EMBODIED HUMANITARIANISM:
REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT FROM VIETNAM TO VANCOUVER

by

GRAHAM WEBBER

B.A. University of Toronto, 1992.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
GEOMETRY

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2005

© Graham Webber, 2005
Abstract

There is a tendency in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), to racialize and criminalize recently-arrived minorities. This acts as a barrier to successful integration between newcomers and host groups. The difficulties inherent in these processes have been exacerbated for Vietnamese settlers through the prominence they gained in the media and public discourse during the Allied War in Vietnam, Operation Babylift and the Private Sponsorship Programme. Through interviews and discourse analysis, I have come to believe that the framing of Vietnamese 'refugee' bodies has provided an extraordinary venue for Canada to produce, naturalize and reify the settler nation as humanitarian, compassionate, enlightened, unified and permanent – as more than we truly are – in a collective forgetting of the less press-worthy of our flaws. This discursive strategy intersects and overdetermines the bi/multicultural settler state while also threatening to undermine it. Thus, to a certain extent, Vietnamese (and other) refugee bodies resignify from receptive, when/where the public is in favour of refugee sponsorship, to criminal, when/where they are not. This discursive 'risky refugee' rides the contradictions of liberal humanitarianism, marginalizing the formerly welcomed and undermining the political will to support the refugee process.

There are strong interests in the Lower Mainland of BC who work tirelessly to sponsor and support refugees, despite this fickle nature of self-serving public opinion, pressuring the government to live up to its myth. Meanwhile, Vietnamese people in Vancouver, in general, have struggled and fought to rid themselves of the myths created through pejorative racialization and criminalization. My position in this thesis is that we need to relax this space of very constricted possibilities for negotiations around identity and space, acknowledging refugees as more than just under-educated, potentially-diseased and probably-criminal Others. Suggestions, in the final chapter, come directly from interview material, as all study participants have had at least 20 years of refugee support and advocacy. The more general conclusion, from theoretical, operational and epistemological perspectives, is that we should work through all our diverse vulnerabilities to re-imagine a multiculturalism more expansive than inclusive. I hope my thesis will challenge the shaky short-term humanitarianism of the liberal state, encouraging a more stable and genuine commitment to refugee support.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ iii

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER I: Charges/Criminals: Vietnamese Identity and Refugee Sponsorship in Vancouver, BC ................................................................. 1

  1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  1.2 Definition of Terms ........................................................................................... 2
  1.3 Positionality ....................................................................................................... 7
  1.4 Introduction to Discourse Analysis, and Chapter Guide ........................................ 9
  1.5 Literature Review ............................................................................................. 14

CHAPTER II: Operation Babylift: Black Bodies, White Saviours .................................. 27

  2.1 Setting ................................................................................................................ 27
  2.2 Introducing the Other into Richly Knowable Space .............................................. 32
  2.3 Babies’ Bodies in Settler Space .......................................................................... 36
  2.4 Orphan Bodies as Visions of Victory in the Midst of Defeat ................................. 37
  2.5 (Re)covering the Body of Whiteness from Imperialist Misadventure ................. 47
  2.6 Re-Stating the Nation State ................................................................................ 53
  2.7 Re-Patriating the Patria ..................................................................................... 60
  2.8 Conclusion: Heralding the New Era of Incursion ............................................... 63

CHAPTER III: Social Multiculturalism and its Other: Discourses of Refugee Sponsorship ................................................................. 64

  3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 64
  3.2 Background ....................................................................................................... 66
  3.3 The Threatening but Manageable Other and a Strong Sense of Self ..................... 68
  3.4 Presenting the Immigrants: Visibility and Media Coverage ............................... 73
  3.5 The Economic, Political and Moral Benefits of Sponsorship ............................... 79
  3.6 Mediated Citizenship: Flipsides of Support ....................................................... 87
  3.7 Set-up for Threat ............................................................................................... 93

CHAPTER IV: Sacred/Scared/Scarred: The Knowability of Refugees .............................. 96

  4.1 Introduction and Literature Review ................................................................... 96
  4.2 Studying Minorities .......................................................................................... 102
  4.3 Land/Body, Benevolence/Backlash .................................................................... 105
  4.4 Persecution/Prosecution: Threat from the Outset .............................................. 106
  4.5 Backlash .......................................................................................................... 108
Table of Contents (continued)

4.6 Vietnamese Criminality and the Refugee Determination Process .......... 114
4.7 A Frontier Press: BC Media and the Creation of the Vietnamese .......... 117
4.8 Destroyed People Destroying the Land ........................................ 124
4.9 Conclusion: Public Health and Enlightened Management of the Other ...... 131

CHAPTER V: Conclusions, Hopes, Dreams, Possibilities ................................ 134
5.1 Introduction: Speaking from our Inherent Vulnerabilities ..................... 134
5.2 Stories from the Waves, from the People ....................................... 136
5.3 Local Media and Fixed Sensibilities ............................................. 151
5.4 Academic and Spiritual Literature: Grounds for Support .................... 155
5.5 Conclusions: Suggestions for Sponsorship ..................................... 159

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................................................................... 166

List of Figures

2.1 “Vietnam Napalm” ........................................................................... 33
2.2 Vietnamese Baby in the Arms of President Gerald Ford ....................... 39
2.3 “Carry On Canada” ......................................................................... 41
2.4 Vietnamese Baby in the Arms of the President with Vietnamese Woman .... 42
2.5 “Doors Open to War Orphans.” ..................................................... 45
2.6 “Doorway to Future” ....................................................................... 46
2.7 “Health of Boat People Worries their Sponsor” .................................. 58
3.1 “Refugee Children” ......................................................................... 64
3.2 “Food Piles Greet Refugees” ............................................................ 85
3.3 “First Donations” ............................................................................ 85
4.1 “Boat People” ................................................................................ 96
4.2 “Rage on Main Street” .................................................................... 111
4.3 “Bogus Refugees” .......................................................................... 113
4.4 “A Spotty Humanitarianism” ............................................................ 114
4.5 “Public at Risk” .............................................................................. 122
4.6 “Gang Warfare” .............................................................................. 123
4.7 “Dog Refugees” ............................................................................. 124
4.8 “Fighting to Stay in the Philippines” .................................................. 127
Acknowledgements

I think, by now, my Supervisor, my family, my friends, my many respondents, the folks in my garden, my building and the local sushi shop are all tired of hearing me gush about the wonderful people I have met, who have contributed not only to this thesis but to my ability to learn many very important things about my life and about our world. On the academic side of things, I have been extremely fortunate to be a part of the UBC Geography Department. David Ley, Dan Hiebert, Juanita Sundberg, James Glassman, Greg Feldman, Trevor Barnes and Gerry Pratt have all inspired my work. On the more personal side, Jo Long and Silvia d’Addario have been incredible friends and provided wonderful outlets to “not say anything about our work.” Alison Mountz and Helen Watkins have given me the support and the calmness of the already initiated, to help me through the rough patches. My many students at UBC and Vancouver Community College have provided hours of feedback for my opinions and ideas, as have Aiwha Ong, Liisa Malkki, Kay Anderson, and Howard Adelman, among others. My parents, my brother and sister-in-law serve as constant reminders of how wonderful a family can be and Sofia and Aidan have made sure I spend at least a few hours a week on swing-sets, Skytrains and rolling down green-grass hills. Concurrently studying Homeopathy has allowed me the mental peace and insight to look beyond mere criticism to a deeper sense of humanity and humanitarianism. My colleagues at the Vancouver Homeopathic Academy are some of the greatest, most supportive friends on earth, as is my remarkable friend, Avril Trudeau-Bai.

By far the most inspiring and life-changing moments during this thesis process have been the opportunity to learn from the experiences of my interview respondents, and to find some very wonderful friends amongst them. Each of my interviews lasted close to three hours and contained ideas, thoughts and feelings that gave me cause to explore my wonder at the richness of humanity and our endless possibilities. Knowing there are people like Adrian French in the world, who actually fight to achieve the most enlightened imaginings of refugee sponsorship, has made me remember there is more to life than lattes and Masters’ degrees. On that note, I would like to extend another, final, thank you to my Supervisor, Dr. David Ley. His work has provided me with excellent examples of the possibilities of research in Social Geography. His inclusion of, yet not surrender to, the diverse voices of urban, transnational spaces has inspired me to reach further, to ask for more, and to not be satisfied with mere criticism. But most importantly, he has tolerated my weirdness for the past several years.

1.1 Introduction

In the spring of 1979, a brief and exceptional momentum to sponsor victims of the ‘boat people crisis’ resulted in private individuals bringing approximately 34,000 refugees to Canada over a two-year period. Journalists, academics and former escapees have memorialized this movement as a humanitarian highpoint, foundational in the myth of Canada as a ‘nation of immigrants’ built around sound bio-management, enlightened ideals and an internationalist outlook. Receiving the only medal ever given by the United Nations to the people of an entire nation, in recognition of Canadian support of the refugees, has advanced the nation’s role and influence in international foreign policy by emphasizing a profile of Canada as a nation of humanitarians. Because of the dynamics of the ‘Private Sponsorship Programme’, and the exposure in media ranging from Church circulars to front-page news, Vietnamese orphans and refugees have occupied places in close discursive proximity with established Canadians. Thus, the twin discourses of the extreme nature of their flight/ plight and the conditions of their resettlement interact in granting them a visibility unlike most other immigrant groups. Because of the nature of these relationships, the use of the Vietnamese orphan/refugee body to naturalize Canadian identity as humanitarian has had inverse effects on people identified as Vietnamese. Within the first decade of settlement, the media transitioned from portraying the newcomers as war-ravaged ‘charges’ to representing them as an enormous criminal threat to the foundations of our society, playing a role in the larger terrain of multiculturalism, backlash against immigration, and the duplicitous nature of neo-liberal border regimes. The first 30 years of this refugee movement therefore provides an engaging look at the mechanisms of political power at all levels in Canadian society. It provides rich insights into the production and perpetration of myths around Canadian identity in the dynamic context of a neo-liberal, semi-privatized approach to refugee settlement. In this thesis, I examine ways in which notions of Canadian and Vietnamese

---

2 Nansen Medal: 1986. Highlighting the discursive importance of the medal, Industry Canada/Industrie Canada has produced an online education module focusing on this achievement.
space and identity interact to naturalize boundaries around the idea of 'Canada' and its 'Other'. Through an inquiry into the discursive ingredients of the private adoption and sponsorship programmes and the concurrent criminalization of Vietnamese identity in Vancouver, this thesis will help inform priorities in future immigrant support and backlash management.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘Vietnamese’ to include people who have migrated to Vancouver from the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (Vietnam), as it has been known since re-unification in April, 1975. Ethnicity is always slippery, and the historically fluid boundaries in that part of the world are reflected in the complex mixes of ethnic identities which emerge from the region, stuck with the name ‘Indochina’, considered by many as a pejorative term. With migration, colonialism, war and famine being prime factors in the recent history of most Vietnamese families, it is often hard to pinpoint or enforce divisions between one ethnic identity and another. This, of course, further complicates any blanket assumptions that may be made of ‘the Vietnamese’ as they are portrayed and considered in the Vancouver region, and as they had been multiply visualized and imagined through the war. In the following quotation, from the Vancouver Police Cross Cultural Module to educate their officers about the ‘Vietnamese’, we see Henry Kissinger categorizing and determining Vietnamese identity against peoples from neighbouring countries as less human, graceful, and even less attractive:

Lacking the humanity of their Laotian neighbors and the grace of their Cambodian neighbors, they strove for dominance by being not attractive but single-minded. So all-encompassing was their absorption with themselves that they became oblivious to the physical odds, indifferent to the probabilities by which the calculus of power is normally reckoned. And because there were always more Vietnamese prepared to die for their country than foreigners, their nationalism became the scourge of invaders and neighbors alike. 3

I wanted to avoid these kinds of racializations, as these are the very dynamics I seek to unravel in this thesis. As explored later, I feel research done within this tradition is myopic at best, injurious at worst.

Many of my interview respondents have chosen 'Vietnamese' or 'Chinese' or 'Lao' in order to provide a solid basis for ethnic identification. I retreat to the category of 'Vietnamese', with occasional specific reference to any other identities as expressed by participants in my study. Most of my interview participants of Vietnamese/Chinese heritage agree that pinpointing specific ethnic identities in the region is problematic and they feel the category 'Vietnamese' is sufficient considering the limitations inherent in any such term.

What we find in Corrections is that, when a Chinese person from Vietnam does something good, they call themselves Chinese; when they are caught doing something bad, they call themselves Vietnamese.4

People are changing their names. It used to be just changing them to Chinese, which was strange enough. Now they're taking completely Caucasian names. I don't even know they're Vietnamese until I meet them. There was a woman who contacted me for work and I didn't know she was Vietnamese until I met her. Her name was, like, Kathy Tompkins or something. I asked her why she changed her name. She said she was just tired of all the police harassment and people constantly worried about what she was up to. She didn't want to be seen as Vietnamese. It's really common.5

Another difficult concept in the context of this thesis is 'refugee'. As Morton Beiser6 and others have pointed out, the category of 'boat people' is an awkward one, as most people actually escaped from the Indochinese peninsula overland into Thailand or China. However, in the discourse surrounding Vietnamese people in Vancouver, it is astonishing how salient this expression has become, as shown in recent newspaper articles such as "Boat People Repay Kindness."7 Despite its drawbacks, the familiarity of this particular category of potential immigrant creates 'boat people' and the 'boat people crisis' as identifiable frames of analysis for the purposes of this thesis. 'Refugee' is similar in this respect, particularly as the Canadian government decided to forgo the Geneva Convention in determining refugee status in December 1977, in order to facilitate migration from South East Asia.8 The word 'refugee' is an identity projection and abject

---

5 Interview, NGO worker and refugee advocate (W1). June 25, 2005.
6 Beiser 1999.
category mobilized in contrast to an idea of a bounded nation-state and a conception of a
fixed statehood and citizenship.

The problem is that the necessary delivery of relief and also long-term assistance
is accompanied by a host of other, unannounced social processes and practices
that are dehistoricizing. This dehistoricizing universalism creates a context in
which it’s difficult for people in the refugee category to be approached as
historical actors rather than simply as mute victims. It can strip from them the
authority to give credible narrative evidence or testimony about their own
condition in politically and constitutionally consequential forms. 9

These are the kinds of power plays I examine and attempt to denaturalize in this work,
looking for ways to open spaces for fuller and more dynamic immigrant identities. Thus,
in attempting to flesh out some of these histories and geographies, I will avoid, as much
as possible, describing any of the Vietnamese people involved in my research as
‘refugees’; they are so much more.

Conversely, in any research of this type, defining and denoting the receiving
population is a tricky business. Determining, writing or even performing any kind of
hegemonic or originary identity can be treacherous, specifically in the context of a settler
nation and especially as I want to try to get beyond the concept of a one-dimensional,
pejorative ‘whiteness’ that seems to dominate even such laudable and respected analyses
as Kay Anderson’s influential examination of Chinese identity formation in Vancouver.10
While any discourse around assimilation or integration intimates the very real difficulties
of immigrant adjustment, placing minority identity on the fringes of an impenetrable
hegemony denies agency to those who negotiate in, around, and through a more
established citizenry. Beiser writes about the challenges in Vietnamese adjustment to
“mainstream Canadian life”11 from a position of “traditional Vietnamese
Confucianism.”12 While both Beiser and Anderson have been greatly influential in
interrogating minority experiences in Canada, I believe there is a need to get beyond such
stubborn categorizations and boundary effects. Both ‘mainstream’ and ‘whiteness’ rely
on a vague notion of national consensus which denies the turbulence and indeterminacy
of any kind of Canadian identity, certainly as experienced by the immigrant and taken as

10 Anderson 1991
12 Ibid p. 49.
relational to American identities. As well, a major purpose of this thesis is to try and identify possibilities for ‘unrepeating’ and denaturalizing these kinds of strict positions around the nation-state, as they themselves entail a defining and delimiting of space. Thus, when speaking of identities and strategies around Vietnamese settlement in Canada, I will challenge the generalizing effects of objectification and dehistoricization partially by consciously avoiding delimiting political and citizenship positions into ‘Vietnamese’ and ‘mainstream’.

‘Adoption’, as I refer to it in this thesis, was the process of receiving children from Vietnam either through an advance request or as a response to an urgent need in responding to the Babylift in 1975. As the debates surrounding adoption from Vietnam were much greater than the actual arrivals seem to justify, ‘adoption’ gains meaning also as it relates to the everyday political maneuvers of public discourse. ‘Adopting’, for the great majority of Vancouverites, was more a process of appropriating this meaning than an actual support of parentless children. Refugees from the area of Vietnam, further separated from other immigrant movements in a ‘humanitarian category’, were admitted into Canada under the following three groups. ‘Government Sponsorship’ laid responsibility on Federal and Provincial agencies to support the refugees in Canada. ‘Private Sponsorship’ is the process through which private Canadian citizens, often under umbrella arrangements negotiated between the Federal government and spiritual organizations, committed one year of financial and moral support to Vietnamese people under the provisions of the 1976 Immigration Act

13 More on Private Sponsorship in Chapter 3.
already established sponsors but were negotiated to ensure the family and friends took full responsibility for the resettlement.

Then things started to change, though. Like those families – those groups – 2/3 years down the road. It wasn’t on the TV any more. Basically you and I looked after them. And what we would get then was...people that we sponsored...they would ask for the friends or their relatives... And then we didn’t have these groups any more. They would say, well, you don’t have to worry about financing. As long as you do all the paperwork. When they come here, we’ll look after them.\textsuperscript{12}

We had a great system to make sure we weren’t on the hook if things went wrong. The family would give us 12 months of post-dated checks for the estimated cost of rent and expenses. If something went wrong, we could cash the cheques, that was the idea. But that never happened. We just ripped them all up. That was how we worked the paper sponsorship. We brought in, oh, about 1200 people that way. I don’t think we were supposed to do that, but sometimes you’ve got to work the system.\textsuperscript{15}

I have personally sponsored over 1300 Vietnamese in the past 20-or-so years. I find there’s a need, so I call up one of the people I sponsored in the past and say “payback time”. That way, the people that really know what it’s like can support somebody new. No, I haven’t actually paid for someone for at least 15 years. I just do the paperwork and get them connected and it works.\textsuperscript{16}

There were at least a couple of Ministers who were caught accepting bribes for a paper sponsorship. There’s corruption everywhere. But those were isolated cases.\textsuperscript{17}

These arrangements not only overemphasized the commitment of private citizens to refugee sponsorship but also allowed certain committed people to facilitate the admission of thousands of Vietnamese newcomers. However, as my thesis regards more the thematics than the numeracy or structural aspects of private sponsorship, inflated statistics around this programme are not a central concern.

Finally, while I am aware of the sensitive nature of categories and semantics, and the nature of my analysis benefits from a further opening of ideas like ‘refugee’ and ‘mainstream’, I do not want my work to be hobbled by an obsession for comparative

\textsuperscript{14} Interview, prolific private sponsor, regional sponsorship supervisor and refugee advocate (W2). April 5, 2005.
\textsuperscript{15} Interview, prolific private sponsor (W3), April 3, 2005.
\textsuperscript{16} Interview, M1. January 29, 2005.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview, media spokesperson and community representative (M2). March 16, 2005.
nomenclature. I apologize for all the areas in which my work reifies stubborn categories and ideas but realize that this is part of the nature of language, research and writing. Thus, I readily acknowledge my shortcomings and the inevitable flaws in my argument. I emphasize my partiality as we can not possibly analyze completely all the factors in 30 years of refugee sponsorship and adoption. However, working within the ‘fuzzy frontiers’ of identity, instead of avoiding them, helps us come to a closer idea of how these fragile borders are produced, naturalized and policed. Recognizing the potential of working from positions of vulnerability, as empowering rather than embarrassing, has been essential to the development of this thesis.

1.3 Positionality

Walter Benjamin writes about the spatialization of experience, about the topography of ideas through which we chart our understanding, and in which we invariably get lost, seeking beyond the maps drawn by our predecessors.\textsuperscript{18} I lived and worked in Vietnam for two years. Since then, meeting thousands of Vietnamese people on five continents and in cyberspace has allowed me to experience Vietnamese culture as a transnational, fluid collection of identities and realities. As well, through extensive years of travel, I have seen many ways in which Canadian and other identities are mapped onto space on a global scale. As Dauvergne writes, “...identity emerges in contrast to an “other.” Even someone who rarely feels Canadian and who would argue that their Canadian identity is of no importance to their life, would likely claim to be Canadian at a border crossing or in a war zone.”\textsuperscript{19} My conceptualization of border regions around identity embraces far more than the often-distant regions where the presence of border guards or national armies underscores particular ways of visualizing the world. Borders are spaces of limitation, yet negotiation, that enter into everyday aspects of defining identity and space. Thus, despite my focus on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC), the map I will attempt to draw here is one with lines that are meant to be crossed and a politics I acknowledge as highly mobile, dynamic, and negotiable, implicating and utilizing multiple scales of power and knowledge.

