 National Film Board production *Is it a Woman's World?* For another line of argument about “the private”, “the public”, and consumption, see Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Consumption in Postwar America* (forthcoming).

25 Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 5.

26 This point was clear to Porter during the period (*The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 5). Veronica Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945–60”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 4 (1991), pp. 470–504, and “‘Their Side of the Story’: Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945–60”, in Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women*; also, in the same collection, Joan Sangster, “Doing Two Jobs: The Wage-Earning Mother, 1945–70”. For more on housing and suburbia, see also Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

ences while simultaneously accentuating gender differences.²⁷ Here I return to Ross's crucial argument that modernization also encodes processes of racial difference: "Class conflict, after all, implies some degree of negotiability; once modernization has run its course, then one is, quite simply, either French or not: exclusion becomes racial or national in character."²⁸ To what extent does her argument work for Canada, if at all? How might this question be approached and through what evidence?

Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* suggests one possible line of inquiry, as well as providing us with a way to think about the other half of Ross's story of modernization: the history of colonialism and decolonization. In the opening pages of his study, Porter remarks that the ideology of a classless Canada rests, not just on notions of material abundance for all, but also on the idea that the country was founded as a nation of independent and equal settlers. While Porter was aware that equality did not reign in settler society and states so, he also does not name the "forgetting" of colonialism that is at work.²⁹ Moreover, consideration of the living standards of most Native peoples in the period, then as now, could have provided Porter with some of the strongest evidence for his argument that the representation of Canada as a classless society was profoundly flawed. As was typical of much of the contemporary sociological and historical writing, however, Porter does not mention the dispossession and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples, either historically or in relation to the period in which he was writing.

Yet, for Native peoples in Canada, the immediate postwar era did not mark any profound break with a long history of colonial relations. If anything, it inaugurated the period of "welfare colonialism" as Native peoples in many cases faced declining or no access to the wage economy while becoming trapped in the state's expanding social welfare project.³⁰ As J. R. Miller observes in his historical account of Indian-settler relations, the decolonization movements of the postwar period did raise "questions among thoughtful Canadians about how long Canada could go on treating native communities as internal colonies".³¹ Similar questions, with far greater urgency, were raised among Native peoples themselves.

The work of Aboriginal feminist Lee Maracle represents one of the most sustained critiques of the early postwar period in Canada from an anti-colonial perspective. Her novel *Ravensong* is an evocative treatment of the

27 Parr, "Introduction", pp. 4-5; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 164.

28 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 12.

29 Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, pp. 3-4.

30 For discussions of "welfare colonialism", see Jo-Anne Fiske, "Carrier Women and the Politics of Mothering", in Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds., *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997); John Lutz, "Gender and Work in Lekwammen Families, 1843-1970", in McPherson et al., eds., *Gendered Pasts*.

31 J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 223.

themes of consumption and colonialism from the standpoint of a west coast Aboriginal community.³² Set in the 1950s, the novel portrays a reserve suspended between the experience of World War II, in which many Native men fought, and the far-off decolonization movements that have yet to come home. Maracle's method in *Ravensong* is systematically to decentre and "make strange" white, middle-class society, thereby producing a thorough critique of the fifties ideal with its patriarchal domestic and family arrangements, sexual double standards, compulsory heterosexuality, absurd notions of femininity, and fetishism of cars and houses. The novel is also an examination of the profound political isolation of the period, in part the product of the "privacy" so central to the consumer ideal of the postwar period: "They moved about their lives, mowed their lawns, weeded their gardens as though the fate of life outside their matchbox homes had nothing to do with them."³³ By contrast, the most important male elder in the novel, Dominic, has an acute sense of the extended relations beyond the reserve community and of their political implications. Stacey, the novel's central character, "could see Dominic, hear him talking about the coming African revolt, how Black people would shed the first blood that would change the world forever, including her own".³⁴ It is Dominic's teaching that helps Stacey make the difficult decision to leave the reserve and to go to university in the city.

Mohawk scholars Marlene Brant Castellano and Janice Hill have recently commented that "[t]he social history of Ontario Aboriginal people since 1950 remains to be written", and the same could be said for much of Native life outside Ontario.³⁵ For this reason, a full historical discussion of the links specified in Maracle's *Ravensong* between the world of middle-class consumption and the processes of decolonization among Aboriginal people in Canada will require considerable research and theoretical work. What is clear, as Brant Castellano and Hill's recent article suggests, is that the immediate postwar period was indeed crucial for the transformation of Aboriginal life; in this period the arrival of mass communications, namely television and radio, reorganized the relationship between Native communities and large urban centres.³⁶ Moreover, as Miller notes, "the resource-based boom

32 She opens an essay entitled "The 1950s" in her wide-ranging collection of reflections on gender and decolonization with the following exchange: "'In Canada, we are all middle class,' the teacher said, parroting the spirit of neo-colonialism, and then dressed down the foolish lad who arrived at school coatless. Obviously, he had forgotten his coat. That he did not own one was a shock which would not shake the peace of CanAmerica until it was much too late for him." In this story, it is the white, working-class child who is destroyed by the inability of those around him to acknowledge the fact of his condition until it is too late to save him. Maracle, *I Am Woman*, p. 71. Maracle was born in 1950 and her political formation as an Aboriginal leftist was significantly shaped by the decolonization movements in Asia and Africa and by the American civil rights movement.

33 Lee Maracle, *Ravensong* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1993), p. 193.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

35 Marlene Brant Castellano and Janice Hill, "First Nations Women: Reclaiming Our Responsibilities", in Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women*, p. 234.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 232–233.

that fuelled much of the prosperity that Canada enjoyed” in this period was based on invasions into Aboriginal territories not seen since “the expansion of agricultural settlement in the late nineteenth century”.³⁷

Yet, as work on the representation of “Indians” has documented, Native people are consistently positioned outside time, space, and social context. Daniel Francis, for example, argues in his popular study that advertising “used the Indian as a symbol to appeal to modern consumers who admired values they associated with pre-industrial society”.³⁸ More recently, in a sophisticated and groundbreaking attempt to bring together questions of colonialism, consumption, and gender, Julia V. Emberley considers the response of indigenous communities in the Canadian north to the “animal rights” and anti-fur movements based in the south and in Europe.³⁹ She shows that ideologies of cultural difference, as articulated for example in the fashion industry’s “fascination with ‘Eskimo’ clothing styles”, have worked to obscure changes since the 1950s which have radically increased the dependence of Native peoples on money at the same time as land-based economies and access to paid labour have been further undermined.⁴⁰ Her work suggests how a spatial and historical analysis of change within and without northern Aboriginal communities can help to reveal the colonialist framework through which such communities are understood while opening up space for understanding the decolonizing strategies developed by indigenous peoples through Aboriginal television, fur fashion shows, stories, and broader struggles for economic and political self-determination.

Through these reflections, provisional as they are, on Maracle’s fiction, Emberley’s cultural analysis of fur, and some of the historical literature on transformations in Aboriginal life in the 1950s, we can begin to see how Ross’s thesis about modernization and colonialism might be translated from French to Canadian context. As in France, the right wing in Canada is keen to deny any history of colonialism or to relegate it to another time frame altogether; the Canadian variant is to argue that Native peoples are citizens just like any others, with no “special rights”. The result is that the postwar neo-colonial project, not to speak of its links to “modernization”, disappears. Moreover, while Francis’s thesis is correct that Aboriginal people are often relegated to the pre-modern in advertising and other representations, this colonialist construction has another pole: contemporary right-wing discourse also constructs them as reckless consumers of all the nation’s natural

37 Miller, *Skyscrapers*, p. 222.

38 Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), pp. 175, 176. See also Karen Dubinsky’s discussion of Niagara Falls in Pierson and Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, Empire, Colony*; Beth Brant, “Anodynes and Amulets”, in her *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1994).