-I guess I feel Canadian, and part of the idea of Canada made me think sponsoring a family was a good idea. But mostly it was because my family were also

\textsuperscript{18} Benjamin 1979.

\textsuperscript{19} Dauvergne 2005, p. 49.
refugees. They had to leave Russia because we were Mennonite and, well, I'm sure you know something about what Stalin did. But I'm proud, I think we're all proud of Canada's humanitarian heart.20

-My family were never refugees. I just did it because it seemed like the right thing to do.21

During my interviews, I was constantly aware of the dangers of getting lost in stories and emotions, as these were stories that touched the core of the human soul. I depended on my central research questions to draw respondents back to some sense of a structured academic project, but felt straying from an exclusively objective framework was sometimes necessary to add to the richness of the emerging topographies of private sponsorship, criminality and Vietnamese identity in Vancouver. In working across cultural norms and boundaries, there are times when narrative is the most effective route to deeper meaning. The questions I always drew back to were the following:

1. Why was there this mass movement to sponsor refugees from Vietnam?
2. Do you think it could happen again?
3. How do you think Vietnamese people have done here?

The responses to the first two questions revealed a richness of diverse opinions. The pessimism that unanimously greeted question three provided fruitful terrain for eliciting policy recommendations from people for whom refugee advocacy has become a central passion.

As Benjamin also writes, "...no one should rely unduly on his "competence". Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed."22 The only people who did not agree to be part of my research were those I had encountered during my initial experience of private sponsorship, when I was part of sponsoring a family, in 1979. Thus, my research came from places with which I was almost entirely unfamiliar, including the Salvation Army detox on Cordova Street and a church basement in the suburbs. One of the greatest lessons during my research was when Ngo Thien Hiep ignited his van in front of Vancouver City Hall. Sitting under a cherry tree, watching the fire burn, he said to me (in Vietnamese), "Sometimes, when no-one listens to you, you need to do something extreme to force them to listen. Sometimes there are things in life...

---

21 Interview, prolific private sponsor and refugee advocate (W4). April 5, 2005.
22 Benjamin 1979, p. 49.
you just have no choice about; that you just need to do.” In order to supplement the debates that rage through the literature of the region’s finest immigration analysts, I needed to allow for the revealing of a topography of immigrant settlement that resists authoritative mapping. Through my personal involvement on many sides of these issues, I found thematic, discursive, emotional, viral, political, sentimental, fluid, and often quite irrational geographies that did not rest in statistics or policies or even in surface stories of immigrant success or failure. Digging deeper into what it means to be a citizen, a Canadian and a criminal, partially as a result of the obvious intelligence, talents and critical faculties of all of my respondents, required reaching beyond what could perhaps be considered the merely academic. Following Benjamin, dropping the guard of objectivity allowed those left-field realizations that take our research beyond the goals of scientific certainty.

1.4 Introduction to Discourse Analysis, and Chapter Guide

In order to gain an understanding of the way Vietnamese and Canadian identities have been produced in the Lower Mainland, I analyzed every article from The Vancouver Sun, The Province (Vancouver), the Daily Times (Victoria), and The Colonist (later amalgamated to the Times-Colonist (Victoria)) from 1962 to 2005 which contained the words ‘Vietnam’ or ‘Vietnamese’. Also included in my study were articles from The Express (a strike paper of The Province), the Courier (Vancouver), and smaller newspapers from the Lower Mainland and throughout the province of British Columbia. This amounts to approximately 40,000 articles and images. As it was beyond the scope of my thesis to analyze each of these in detail, I chose specific foci for each major era in the settlement story of Vietnamese people in Vancouver. While this will be elaborated upon in the relevant chapters, I will quickly mention what I looked for in these articles, taking the opportunity to provide a brief chapter guide.

From 1962 to 1975 I wanted to gain an understanding of the identities that awaited Vietnamese people before they came to settle in Vancouver, and to get some idea of local perceptions of the war. I chose 1962 as an appropriate lead up to the Tet Offensive of 1968. I had expected a spike in reporting about Vietnam and the alacrity of the Vietnamese people in mounting such an effective attack against the Allies in Southern Vietnam from within their borders through tactics including an extensive underground
tunnel system and 'guerilla warfare'. This seems the stuff of which geographies of ‘border-crossing’, mysterious East and pernicious cunning are made. I am not aware whether detailed or critical reporting was circumscribed during the war, or if Vancouverites were not interested, or if the bias of the paper was blatant enough to suppress such reporting, but the local papers never mentioned the Tet Offensive. In fact, there were 3 month gaps in any reporting about Vietnam from 1962 to shortly before the end of the war, in April, 1975. The impending entry of the Communists into Saigon provided initial insight into elements of identity formation as some Vietnamese were being lauded (Capitalists) while others were vilified (Communists), but there seemed little beyond the obvious to merit a full analysis as relating to Vietnamese people in Vancouver.

Operation Babylift, a mission to evacuate thousands of babies in the last days of the war (April, 1975), ignited a major media frenzy reflective of the extent of public debate around Vietnamese identity vis-à-vis the West. The Ford government in the United States had hoped the presence of these orphans in Western space could help convince Congress to release more funds for the unpopular war. Images of the babies not only put a human face on the struggle but also created and highlighted the potential horrors of a Communist overrun of one of the Capitalist bastions of Asia\(^{23}\) during the transition from Cold to Warm War\(^{24}\). This is the period I explore in Chapter Two; trying to determine some of the meanings the bodies of the Vietnamese orphans created for the people of British Columbia and the Lower Mainland and how this might be foundational for the subsequent imagining of Vietnamese identities.

The next great frenzy in media reporting about Vietnamese people peaked in Spring, 1979. It began with the plight of the Hai Hong, one of the first large ships carrying refugees from Vietnam to a country of first asylum and eventual settlement in Canada and elsewhere. The obvious choice for this analysis would have been the countless negative articles and letters which exploited various strategies, many of them racializing, to argue against the resettlement of Vietnamese people in Canada. Despite this rich material, I felt studies of this nature had already been very ably managed,

\(^{23}\) Loescher and Scanlan 1986

\(^{24}\) This idea is developed from Christina Klein (2003) and through conversations with the author. This concept is further explored throughout the thesis.
offering many insights into the naturalization of the settler state through the systematic victimization and marginalization of the other. Choosing the ‘positive’ articles, letters, editorials, images and advertisements offered a more fine-grained insight into the beginnings of Private Sponsorship, as well as the kinds of themes repeated in press reports of subsequent global charity drives. Chapter Three covers the productive elements of mainly positive public opinion pieces during the period of 1979 to 1985, with a particular focus on Summer, 1979, as the early height of media reporting on the ‘boat people crisis’.

Growing up in Vancouver, I have often heard the word “Vietnamese” on the news. Not only did I always assume the story would be about some form of violent crime, but I almost felt “Vietnamese” had become synonymous, in Vancouver, with drugs, gangs and violence. Subsequently, after deciding to research issues around Vietnamese identity in Vancouver, many people displayed their feelings about the Vietnamese as a group by asking if I would need some sort of ‘police protection’ or if I was afraid of being threatened or even lynched. Having many Vietnamese friends in Vancouver and abroad and having worked with several Vietnamese community organizations, I knew of this criminal element but also realized the great bulk of Vietnamese people are pretty ordinary citizens who are sometimes experiencing extraordinary barriers to success because of perceptions around their backgrounds.

The 80s were pretty intense, especially since I exactly fit the profile of what the police were looking for (young, male, Vietnamese), and I didn’t have much place to exist other than on the street. We had to fight like crazy to try and get the police to stop abusing their power. Even now, though I’m a high-ranking ......, people still try and eject me from the elevator now and again. They think I shouldn’t be here because I look like their stereotype of a criminal. I'm sorry I opened my big brave mouth at one time demanding fairness and justice. The wise ones just shut up and wait, albeit occasionally screaming their frustration into the toilet bowl. I'm getting wiser... I do own several toilet bowls.

You have no idea what it was like, growing up and going to school in Vancouver as Vietnamese in the ‘80s. No matter how well I did in school, how smart I was, most people identified me with this gang stereotype which was so far from the

---

truth. I think it’s actually part of what drove me to be so successful. It also made me make some pretty bad decisions along the way!27

I’m like an ostrich in the sand. I don’t want anyone to know I’m Vietnamese. When that police officer got shot at a grow-op I was like SHIT – I hope they’re not Vietnamese. It’s the last thing we need. You get people at work that get these crazy ideas about you – about all Vietnamese people – from the media. They think you’re all drug dealers or something. How are you supposed to fight against that? They start treating you different. It makes you really ashamed – you don’t want anybody to know you’re Vietnamese because they’ll start thinking bad things about you.28

The first major watershed in reporting about Vietnamese criminality began with the double kidnap-murder of Jimmy and Lily Ming, a horrible crime stretching from Vancouver Chinatown to Squamish, BC in March, 1985. Without any reasonable suspects, the police publicly fingered Vietnamese gangs which Mike Harcourt, the Mayor of Vancouver at the time, immediately labeled as “Public Enemy Number One.”29

W1: Oh – that was a biggie. I was so shocked and embarrassed. I couldn’t believe they were doing that to us. We were out there with signs and stuff. And we all wrote to the paper. I went right into the copshop on Main Street and asked, “Why are you doing this to us?” They caught some people eating dog meat and they thought they were Vietnamese. And I know because I was the ..... on the case. They weren’t, but it doesn’t really matter. Mike Harcourt said something about it in the paper and being Vietnamese people and we were so furious. Researcher: Yes. I remember that. We actually closed our gates at that time, in Kerrisdale, and worried Vietnamese people would come eat our pets. Our friends did too. But I thought that protest was about that double murder. Jimmy and Lily Ming?
W1: Oh yeah. I’d forgotten about that. But it was the dog meat thing that really made me angry. That’s the last thing we need – and dog meat – yech! How disgusting. They do it all over the world. I’d never do it. Why does it have to be Vietnam they pin it on? And Mike Harcourt never apologized.30

I remember that. I was going to Gladstone (High School), Grade 8. All of sudden these people turned from lonely, welfare kids to violent gang members. And eating dogs. We all got afraid of them. But, looking back on it, they seem like pretty normal guys. But they kind of kept to themselves.31

31 Interview, Teaching Assistant, UBC. February 15, 2005.
Those people [Jimmy and Lilly Ming] were Taiwanese agents who were ripping off the Taiwanese government – keeping the money. All of the ransom notes were published in the Chinese newspaper – that’s how the kidnappers communicated with the family. So why did they think it was the Vietnamese? It was bad RCMP intelligence.\textsuperscript{32}

Since that time, these murders have been naturalized, through repetition,\textsuperscript{33} lazy journalism,\textsuperscript{34} and the human tendency to stereotype,\textsuperscript{35} as a watershed violent Vietnamese crime; a foundational moment in projecting a criminalized identity onto Vietnamese spaces and bodies in Vancouver and constructing that object as Threat. As a whole, local media reporting about Vietnamese people in the BC papers has almost entirely shifted between the twin fetishes of food (consumption of the other) and crime (fear of the other). This, and the Vancouver Police Cross-Cultural Module D: The Vietnamese, are the topic of Chapter Four.

Previous to this thesis, my knowledge of the Private Sponsorship program had been limited to my experience of being part of a group that helped one family for a year then never again considered any kind of refugee sponsorship. We had felt very rewarded by the project, but conversations with others who had become involved in sponsorship revealed very mixed reactions, as some of the arrangements had worked out better than others. “Our family was fine, but I’ve heard about others that were a total nightmare.”\textsuperscript{36} As mentioned above, I was initially propelled to ask why these people, all across the country, had ‘opened their hearts and wallets’\textsuperscript{37} to strangers on the other side of the world. However, I quickly learned that there was an even more exceptional story to be told – that of the handful of people who had sponsored and supported large numbers of Vietnamese people in the Lower Mainland, many of them continuing to lend assistance and advocacy to people from other parts of the world. Some were sponsors, some

\textsuperscript{32} Interview, M2. March 17, 2005.
\textsuperscript{33} Murders like these were sometimes reported dozens of times over a matter of years.
\textsuperscript{34} Elizabeth Aird. “Death of a gangster: how do we stop the bleeding?” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. May 5, 1994, p. B1. (Nine years later.)
\textsuperscript{35} Kevin Griffen. “Youth with gang links found slain.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. September 19, 1987.
\textsuperscript{36} Interview, M1. January 29, 2005. “Particularly in Vancouver, a bunch of youths having a big party and they’re all drunk, throwing stuff at police cars and they’re just a bunch of youth – a party got out of hand. If they are Asians – well – we stereotype. White is good. Yellow is dangerous. Fearsome.”
\textsuperscript{37} Interview, Elementary School teacher and former sponsor (W5). March 14, 2005.

sponsored, some community workers and some just private citizens who felt driven to fill some gaps in immigrant settlement. Of the 26 3-hour interviews and 2 focus groups I completed, discussion during my Vietnamese-language radio show, and my participation in many community events and organizations, I learned a great deal from people who have been intimately involved in the settlement of Vietnamese people in Vancouver. In fact, out of all those interviews, there were only 3 people who had not been closely involved with refugee resettlement, support and advocacy as private citizens for at least 20 years. While informing the entire thesis, their opinions, and the roles they played in the Sponsorship and support of Vietnamese people help me reach my conclusions in Chapter Five, conclusions that move beyond the critical social science of the earlier chapters as I document the enactment of hopes and possibilities emerging from intercultural dialogue and the labours of love of cultural risk-takers. Their stories deserve much greater discussion than there is space in such a brief chapter, but their voices are present throughout the thesis, and will hopefully be the subject of subsequent work.

1.5 Literature Review

The social construction of race can define and limit the roles ethnic minorities are able to play in a society and through space. Segregation occurs at all levels of citizenship and transcends the rhetoric of institutional policymakers, the media and the public. Within a ‘multicultural’ society like Canada, where national identity is construed as a mosaic of ethnicities and backgrounds, the police, media and others purport to recognize and revere diversity. In fact, as Christina Klein points out, citizens and their representatives use the management of heterogenous populations at home to justify intrusive actions abroad in a discursive mode designed to avoid claims of imperialism. However, many believe the treatment visible minorities receive in Canada is getting worse rather than better. Some believe that multiculturalism as a policy has enriched the Canadian political landscape with a greater diversity of voiced perspectives. Caruthers argues that official pluralism creates a space for struggle against negative representations of a community, while Joseph uses a richer sense of diversity to

38 Anderson 1991
41 Caruthers 1995.
problematize the very notion of community and the possibility for its use to force any larger change. In this work, I abandon the notion of a ‘Vietnamese community’ as, though like-identified groupings can be a positive factor in the ability to negotiate identity and space, the way ethnic identification is used in Canada means the term ‘ethnic community’ rarely favours diversity over an often false sense of sameness. Viewing a same-identified group or ethnicity as a community is often a tool more for essentializing a racial/cultural category by discounting diversity and relying on/(re)enforcing stubborn notions of racial/cultural boundaries. Talking about a ‘Vietnamese community’ inheres a whole raft of assumptions which go against the realities of fuzzy, flexible and dynamic boundaries with possibilities for negotiation. Thus, comments here about Vietnamese people are representations that exist in Vancouver but I am not, in this thesis, in any way attempting to define and categorize a ‘community’. In fact, it is this tendency in academia, the media and public discourse that I am trying to rethink. Other analysts argue for the possibilities in multicultural policies to challenge the anglocentrism that has historically marginalized minority participation in Canadian nation building. However, one of the ironies of these potentially empowering aspects of multiculturalism is the official enshrining of like-cultural identification. Reliance on stubborn categories speaks to some of the formidable challenges minority groups still face in Canada. As Beiser writes, “no country, Canada included, offers newcomers the welcome they need and deserve.”

I imagine the world as an infinite collection of subjective perceptions that create and define what and how we see. Through generalization and repetition of certain of these windows on space and identity, the media play a vital role in cycles between subjective impressions and what comes to be known and naturalized as objective truths about peoples, places, and interactions between the two. The media are widely recognized as fundamental to the creation and dissemination of information, values, social identities and relations and to the construction of corporate realities as opposed to

42 Joseph 2002.
43 O’Regan 1993.
44 Beiser 1999, p. xiii.
45 Nancoo and Nancoo 1997.
46 Vipond 2000.
those filtered through first-hand experience.\textsuperscript{48} As such, the media have been central to criticism surrounding the ‘othering’ of minority groups in Canada, often inciting or encouraging fear and hatred of the newcomer.\textsuperscript{49} An important dynamic in determining and disseminating these dominant discourses is the discursive boundaries delineated at all scales between the progressive and enlightened West, on one hand, and the traditional, irrational East, on the other.\textsuperscript{50} These lexicons and strategies of difference have long legitimized the production, naturalization and disciplining of lingering colonialist sensibilities.\textsuperscript{51} Pratt’s assertion that colonial discourses remain in our local social structures can be extended to enduring Cold War resentments vis-à-vis the Vietnamese community in Vancouver.\textsuperscript{52}

Though there was a definite improvement from 1962 to present, the media’s treatment of minority issues in Canada is “mixed at best, and deplorable at worst.”\textsuperscript{53} It is racially polarized through both underrepresentation and misrepresentation,\textsuperscript{54} bolstering the ethnocentric foundations of media institutions.\textsuperscript{55} The media in Canada continues framing minorities as variously mysterious, criminal and immoral.\textsuperscript{56} Despite the consistent efforts of media critics and grassroots activists, the media still displays a resistance to change, as countless protests and reprimands still leave the door open for the racializing tendencies of the press.\textsuperscript{57} Racialization and criminalization of ‘the Vietnamese community’ is persistent, dominant and continues in the local media right to the present day.\textsuperscript{58}

As well as managing their relationships with the local media, Vietnamese people also have had to contend with a long history of negative or abject representations in Hollywood films. Previous to the American stage of the war, Vietnamese characters represented the Janus face of the dually-fetishized savage: the fearsome, anti-ethical

\textsuperscript{48} Fleras and Kunz 2001.
\textsuperscript{49} Ginzberg 1987.
\textsuperscript{50} Henry and Tator 2000A; Said 1994; Douglas 1966.
\textsuperscript{51} Blaut 1993; Said 1993.
\textsuperscript{52} Pratt 1997.
\textsuperscript{53} Fleras 1994, p. 267.
\textsuperscript{54} Telreja 2004; Dunn and Mahtani 2001; Bissoondath 1994; Fleras 1994
\textsuperscript{55} Fleras and Kunz 2001.
\textsuperscript{57} Roth 1996.
barbaric on one side, the adorably traditional, childlike innocent on the other, and the often unpredictable and threatening shift between the two. In more recent films, where no other war has been “so visually and audibly present,” the Vietnamese “are posited as an inexplicable other.” In films like *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*, the Vietnamese people are mainly absent and silent, unable to compete with the roar of Hueys, enemy fire and the deep psychological complexities of the American central subject, yet the mysterious, sinister jungles are teeming with them, humid with their apparent cunning and savagery. This primitivization of Vietnamese people during the war, as inseparable from a dark, savage land, links them with long histories across colonial geographies both here and abroad, and is used to lend credence to America’s role in an unpopular war, and to construct the Vietnamese as objects/threats to be managed/feared.

Consider the following characterizations of our enemy: “universally cruel and ruthless” and “tough but devoid of scruples.” Or that we fought “a war against an enemy whom Americans at first underrated,” a fighting force perceived as “scrawny, near-sighted, and poorly trained and equipped,” people whom Americans regarded “as not quite human, endowed with a strange mixture of animal cunning and ability to live in the jungle, and [a] superhuman devotion” that rendered them fearless in battle with a willingness to commit suicide for the cause. Accurate descriptions of American sentiments about the VC and the NVA, to be sure, except in this case all drawn from the anti-Japanese rhetoric of World War II.

Another aspect to Charlie...is even more sinister: the way in which in *Go Tell the Spartans* Courcey is duped by a group of VC posing as refugees...the family betrays Courcey and the garrison... This is the simple but painful refrain heard time and again from veterans, in novels and in films: that they could not distinguish ally from enemy, friend from foe. The Occidental, racist cavil that all Orientals look alike became painfully all too true in Vietnam. In *Go Tell the Spartans*, the VC are condemned, for the warfare they wage is a betrayal of common standards of decency. Courcey saved their lives and offered them American hospitality. They repaid him with their betrayal.

We can see all this as part of American benevolence and the belief in American chosenness and uniqueness.

---

60 Anderegg 1991, p. 6.
61 Braun 2002.
63 Following Said 1993.
64 Following Haraway 1989.
65 Desser 1991, pgs. 94-96.
What did Vietnam look like? Well, if it wasn't for the people it was very pretty. The people over there are very backward and very primitive, and they just make a mess out of everything.\textsuperscript{66}

My project is not to specifically determine the effect these films had on identity formation in Vancouver or elsewhere. However, when I asked one of my respondents about their immigration experience they asked, "How were we supposed to be respected in this place with all of those movies going on? We just felt everyone was afraid of us. Most people seemed pretty sure what we were like before ever meeting us. The newspaper stories just confirmed that."\textsuperscript{67} Throughout this thesis, I imagine the effects some of the themes from these films had in the production and 'objectivization' of the highly mobile, violent, mysterious and ruthless Vietnamese criminal plaguing the streets, beaches and homespaces of British Columbia.

Media pigeonholing of minorities reaches back to the founding of Vancouver as a far-flung outpost in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century and the concurrent colonial visualizing of BC.\textsuperscript{68} Kay Anderson looks at colonial newspapers and their role in the creation of Chinese ethnic identity in Vancouver.\textsuperscript{69} Alison Mountz traces this lineage forward to the mobilization of media response surrounding the arrival of the Chinese boat arrivals on the west coast of British Columbia in the summer of 1999.\textsuperscript{70} From their initial arrival, immigrants like these are constructed into categories that determine their place inside and outside the 'host' society.\textsuperscript{71}

Of equal importance was Mrs. Murphy's (the author of Black Candle, 1932) impact on the public's perception of drug use and users. She created a series of women-seducing villains, primarily non-white and non-Christian, who threatened the Anglo-Saxon way of life. Driven to insanity and crime by hopeless addiction, these cunning "dregs of humanity" more than deserved the harshest penalties. All prohibited drugs were addictive poisons which destroyed the body and the inhibitions of a good Christian upbringing. Although her more outrageous claims have been dismissed, many of her

\textsuperscript{66} Lt. George Coker in Davis 1974. This quotation is analyzed in more detail at the beginning of Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{67} Interview, M3. March 2, 2005.
\textsuperscript{68} Braun 2002.
\textsuperscript{69} Anderson 1991.
\textsuperscript{70} Mountz forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{71} Pratt 1997; Ong 1996.
erroneous assumptions are still accepted by segments of the Canadian public. The police have been accused of deeply entrenched racism at all levels in their enforcement of these pejorative ethnic constructions, leading to the overpolicing and criminalization the very minorities placed at most disadvantage.

Oh – it happened all the time. If you were Vietnamese and in public you knew you’d get stopped at least once. The cops jumped this guy for a B&E. They took his money, arrested him, took his wallet. They threw him in the drunk tank. My other friend was just walking home from the gym. He didn’t do anything to stop them. You should do what you have to do – I’ve always stood up to the police. He won’t stand up for himself. He has a fear of the government. He won’t stand up against them. There’s a lack of coherence in the community – there are a few who will. They cuffed and searched him. I convinced him to complain and they got a reprimand. The cops abuse their power. The cops and media know we’re not gonna fight back.

They took my citizenship card and threw it in the sewer. They always do that. It shows what they think of you. You’re nothing – not even Canadian. You’re not even that. That’s what they are.

When 72-year-old Vietnamese immigrant Trong Nien Dao opened his front door Wednesday afternoon, he says he was greeted by two Vancouver police officers pointing guns at his head. He was taken out of the house and handcuffed on the front lawn. He says police rushed into the house, guns drawn, and took four members of his family into custody, handcuffing his 34-year-old son Sinh and 30-year-old son-in-law Quan Le. While the family stood on the lawn, the police conducted a quick search of the house. The search warrant was for "theft of electricity," but they were searching for signs of a marijuana-growing operation. They found none, and left. Dao’s daughter Anna is furious. She thinks the police raided the family home in the 5600-block of Inverness on scant evidence, because the family is Vietnamese. "I believe this is discrimination," said the 34-year-old court interpreter. "We are Vietnamese people, we live in east Vancouver and we pay a low [electricity] bill. It doesn't mean we do drugs." As an interpreter, Anna Dao has accompanied the police on growing-operation raids in the past. She says having an armed police squad raid the house was heavy handed, and wonders why they treated her father so roughly, given his age. "He opened the door and that's it," she said. "They said 'Out! Out!' and handcuffed him. He still has the bruises. They hurt him." "He was really shocked and traumatized," said Quan Le. "He

---

72 Anthony and Solomon 1973, p. 3.
74 Interview, NGO worker (M4). March 17, 2005.
75 Interview, homeless crack addict and former refugee/adoptivee (M5). February 19, 2005.
cried. It was really hard for him. Usually he sleeps very easily, but last night he couldn't sleep the whole night. It was humiliating.”

Sherene Razack, in her project to ‘unmap’ the centrality of the white settler society, examines how these racializations create spaces where the Other is less free to access and claim space than is the central white subject. Following her lead, I will explore some ways in which power operates at all levels in Canadian society to produce and naturalize backlashes against immigration and the immigrants in Vancouver while acknowledging Canadian hegemony as negotiable, infinitely subjective, and not entirely white.

Mary Douglas’s ideas of the various conceptions and perceptions surrounding the determination and segregation of ‘clean’ from ‘dirty’, ‘welcome’ from ‘threatening’, were meant to explain the discursive structures of what she called primitive cultures, in their less-developed standards of objectivity. In the years since publishing her book, people at all levels of society have blurred distinctions between primitive and advanced cultures, and many academics have been able to use her ideas in understanding the ways in which boundaries are erected and policed from the frontiers of a nation right down to the norms regulating personal and domestic contact. These distinctions, as enforced by the state, are highlighted in the removal of children from mothers suspected of drug offences.

Yeah – I was there in the hospital with her. She had her baby and, one day later, the Ministry just came and took it. She was horrified. Three years before that, her boyfriend was caught with a small amount of marijuana in her apartment. She was never charged, but there was a bargain that she would stop seeing him and they would stop giving her trouble. But someone had a personal vendetta. Or it was probably something racist. That’s the thing with these people – it totally depends on who’s got your case. This officer was responsible for dozens of Vietnamese kids being taken from their parents. Totally unfair. We tried like crazy to fight it, but these people have a lot more power than we do. Once drugs are on your record, all your power is gone as a mother.

---

77 Razack 2002.
78 Mountz and Mahtani 2002.
80 Douglas 1966.
82 Interview, W1. April 23, 2005.
Susan Sontag and Julia Kristeva both closely follow on Douglas’s work, examining such diverse fields as epidemiology, horror films and how we incorporate foreign violence within our own symbolic lexicon. Concerns about disease, media images of the war and local interactions with these discourses all played roles in negotiations around Vietnamese identity in Vancouver. Academics and activists use countless metaphors to describe techniques through which we erect discursive boundaries between Self and Other. One of the most recent of these is Derek Gregory’s idea of Israel versus Palestine being the difference between a positive and a negative photograph. While it is an interesting and poetic concept, and there are certainly many violences developed through stubborn dualisms, such set and differentiated alternatives theorize a strictly delimited commonality, detracting from the multiple subjectivities through which negotiation occurs. If I were to choose a certain metaphor as launching point for analyzing and encouraging discursive intervention, Hannah Arendt’s more fluid notion of public/private interests as “waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself” would most closely resemble my mode of analysis. This metaphor allows for the fluidity of boundary regimes, creating a dynamic space for negotiation that hints at greater possibilities. The mother who still, three years later, has not regained custody of her three children may not agree with the seemingly bucolic, flexible metaphor of a river. However, if Vietnamese identity were regarded in more fluid and dynamic ways, perhaps her social worker would not have singled her out.

Benedict Anderson explores a similarly dynamic conception of national identity, describing a kind of “political love” which lends the nation “a profound emotional legitimacy.” This power-play creates a “field of symbols and meanings” which are reenacted and objectified through the constant repetition of “invented tradition and ritual.” These are mechanisms through which we all produce and naturalize a sense of national identity. Hobsbawm regards this need for constant reiteration of the self and the nation as evidence of the inherent vulnerability of the transnational state in the age of

84 Gregory 2004.
86 Interview, Wl. April 23, 2005.
88 Bhabha 1990, p. 3.
89 Hobsbawn 1990, p. 4.
globalization and the neo-liberal consensus. The metaphor he chooses is that of a mussel, soft and weak on the inside, surrounded by a hard, sharp shell, which can open or snap shut in an exercise of border-regime sovereignty. This is the mode of analysis Catherine Dauvergne uses as she explores the open/closed door contradictions of immigration law under the liberal humanitarian consensus. She writes about ‘refugee love’ and how the temporary relaxing of sovereignty for a disadvantaged Other, “marks the nation as good, prosperous and generous.” My work takes these concepts past the juridical to try and understand, under everyday regimes of local power effects such as objectivization, how the immigrant interacts with the dynamics of sovereignty and discipline well within national borders in the bounded semiotic spaces of the city, the forest and the beach.

Beiser has done an extraordinary amount of work with Vietnamese people in Vancouver, specifically around mental illness and the dynamics of integration. He proves that the perception of Vietnamese people as being dependant on welfare is greatly exaggerated. Going against popular notions of the “lazy, diseased immigrant”, he argues that they have adjusted well to Canada and the incidence of mental illness has been lower than expected.

The first year they were here everything was new. Everything was full of wonder and nice. The second year nothing was new any more. They were homesick and the whole family was depressed. Third year – they owned their own autobody shops etc. They weren’t helpless children. These guys were getting it together like you wouldn’t believe. Maybe people didn’t believe it. Maybe they got scared. And they have talent. And their interpersonal skills were without compare.

In fact, Beiser and Adelman both believe stresses since arrival have been larger contributors to any mental problems than previous histories of war and migration. That finding was debated heavily by my respondents, some of them depending on assumptions about Confucian culture, others holding strong opinions about Communism while many

91 Dauvergne 2005.
94 Beiser 1999.
96 Ibid; Adelman 1982.
felt the horrors of the refugee camps had a lingering effect. Along with Pfeiffer\textsuperscript{97}, Beiser reported slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction and mental illness amongst privately sponsored Vietnamese as opposed to those who had been sponsored by the government. This they attributed to the intrusive nature of the sponsor-sponsored relationship and to cultural misunderstandings. However, this assertion was also challenged in my interviews. Though the sponsorship experience varied widely, most sponsors felt they were very clear about respecting Vietnamese culture and religion. Many explained that the government took the people with the most skills, thus the highest chances of success, while the private sponsors were left with some of the tougher cases. Thus, considering the extra challenges written into the dynamics of private sponsorships, the outcomes were, on the whole, extremely positive. The sponsors most committed to refugee advocacy actually sought and fought for those who had been repeatedly refused as the most marginal candidates, believing the government’s attitudes to be discriminatory and misguided.

We had a wonderful immigration officer in Abbotsford. His name was Tom Scott. He just did everything to make life easier. He was so obliging. He really tried hard. We had a family from Vietnam. They had a brother and sister who were deaf. So immigration rejected them – again and again - said they couldn’t come here – they had health problems. There was nothing intellectually wrong with these people; they were just deaf. So I went back to immigration many many times for this family and Tom said to me one time, “Why do you keep coming back here with this?” And I said, “Because I think it’s highly unfair that they keep getting rejected because they’re deaf.” He says, “I believe you. I feel exactly the same way. I’ll tell you what to do. Tell them to hire a teacher to teach them English sign language.” So the family went and hired somebody and had a notarized letter written up. Took it to immigration and they’re here. And they’re very very good people.\textsuperscript{98}

While these people have done well in Canada, there were many, much tougher cases who escaped from the camps through private sponsorship.

They got a hold of my name. These were people who had been refused government sponsorship. They’d send me a list of names. They’d been there for a long time. They were starting to be forced back. So we did a lot of sponsorships.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{97} Pfeiffer 1999.
\textsuperscript{98} Interview, W2. April 5, 2005.
Beiser’s evaluation of ‘success’ is also undermined by his dependence on questionable interpretations of Vietnamese culture as “traditional” and “Confucian”.

Ha! Confucius? Who is that? I challenge you to find any set of beliefs that most Vietnamese share. We have lots of things in our recent history that are far more important to us than what some Chinese guy wrote hundreds of years ago.\textsuperscript{100}

Through problematizing Beiser’s findings I am able to work beyond his strict cultural categorizations and flesh out some of the discourses around his rich statistexts.\textsuperscript{101} He very usefully interrogates the Canadian humanitarian myth as it is propagated through refugee sponsorship and settlement. However, he places it against his own vision of Vietnamese culture. Through my interviews and discourse analysis, I attempt to open and dynamicize these categories, searching in their wakes for opportunities to negotiate beyond the effects of isolated academic publications and conferences.

Very useful in my work has been both the writing and mentorship of Howard Adelman. His participation was instrumental in the beginnings of the Private Sponsorship Programme as one of the founders of Operation Lifeline. In his 1982 book on the dynamics of early sponsorship he wonders how much of the public support was an expression of humanitarianism and how much was “pure self-interest” in increasing population, boosting economies and sourcing cheap labour. I feel it analytically useless to divide and determine between these two interrelated aspects of the “mechanics of human nature”; elements of self-interest are a natural part of humanitarianism and few humanitarianisms can claim to be pure. Thus, though some realms of self-interest are more destructive than others, they do not, in themselves, comprehensively taint diverse spirits of compassion. I source some of the disciplining moments of refugee sponsorship within these varied interactions. As well, writing 30 years later, I can benefit from the kinds of long-term dynamics and perspectives Adelman could not achieve by 1982.

As seen in the recent debates around debt forgiveness in Africa, humanitarianism can be seen as far more than a pure, compassionate benevolence springing from the depths of the human spirit, though it is often used to produce that impression.

\textsuperscript{100} Interview, M3. March 28, 2005.
\textsuperscript{101} A concept used in Kobayashi 1992 to acknowledge the rich textual effects and references mobilized through the development and use of statistics.
\textsuperscript{102} Interview January 29, 2005.
Live 8 concert organizers want to spur a global groundswell of support for African debt relief, but experts say the biggest challenge in the United States is changing entrenched perceptions that it is the world's most generous country. Polls over the last decade show most Americans believe 10 percent of the federal budget is spent on humanitarian and economic aid for the world's poor and that America gives more than any other country. But the world's richest economy actually spends just over one half of 1 percent of its budget on aid to the world's poor, less per capita than every other wealthy nation.  

A diverse cannon critically examines humanitarian relief to determine more effective ways of expressing the compassionate instinct, at those times when it flows across national borders, to greater benefit the people at risk. At one extreme, Razack sees humanitarian intervention as a re-enaction of the colonial violences of the settler nation. Hyndman challenges the imperialism of humanitarian regimes in the Horn of Africa by calling for transnational, feminist “constellations of power” that will supercede existing foreign aid regimes, while Ong criticizes Western feminists for imposing their societal ideals through humanitarian support and organizations. Agamben believes that “humanitarian organizations... can only grasp human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight.” This conveniently explains away the identities so readily fixed upon the bodies of the immigrants by depending on the straw man of Western humanitarianism, ignoring local interests and positive impulses and results. Deleuze and Donzelot examine the ways in which philanthropy is intrinsic to the liberal regimes of managing life and enforcing norms, asserting their role in the centrality of the Western nation-state. Some writers doubt how much compassion there truly is in humanitarian efforts overseas, while others believe adoption and sponsorship are mainly strategic moves by the state in order to expedite policy initiatives, both domestic and foreign. Several authors examine the way these moves propagate the Canadian humanitarian  

104 Razack 2004.  
105 Hyndman 2000, p. 191; Ong 2004.  
107 Deleuze and Donzelot 1979.  
109 Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
myth\textsuperscript{110} which positions itself against a vision of the immigrant as a threat and potential criminal.\textsuperscript{111} My work explores the power humanitarianism holds in identity formation at all scales,\textsuperscript{112} as well as the racializing tendencies of this strategy, as national subjects are placed in a position of centrality against the diseased, criminalized other.\textsuperscript{113} Lofgren writes, “national identity has to be constantly reaffirmed because it is a somewhat fragile construction. The ethnic mix and fluidity calls for a constant remaking.”\textsuperscript{114} By unmapping, unraveling powerplays around Vietnamese people and their settlement in Vancouver, from multiple positions of flawed vulnerability,\textsuperscript{115} I hope to encourage a remaking and rethinking of immigrant sponsorship and support into a topography more of humanity and possibility than of punishment and marginalization.

\textsuperscript{110} Hague 2004; Manning 2003; Dirks 1995; Hutcheon 1991.

\textsuperscript{111} Folson, Baaba and Park 2004; Chan and Mirchandani 2002; Pratt and Valverde 2002; Thobani 2001.

\textsuperscript{112} Malkki forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{113} Razack 2000.

\textsuperscript{114} Lofgren 1986.

\textsuperscript{115} following Butler, 2004.
Chapter Two: Operation Babylift: Black Bodies, White Saviours

2.1 Setting

Operation Babylift was an evacuation of Vietnamese orphans\textsuperscript{117}, initiated by elements of the American government and society who wanted Congress to commit more funds to the Allied War in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{118} Friends for All Children and other organizations had worked tirelessly with Indochinese orphans, setting up and supporting orphanages around the region with funds raised in North America.\textsuperscript{119} They also arranged adoptions to rescue some of these orphans to the Western couples who wanted to help and who were recently open to ‘cross-cultural’ adoption due to the legalization of abortion (Canada: 1969, United States (Roe vs. Wade): 1973) and the resultant shortage in local, white babies.\textsuperscript{120}

All the news coverage, the World Vision commercials, they showed us so many images of these orphanages, these babies. They just looked so helpless. The conditions were horrible. I went down to the office and asked if I could adopt. It was just chance that ..... came during the Babylift. We’d been waiting for him for months. We weren’t the ones acting on impulse.\textsuperscript{121}

Several thousand young children were suddenly evacuated from Vietnam and sent for eventual adoption mainly in Canada, the United States (US) and Australia in April, 1975, as the war was ending. Allison Martin claims that, on April 27\textsuperscript{th} alone, over 7,000 orphans were evacuated from Saigon as part of Operation Babylift, with President Ford waiting on the tarmac in Washington. This was a skillfully-arranged propaganda move designed to place a human face on a people easily constructed as victim through the

\textsuperscript{116} Photo from Shirley Peck-Barnes 2000.
\textsuperscript{117} There was some debate over the status of some of the babies but, partially as the dynamics of each individual adoption are less of a concern than the discursive weight of the Babylift as a whole, and partially as the doubts over individual status came more from a politics of protectionism and prejudice than the enlightened, internationalist humanitarianism I analyze here, I will refer to all of the babies as orphans. Also, again, I acknowledge ‘Vietnamese’ as a flexible category.
\textsuperscript{118} Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
\textsuperscript{119} Gallagher 2001; Taylor 1976.
\textsuperscript{120} Interview, NGO representative (W6). December 15, 2004.
visible bodies of malnourished orphans. The Babylift was halted after only 2 days as a result of the vocal protest both of Vietnamese citizens and their government, as no permission had been granted to take these babies from Vietnamese soil. Americans eager to continue funding for the war, however, had already felt the effects of the Babylift on popular opinion thus were desperate to continue the evacuation.

A brief halt to Operation Babylift was rescinded and more than 18,000 children were being processed to leave for new homes in Canada, the U.S. and Australia. “I think the arrival of the orphans in other nations showed the cruel war in South Vietnam and made them realize the tragedy which has been going on there and how much more we can offer them through bringing them here,” said Andras [Canadian Immigration Minister].

Earlier in the 1970s, the Bangladeshi government had halted Canada’s ambitions for adoption following the rebellion of 1971. The Saigon of the mid-1970s, however, was a political terrain easily available to Western coercion, making possible the removal of many thousands of young children despite the very serious misgivings of the Vietnamese people and governments.

Commenting on Operation Babylift at the time, Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Deputy Prime Minister for Social Welfare, wrote Prime Minister Khiem after meeting with Ambassador Martin:

The departure of a considerable number of orphans will cause a profound emotion in the world, and especially in the United States, that will be all to the benefit of South Vietnam. The American Ambassador will assist us in every way possible, since he himself is convinced that the evacuation of thousands of war victims will help to sway American public opinion in South Vietnam's favor. When the children arrive in the United States, the press, television and radio will give ample publicity to the matter and the impact will be enormous.

Though Canadians participated on a much smaller scale, with only a handful of baby arrivals in Vancouver and many more further East, hundreds of people went to the Vancouver airport to witness the advent of Canadian overseas adoption. The actual physical presences of the Vietnamese babies in British Columbia (BC) were far outweighed by the discursive significance attributed to them in the debates that raged through the local press, linking with popularly-held notions of the Vietnamese subject

---

123 Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
124 Ibid, p. 106.
125 “Canada opens her arms to war orphans.” *The Vancouver Sun*. April 7, 1975, p. 1.
and productive of a vision and tradition of Canadian humanitarianism and enlightened management.

In this chapter, I examine not the motives, the details, nor results of this programme nor the experiences of individual adoptions. Rather, my focus is on the specific dynamics that emerged in the press employing these bodies as objects of charity, productive of specific identities for whiteness at the end of the Allied War in Vietnam. Thus, I am not entering into the debate over cross-cultural adoption nor am I taking these constructions at face value. My main focal point is a discourse analysis of the coverage of ‘Operation Babylift’ in the Vancouver and Victoria newspapers of April 1975, placed in greater historical and geographical contexts as moments of racialization of the Eastern other and revaluing of the Western self.