39 Julia V. Emberley, *The Cultural Politics of Fur* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185, 187, 197–199.

resources (especially fish, animals, and trees) who use the alibi of Native sovereignty.

It is in this latter respect that anti-Native discourses resemble the contradictory discourses surrounding consumption and immigrants to Canada. Consider, for example, constructions of Chinese immigrants in the contemporary Canadian context. On the one hand, they are depicted as model and orderly citizens who work hard and maintain strong families; on the other, they cut down the lovely trees of British Columbia and build monster homes that destroy cityscapes.⁴¹ Postwar discussions of immigrants were organized around somewhat the same terms: either they are ruthless under-consumers who lower the national standard of living because they are willing to work for low wages and live twelve to a room, or they care about nothing except big houses, flashy cars, and out-consuming the Canadian-born.⁴²

How are we to make sense of these conflicting poles? Do these anecdotal observations suggest that Ross's analysis of the historical logic of anti-immigrant discourse in France must be modified for the Canadian context? Bonnie Honig, in a recent exchange on immigration and nation in *Social Text*, provides some useful insights into both questions. As she reminds us, characteristically North American myths of nations built on immigrants frequently serve not only to obliterate the histories of colonialism and slavery, but also to underwrite the false promise of upward mobility for all who are willing to work hard. While seeming to celebrate the work ethic of immigrants, such discourses often turn into the reverse:

Because the capitalist foreigner is depicted as someone who is interested only in material things, he or she quickly turns from someone who has something to offer us into someone who only wants to take things from us. The nationalist, xenophilic deployment of the foreigner to model the American Dream itself helps to generate these xenophobic reactions.⁴³

What is at work here, argues Honig, is that it is precisely "the immigrant's *foreignness*" that "positions him or her to enhance or reinvigorate the national democracy", the economy, and communities. As she contends, however, such arguments therefore generate their own problems even when put forward by those keen to counter the current rise of anti-immigrant discourse and restrictive legislation. Counter-discourses about the "gifts that foreigners

41 For a look at the construction of "monstrosity" in relation to immigrant homes, see Richard Cavell (English Department, University of British Columbia), "Monster Houses: The Race of Space" (paper presented at the conference on "Race, Gender and the Construction of Canada", Vancouver, University of British Columbia, October 19–22, 1995).

42 For an example of how this discourse operated in relation to Toronto's postwar Italian community, see Franca Iacovetta, "Defending Honour, Demanding Respect: Manly Discourse and Gendered Practice in Two Construction Strikes, Toronto, 1960–61", in McPherson *et al.*, eds., *Gendered Pasts*, p. 218.

43 Bonnie Honig, "Immigrant America? How Foreignness 'Solves' Democracy's Problems", *Social Text*, vol. 56 (1998), p. 4.

have to offer” as citizens, workers, consumers, and community-builders still operate within a nationalist framework and thus are ultimately problematic:

Since the presumed test of both a good and bad foreigner is the measure of his or her contribution to the restoration of the nation rather than, say, to the nation’s transformation or attenuation, the myth of an immigrant America serves to secure the very identification of democracy with the nation-state that widespread immigration might otherwise call into question.⁴⁴

In the context of postwar Canada, widespread immigration also called into question the nature of the city, specifically Toronto, the Canadian city that absorbed more immigrants than any other in the country. This period saw not only a large influx of immigrants, overwhelmingly from Europe, but a remaking and modernizing of the city — much of which was accomplished through this immigrant labour, particularly Italian. In Ross’s account, the immigrants from France’s former colonies who provide the labour — for example, in the Renault car factories or in the reconstruction of Paris — enable the rapid economic and social transformation of France. The process in Canada was rather different with respect to colonial and ex-colonial labour. For one thing, Aboriginal people comprised one social group which remained predominantly in non-urban centres in this period, although there were important exceptions: Native men, for example, who helped build city skyscrapers and those Native women who were disenfranchised from reserve life by the sexist provisions of the *Indian Act*. Also, while Toronto’s Black and Asian communities, often in coalition with allies in other excluded communities such as Jews, campaigned with mixed success for decades to widen access to the country for immigrants of African and Asian descent, it was predominantly the immigrants from Europe who transformed Canadian cities such as Toronto in this period, since official immigration policy remained racist in character until 1967 and implicitly so thereafter. Significant exceptions included, of course, the well-documented instance of the Caribbean women who were admitted to the country on the domestic labour scheme and who helped the country’s upper-middle class to achieve the postwar ideal of the beautiful private home.⁴⁵