This scheme rode the boundaries between the then old-school stern anti-Communism of the Cold War era and the newer discursive regime of what I call Warm War internationalism. Following Klein, this internationalist outlook masked Western imperialism in a conscious epistemological shift through which the management of diverse peoples on home terrain indicated the capability and even the responsibility to manage them abroad.

Domestic ideology in some instances facilitated the outward turn toward global engagement that the Cold War demanded. Maternal love was imagined as a force capable of overcoming racism and a source of benign global power. The adoptive U.S.-Asian families, both imaginary and real, created through this love met many of the ideological demands of the Cold War. They encouraged a sense of political obligation to a part of the world with which most Americans had limited ties; they assigned re-domesticated women a role in the national project of global expansion; they gave millions of Americans a sense of personal participation in the Cold War. Perhaps most important, they affirmed that Americans, despite their nation’s history and their own prejudices, were not irredeemably racist or imperialist.126

The fact that Gerald Ford, then President of the US, was on the tarmac to greet the first load of orphans indicates the significance their arrival held for his people and polity as the war came to an end. These articles, images, editorials and letters involved in the debate around the Babylift provide rich indications of the ways in which the presence of these babies’ bodies invited us to imagine ourselves, as well as the histories they helped

126 Klein 2003, pp. 189-190.
to deny, in the kinds of collective forgettings that Jane Jacobs blames for many of the lost opportunities of the North American settler experiment.\textsuperscript{127} Through this discourse analysis, I examine the ways in which these bodies were treated as boundary objects full of dangerous possibilities,\textsuperscript{128} threatening to reveal some of the not-so-compassionate histories they could be chosen to represent. In the early days of cross-cultural adoption, opinions of cultural adaptation inhered the threat of Vietnamese children as being somehow marked by the dynamics of the war and the mysterious East.\textsuperscript{129} The greater the perception of threat, the more the picturing of Vietnamese bodies in North American spaces added value to the various levels of Western management capability, from the family to the state to the people.

There is no doubt that a lot of genuine compassion was involved in the adoption of Vietnamese orphans at the end of the war. Great sacrifices were made and, on the 30\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Babylift, adoptees around the world are contacting each other at least partially to celebrate the successes of their adoption. However, the discursive desire for these bodies was also hedged in the need to revalue the management potential of the family, the patriarchy and the state at the close of both the war in Vietnam and the countercultural revolution at home.

We had seen so much fall away, so much death and destruction, and it was us that was doing this. The kids were challenging their parents, churches were closing down, even the price of gas was changing the way we thought about our role in the world. This was an opportunity to show what we believed in – to show we weren’t all bad. To show our faith.\textsuperscript{130}

I harboured draft dodgers. So we certainly followed it [the war]. Oh the media was saturated. Peace marches. We went to peace marches. There were probably very few Mennonites that were in the peace marches but... Now that you mention it, there were a number of draft dodgers that came through here. It was quite controversial – some of our churches, whether or not to support them. And some churches did and some didn’t. And some individuals did. The Mennonites obviously never supported – we aggressively lobbied all levels of government to try and stop the war. Mennonites obviously advocate peace at all times. I think we got to the end of the war and were ashamed we hadn’t done more.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{127} Jacobs 2004.
\textsuperscript{128} Haraway 1991.
\textsuperscript{130} Interview, M6. March 2, 2005.
\textsuperscript{131} Interview, W2. April 5, 2005.
Dynamics like guilt, faith, empathy and compassion are all productive of the kinds of humanitarian instincts and commitments that are not only essential to the survival of humankind but which can be closely aligned to some of the structures of separation, subjugation and imperialism.\textsuperscript{132} I do not examine these discursive dynamics as a venue for criticizing humanitarian instincts and commitments for, as Mother Theresa wrote, it is the small things we do with great love, for we can never do great things, that express the goodness of the world. I am furiously proud if Canada may be at least partially defined through humanitarian acts and am equally awed by the commitment of many of the sponsors and the alacrity of the Vietnamese, and other migrants, to be able to rebound so quickly from so many extremely difficult situations. Migration can be one of the most difficult challenges in a lifetime, and is equally challenging from regulatory and cultural perspectives. However, being proud of the accomplishments at all sides of migration means acknowledging and examining our ups and downs to find ways for doing better.

I believe the discursive weight added to the babies’ bodies through the press, the State, and public discourse attempted to claim the imprimatur of the small acts of charity and grant significance across the terrain of a post-war West. This discursive inflation will never negate the generosity of body, mind and spirit of many of those who have supported the adoptions nor those involved in other highly-publicized charity drives like the later Boat People crisis. However, analyzing the gap between the babies themselves and the discursive significance around their arrival helps in understanding how these events produce and naturalize myths about Us, position the immigrant Them as simultaneously instrumental yet marginal to these myths, and overdetermine/undermine richly-imagined spaces for immigrant identity and negotiation. Too many small moments taken together encourage a repetitive myopia within which marginalization resides. These mechanisms can sometimes act as barriers to a whole-hearted approach to refugee sponsorship and support.

2.2 Introducing the Other into Richly Knowable Space

What did Vietnam look like? Well, if it wasn’t for the people it was very pretty. The people over there are very backward and very primitive, and they just make a mess out of everything.\(^{133}\)

An immense cargo plane shuddered into the sky over Saigon. Inside the cabin, frightened toddlers and older children were strapped in with seat belts along the hard aluminum benches on each side of the aircraft. Down the center of the plane ran a row of 2-foot square cardboard boxes, each containing a precious cargo of two or three babies. A long strap stretched over the row of boxes securing them in place. Agency workers, Air Force personnel and volunteer parent escorts shook off their own fatigue and fear to scurry about trying to quiet the crying. Another flight of Operation Babylift had lifted off. Its cargo of orphan children had now left war torn Vietnam on their way to new lives in a distant country.\(^{134}\)

The rural and urban jungles of Vietnam, productive terrains for the hearts and minds of the Cold War, were considered plagued with the irrationality of the Vietnamese people and culture, stubbornly backward and primitive in the face of inevitable modernity and capitalist enlightenment.\(^{135}\) As bombs, napalm and coercion failed in their surveillance and subjugation of Vietnamese land and culture, American employment of Vietnam in the inflamed discourses of the Cold War turned from subjection to objection, as the bodies of Vietnamese orphans became rich symbols of Western enlightened internationalism at a time when the American project had reached a military, political and moral crisis.\(^{136}\) The Other, in the form of the Vietnamese orphan rescued from the sullied transnational geography of wartime Vietnam, was created by the media (as public political instrument) to serve as a cipher against the downsides of liberal modernity as they had been exposed throughout the war.\(^{137}\)

The presences of Vietnamese orphans positioned, as they were, in the arms of the enlightened universal body of ‘whiteness’, were nutritive to a legend of Western global humanitarianism. The war in Vietnam had been unprecedented in its visibility, being the first war delivered through the TV to the living rooms of the West.

---

\(^{133}\) U.S. Lt. George Coker, as quoted in the film *Hearts and Minds*, directed by Peter Davis 1974.
^{134} Martin 2000.
^{135} Rostow 1960.
^{137} Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
Leading up to it was all the television publicity during the Vietnam War, and the things that were going on there. The sort of classic picture of that young child that was burning. Kim Phuc. I still remember the first time I saw that clip, you know. So we had this image of these people, you know, just terrible. When the reels came, you know, it was something that, it was the first time that everybody, that a war was presented to us in that way. And we were the ones doing it. And we all just didn't know what, you know, what we were doing; why we were doing this. But we were young at the time. We didn't agree. But when the refugees started coming, that was something we could do. Then we found out these people were starting to flee. Of course Communism. I think that’s another aspect... is an anti-Communism.\footnote{138}

The degradation of the American subject position which had become so evident and disturbing in the above newsreels, the theories and scandals of Walt Rostow and Richard Nixon, and the breaking of the souls of suburban conscripts, cast doubt over the modernist project and stimulated strong reactions to Allied overseas ambitions. Popular conceptualizations of the War relied on interactions between various media, including images like that of Kim Phuc (Figure 2.1), the countless movies and TV shows examining the Allied experience in Indochina, and the extreme difficulties of many of the veterans returning from the War.\footnote{139}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure2.1.jpg}
\caption{Figure 2.1: Nick Ut (Huynh Cong), “Vietnam Napalm.” \textit{Associated Press}. June 8, 1972.}
\end{figure}

\footnote{138}{Interview, M6. April 5, 2005.}
\footnote{139}{“Post-war syndrome hits vets.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. December 24, 1987, p. D12.}
I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for twelve hours. When it was all over I walked up. We didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' dink body. The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like... victory. Someday this war's gonna end...\textsuperscript{140}

A lot of the war reporting was focused on images of children.\textsuperscript{141} Partially as a result of this, Western colonial identity seemed to sidestep its meticulously produced enlightenments into a pervasive depravity, militarized racism and complacency in the face of genocide, challenging the very idea of the word ‘victory’.\textsuperscript{142} As a recovery mechanism at the end of the war, many diverse factions mobilized humanitarianisms located in a North American faith and wonder at the altruistic potential of the Western subject. Ironically, the discursive transition of the Babylift from wartime propaganda to a paean for post-enlightenment Western humanitarian ‘nature’ shifted the focus from the potential these children might have had in the post-war reconstruction of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{143} Allison Martin from adoptvietnam.org memorializes the Babylift in order to promote overseas adoption, producing the project as an ideal example of the depth of the American soul and, by extension, the soul of a humanitarian whiteness as, while most of the discourse of the Babylift is couched within an American framework, these are dynamics which spread easily across national and cultural borders. Thus, with the benefit of time and distance, we can also see in Operation Babylift dynamics that reveal a specifically \textit{Canadian} identity; discursive strategies which produce notions of who ‘we’ are, who we think we are, and how we use other people and places to bolster a very specific ideal of what it means to be Canadian, white and Western. These babies’ bodies were also employed, symbolically, for alleviating some of the emotional baggage of a post-war West. Through the shocking images of violence and destruction in Vietnam, the assumed enlightenment of the West and moral superiority of the modernist project seemed under threat. The post-colonial era fractured the omniscience of the universal white male subject, challenging his ability to dominate the world. The counter-cultural revolution, with all of its rethinking of post WWII norms like the nuclear family,

\textsuperscript{140} Milius and Coppola 1979.
\textsuperscript{142} “Vietnam sign of ‘disease’.” \textit{The Victoria Daily Times}. November 15, 1969, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{143} “Robbing Vietnam’s future.” \textit{The Victoria Daily Times}. April 26, 1975, p. 4.
responsibility to defend your country’s interests and respect for authority, as well as the failure of the war itself, seemed to challenge the assumptions upon which many of the myths of the North American middle class rely. Thirty years on, the Babylift is still being memorialized as “the greatest humanitarian gesture of the last century. This is the one thing about the Vietnam War that made Americans feel relief. They were saving children.”

As a potent moment for national definition, the Babylift also continues to be celebrated in Vancouver, despite the fact that only 7 babies had been adopted by families in BC.

The children of the Babylift were portrayed as passing from a war-torn and threatening East to a peaceful and nurturing West, despite the fact that one of the first missions ended in tragedy as the plane crashed and 172 of the babies were killed.

I'LL TELL YOU what it was like. But you won't know what I'm talkin’ about, man, 'cause you weren't there. And if you weren't there, no way can you imagine what it was like. It was hell on earth. The wind doesn't blow in Vietnam, it sucks. Nam. It means always having to say you're sorry.

Just days removed from orphanage and foster homes in his tragedy-laden Vietnamese homeland, young Thien finds himself the centre of attention in a comfortable middle-class house in Victoria’s placid Fairfield district.

Through the production and policing of separate spaces of West/East and Capitalist/Communist, Western families and societies were able to indulge in a kind of discursive humanitarian fantasy (re)producing a white, Western subject with the power to enforce, and thus circumvent, national, cultural and historical boundaries.

Of all the representational moments in and around the im-patriation of these Vietnamese babies, I have chosen to focus on three discursive strategies that emerged from my discourse analysis and interviews. I examine geographies of nationhood, a discursively vital terrain specifically for a hegemonic notion of Canada in the 1970s, following the F.L.Q. (Front de Libération du Québec) crisis and strong challenges around Quebec sovereignty. I look at how citizenship was imagined through the bodies of these

---

144 Peck-Barnes 2000.
babies as boundary objects. Finally, I interrogate the identity-effects these orphans and the Babylift had upon the white, Western moral subject as it was imagined in the local media. Through these various dynamics, Operation Babylift was foundational in the imagining of Vietnamese people in relation to conversely imagined Vancouver hearts, families and regulatory regimes. This analysis thus serves as a starting-point to understanding the racialization and overcriminalization of Vietnamese peoples in Vancouver.

2.3 Babies’ Bodies in Settler Space

Many aspects of social theory are useful in conceptualizing discursive roles the babies’ bodies have played in the settler society, including the productive effects on the middle-class hegemony of the time. Butler writes about the disciplining of certain bodies into certain categories and spaces and how this relates to the formation of oppositional citizenships and identities.\textsuperscript{149} There are many times at which the babies of the Babylift, framed by the political dynamics of the situation, acted in the media as silent yet epistemologically vocal vessels for Canadian self-identity. Haraway examines the ways in which these kinds of framings occur; how postcolonial objects are taken heroically from a dangerous, ‘primitive’ situation into the purified environment of Western enlightenment and technology.\textsuperscript{150} These tropes have been explored in a wide range of media, notably in the films \textit{The Children of An Lac} and \textit{Missing in Action III}, where Chuck Norris’s character battles through the jungle, killing countless Vietnamese civilians and soldiers, in order to rescue his half-Asian son from the Communists.\textsuperscript{151} Haraway concludes that these kinds of framings produce and naturalize a patriarchal, modernist order in which the Other is pictured frozen in times and spaces peripheral to the central Western subject. These dynamics of peripherality create and naturalize the (post)colonial Other as boundary object, submissive yet potentially dangerous. This positioning and proliferation of Threat bolsters perceptions of the management capability of the Western nation-state. Playing their discursive role, the objects of the Babylift are repeatedly captured in moments of arrival, receptive of the generosity of the white moral

\textsuperscript{149} Butler 1993.  
\textsuperscript{150} Haraway 1989.  
\textsuperscript{151} Devine 1995.
subject and set in the Western purified spaces\(^{152}\) of the airport arrivals lounge and the Vancouver suburb. Ong writes about the values we place upon refugees as contrast to the ways we imagine ourselves through our neoliberal concepts of enlightened transnational management.\(^{153}\) I regard values and identities as more contrapuntal than contrasting as, even in extreme examples like the Third Reich, there are moments of negotiation on the frontiers of identity.\(^{154}\) Through this contrapuntal and dynamic positioning of identities, the generosity and capability of the Canadian is overemphasized and the Vietnamese baby, as the always-dangerous boundary object, can easily and cunningly switch, through the interlinking aspects of time, history and space, from abject to menace.\(^{155}\) It is this switch, and one of its symptoms, backlash against immigration, that I am trying to expose and examine.

2.4 Orphan Bodies as Visions of Victory in the Midst of Defeat

Operation Babylift was, in many ways, a culmination of long and sometimes laboured efforts to convince ourselves that there was something redeeming about the Allied War in Vietnam. As such, the humanitarianism and enlightened Western management of the campaign came to signify some sort of moral victory at the conclusion of Allied involvement in the war. Earlier articles had depersonalized the Vietnamese as either savage enemy or primitive/corrupt/incompetent ally. Vietnamese land and culture were also somehow accountable for the transformation of so many American teenagers into killers on foreign soil.\(^{156}\) In this category is *Vietcong Terrorist* ("You see dead Viet Cong bodies rotting on the roads, many of them bloated after days in the sun. But you can't feel pity.")\(^{157}\). During the Babylift, attention was refocussed on the generosity of the West: *Canada will take 500 children* ("A world slow to awake to the plight of Vietnam war orphans scrambled Thursday to make up for lost time...dozens of children flown out of Saigon Wednesday in an unauthorized departure.").\(^{158}\)

\(^{152}\) Melosi 2000.
\(^{153}\) Ong 2003.
\(^{154}\) Bauman 2000; Mazower 1998; Arendt 1979
\(^{155}\) Bhabha 1994.
\(^{156}\) "Whom the Gods destroy..." *The Daily Times*. December 29, 1972, p. 4.
As witnessed in the response to the 2004 tsunami, media coverage increases the proximity of the disaster and much of the discourse is occupied by the dynamics of the response. Thus, part of the focus is diverted from the disaster itself onto its significance for the generosity, prosperity and management potential of Western humanitarianism. My interview respondents almost all compared support for the Babylift and Private Sponsorship Program to the response after the recent tsunami in Southeast Asia.

You see it’s foreign for a society – you see that with the tsunami – they say the most money is collected in the first week, it’ll be in the newsmedia for a month, then after 3 months you won’t hear anything, and that is exactly what has happened. So for somebody to continue on with something is very unlikely. So for somebody to sponsor that many people over a 15 year period – we’re still busy with them...

Our charity events have defined us ever since we came here, as a community. Like the tsunami. They draw us together.

It was like with the tsunami. World Vision had lots of money and put lots of ads... Terrible stories. It was not unlike the tsunami. Not as unbiased. We needed to know a way to help. This seemed direct, positive.

Similarly, during the Babylift, the headlines quickly shifted from the disaster itself to heralding the exceptional contributions of Canadians and people from British Columbia. Placing these children proximate isolated and emphasized their discursive relationships with various scales of Canadian identity. This proximity, with the exaggeration of the significance of the event, provides a proliferative body requiring the surveillance, management and assurance of the West. As this proliferation requires superstition, on the one hand, and an inflated sense of expertise, on the other, very


\[162\] Interview, prolific sponsor (M7) April 3, 2005.

\[163\] Interview, M4. March 17, 2005.


quickly we are able to amplify our distance from the war while doubt begins to emerge over the quality of immigrants from Vietnam.\footnote{Adelman 1982. “Ottawa gets headache over shady immigrants: Do we really want to let these kinds of criminals into our country?” \textit{Victoria Colonist.} May 29, 1975, p. 1.}

Homi Bhabha explores the way we use ‘mimicry’ to create, visualize, surveille and manage the identity of the (post)colonial Other. Mimicry allows us to place ourselves in direct proximity to the other, as pictured by the orphan in the arms of President Ford, showing at once the commonality and difference between the ‘in’ and the ‘out’ groups. We picture the baby as similarly human but also inherently less than the central white subject of the President of the US. President Ford is taking advantage of the opportunity to make himself look humanitarian, looking vulnerably forward, while we know the baby is gone as soon as the shutter is dropped. Ford heads to Congress to try and encourage them to re-fund the war while the baby is forever imagined and memorialized in the iconic photograph.

![Figure 2.2: Vietnamese baby in the arms of President Gerald Ford, from the website for the KCTS program Precious Cargo.](Image)

Following Lacan, Bhabha writes that “...the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite)...fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence.”\footnote{Bhabha 1994, p. 86.} Thus, though within modernity the colonial object is considered as undoubtedly human, their humanity is somehow less, different, and is positioned in relation to the Western subject as the globalized norm. In this paradox, incursion and
management are justified while the assertion of difference discursively protects against the Other; Almost Me is never, and can never be, Me. Figure 2.3 (Carry on Canada) was produced in 1969 and placed in a number of BC newspapers by local unions and their representatives. They urge their readers to protest against the supplying of materiel for the war in Vietnam through an identification with, but opposition to, the “odd Oriental.” They also have mothers, brothers and sisters but they are odd, emerging as they do from the “gangrened foot of Asia.” Through the projection of a weak, diseased, dark “oriental”, both in the illustration and the text, the Canadian subject here is called to remember his obligations as white, strong and Christian.

The colonial subject thus becomes “an object of regulatory power, as the subject of racial, cultural, national representation, [revaluing] the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history.”\textsuperscript{168} Thus, through the use of discursive mimicry – placing the boundary object in direct relation to the central, seemingly fixed ontological norm – the Other is pictured, performed and written as an abject/object of control emerging from the core of humanitarian whiteness and fluctuating on its periphery. As one respondent says about the subsequent private sponsorship:

In most groups it did end up being the job of one or two people, not the whole group. Often, in my experience, it was the women as well. They were the ones that took the mother and kids to school, took them shopping. They weren’t working. So, for us at least, the large commitment was pretty brief. And it was the ones who were, well, directly involved, who started to really understand. I think some of the others felt bitter. They didn’t get it – why we were so committed.\textsuperscript{169}

Similarly, the ‘hundreds’ who wanted to participate in the Babylift did not actually end up adopting. However, they had been implicated in the discourse of the Babylift, as every citizen is involved in the voluntary relaxing of sovereignty and the identity effects of globalized charity.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{168} Bhabha 1994, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{169} Interview, prolific sponsor (M6). April 3, 2005.
\textsuperscript{170} Davergne 2005.
CARRY ON CANADA

Somewhere at the gangrenous foot of Asia, this Christmas the children are falling like sparrows, like sparrows.