In Ross’s account of the modernization of postwar Paris, immigrants fig-

44 *Ibid.*, p. 3. Again, Iacovetta’s “Defending Honour” illustrates well how Italian immigrants in postwar Canada were positioned either as family-oriented and hard-working nation builders or as “dangerous foreigners” who ought to be deported.

45 There is a large literature on domestic work and immigration in Canada. See, for example, Rina Cohen, “A Brief History of Racism in Immigration Policies for Recruiting Domestic Workers”, *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 83–86; Agnes Calliste, “Canada’s Immigration Policy and Domestic Workers from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme”, in Jesse Vorst, ed., *Race, Class, Gender: Bonds and Barriers* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989); Makeda Silvera, *Silenced* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1983); Sedef Arat-Koc, “Immigration Policies, Migrant Domestic Workers, and the Definition of Citizenship in Canada”, in Strong-Boag and Fellman, eds., *Rethinking Canada*.

ure predominantly as those who carry out the productive labour and who are then banished to the working-class suburbs. Her immigrants are rather undifferentiated by gender and household formation, however, and in fact she seems to consider only men. Perhaps this also explains why she does not consider whether, or how, the immigrants were addressed as consumers and by whom.⁴⁶ In Toronto the process was somewhat different, as the example of Eaton's illustrates. Along with the redevelopment of urban space and housing, department stores and mass-circulation magazines played a crucial role in this period as consolidators of a national, urban middle class. By the mid-fifties, Eaton's truly was national with stores in all ten provinces. In Toronto, however, Eaton's faced a crisis particular to that centre: the very high levels of European immigration to the inner city where stores were located in combination with the suburbanization of the store's predominantly Anglo-Canadian clientele threatened to transform the character of downtown shopping. Historically very attentive to American retailing developments, Eaton's was not anxious to make the same mistake as big city stores in the United States, some of which were trapped in "declining" neighbourhoods as their clientele moved further out. Indeed, the coming of the European immigrants in such large numbers posed a clear dilemma for Eaton's since it was not at all evident how, or even if, they could be transformed into "modern consumers".

Elsewhere I have written about the attempts by Eaton's to capture the Toronto-bound postwar immigrants, including the store's strategy with respect to extending credit to new arrivals, hiring practices, interpreter services, and advertising in the ethnic press.⁴⁷ All of these efforts were directed at Europeans only; domestic workers from the Caribbean, for example, did not figure in Eaton's vision at all, not surprising at a time when Black women could not find employment in the city's department stores and were never addressed as shoppers. Yet, as the fiction of Austin Clarke suggests, Eaton's played a significant role in the imagination of Caribbean women immigrants of the era.⁴⁸

46 In the Canadian case, as the work of Franca Iacovetta and others has established, immigrant women were significant contributors to the paid labour force in Toronto. Some 40% of Italian women, for example, were in wage labour by the early 1960s, and many more were engaged in the "informal economy". Iacovetta, "Defending Honour", p. 210. See also her "Remaking Their Lives: Women Immigrants, Survivors, and Refugees", in Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women*.

47 Cynthia Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950" (doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 1993), chap. 6.

48 Sheldon Taylor discusses the failed efforts to get Black women work in department stores in his thesis, "'Darkening the Complexion of Canadian Society': Black Activism, Policy-Making and Black Immigrants from the Caribbean to Canada, 1940-1960s" (doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 1994). Austin Clarke's *The Meeting Point* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967) is the first volume in his Toronto Trilogy of novels. On African-American women and consumption in the early postwar period in the United States, see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1986), pp. 268-274.