Of course, they are Oriental children, with odd Oriental ways:
their mothers love them,
their brothers punch and protect them,
their older sisters belt and bathe them,
their little playmates hug and play with them,
their little playmates hug and die with them.

In Vietnam:

Time.u.

Still, God rest us merry Canadians.
"Made in Canada" is a proud boast.
Put it, for profit.
on guns and planes and parts.
Put at, in fact.
on Christmas death.

For children.
In the dust.

We are by members of parliament, or the prime minister's effort, protesting Canada's continued supply of war material to the Allied forces in Vietnam.

INSETTED BY:

Vancouver & District Labour Council
B.C. Federation of Labour
and three organizations and individuals:

Marine Workers' Union Local 478
Caggers Union Local 400
Transport and General Workers' Union Local 400

CARRIED ON VANDERBILT WARD OF ALBANY

Robert看你 • Murray N. Bean • George Nelson • Stewart Henley • C. J. Heeds • Gordon Muncy • Opal Shilling

“The nation’s ‘coming into being’ as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity, emphasizes this instability of... the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life.”\(^\text{171}\) This instability in the way we read the world, according to Bhabha, means that ‘mimicry’, a closeness that is barely different, repeatedly turns to ‘menace’, which is almost but not quite total difference. For an example of this, we can see the shift between Figure 2.2, where President Ford is the nurturing figure, central to the experience of the anonymous Vietnamese orphan’s entry into Western space, and Figure 2.4, where the President’s centrality seems threatened by an equally anonymous yet potentially menacing Vietnamese woman, disturbing the moment of calm, compassionate reflection.

Figure 2.4. Patrick Mondout (1975) C5 Crashes In Vietnam During Operation Babylift, from Schechter 2001.

Thus, we can see the ways in which ‘mimicry’, as employed in *Carry on Canada*, can easily shift to ‘menace’, as the hegemony requires a ‘shoring up’ in the face of challenges at the management of the Other. At the time when *Carry on Canada* was produced, in 1969, there was danger in expressing any kind of support for the people of Vietnam, particularly as this was seen as subversive to the interests of the nation and its part in the Allied Forces.\(^\text{172}\) Thus, the Unions mounted their criticism from a position where the Other could be used as evidence of threatened humanity, while being careful to note their difference from a position within the Western hegemony. In this way, discursive mimicry strategically acts to produce and naturalize a raced, classed Other,

\(^{171}\) Bhabha 1990, pp. 1-3.

\(^{172}\) “Being ‘good’ Canadians galls increasing number.” *The Victoria Colonist.* December 16, 1972, p. 19.
floundering in the dust of poverty and war, while simultaneously constructing the central subject of the pure Canadian. If the colonial object is too proximal, materially or semiotically, the moral threat it represents is much greater. The babies, similar yet different to our own, were young enough they could be assumed ‘unmarked’ by culture and war and thus were available for loading with meanings reflected onto their saviours. Conversely, the Babylift’s detractors focused on the menace of the proximal object of the baby, also productive of the kinds of prejudices and racializations that keep the Other in its place. As mimic and menace are intrinsic to one another, any threat the babies could be seen to represent served to add value to the Canadian, as central subject in the commentary around the Babylift, while assuming through historical, cultural and racist contexts the potential threat of the Other.

In most immigration literature, there is silence or denial around Canada as a settler society, depicting demographic shifts across a terrain limited by dynamics such as geography, class and race, but not ‘indigeneity’. Operation Babylift can be seen as yet another episode in the production of white settlers as the legitimate stewards of North American space. We need to ‘unmap’ this colonialist assumption of Canada as a modern nation-state in order to reveal some of the ways in which this patriarchal, Eurocentric order is produced and naturalized over space. Following Foucault’s determination that the creation of space is also the production of included and excluded bodies, Razack writes, “The land, once empty and later populated by hardy settlers, is now besieged and crowded by Third World refugees and migrants who are drawn to Canada by the legendary niceness of European Canadians, their well-known commitment to democracy, and the bounty of their land.” In order to challenge this and other discourses of marginalization in the settler nation, Razack suggests we begin by unmapping “…what is being imagined or projected onto specific spaces and…bodies.”

In the images created by the Babylift, the press projected a moral degradation of ‘Communist Vietnam’, producing the (fundamentally baseless) assumption that, if they

174 Also Lefebvre 1991.
175 Razack 2002, p. 4.
were to remain in Vietnam, these babies would all be slaughtered.\textsuperscript{177} By ‘rescuing’ the children from this projected threat, governments, corporations, NGOs, politicians and private citizens marked North America and capitalism as safe, permanent, rational space while the discourses in the media reified the assumption of humanitarian whiteness and all it was chosen to signify.\textsuperscript{178} These babies, despite the protests of the Vietnamese peoples and governments who were opposed to the Babylift, were taken from the Western discursive terrain of ‘Communist Vietnam’ into what was constructed as the most advantageous paradigm for the nurturing of children: the nuclear family. These tropes relate directly to conceptions of political, social and spiritual difference constantly produced about the Other from the slippery subject position of the settler state.

In Figure 2.5, six Vietnamese children who were brought out from Saigon on an ‘unauthorized flight’ rest on the laps of their new, white, nurse mothers on a big American couch. This picture and others like it produced a huge surge of interest in the adoption of Vietnamese babies as an imagined ideal homespace interaction between internationalist whiteness and its Other.\textsuperscript{179} In this point of contact, the proximity between humanitarian nurse/mother and victimized Vietnamese baby, everything is in place (yet also out of place). Here is proliferation, prosperity, solidity; home life managed by white nurses trained and supported by the state, possessed of a selfless benevolence that (selectively, and perhaps foolishly) crosses cultural/racial boundaries, and bankrolled by the absent white husband. This construction calls to bucolic, hegemonic notions of a bounded whiteness and is thus projected against the devastation, backwardness, fracturing, confusion and shame of a Vietnam in a constant struggle to defend any kind of sovereignty. The peace and reassurance that is produced in this picture denies and devalues the violences involved in the establishment and reassertion of the colonial paradigm that is both supporting and supported by the Babylift, including the injustices of the war and the denial of North America as contested space.


\textsuperscript{179} Klein 2003, as quoted above.
Canada will take 500 children

Doors open to war orphans

Nurses Myrna Fisher, left, and cousin Mary Fisher welcome Vietnamese orphans into their Sacramento home.

Province News Services

A world slow to awake to the plight of Vietnam war orphans scrambled Thursday to make up for lost time.

As dozens of children fanned out of Saigon Wednesday in an unauthorized departure left San Francisco on Thursday for new homes across the U.S. 

- President Ford announced he had authorized $2 million to fly about 2,000 more homeless youngsters to the U.S. in the next few days, and the first giant C-5A cargo aircraft left the Philippines for Saigon to begin the program.

- Federal and provincial governments and private groups in Canada moved to arrange emergency evacuation and adoption of 500 war orphans by chartering an aircraft expected to leave for Saigon Friday. Two flights, each for about 250 children, are planned and 25 Cambodian children also will be brought to Canada.

- B.C.'s Human Resources Minister Norm Levis said he is complying with a request from federal Immigration Minister Hubert Anderas that provincial governments make available facilities for resettlement of the children. But it was unclear whether any of the Southeast Asian children would get to B.C.

- Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia also said they will assist resettling children, and various departments set up an emergency desk to coordinate information on Canadian families waiting to adopt them and the number of children available.

Groups in Australia, Britain and West Germany also are making plans to fly orphans to safety and new homes.

Andras said Canadians who want to adopt orphans should deal with provincial authorities.

Finally, Figure 2.6 shows an assumed orphan, identity card around his neck, staring through a glass door that is regulated by a Canadian customs official. This picture illustrates the paradox of the 'almost-us' Vietnamese orphan for whom a simple pane of glass and the surveillance of a government representative indicate that he is so obviously 'not-us'. The spatial/spiritual boundary of the policed "doorway to future" emphasizes not only the distance between 'his world' and 'ours' (which he is about to enter with the help of crutches, white family, enlightened society and the state) but also produces a progression in becoming a member of an enlightened, modern, liberal state. Like us, he has arms and legs and the potential futures of a small person (having had a thorough health screening), but he is physically and symbolically marked by the poverty and struggle in Vietnam as well as his orientalized culture. He requires crutches to walk on his apparently bare feet and he needs the supervision of a stranger in uniform who represents the state. All this makes him look old for his years; crumbling under the
Vietnamese orphan found doorway to future at airport Sunday.

Figure 2.6: *Vancouver Province*. April 4, 1975, p. 1.
weight of his culture and history yet looking wisely forward to his graduation through direct adoption from a racialized/classed past into a superior paradigm of the white, nuclear family in a multicultural, capitalist state. His mobile body discredits Communism and the struggle for Vietnam, returning value to the organs of the state: family, colony, capitalism and white supremacy.

2.5 (Re)covering the Body of Whiteness from Imperialist Misadventure

North America is “an island of material prosperity unmatched on this planet. It is easy for us to relax our moral standards and...to become insulated against the horrors that we tolerate. We need to lose some face, and then maybe we will find a new face – one that resembles man and not the devil.” John Taylor – a Unitarian Minister.

After one attack, a wide-eyed and mangled herd of South Vietnamese were rounded up and shot.

These passages represent two sides of war opposition at the early stages of the Allied escalation in Vietnam. The first employs a projection of Western space and identity as more material than moral, while the second is a report from a Canadian soldier explaining strategies of dehumanizing the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese people are constructed as wild and primitive, sharing more with a herd of animals than with the individualistic Western subject. North Americans, on the other hand, are absent here. They are assumed to be part of a moral body – one that is fracturing and falling on bad times but which will one day be able to return to a stage of ethical enlightenment which is not shared by any peoples outside the West. We “tolerate” horrors, rather than perpetuating them, thus asserting that we have a “face” that can be lost and easily regained. This is the universal, centrally visualized white face of the enlightened West – the land of absolution through confession – a body assumed previously moral that required reconstruction at the end of the war and following the oil shocks of the early 1970s. Both events had shaken the foundations of the North American way of life, questioning its cultural superiority and placing its continued prosperity in doubt.

182 Foucault 1990.
Newspaper reports critical of the war were hauntingly similar to those we have read during the most recent war in Iraq. “It’s wrong for the U.S. to police the world"\(^{183}\) reads one article (1968!). In a letter to the editor entitled “Making Blood Money out of Vietnam War,” the author writes:

> The view of Communism as an evil philosophy is a distorting prism... Looking through the prism, we see Viet Cong who cut the throats of village chiefs as savage murderers but American flyers who incinerate unseen women and children with napalm as valiant fighters for freedom...and we, with hundreds of thousands of men, are resisting foreign invasion.\(^{184}\)

Thus, the words used to separate ally from enemy are both creative of and referential to generalized differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Several letters and articles examine the many financial and discursive motives in continuing the war in Indochina. “Greed drives Viet war” states that “The sole motive for continuing the Vietnam war is to fuel the military-industrial complex.”\(^{185}\) Yet, despite being deeply compromised during the war, the body of whiteness was continually constructed as humanitarian and progressive.\(^{186}\) Operation Babylift had a significant role to play in this discursive positioning.

As Allison Martin writes, “the children were airlifted to countries where many people preferred to forget the traumas of the Vietnam War.”\(^ {187}\) She ironically regards these children’s bodies in the U.S. as “traumatic reminders of a best-forgotten chapter” in American overseas involvement – forever carrying the memory of ill-adventure in Indochina. Thus, in an elaborate amplification of the intricacies of American humanitarianism, Martin finds the people kind enough to take these children into their homes doubly charitable as they will then find it more difficult to forget the war because of the symbolic significance of the bodies which now share their homespaces. Thus, she creates a heroic role for the people she wants to attract, through her website, to adopting children from Vietnam. Through the B.C. papers from the late 1960s up to and following the Babylift, the babies themselves, once they have entered households across the province, are similarly not only signifiers of war but also discursively nourishing to the humanitarianism of the recovered and skillfully marketed white moral body.

---


\(^{185}\) “U.S. Dishonest.” *Victoria Times:* January 26, 1972: 8

\(^{186}\) “Being ‘good’ Canadians galls increasing number.” *The Victoria Colonist.* December 16, 1972, p. 19.

\(^{187}\) Martin 2000.
Several years preceding the airlift, a group of academics from UBC published a petition entitled “Canada’s Responsibility in Vietnam”. Again, this was a difficult time to be asking support for Vietnamese people in the North, thus this humanitarian gesture was couched in a construction of the Canadian as traditionally generous. “We believe these actions are called for by Canada’s history and traditions as a humanitarian country and people.”188 This production of a humanitarian history and tradition denies the violences of the settler society and places the Other, again, as eternally receptive and abject. The Canadian creates himself at the centre of a pure, recovered white land from which enlightenment stems towards the greater good of mankind. This mobilization of ‘Canadian humanitarian tradition’ continues to political statements from the later ‘boat people’ crisis, becoming a mundane yet always-mentioned feature of future internationalist projects:

Premier Bill Bennett told the Vancouver Sun…"Our country has always been receptive and will respond positively to the refugees, despite existing unemployment problems. We have always welcomed people, particularly in times of adversity."189

In my view, the secret of Canada’s success is that this is a very pragmatic country…We have clear values, about which we can be copiously preachy, and our record at respecting what we say we believe is more consistent than that of most nations.190

At the meeting, Mr. Atkey reminded his cabinet colleagues of those "boat people" of 1939. "Do we want to be known as the government that said no?" he demanded. "Or as the government that saved the day?"191

The mysterious Vietnamese, framed by the TV in the purified technological realm of the North American living room, possesses an almost primal will for nation/land which surpasses all other needs and considerations, and which has resulted in the absolute desecration of that land through privations economic, corporeal and moral. These orphans and, later, the Vietnamese refugees, gave up this land for which so many had fought and died. Their presences in Canadian space, placed by the superior values that

189 “B.C. bill opens way to more refugees.” The Vancouver Sun. July 18: A16
190 (Ex-Prime Minister Joe) Clark 1984, p. 287.
create and imagine this land, thus enforce notions about Canadian exceptionalism within the changing paradigms at the close of the war in Vietnam.

Other columns apparently supportive of the Vietnamese mobilize a distinctly North American concept of prosperity contrasted with a place where “Ninety per cent of the Vietnamese are underprivileged, half-starved coolies. They have always had nothing in life and they continue to have nothing.” As part of a long heritage of bourgeois constructions justifying the sidestepping of sovereignty for colonialist incursion and management, the Editor of *The Province* places Western prosperity against the depravity of Vietnam to conclude that “[Coalition forces] should take over completely.” By the time of the Babylift, these contrasts had been repeatedly emphasized in the media, producing the mobile bodies of the orphans as an escape from a geography of privation and degradation, conversely asserting a prosperity and moral fortitude of the West. Images of degraded youth and destroyed land are commonly employed to emphasize distinctions between a prosperous, healthy, hegemonically white West in relation to a poverty-stricken, diseased, Dark East. While these dynamics are certainly present in deeply flawed imaginings of Vietnamese land and bodies, as opposed to Razack, I do not regard these constructions as merely symptomatic of a deeply-entrenched racism that undermines every possible gesture of cross-cultural humanitarianism. While much good comes from the humanitarian gesture, images of cross-cultural families helped address the identity crises of the West at the end of the war.

How can we define our nation as a nonimperial world power in the age of decolonization? This was also a problem of collective subject formation: How can we transform our sense of ourselves from narrow provincials into cosmopolitan citizens of the world who possess a global consciousness?

Not necessarily a conscious attempt to marginalize, restating the humanitarianism and enlightened ideals upon which white Canada is supposedly founded works towards recovering a sense of land and identity from the shame and shock of war. It also potentially produces, describes and delimits a collective identity for the objects of a very

---

193 Engels 1892.
specific kind of cosmopolitan consciousness. Even genocidal regimes, such as those in Indonesia and the Philippines at the time, were preferable in their ‘knowability’ as Capitalist allies in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese Communism was considered “unruly”, while liberal North America supported the “much-preferable discipline of regimes such as those in Indonesia and the Philippines.” Humanitarian, liberal, Christian whiteness preferred a visible and penetrable, manageable land where profits were assured under sympathetic regimes.

Consensus was achieved in the Provincial legislature through a non-partisan decision to allocate a substantial aid package to “the children of Vietnam”, crossing political and social boundaries to exercise the Western humanitarian ethos on the malleable bodies of wartime orphans. “Whatever his politics, he’s a humanitarian,” stated a Victoria columnist about then Premier David Barrett, under whom the decision was made. Thus, erasing all the transnational factionalism of the war, the province was discursively united under a call to an inherent, universal and white notion of charity and prosperity. In the end, however, these funds were never dispersed, highlighting this move as more a strategic symbolism than an actual will to support the Vietnamese people.

This conception of charity united ‘Victorians’, ‘British Columbians’ and ‘Canadians’ on many scales, from the family to the state. Headlines like “Canada opens her arms to war orphans” and “It’s all heart and handout for refugees” recovered the body of humanitarian, universal whiteness, which flowed from the realms of ‘race’ and ‘nation’ right down to the bodies of the children. Articles portraying the Vietnamese people as “very backward and very primitive” were juxtaposed against “B.C. Hearts” that were “open to war orphans. There is a lot of generosity here.” Through this discourse, being the receivers of Western munificence sets the Vietnamese symbolically apart thus

201 “Canada opens her arms to war orphans.” The Vancouver Sun, Apr 7, 1975, p. 1.
limiting the extent to which they can be brought in. In the proximity between discourses of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the objects of our charity become projections of how we believe ourselves to be set apart in this world. Placing orphans and refugees, with all of the historical, geographical and cultural contexts we choose them to signify, as closely proximate boundary objects, we add value through them to the social body of the white Canadian.

The discursive strategies of the Babylift, as mobilized on various scales from the family to the state, were criticized by certain representatives of Canadian NGOs at the time. Naomi Bronstein of Friends of Children Everywhere said:

It’s like getting meat in a meat market. This province wants 200 babies. This province wants 300. Australia is trying to outdo the U.S., the U.S. is trying to outdo somebody else. The feeling in Saigon, and this is mine also, is that the children are just being used for a big show.”

One of my interview respondents linked this kind of humanitarian frenzy with the later boat people crisis, likening it to a “cattle market.” Flora MacDonald, the Minister of External Affairs who advocated increased admissions of Vietnamese refugees, in 1979, called it “a chance for Canada to set a bold example, to shame other countries into action.” My interviewees used the very public race to support victims of the 2005 tsunami as evidence that these kinds of dynamics have continued in gestures of cross-border humanitarianism.

This show is kind of like a necessary evil. People get on the bandwagon – everyone’s doing it so you can’t be left behind. But then, a couple weeks later, nobody cares and you just use it to feel good about yourself. But if they didn’t have that, there’d be no awareness, would there?

In the case of the Babylift, during the frenzy, the depersonalized bodies of Vietnamese babies were fetishized as objects of charity, adding value not only to the individual making a selfless commitment but to collective identities that compete within white Western capitalism to be considered humanitarian.

---

204 “Orphans treated ‘like meat in a meat market’.” The Province. April 7, 1975: 27.
Placed as a boundary object to such a generous conceptualization of the Western subject, the Vietnamese body is destined to be related as a threatening and inferior Other. Support workers and commentators realized this could become a challenge to success for the orphans who came to this country.

A warm heart is not necessarily a guarantee of tolerance and flexibility, and these qualities will be vital. The temporary idealists who are appalled by the Vietnam bloodbath and want to show that not all Westerners have hard hearts, should be carefully screened.209

My sponsors got their tax receipt and kicked me out. They said it was because I stole an apple from the bowl. I was terrified – I didn’t know anything about this place or English and I was way out in Coquitlam. I’d only been here, well, less than a week. But I think they got me in their basement and realized they were terrified of me. I couldn’t explain who I was. I still visit them to say thank you. Sometimes you don’t realize what things will actually look like - it seems like a good idea in theory.210

The motives behind the orphan-snatch are at best sentimental and at worst egotistical and selfish… It can be said that some of the wildest prejudices of the Western countries are involved. No doubt the men ignoring airport commands as they take Vietnamese children out of their homeland believe they are “saving them from Communism”. No one has ever heard, however, that any of the Communist countries abuse or mistreat orphans… Anyone who listens to some of the broadcasts about this operation can legitimately wonder, however, how far sentimentality and anti-Communist prejudices are the only motives… Neither the US nor Canada are such models of racial tolerance that anyone can safely predict that discrimination will not replace today’s surge of feeling.211

As highlighted by this letter, the assumption of a hegemonic laudability for both Operation Babylift and the Private Sponsorship Programme can be productive of discrimination, and the proximity of the objects of our charity can quickly transform into a focus for their failings.

2.6 Re-stating the Nation State

Some years ago, a book of photographs was published in New York. The caption on the photograph of a Negro child was this: “Who will speak for me?” I would like to ask the governments in Canada and its provinces the same question in regard to the Vietnamese orphans. Who will speak for them? I am not questioning the sincerity of the many who want to help these children. My

210 Interview, M3. April 2, 2005.
feeling is that the children should, nay must, have the protection and supervision of some government agency, at least until the children’s happiness is assured. To do less is to continue the haphazard care of these helpless children.\textsuperscript{212}

“Winning in South Viet Nam is now regarded by the Americans as a matter of national prestige,” said Chairman W.T. Lawson of the Victoria Citizens’ Committee to End the War in Viet Nam. “The crucifixion of Viet Nam should stop. It is double-murder – of the Vietnamese and the soul of the United States.”\textsuperscript{213}

Both of these passages reflect the high moral tone adopted in debates over both the Allied War in Vietnam and the Babylift. They also clearly illustrate the discursive scale shift from the body to the nation, as the organs of the Canadian state are called to listen for the babies’ voices while the war speaks of the murder of the American soul. Countless articles refer to BC or Canada as one ‘body’, reaching out to ‘help’ the ‘children of Viet Nam’ and other children orphaned by the unjustness of war: “You should remember that we were told to expect 1,700 Bangladesh kids a few years ago and it just didn’t come to pass. \textit{We got maybe a dozen},” said a spokesperson from the Human Resources Department of the BC legislature, referring to the only previous national program to adopt overseas children. As part of the mobilization of Canadian human resources agents, government representatives were sent to Saigon to “intercept the loads [of children] carried by boat from further up the coast. \textit{We want to ensure this is done our way}. Even so, several officials were expressing doubts Thursday about whether the offers would be taken up by either the Cambodian or South Vietnam governments.” These doubts were raised because the South Vietnamese government was “reluctant to allow children to leave their countries – and one can appreciate that. They feel their children are important to them as a nation.”\textsuperscript{214} Both governments in Vietnam realized the threat and incursion the Babylift represented. The South balked against the removal of Vietnamese children while “the Viet Cong charged that the American evacuation policy [was] “a maneuver” to allow the Ford administration to “pursue its interference” in the country”\textsuperscript{215}. The potential significance of these children to the rebuilding of Vietnam was often noted in the BC papers at the time. For Canada, participation in Operation Babylift

\textsuperscript{213} “Fear of red irrational, says minister.” \textit{Victoria Colonist.} Nov. 28, 1965, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{214} “BC mobilizes to receive children.” \textit{The Province.} April 4, 1975, p. 1. (My emphasis).
\textsuperscript{215} “‘Emotion explosion’ worrying officials.” \textit{Victoria Colonist.} April 5, 1975, p. 1.
placed our management capability in dramatic contrast to the situation in Vietnam, rebuilt confidence in a Canadian identity, and restated the Canadian nation-state through distancing itself from the ‘moral pollution’ that threatened to contaminate us from across the border.\textsuperscript{216}

These priorities were woven through the various orientalisms that dominated the press at the time, as noted in the following letter:

The semantics of this war are hilarious. When guerrillas throw a bomb it’s an act of terrorism, when we drop a whole load it’s a mission – nice, clean, and somehow right.” But Mrs. Duckies is not concerned only with what the war is doing to the Vietnamese, she is concerned with what it is doing to Americans. “We talk about ecology and pollution. We must concern ourselves with moral pollution as well. I’m afraid the U.S. will just crumble if we don’t get out of Vietnam. It might just collapse into chaos.”\textsuperscript{217}

The tone of Mrs. Duckies’ letter points to the large anti-war movement, which had caused and been reflective of significant fissures in subjectivities at all scales. These semantic dualisms so ably explored by “Mrs. Duckies”, and seen more recently in discourses surrounding the ‘War on Terrorism’, functioned to separate the geographies of ‘home’ and ‘warzone’, ‘management’ and ‘subversion’. Creating the Vietnamese as guerrillas, from body to the nation, delegitimizes them as a people and way of life to be feared, maligne and obliterated for the assumed good of the modern nation-state and thus humanity itself. Before the end of the war, the concept of ‘helping’ the Vietnamese was rarely and, as analyzed earlier in this chapter, very tentatively broached. The focus of the conflict had been more about the fight against Communism and the domino effect than about management and assistance.\textsuperscript{218} With the impending takeover/liberation of Saigon, however, taking babies from the delegitimized East and welcoming them into the highly-managed, media- and state-surveilled homespaces and institutions of the West was a publicity skirmish undermining the Vietnamese nation and transferring some of its remaining value to Western states.\textsuperscript{219} Trying to compete with the Americans over the number of adopted babies, while operating within their discursive framework, was a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} These ideas of pollution and contamination are further examined in Chapter 4, with reference to the work of Mary Douglas.
\item \textsuperscript{217} “War refugees now relabeled as ‘tourists’.” \textit{Victoria Times}. March 3, 1970, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{218} McNamara 1995.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
\end{itemize}
paradoxical attempt to distance ourselves from the post-war US while simultaneously valuing a common humanitarian construction of the Western nation-state.

In order to rationalize the violation of Vietnamese sovereignty through the wholesale impatriation of small children, the state itself had to be rationalized. One of the most effective discursive moves was to discredit the management potential of wartorn Vietnam. ""It is definitely a country where only the fittest survive," Anne [a Canadian nurse recently returned from Vietnam] mused. "Many of these children just fade away because they don’t receive enough attention."" While many Vietnamese people had been enduring extraordinary hardship, and this nurse was actually writing against the Babylift, this kind of discourse gains quick credence written across and therefore producing the ontological certainty of the Western state’s role in regimes of nurturing and support. Many critics were appalled at the blanket assumption that Communism was harmful for children. However, while many suggest that Communism might also be a suitable model for domestic reproduction, these authors mostly depend on discourses of cultural appropriacy to dispute the legitimacy of the Babylift. "Setting aside political labels, there is plenty of indication that countries such as North Vietnam and North Korea have a great deal of concern for children – just as we do....Their best interests are best provided for in their own culture and traditions." ""The conflict to stop communism could become a war of white against color," said Rev. Robert U.J.D. Morris of Victoria’s First United Church, "a war we would inevitably lose. If we would learn to live with communist nations, in the long run these nations would develop patterns such as arrived at by us." Canada, in the early days of official Multiculturalism, is conversely portrayed as progressive and enlightened, inherently capable of managing diverse populations and interests. "These children will undoubtedly be far better off in the racially mixed societies of North America than they would be in the race-conscious world of Vietnam, where they would have to contend with discrimination all their lives."

This passage specifically refers to the ‘children of the dust’ – the ‘mixed’ offspring of American soldiers with Vietnamese women who were almost exclusively adopted to the

220 "Affluence shocks nurse from VN." *The Vancouver Sun.* April 23, 1975, p. 39.
222 "Fear of red irrational, says minister." *Victoria Colonist.* Nov. 28, 1965, p. 17. The non-capitalization of Communism and Communist is the way they were printed in the newspaper.
US. However, the idea of Western tolerance and enlightened biopower produced in this and in other articles relates directly to the discursive productions of the Western nation-state as superior in its capacity to manage diversity. This valuation of the Western state is naturalized by the subsequent presence of Vietnamese orphans and other refugees, especially when the complexities of ethnicity, culture and tradition are mobilized.\textsuperscript{225}

In discursive reversal of the way military metaphor is used to describe illness,\textsuperscript{226} illness is mobilized in the press to produce difference between the orphans and the purified body of the Capitalist state, threatened but capable of managing the danger to public health that these babies represent. An anonymous caller criticized a supporter of the Babylift during a Vancouver radio show by saying “Communism is a disease and you’ve obviously caught it.”\textsuperscript{227} Cresswell argues that “truth is relative to understandings grounded in our experiences as cultural and social beings and constructed through metaphor.”\textsuperscript{228} Focusing public attention on the health problems of the babies produces the capable scientific management and healthy body of the ‘sanitary’ West as opposed to the chaos and ‘traditional backwardness’ of the body and state of the war-torn East.\textsuperscript{229}

Doctors said all the children suffered from malnutrition. Two or three have heart ailments, one child has non-infectious meningitis, one has an infection of the bloodstream, and another was suffering from seizures. Two children are listed in serious condition. It took more than three hours to unload the crowded aircraft after it landed because of precautions ordered by public health officials.\textsuperscript{230}

The boundary object, on arrival in Canadian space (which is purified in direct proximity to its other) presents a challenge to the representatives of the state but, through solid management and disciplining into categories of abjectness, the risk is Stated. The various illnesses of the orphans are placed in public view by the very mechanisms used by the State to reduce the threat.

\textsuperscript{224} Martin 2000.
\textsuperscript{225} Following Klein 2003.
\textsuperscript{226} Sontag 1990.
\textsuperscript{228} Cresswell 1997, p. 333.
\textsuperscript{229} Melosi 2000.
Health of boat people worries their sponsor

Aldergrove housewife Suzanne LaRose is worried about the health of her baby. She and 2,000 refugees for more than a month and plan a new program to try to minimize the health of Vietnam refugees. The families share the same kitchen. The Tran family's health

Figure 2.7: David Clark, photo. "Health of boat people worries their sponsor." The Province. Nov. 16, 1979, p. A4.

Figure 2.7, from the later paradigm of Private Sponsorship, reinforces the notion of the Vietnamese body as threat, placed in awkward proximity within the family home, while simultaneously representing a plea from sponsors to the State for assurances of safety from the potentially diseased Other. Whereas the juridical represents a stability and viability of disciplining through hegemonic power, "clinical categories are relatively unstable and change rapidly." Thus, the threat of disease represents a dynamic risk in managing the boundary object; one capable of very quickly inflating through the world of metaphor and fear of the Other to signify risk to Public Health. The BC government, in a move that displays the capability of public health to manage these apparent downsides of the Babylift, reassured citizens that "BC is ready and willing to care for them."232

---

231 Foucault in Chambon 1999, p. 84.
Considering that only 7 orphans were actually settled in British Columbia, they represented a threat that was far more discursive than viral or corporeal. Inflation of this threat thus produced the orphans' bodies as evidence of a Canadian ability to identify, contain and manage the proximity of dehumanized bodies foreign to the central, white body of the nation. This willingness to manage the discursively inflated difficulties facing the orphans and their sponsors was attributed to, thus productive of, the "natural sense of charity of Canadians." The BC government, as an end to a conflict where so many values had been questioned and corruptions revealed, used the mechanisms of state to "prove to the world that humanitarianism is still flourishing." This production of the state as instrumental in a naturalized construction of Canadian humanitarianism created, in itself, an impression of a strong state and capacity for social welfare in the face of doubt and worry at the end of a failed war of Western incursion.

Finally, as examined above, a primary foil for Canadian identity is how we imagine ourselves in relation to the U.S. Throughout the coverage of the war and the Babylift, commentaries dwelt in the ambivalence zone of supporting at least nominally the protection/promotion of Western interests while being critical enough to set Canada apart from the Americans. Mostly, this position concealed the complicity of the Canadian government and public and encouraged the complacency of Canadians during the war. This geography was increasingly exposed as the war continued, with veterans describing the 'shameful' involvement of the Canadian government and industry in Vietnam. Meanwhile, in the streets of Saigon, "Canadians, generally, are equated with the Americans," said Wilf Allan, then Director of YMCA Vietnam. "I'd walk down the street and the Vietnamese would speak to me and be nice because they had something to sell me – a girl, a drink. But they’d make comments after and I can understand why because they thought I was American." There are few better ways of re-stating the Canadian nation-state and identity than by discursively contrasting it with the US, especially at such a sensitive time and in such a loaded context. As well, a North American identity is produced against an amoral, impoverished, dehumanized,

233 "Indo-China war orphans 'would do better in a familiar culture'." Vancouver Sun. April 7, 1975, p. 33.
236 Interview, April 5, 2005.
generalized Other who has been pictured in the streets of Saigon in a media heritage stretching from “The Quiet American” to “Miss Saigon”. The behaviour of the Vietnamese hustlers, however, also reflects poorly, in this article, on the American as an essential part of the situation that has produced the street scene of wartime Saigon. This ambivalence in the definition of the Canadian nation-state as same but different from the Americans is expressed in the moral superiority Canadians produced for themselves while at least discursively tagging along with President Ford’s Operation Babylift.

2.7 Repatriating the Patria

Mr. Sandperl (a Ghandian scholar) said wars, such as the one going on in Vietnam, are not incidental to history. “They are part of a paternalistic society. They are part and parcel of the nation state.”

Many people wanting to adopt Vietnamese children have no notion of the implications of the cultural gap dividing North America and Southeast Asia. A Vietnamese child, who may already be old enough to be set in the local personality mold, cannot be treated in the same way as a North American child. His demands on the family and on society as a whole are quite different.

The Babylift was a challenge for the nuclear family and it was presented as proof of the strength and capability of the paternalistic framework of Western society. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Western model of family and home had come under significant strain during the questionings of the countercultural revolution. As part of a greater attempt to attract funds for the continuation of the war, the visibility of the babies offered to discursively ‘repatriate’ the homespaces of BC as a place of capable management, domestic reproduction and cosmopolitan progressiveness. In the newspapers during the Babylift, the ‘cultural gap’ and ‘demands on family’ were consistently inflated, especially since almost all of the 7 babies who were adopted in BC were less than one year old and there was no indication that these children would cause any more hardship than a ‘Canadian’ child would. These discourses created the idea of the Vietnamese orphan as a significant challenge to the capabilities of the Western family. Again, surviving this discursive challenge added value to the nuclear family and the greater patriarchal structure of Canadian society. As seen in Figure 2.5, the bodies of Vietnamese babies in

---

the arms of white mothers reasserted the calm capability of the Western family thus revalidating the paternalistic model of domesticity in the homespaces of BC.

While taking babies from orphanages denigrated the capabilities of public management and family structures in Vietnam, these spaces were completely silenced in the BC newspapers. Instead, reports focused on the historical and geographical backgrounds of the Vietnamese children as contrasted with their transplanted BC homespaces. “People are encouraged to regard them as things, and they don’t feel so bad if one of them gets killed during a bombing raid or other action. The policy of conducting the war is made much easier when backed by racism.”

Through all of the criticisms of the ‘nature’ of the Vietnamese object – their inferiority, their culture, their traditions, the shocking state of their ‘homeland’ - it is easy to construct the racializing logic of delivering children from a place where "people are living underground day and night, and the health of the children has been seriously affected," to the land of purity and the recently revalued patriarchy. Value is thus removed from the homes and the institutions of Vietnam, through not only the disruption of the babies’ lives but also the emphasis placed upon the tragedies their people had suffered. These babies then travel through the contrasts between Vietnamese and Canadian spaces to add value to the families and capabilities of the patriarchal white settler society.

This discursive interaction was focussed on the homespaces where the integration of Vietnamese children was most closely managed and supervised. Faith rested in the transformative powers of the nuclear family, with the support of society’s norms and institutions, to make these children into the kind of productive Canadian citizens who would (re)produce the legend of the great humanitarian efforts at the end of the war in Vietnam. However, this faith in the family was not limitless in the discourse around how many to accept. Andras is quoted as stating, “Everything depends upon how many children are allowed to come – half a dozen are easily assimilated but it would be quite difficult to absorb 500.”

The assumption of assimilation, of course, depended upon visualizing Canada as a concrete, definable entity into which one could assimilate – an

---

242 “Where is the money we promised?” The Province. Feb. 22, 1972, p. 3.
idea that would be challenged repeatedly before the end of the century. Dependence on the concept of assimilation in this context also produces an emphasis on nature (blood, genetics) rather than the nurturing capability of the family and the state. Talk of assimilation, especially while articulating doubt over the assimilative capacity for such a small number as 500 babies, expresses a paternalistic micromanagement of the state that bedrocks the capabilities of the individual family.

As the press followed the babies into their adoptive homes, these spaces of assimilation were very specifically located, carrying symbolic weight for hegemonic imaginaries of BC families and neighbourhoods as representative of Canadian nature/culture.

Just days removed from orphanage and foster homes in his tragedy-laden Vietnamese homeland, young Thien finds himself the centre of attention in a comfortable middle-class house in Victoria’s placid Fairfield district. Thien, after a 6,500-mile air journey from South Vietnam, arrived in B.C. Sunday to become the new son of Victoria professional engineer Erich Mueller and his wife Kathy. He is now, legally and officially, Erich Mueller (Junior) of 451 Durban St. The other, a nine-month-old boy named Jamie, has been adopted by Norman and Betty Henson of 4203 Leeron Place, Metchosin.

While disappearing into the white nuclear family as Jamie Henson and Erich Mueller (Junior) of “comfortable”, “placid” and “professional” Fairfield, the children will always remain a visible signifier and reminder of their ‘tragedy-laden Vietnamese homeland’. The third family profiled was the Hannafords and their “new son David” who were farmers in B.C.’s far North – truly distant from “the horrors of the war they fled from” but within a homespace and nation-state geography still fraught with discursive remnants of the war. “Vietnam may be on the other side of the globe, but the war had kept that country in the minds of millions who were never directly affected by it.” As the TV brought sharply constructed images of war into living rooms across North America, Operation Babylift, and the later Private Sponsorship Programme, brought these issues home. In a richly-imagined Nation-State based on the notion of a patriarchal, colonialist settler society, land and identity have continued as centres of negotiation and resistance between Canadian peoples, families and geographies.

244 Hiebert and Ley, 2001.
246 “They’ll know what peace is like.” Victoria Colonist. May 1, 1975, p. 13.
2.8 Conclusion: Heralding the New Era of Incursion

The Canadian government’s approval of and participation in the snatching of babies in Vietnam and Cambodia and in the kidnapping of these infants to the U.S. and Canada is obscene, disgusting and a gross violation of [several international accords]. The human rights of these children are being completely violated, as they are stolen from their homeland and culture, and brought to a foreign land for adoption by North Americans experiencing hysterical humanitarianism. This hysteria stems from feelings of guilt for their lack of protest during the past 10 years when millions of Indochinese children were murdered by bombs and napalm.247

The dehumanization of others is more easily accomplished and condoned when we understand those others to be different and when we understand ourselves to be standing outside of the world’s crises as impartial and compassionate observers.248

There was more than “guilt” involved in the unusual and sometimes bizarre discourses surrounding Operation Babylift. The Babylift was part of the same mechanism that had produced and justified the continued incursion into Vietnamese space and society, supported and funded by the Western hegemony from 1945 to 1975. This incursion failed, revealing the very subjective and myopic priorities of the Allied forces. The Babylift was thus designed, during the Ford presidency, to take part in the rebuilding of white, Western humanitarian objectivity/credibility at the end of the Allied War in Vietnam.249 The presence of Vietnamese orphans and their management within the Canadian context produced and naturalized a Canadian humanitarian tradition and identity that helped discursively distance ourselves from the failures and moral fallout from the War and all the changes swirling around it. By producing the body of the Vietnamese orphan for the white, patriarchal gaze, the Babylift helped stabilize the discursive foundations of Canadian national identity: capitalism, modernity, Christianity, race, class, family, neighbourhood and home.

249 Loescher and Scanlan 1986.
Chapter 3: Social Multiculturalism and its Other: Discourses of Refugee Sponsorship.

3.1 Introduction

CBC Interviewer: What was it like being in the pool with Iraqi swimmers?
Rick Say (Canadian Olympic Swimmer): I, well, Canada has such a strong and long tradition of tolerance and Multiculturalism with people from all over the world living together here. I've been proud, as a Canadian, to be able to show them how good that can be."

The ‘boat people’ lost me the election.252

---

250 Sofia Indigo Webber, my 4 year-old niece. March 17, 2005.
252 Former Prime Minister Joe Clark on a radio show, January 16, 2005, CJSW Calgary.
In his mere attempt to blame his electoral misfortune on refugees, Joe Clark emphasizes how important immigration is to Canadian politics and the usefulness of refugee bodies in political discourse. Since 1971, Multiculturalism has been a cornerstone of Canadian identity, at least for those who are welcomed to share perspectives in the media and abroad. Rick Say’s statement shows Canada being created, through the twin ideals of tolerance and Multiculturalism, as a place where people can co-exist in an atmosphere of enlightened co-operation and charitable acceptance. However, as a white Canadian male, Say sources himself at the head of power dynamics which alternately privilege and silence. He positions his Iraqi co-competitors as a partial presence in relation to his state- and ethnicity-bestowed power to ‘tolerate’. This object of power-knowledge thus created simultaneously denies the histories and geographies which have contributed to his ability to claim, identify, define and produce his conceptualization of normalized national space. Through his statement, in creating a vision of Canada fit for Olympic consumption, he silences centuries of violence and marginalization while privileging the acumen of the white Canadian for managing bodies, ethnicities and spaces which could otherwise constitute a threat; even in a pool. Without the presence of this ‘threat’, the news story would not have existed; without the statement of tolerance, we might not have been made sufficiently aware of the extent of this ‘threat’, thus could not be duly impressed at the enlightened competence of its management.