There were clear differences in the approach that the store took, or did not take, to particular categories of European immigrants, the so-called “New Canadians”. While white and European immigrants found it easier to enter Canada, they were distributed along a racial and class hierarchy with communities such as the inevitable Northern Europeans and British positioned at the top. My research made it clear that the Italians, in particular, were missing in Eaton’s construction of “the customer”. The inability to reach Italians as shoppers was critical given that Italians comprised one of the most demographically important immigrant categories in Toronto: “well over 100,000” had arrived by the mid-sixties. Moreover, not only did Italian men build the city’s new housing and modernized infrastructure, but Italian households had a very high rate of home ownership.⁴⁹

In accounting for “the missing Italians” in Eaton’s appeals to the European immigrants, I attributed this to their low class and race status within the Toronto urban context. As Franca Iacovetta has documented, anti-Italian sentiment in 1950s Toronto was heavily racialized; descriptions such as “ignorant, almost black” were not uncommon and relied on long-standing prejudices against Italians, especially Southerners.⁵⁰ These constructions of Italians lead to two final points. First, as Ross establishes in her reading of postwar French culture, the gap between the “modernized” on one hand and the “unmodern” on the other is frequently represented as a problem “that occurs at the level of consumption”.⁵¹ Secondly, modernization itself encodes racial and national differentiation; it is not separate from these processes or somehow in another time frame.

This is not something I was able to see at the time I first studied immigrants and Eaton’s. Commenting on Eaton’s early consumer research on the European market, I wrote: “That some of this research relied on crude generalizations and popular racist stereotypes should not distract us from the fact that it marked the entry of immigrant shoppers into the category of shoppers.”⁵² Now it is clear to me that such consumer research actually produces racialization as part of its logic. Further, in postwar constructions of Italians in Toronto, not only do they appear as “unmodern” at the level of consumption, but also — relatedly — as outside the borders of nation. One contemporary “expert” on the New Canadians suggested that southern Italians harboured fear and suspicion of others — thereby making them hard to reach

49 Iacovetta, “Defending Honour”, p. 288, n. 17. A third of Italian labouring men worked in construction, making up “one-third of the city’s total workforce” (p. 202). Iacovetta adds that home ownership did not necessarily mean single-family occupancy, as many immigrants formed complex households as an economic survival strategy (personal communication with author).

50 Iacovetta, “Defending Honour”, p. 202. See also her book *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992). Porter noted that only Aboriginal people were below Italians in the class hierarchy (*The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 84).

51 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 146.

52 Wright, “The Most Prominent Rendezvous”, p. 222.

— because a history of fierce Italian regionalism and a weak nation-state made for an immigrant community without clear internal leadership. As Ross comments for France, “When modernization has run its course, national subjectivity takes the place of class: one is French or not, one is modern or not. Differences in culture or modernity are reinterpreted in terms of various archaisms, that is, as a set of fundamental, naturalized — racial — disabilities.”⁵³ Or, as one contemporary observer consulted by Eaton’s commented on the Italians, they are “most likely to antagonize staff because of language difficulties and inherited indecisive shopping habits”.⁵⁴ Lacking the ability to make a shopping decision, much less a nation, Italians simply were not intelligible to Eaton’s. While Italians would eventually make their way in Toronto as workers, consumer-citizens, and community members, the nature of their struggle should remind us that many of these questions of “race”, modernity, consumption, and the boundaries of nation are still contested both for retailers and for historians of twentieth-century everyday life.

53 Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 149.

54 Archives of Ontario, Eaton’s Archives, series 69, box 27, file “New Canadians’ Committee — including B[lack] F[older] of Minutes”, “Facts Gathered From New Canadian Discussion Held With C. Holman, New Canadian Director Toronto Telegram who Is Familiar With This Consumer Group”, p. 2.