In this chapter, I try and determine, through a detailed analysis of Vancouver and Victoria newspapers from January 1976 to December 1980, and incorporating interview data, some of the ways in which the sponsorship of refugees during the ‘boat people crisis’, and the management of the Threat their presences posed to various elements of Canadian national space and society, served to discursively benefit the liberal, Multicultural state, institutions and people. As Foucault argued, “…a hermeneutics of the self has been diffused across Western culture through numerous channels and integrated with various types of attitudes and experiences so that it is difficult to isolate

253 See Bissoondath, Neil (2002) ix-xvii for perspectives on speaking out about Multiculturalism and being considered an “ungrateful immigrant”.

65
and separate it from our own spontaneous experiences.” Thus, building upon my analysis of the Babylift, I attempt to treat the identity effects of Private Sponsorship less as an isolated event in Canadian history and more as a part of the daily production of power and knowledge that works its way through everything and everyone involved in identity and space. This allows a greater richness to my analysis. I incorporate a greater diversity of material and place it in fairly chaotic motion, as all geographies are born of interaction, opposition and negotiation. It also gives me the chance to include spontaneous moments of epiphany, in the Jamesian sense, which allows for Benjamin’s above-mentioned ‘left-handed blows’ of spontaneity. Hence, woven amongst the dynamics of sponsorship are discursive moments that seem less random when placed in proximity with the everyday production of identity and space. Through this kind of engaged and contextualized analysis, I explore relationship spaces between Vietnamese citizenship positions as boundary object, as they were produced during the sponsorship, leading into the neo-liberal regimes of identity production which I examine in Chapter 4. This chapter forms the next step in the greater project of identifying and proliferating spaces where further negotiation could occur between newcomers and the Multicultural nation-state and society.

3.2 Background

The term ‘boat people crisis’ is used to describe the mass migration from the Indochinese region from 1975 up until the closing of the Hong Kong refugee camps in the late 1990s. However, the main focus for this chapter is 1979-80, with chapter 4 covering the subsequent years up to 2005. The reasons for this migration are complex and have been long debated from a group level right down to the motives of each individual refugee claimant. Part of this chapter is devoted to how these dynamics were reported in the press. As mentioned in Chapter One, Beiser, Adelman and others dispute the appropriacy of the ‘boat people’ moniker as most people escaped overland into Thailand and China, not across the ocean. Grouping the Vietnamese refugees under this category is nonetheless significant metaphorically as representing a landless, rootless, stateless people adrift on the stormy seas of Cold War geopolitics. The fixing of the

---

254 Foucault in Martin 1988, p. 16.
refugee identity as ‘boat people’ emphasizes both the extreme circumstances of the sea escapes, garnering them attention in globalized media and popular discourse, while linking them to boat arrivals throughout Canadian history. It also serves to marginalize the Vietnamese as not just migrants, not even refugees, but “outcasts of civilization;” wetbacks emerging from the sea. These dynamics were constantly apparent in press reports at the time and at future points documenting Vietnamese presences in Vancouver and Victoria. The category of ‘boat people’ lingers into the present, including previous and subsequent depictions of ocean arrivals from other parts of the world.

‘Private Sponsorship’ is a category for refugee support and integration that was enshrined in the 1976 Immigration Act. Under the Act’s provisions, private organizations or individuals can sponsor refugees under categories determined by the Federal government. The immigration regulations of 1978 specify that groups of five or more sponsors must provide material and moral support for sponsored refugees over a one-year period. Most organizations that had traditionally supported refugee resettlement initially balked at what they regarded as the government unloading its responsibilities onto private citizens. However, by early 1979, several groups such as the Mennonite Central Committee had signed ‘umbrella agreements’, which helped to speed the sponsorship process while further shifting responsibility away from the Federal government. The Federal government was to match private sponsorship person-to-person, but this commitment was cancelled in December, 1979, due to the overwhelming success of the Private Sponsorship Programme and the dramatic shift in public opinion against admitting the ‘boat people’. By the end of 1980, almost 50,000 refugees had been sponsored, with privately sponsored refugees accounting for 55 per cent of the total. While currently less than 2% of refugees come to Canada through private sponsorship, reflecting the drop in public support since 1980, over 180,000 refugees were privately sponsored from 1979 to 2002. Following are two diverse answers to the question “Do you think there could ever be such a large private sponsorship as there was in 1979-1980?”

No. No. Never. Ever. Never. They’re very strict and picky now. The make it as hard as possible. We’ve given refugees a bad rap.\textsuperscript{259}

Of course. How dare you? Don’t you believe in humanity? We’re told we’re a generous country – but nobody’s given an opportunity. The government gave us that and realized there was a lot more support. The momentum started and we realized it could happen. We got faith in what we could do. The government commitment used to be 1 year. Now it’s 10. On what basis? Why did they cut it off? It isn’t politically useful for the government any more. But if you go by all the organizations and people committed to refuge sponsorship – they’re doing a good job. When you see someone in that kind of situation. People must help. Some people get angry. We all have different reactions. But at least we do something. They throw a line. Why are they risking their lives to save a drowning man? Because they have to. I think it’s a law – an absolute must.\textsuperscript{260}

My hope is that this thesis will provide points of discussion on ways to further strengthen private sponsorship’s role in refugee settlement and support for the future.

3.3 The Threatening but Manageable Other and a Strong Sense of Self

"I hope that as a result of our efforts, as a result of our helicopter pilots being seen by the citizens of Indonesia helping them, that value system of ours [sic] will be reinforced," Powell said. The United States bankrolls humanitarian relief in part "because we believe it is in the best interest of those countries and it's in our best interest," Powell said. "It dries up those pools of dissatisfaction that might give rise to terrorist activity. It turns out that the majority of those nations affected were Muslim nations. We'd be doing it regardless of religion, but I think it does give the Muslim world and the rest of the world ... an opportunity to see American generosity, American values in action, where we care about the dignity of every individual and the worth of every individual, and our need to respond to the needs of every individual of whatever faith," Powell said. "America is not an anti-Islam, anti-Muslim nation."\textsuperscript{261}

Being perceived as humanitarian is vital. Canadian law and rhetoric displays pride in the generosity of the nation, and therefore constructs a generous mythology of nation.\textsuperscript{262}

Colin Powell, then American Secretary of State, here gives us a fantastic example of how humanitarianism can be used to enforce and manipulate identity regimes from a position of hegemonic power and control. Powell directly co-opts the dynamics of this disaster, producing and utilizing it discursively as a topography of American values and

\textsuperscript{259} Interview, NGO worker, para-professional and refugee advocate (W8). March 19, 2005.
\textsuperscript{260} Interview M1. January 29, 2005.
\textsuperscript{262} Dauvergne 2005, p. 281.
enlightened management. Within this context, it is easy to see how the projection of charity onto the spaces and bodies of the tsunami, the 'less fortunate', 'less enlightened' world that is benefiting from American munificence, serves to produce a very specific vision of American identity while obfuscating the very real material and semiotic violences of imperialistic regimes in a region overdetermined with neo-liberal geopolitics. Despite Powell's assertion, it would be hard to imagine this speech being the same were the disaster in England or Australia. Powell uses this speech to fragment the social environment of global Americanism into self and other, peripheralizing the disaster and its effects to enforce the globalized norm of American internationalism as it acts upon other peoples and states. He exploits this relationship to produce global space with the American system at the centre, represented through aid regimes while non-Christians are uttered through a symbolic denial of difference/distance. Eve Hague argues Canadian immigration policy, through denial of discrimination, "sets the stage for proscriptions and exclusionary policies - presented as objectively ungendered, unraced, unbound by culture":

Negative other-presentation is visible in [Canadian Federal Government papers "Not Just Numbers" and the "White Paper"]. Both texts deal extensively with the threat of illegal/criminal immigrants, bogus refugee claimants and immigrants who are not financially self-supporting. In the White Paper, elaboration of "balancing privileges and responsibilities" refers not to state responsibilities to citizenry, but rather to the "reciprocal obligations or responsibilities" that arise from the "privilege of immigrating or resettling in Canada..." These are the strategies by which agents occupying a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space symbolically deny the social distance which does not thereby cease to exist, thus ensuring they gain the profits of recognition accorded to a purely symbolic negation of distance which implies the recognition of distance.

Diverse 'value systems' use complex otherings to define and claim space both within and across national boundaries. The management of this space through technologies of power and knowledge production adds value to the central subject and their position in global affairs. Through placing central, objective values at the head of the boundary-

---

262 Following Klein, 2003.
264 Haque 2004, p. 63.
265 Bourdieu 1990, p. 127 (my emphasis).
manipulation inherent to neo-liberalism, Powell asserts control, though humanitarian displays, over the dynamics of global sovereignty.\textsuperscript{266}

Sherene Razack calls for an ‘unmapping’ of this kind of colonial, patriarchal power-play to allow for more richly-textured conceptualizations of land, power, knowledge and identity; to create space for a radical rethinking of the kinds of discourses that claim and exercise power through objectifying and marginalizing. For my project, this unmapping entails an excavation of some of the multiple sedimentations of colonialist imaginaries which dominate, constrain and discipline the material-semiotic regimes of migration. As explored in Chapter 2, Razack argues this unmapping can be accomplished through recognizing the relationship between identity and space and by interrogating “...what is being imagined or projected onto specific spaces and...bodies.”\textsuperscript{267} Vietnamese citizenship positions have certainly been delimited in Vancouver in terms of the spaces and ways in which they have been permitted expression, as the approximately 17,000 people of Vietnamese heritage that live in Vancouver belong to one of the most occupationally and residentially segregated groups in the city.\textsuperscript{268} Delving deeper into Vietnamese marginality requires a detailed examination of the discursive mechanisms that help to create, project and fix specific identities onto Vietnamese bodies in Vancouver.

As part of his fascinating longitudinal studies on Vietnamese refugees and their experiences in Canada, Morton Beiser explores the Canadian Multicultural Myth in which we are all benigntly tolerant and value all heritages on an equal level.\textsuperscript{269} This myth, as it provides an informative link to understanding what we imagine to be Canadian, has an important role in clarifying some of the projections we place upon immigrant spaces and bodies. It is partially through these projections onto the out-group that the in-group is produced. As the process of integration mediates between these diverse citizenship positions, the Other becomes ‘boundary object’ to our sense of place in the world. As Beiser’s work revolves around a policymaker’s conceptualization of ‘success’, in which immigrants get jobs, buy houses and cars, and become ‘productive members of society’,

\textsuperscript{266} Klein 2003.
\textsuperscript{267} Razack 2002, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{268} Hiebert 1999, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{269} Beiser 1999.
he stops short of imagining the kinds of dynamics that produce the Vietnamese subject position in relation to the ‘myth’. Thus, the many challenges of Vietnamese integration are minimalized through a functionally apologist analysis which congratulates the former refugees for ‘pulling themselves up by their bootstraps’ and which laments that “no country, Canada included, offers newcomers the welcome they need and deserve.”

There was one guy. He stayed with us in 1982. He was illiterate. He thought he’d never own a car. Never own a house. Never find a girl. He was quite homely. He used to go down to Chinatown all the way by bus. And lo and behold, he found a wife. From somewhere in China an Aunt sent a homely girl to Canada and they found each other without being introduced. A homely girl for a homely boy! And he came to ….. and asked his permission, because he was his father here. Now they have cars and a house and two children. Just amazing. We never expected him to do so well. Inspiring.

We had to do all the work on our sponsor’s farm. I was 14 and in Grade 5. I studied as hard as I possibly could and learned the language as quickly as possible. I wasn’t going to let that be a barrier.

While these stories and statistexts come from people who have a breadth of knowledge about the experience of private sponsorship, isolated interventions have little effect against public perceptions of criminality and welfare dependence. Placing immigrants on grids of material success or failure does not reflect the dynamic nature of the public topography of Multiculturalism where diverse outlooks are supposedly negotiated. Impressions of the Other are formed at many levels of public discourse; without a considered and coherent approach to intervention, stories of the very real successes get lost in the media obsession for negative portrayals of immigrants. Thus, laudatory reports of successful integration that go against the purposes certain immigrants play in the creation and proliferation of the national imaginary must be repeated into each successive space and time in order to have the intended material-semiotic effects on negotiations between immigrants and the established hegemony. As individual voices can be easily relativized and dismissed, stories and statistexts of diverse, qualified, and

---

270 Ibid, p. xiii.
273 This term points to the rich discursive terrain and textuality of statistics. Kobayashi 1992.
274 Li 2003.
275 This is the subject of Chapter 4.
realistic successes must also be projected onto immigrant spaces and bodies. Thus, interrogating and challenging the systems that discipline immigrants into objects of dependency, threat and cultural obscurity requires a more thorough ‘unmapping’ of the processes through which these disciplinary and regulatory regimes are created and proliferated. Through a greater understanding of these dynamics, we may then arrive at strategies to intervene with something far more than the ‘tolerance’ of the mainstream press.

Green and Green challenge the very notion of distinguishing the successes and failures of immigration through economistic means and recognize that “immigration in the last 20 years has played a significant role in defining Canada as a country with a richly diversified culture and, through refugee policy, as a generous country.”276 The next step is to consider the value Vietnamese people have added to the Canadian myth, beyond the material notions of success or the concepts of economic, human and social capital that are so often analyzed in the literature but which can always be manipulated to serve specific political agendas. Of course, all discourse is fraught with political maneuverings, but looking deeper and at multiple scales helps to reveal a wider range of these political norms.

Looking beyond the merely economic, David Ley explores the impacts of recent Chinese immigration to Vancouver. We perceive the discursive value their proximity adds to Vancouver’s colonial landscapes, (re)activating the myth of the English aesthetic in the rainforest.277 The aesthetics and values projected onto neighbourhood and national-cultural identity through the ‘fight for Shaughnessy’ produced and mobilized political passions across the boundaries that are manipulated and enforced by the Business Categories of immigration. These political discourses create a blanket identity for the Chinese subject that often excludes and marginalizes expressions of citizenship other than the central norm. These effects linger as formative moments in the negotiation between what we lazily consider as ‘two cultures’ at loggerheads and arguments tend towards not just the aesthetic but also the moral. Ley’s paper shows how boundaries around nation, land and identity extend not only nationally but globally and locally as

277 Ley 1995.
cultural values are attributed and projected at multiple scales. Similar dynamics were at work in the reception of the ‘boat people’.

The biggest challenge of the tragic story of the boat people is not to our pocketbooks or our job market or our welfare funds of even to our capacity to absorb men and women of a different race and color. The biggest challenge is to our perception of ourselves as a nation. What sort of people do we want to be in relation to the boat people? Should we be guided by our humanitarianism or the balance sheets? There should be only one answer to that question.278

The Private Sponsorship Programme also placed the boat people in discursive proximity with the middle class hegemony, as the dominant paradigm in the mental landscape of Vietnamese immigration. Over the course of my interviews, people involved in sponsoring refugees thought their contributions had been much more numerically significant than reflected in the statistics. In the hearts and minds of local people, all of whom play a role in discursive productions, projections and naturalizations of identity, this was a story that enforced notions of the charitable, compassionate, humanitarian Canadian. This knowledge production entailed a disciplining of Vietnamese identity as supplicant, infantilized receivers of charity. “They (Vietnamese family) have been adopted by the parish and one of the first things they were shown Friday afternoon was a gigantic quantity of food piled against the wall behind the altar of the church.”279

Vietnamese people in Vancouver thus had to negotiate from the position of dependant, ‘adopted’ Other, tolerated on the peripheries for the value they themselves had contributed through their partial presence in the space and systems of the public imaginary. Significantly, all of the interview participants of Vietnamese heritage underestimated the amount of people resettled through private sponsorship. Identities from a Vietnamese perspective are far less fixed in the realm of the humanitarian gesture of 1979 and its subsequent gaze.

3.4 Presenting the Immigrants: Visibility and Media Coverage

As we saw during the Fujianese boat arrivals of 1999, which sparked a seemingly unanimous outcry with racist and classist overtones, ‘boat people’ tend to suffer from very negative P.R. These thematics in the media and public discourse follow a vague cycle between benevolence and backlash, employing race and class as justification and

enforcement. The very public debate around the earlier ‘boat people crisis’ and refugee support following the war in Vietnam provides rich material for understanding some of the ways we imagine ourselves through proximity with the Other. Imagining subjective identity in relation to nameless people portrayed in the press in multiple ways and in diverse contexts has effects that can not be strictly generalized or quantified. Such an interrogation helps to imagine ways in which Vietnamese identity has evolved in relation to societal norms. I have analyzed media coverage and editorial material relating to the boat people crisis and refugee sponsorship as they relate to identity.

Mahtani and Mountz explore the ways in which immigrants are presented as “threats... positioned as “them” (the ethnic minority) in relation to an assumed “us” (the mainstream audience).”280 Defining ourselves against an Other creates value, as a ‘we’ is produced as a purified, natural, central category against a sullied, foreign, peripheral ‘them’.281 In the discourses surrounding the Private Sponsorship Programme, the proximity established in the compassionate sharing not only of national space282 but also of the homespaces into which the sponsored families were apparently welcomed283 created stubborn ontologies around who we are as a people and the significance of the ‘boat person’ to the construction of the humanitarian, enlightened Canadian. The identity of the Vietnamese Vancouverite, however, has been dynamic since the sponsorship. These discursive shifts are the subject of Chapter 4.

Over 80% of the Letters to the Editor at the highpoint of the media coverage expressed strong reasons for refusing refugee landings, argued around the risk the Vietnamese people were held to represent to Canadian land, nation, people and economy.284 These sentiments were often expressed through bluntly racist modalities, espousing inflated fears in an unambivalent performance of the undynamic stereotypes of orientalized discourses designed to produce and naturalize the author as the central Canadian subject.

280 Mahtani and Mountz 2002.
281 Douglas 1996.
282 Dauvergne 2005.
283 Pratt 2004.
The “invasion” of 10k Vietnamese refugees is both horrible and frightening, considering there are already 100k (or more) Chinese living in the Greater Vancouver area. Taking into account how rapidly those people multiply, it won’t be long before they’ll outnumber us two to one. Economic and political power will follow, culminating in their electing a Chinese prime minister – or should I say chairman? Our descendants will have a wonderful life, dominated by the yellow race, until finally, unless more drastic measures are taken against them, they too will be set adrift in boats.285

Dr. John Matheson said about 30 per cent of refugees suffer hepatitis while many have non-communicable blood disorders. “These people should be better screened and we don’t know how contagious they are.”286

It seems to be accepted with ecumenical unanimity that only we are expected to have a conscience, and we are expected to pay. In practical terms, what we are doing with the refugees is about as useful as using a bucket to treat a bleeding artery. By accepting whatever numbers we are up to now, we will merely attract 10 or 20 or 100 times more refugees. And when we have filled the continent to standing room only, we – the whites – can of course get in our boats and see if we can find a welcome in a nice, kind sympathetic Asian country with a high living standard, where we can immediately get on the welfare rolls.287

It is hard to imagine this kind of discourse running openly through the Vancouver newspapers, though it certainly displays a candour which illuminates attitudes around race, politics and a strict definition of who ‘belongs’ in Vancouver. Varying in their cleverness, most of the negative letters were transparent in their racializing strategies, linking land with blood and using military and other metaphor to heighten a sense of risk.

Authors arguing for the sponsorship, through claiming the ability to define and manage national space, used spurious data to strictly circumscribe the citizenship position in ways that seemed to go against the best interests of the immigrant. For example, in what seem extreme moves to inscribe national space and identity on the bodies of the refugees, several authors constructed membership in the enlightened, concerned West while advocating sterilization in order to prevent the “real Canadians from becoming boat people themselves.”288 This is a significant thread running through the letters to the editor, showing how complex discursive shifts between tolerance and identifying and

288 Refugees’ overbreeding can only lead to trouble. The Vancouver Sun. Aug 8, 1979: A5.
claiming national space interact in public debates around refugee sponsorship, creating and enforcing a perception of Threat to the land and people.

It is not simply a divide between good tolerant people and bad, intolerant people. Rather, it is a difference of capacity of tolerance between people who equally claim the capacity to manage national space. Both are about realizing a vision of national space through tolerance and intolerance through the exclusion of some and the inclusion of others.\textsuperscript{289}

According to Immigration Minister Ron Atkey, advocating for the boat people was a significant moment as Canadian foreign policy was being changed by a groundswell of popular support\textsuperscript{290}. Putting their money where their mouths were, thousands of Canadian citizens helped support Vietnamese people in their harrowing escapes from horrendous, traumatic situations. However, the public and private displays of humanitarianism allowed popular opinion to considered these the natural responses of “those who care for their fellow man,”\textsuperscript{291} often construed in opposition to an ‘Asianness’ that was assumed to be selfish, materialistic and backward.\textsuperscript{292} This mobilization of an enlightened Canadianness, constructed against the age-old societal prejudices of the settler city, served to minimally include the refugees while excluding them from a symbolically reinforced hegemony.\textsuperscript{293} As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hobsbawm theorizes tradition as a ritual repetition of established practices. Racializing Vietnamese people within an established local discourse of Asianness repeats the long tradition of discrimination in Vancouver, putting the refugees into a position of marginality that easily fits with historical precedent both within and across space.\textsuperscript{294} The huge and “ugly”\textsuperscript{295} backlash at the time seems all but forgotten, despite its dominance of the media and its eventual role in leading the Conservative government to renege on its promise of matching

\textsuperscript{289} Hage 1998, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{290} “Half favour Viets.” \textit{The Victoria Daily Times}. August 16, 1979, 38.
\textsuperscript{291} Sound, healthy sacrifice. \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. August 11, 1979: A5
“It seems to be accepted with ecumenical unanimity that only we are expected to have a conscience, and we are expected to pay.” Collins, G., \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 23, 1979: A5 (letter).
\textsuperscript{292} “How many immigrants is too many?” \textit{Vancouver Sun}. Sept 21, 1979: A4.
Malcolm Orchard. “Call to action for ‘boat people’.” \textit{The Victoria Colonist}. June 27, 1979: 5 (letter): Here, even their struggles speak against Asian people: “Centuries of survival support these Asians in their selfishness.”
\textsuperscript{293} Anderson 1991.
\textsuperscript{294} Following Anderson 1991.
\textsuperscript{295} “Boat people provoke deluge of hate calls.” \textit{The Courier}. Aug 1, 1979, p. 8. Notice how it is apparently the ‘boat people’ themselves who are provoking the hate calls.
sponsors. Yet Vietnamese people must still negotiate their proximity to this discursive node of identity politics that had overdetermined their integration into Canadian society and activated traditional norms over who 'we' are, who we think 'they' should be and how, in the more subtle worlds of multicultural tolerance, these identities are disciplined.

These dynamics become evident through the contrast between the impressions of those with direct experience of Vietnamese interactions with Canadian space as opposed to those relying mainly on identities that remain merely discursively proximal.

This leads me to a personal reflection about sponsorship. It provided a wonderful opportunity to "practice what we preach" in our faith community. It led me to devote many years of volunteer work for settlement and advocacy of refugees. Although there is no requirement on the part of refugees to be of this or that or any faith, working with them has clearly reinforced mine. The work of sponsorship has brought together a number of ecumenical coalitions that work smoothly as sponsors. Many friendships among church members and refugees have continued long after any sponsorship responsibilities existed. Settlement needs of refugees give those of us on the "have" side of town a look at low cost housing and the lack of it, discrimination in rental on occasion, difficulties of finding employment without any reputation or "Canadian experience", in general a window into "have not" living. At the same time the refugees themselves unfailingly have shown us amazing hospitality, generosity and a wholehearted joy in life that is an inspiration every time it happens.

I mean, I haven't been affected by their violence myself – it's not like they live in North Burnaby or West Vancouver or anything – but I know people who know Vietnamese people and I've read about them and seen stuff and they're, well you know they're like the lowest of the Asian people and they're, like, mostly criminals. I mean, we all paid our way here. They're all poor and come from a poor country and they took everything they've got.

The former quotation celebrates connection and the transformation from being a private citizen, unaware of immigrant issues, to becoming a lifetime refugee advocate. The latter, from someone with little or no firsthand knowledge of Vietnamese people, nevertheless creates a personal mythology of superiority through racialization and criminalization. The purpose of this thesis is to examine discursive projections onto Vietnamese identity and space in order to identify possibilities for more productive and

---

296 Interview, prolific sponsor (M8), April 3, 2005; Interview (M6), April 5, 2005; Adelman 1982.
297 Email communication from Interview participant, June 17, 2005.
298 Interview with a sponsor who is a Medical Doctor, has a PhD and lectures at UBC, August 2, 2004.
inclusive negotiations of identity and experience – of the kind shown by the sponsor above. Thus, rather than negating the overwhelmingly positive aspects of private sponsorship, my focus is on the myopic, inflexible and mal-informed constructions shown in the latter interview and repeated across public discourse. Highlighting the impressions of those not directly involved in refugee support but who nonetheless claim a voice in the definition of the Other in the periphery of national space helps in identifying specific spaces for intervention. Given the isolation of Vietnamese people in Vancouver, partially due to the need for same-cultural support in the difficult process of integration, and also because of historic and geographic fracturing between Vietnamese identities, possibilities for challenging established notions about Vietnamese people and spaces have been consistently compromised through processes of discrimination. As who we are never stops changing, we need a dynamism in concepts of prosperity/poverty, central/peripheral and respectable/violent through which to interrupt established boundaries and revamp discursive processes of integration. In other words, there is no need to kick your neighbour when he is down. Migration is a struggle – perhaps the hardest thing someone does in their lifetime. We need to allow and encourage newcomers to gain a discursive toehold in the richly negotiated biopolitical terrains of the settler state.

Why don’t you learn Chinese? I’m willing to teach you. You didn’t give us a chance to get to know you. You think, “They’re bad news – they’re Asian.” You pretend to know everything. Knowing is better than thinking? No. And they’re just being Asian and airhead. “We’re all the same – why make such a big deal?” I got stuck there, in the race place. There’s something missing. We’re born to learn.

I think how the barriers, the barriers fell away, is you have a common empathy – you have that common empathy because you understand what you’ve gone through, or your parents did, so then you have that common ground, is understanding where they’ve come from so you try to find that middle ground and so instead of starting looking down on them you actually start to – when they came – you live with them, they lived with a lot of us and so after a while, what I found, when ..... started speaking Vietnamese language, the stoniness fell away. If you’re not willing to do that then you’re always viewing it with a wall in

---

299 Hiebert 1999.
300 All my interviewees mentioned this.
301 Interview, M4. March 17, 2005.
between. And I think that’s what happened to us; we gained a love and respect for this culture. We starting seeing that they weren’t any different from us.\textsuperscript{302}

3.5 The Economic, Political, and Moral Benefits of Sponsorship

On the pages of the daily newspapers, articles about the ‘boat people’ crisis were sandwiched between concerns at all levels of society during the Carter era and under a Conservative minority government briefly successful in discrediting the Trudeau Liberals. Not only had the wars in Indochina been failures for the West, but the Cold War was in full swing and the price of oil had risen from $14 to $25 a barrel\textsuperscript{303}. There had been fractures in society which seemed unprecedented, with so many conflicting factions over the wars in Indochina and the many challenges to the nuclear family and other institutions.\textsuperscript{304} Spirituality itself had come under attack with increasingly uncomfortable questions being raised around abuse in the residential schools and the Jonestown Massacre, which occurred near the height of the boat people crisis. The change of tone in the newspapers over the period between 1967 and 1980 is remarkable. It ranges from a parochial ‘united front’ attitude, with actually very little reporting about the wars, Canadian involvement, or the popular protest, to a tone of open conflict in the context of impending economic hardship, high inflation, the stranglehold of OPEC, close to 10\% unemployment, the aftermath of the FLQ crisis,\textsuperscript{305} and the Federal Government’s plan to sponsor 50,000 Indochinese refugees portrayed as corrupt, without possessions and threatening to steal away jobs.\textsuperscript{306} In this context, with the foundations of North American society under attack on so many discursive levels, it seems baffling why so many private citizens and government institutions mobilized so many resources to sponsor over 70,000 refugees in a matter of months, when yearly total immigrant quotas had been placed at only 12,000\textsuperscript{307} in the context of the backlash by other Canadians against the increasingly diverse source cultures of immigration.\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{302} Interview, W3. April 3, 2005.
\textsuperscript{305} A radical separatist movement that gained momentum in 1970, prompting Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to declare a state of emergency.
\textsuperscript{306} “Boat people: not our problem.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 18, 1979: A5.
\textsuperscript{308} Adelman 1982; See Ley (1995) for background on the shifting source countries of Canadian immigration.
Many Canadians have a very soft spot for the underdog, because I think the majority have been in that kind of situation, or their parents have. I mean – the hungry 30s. But then, after a while, when there are some Vietnamese gangs, or some East Indian gangs, or whatever, and there may be a hundred in the gang and there are 10,000 refugees here, and they all get painted with the same brush, you know. That happens very easily. Even in the church. People in the church saying, “see what you’ve done,” you know. Bringing them here. We had that. But it did have to be done. And it’s their responsibility to make a life for themselves, not ours.\(^{309}\)

The most obvious reason for this outpouring of support was the generous, humanitarian, empathetic reaction to pictures and stories of the hundreds of thousands of displaced peoples, many of whom perished in the South China Sea.\(^{310}\) This was the immediate answer of all the sponsors I interviewed – with the horrors they saw every day in the papers and on the news they felt they had little choice but to lend a hand. However, looking deeper, most of the sponsors I interviewed felt that, on some level, the sponsorship was an act of charity which served as some sort of societal release; as a way of producing a subject image of goodness and legitimacy out of the many challenges of what was, in some ways, a difficult and dynamic period in mythologies of both the West and East and point of negotiation.

I think there was quite a bit of collective guilt for the disastrous experience in Vietnam. The slaughter in Vietnam. I think we all felt that. I don’t say it was the only thing but I think it was the greatest factor. This was an expression of goodwill, outside of religious or political boundaries. It seemed very important at the time.\(^{311}\)

At a time when so many elements of society seemed under attack, especially through the rhetorical exaggeration of the media, the sponsorship of boat people provided an opportunity for renovation. The ‘prosperity’ thus produced was far more than material; the sponsorship of refugees (re)valued North America, Canada, BC and Vancouver as spiritually and materially prosperous, and the private sponsorship took this revaluing right to the scale of the personal.

This (re)valuing was accomplished in the media in an almost naïvely simplistic mode that assumed the moral acumen of the everyday Canadian citizen. This was the

\(^{309}\) Interview, M8. April 3, 2005.


\(^{311}\) Interview, M6. April 5, 2005.
most natural and obvious thing in the world – that Canadians would lend a hand to those in peril on the seas.

An essential aspect of the advocacy of tolerance as a strategy of reproduction by dominant groupings is that they strive to mystify that element of coercion and to present tolerance as if it were a mere benevolent choice on their part...the result of a mere choice of policy made by enlightened people.\(^{312}\)

Thus, debate around refugee sponsorship produced and depended on a conceptualization of the Canadian people and state as operating under an assumed higher law. This was a country and a people unlike any other, where the everyday cares of the turbulent 1970s took a back seat to the enlightened acumen of the moral, enlightened, compassionate nature that flowed from the Canadian public and private realms.

Benevolence, thus constructed and endlessly repeated through the media, was utilized by the government as an impression of unity during the time of a minority government and the threat of Quebec sovereignty. In a conference in Geneva to discuss responses to the refugee crisis, delegates had been firmly instructed not to criticize the Vietnamese government. Flora MacDonald, then Tory Minister of External Affairs, violated this directive in at a speech on July 20\(^{th}\), 1979, producing a humanitarian identity that mobilized a unified, benevolent Canada as a global foreign policy leader:

> My country has a tradition of welcoming refugees to its shores....Two days ago, my government announced that it will accept up to 50,000 Indochinese from this year to the end of 1980....We challenge other countries to follow this lead....We urge other countries to find the humanity in the souls of their nations to make similar efforts.\(^{313}\)

This was a time when transitions in popular culture had people questioning the moral trajectories of Western culture. With perceptions of cultural value at stake, leaders at all levels of Canadian government, which all had taken turns to the ‘right’ side of the political spectrum, were carefully distancing themselves from the suddenly not-so-defendable position of the detached, individualistic, profit-motivated Western subject.\(^{314}\)

As shown in Chapter 2 with the BC Provincial decision to approve an aid commitment

\(^{312}\) Hage 1998, p. 201 (my emphasis).

\(^{313}\) Quoted in Adelman 1982, p. 39.

\(^{314}\) “Previous suggestions that the Social Credit [provincial] government is missing the vital organ known as a heart are hereby withdrawn.” ‘A show of heart for the boat people.’ Vancouver Sun. July 18, 1979, p. A4.
across party lines, politicians were caught between the need to appear humanitarian and united while also responding to public opinion. Dauvergne calls these kinds of dynamics “the liberal-humanitarian consensus,” where isolationists and open border advocates both operate from, and produce the centrality of, the Western subject.  

However, within two weeks of the original burst of interest in sponsorship, a majority of Canadians already opposed letting in the Vietnamese. Within this fertile early period of identity construction, debates around support for the Vietnamese displayed an ambivalence between a now ontologically central surface humanitarianism and an underlying reticence as the Canadian public had shifted their perceptions of the Canadian role in refugee support. At the end of July, 1979, the board of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, made up of the mayors of all Lower Mainland municipalities, voted unanimously to support the Vancouver Project to sponsor Vietnamese refugees, once again needing to appear united under a common geographical category reified as humanitarian, progressive and mendicant. Through the initiative, Vancouver Mayor Volrich:

bolstered his image as a humanitarian – and it needs bolstering... After the meeting, Burnaby Mayor Tom Constable was approached by directors who do not intend to have anything to do with it. They voted to support the project because they could not afford to be seen opposing it.

The bulk of the mayors and directors interviewed by the Vancouver Sun, speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that they were not actually in support of sponsorship but were afraid of being regarded as “anti-humanitarian” To prove yourself humanitarian and enlightened through participation in this program served to deny the diversity of Canadian and European pasts while affording the comfort of a unified identity, always elusive in the Canadian ‘mosaic’ and more so after almost a decade of official Multiculturalism.

Within this paradigm there was a wide spectrum of discursive modes that spoke specifically to contours the white middle class wished to remap in the history and geography of their Canadian imaginary. These all added further dimensions to the value placed upon the stories and bodies of the ‘boat people’ in their relation to the Canadian

315 Dauvergne 2005.
318 Ibid
people and state. Repeatedly twinned with Auschwitz\textsuperscript{319} and the holocaust\textsuperscript{320}, the ‘boat people’ crisis raised the shameful specter of the Federal government’s “none is too many” approach to Jewish refugees attempting to flee the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{321} As Hage writes, in the context of the ‘White Australia’ policies, “Multiculturalism encompasses a present struggle...to appear to be ‘nice’ to ethnic otherness in contrast to a past history constructed as a time when Australia was ‘not so nice’”\textsuperscript{322}. As \textit{None is too Many} was about to be published, the earlier calls to a ‘Canadian history and tradition’ of kindness and tolerance were about to be challenged. Thus, there was more at stake in the response to the refugee crisis than just benevolent humanitarianism; Canada’s very identity as a benevolent, humanitarian country and people (assumed white) hung in the balance.

Edward Said analyzed the way countries/cultures ‘orientalize’ other cultures in order to magnify the strength, progressiveness, and masculinity of their own.\textsuperscript{323} Homi Bhabha examines the way ‘discursive mimicry’ places opposing paradigms in \textit{close proximity}, accentuating the anxiety inherent in the paradox of “us, but never quite, us”, fixing the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence.”\textsuperscript{324} The white, Christian position, explicitly and constantly stated in the media was productive of an identity to counteract the dynamic effects of societal change. This subject position was placed in close proximity with the Chinese Canadian as traditionally selfish and morally corrupt, by either denying their participation in refugee sponsorship or by openly criticizing people with Chinese backgrounds for not doing more, thus rhetorically creating the White humanitarian through contast: “Are whites the only race expected to practise human rights?”\textsuperscript{325}

This happens to be Canada, not Asia, and there are many of us who honestly care. Should we be like the Asians who apparently have no compassion for

\textsuperscript{319}“Another Auschwitz on the China Sea.” \textit{Victoria Colonist}. June 30, 1979: 4. This comparison was readily available not only because of the unbelievable death rate or the context of a totalitarian government but also because of the racial element to the crisis both of which are disputed in Adelman 1982.
\textsuperscript{320}Today a birthday tomorrow history. \textit{Victoria Colonist}. July 1, 1979: 4. This is an editorial that calls Canadians to define themselves, on their national ‘birthday’, as humanitarian and enlightened.
\textsuperscript{322}Hage 1999, p. 105. “It suggests Canada is becoming a more mature and civilized place than we might sometimes believe.” “Sinkin’ the racists.” \textit{The Province}. July 20, 1979, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{323}Said 1994.
\textsuperscript{324}Bhabha 1994, p. 86.
their own? No! We are a nation founded on democratic and Christian principles. To lower ourselves to an uncaring and rather despicable attitude is out of the question. Surely we need a massive infusion of new blood and race hardly matters. The question is not 'Is Canada capable of handling the situation?' but rather, 'Are Canadians capable of handling it?'

This passage defines what it means to be Canadian, democratic and Christian and challenges Canadians to tolerate Asians because race 'hardly matters' for the arbiters of society as contrasted against 'uncaring' and despicable Asians. While there was a large response to the crisis amongst members of the local Chinese communities and their benevolent societies, these programs received virtually no coverage (and no photos) in the press except encouraging Chinese people to 'claim more responsibility for their own'.

We actually had to stop sponsoring, though we started it all and we'd gotten so good at it. We just couldn't compete with the Caucasian churches. Those refugees got TVs and all sorts of luxuries, and that was the kind of stuff that was covered in the press. After all our work, they gave us a bad name.

I think ..... felt quite marginalized by the Caucasians. There was all this press – and ..... was incredible – he was the first, and put lots of pressure on Ottawa – but nobody paid any attention because he's Chinese. Then they criticized him for not doing more. So he got out of it.

In the local papers, there were only a handful of mentions of any Chinese participation. This one, which reports remarkable statistics, only made the final paragraph of a page 8 article: “An accompanying news release highlighted some of the efforts by private citizens. In Vancouver, for example, the Chinese community has banded together to sponsor 1,000 refugees at a possible cost of $2 million.” In fact, whenever Chinese people were mentioned, age-old prejudices around the 'lazy Chinese' were actually contrasted against the projected participation of the newer immigrants as 'real go-getters'.

327 Interview, prolific early sponsor (M9). March 15, 2005.
City's first Vietnam refugees pose beside welcoming piles of food at Sacred Heart church

Food Piles Greet Refugees

Figure 3.2: Victoria Daily Times. March 3, 1979, p. 1.

Safe in Vancouver, refugee terror tales shockingly similar

Figure 3.3: The Vancouver Sun. July 14, 1979, p. A12.
There are several relations between the Vietnamese and white, middle-class Canada that followed closely on these patterns, creating value in the Vietnamese refugee body for accentuating the generosity/morality and prosperity/unity, in a time of doubt and rapid change. Pictures of the recently-arrived refugees show the proximity of the refugee placed in direct contact/contrast with piles of food and other support with their White, Christian sponsors, physically or figuratively, placed centre-stage (figs. 3.2, 3.3). Thus the White, central humanitarian is actually created through images of the refugees, making this presence universal, assumed and essential to the moral existence of the prosperous, enlightened nation. “Such cruel and desperate measures seem unspeakable to western nations with their well-oiled social welfare machinery which sees that not even a cat need suffer for food and a place to sleep.”\textsuperscript{331}

These photos are the first exercise of ‘agency’ on the part of the refugees themselves, as these represent their initial ‘presences’ in Canadian national, domestic and institutional space. At this point, language is not necessary, as the message of Canadian generosity and enlightenment, at all scales, is inherent through the way the refugees are placed within Canadian space, mediated by their role in Canadian society. “They go to free language classes at VCC 3 times a week,” writes Maureen Dorais in a letter to the Vancouver Sun supportive of the refugee influx. “I’m sure the first words out of their mouth will be a heartfelt thank-you to the people of Canada.”\textsuperscript{332} Thus the sponsorship of refugees from Indochina was a boon for those wishing to (re)build Canadian space, government and people as worthy of admiration, integration and gratitude.

Meanwhile, the sponsorship of refugees took focus away from the mounting problems which seemed to overwhelm the nation and its constituents. There was a huge crisis in employment, with white lower classes being increasingly perceived as lazy and dependant on taxpayer handouts, yet supporting refugees with the necessities of life was somehow more righteous and thus held by many to be morally indisputable. Also, the dissolution of family and the institution of marriage was robbed of momentum through the addition of young, productive, ‘strong’ families, with the newly revalued Canadian model of domestic reproduction providing a framework of support. Thus, when the

wealthy, white, unified middle-class gains centre stage guiding upstanding, victimized folks to ‘a new life’, the background difficulties of the countercultural revolution fall into discursive obscurity. Canada was ‘good’ again; moral. And the constant constructions of infinite prosperity\textsuperscript{333}, the source from which such generosity flows, discursively strengthened a Canada which wanted to locate societal shortcomings elsewhere. As we can see from the following quotation, the inadequacies of others are often productive of the moral Canadian underdog, mobilized strategically when under threat.

“We’re Canadians. We’re always the nice guys. We always play fair. Our trouble is we expect other people to play fair, too. We’re here to protect our athletes and the integrity of the sport. Those are things we won’t compromise.”

Canadian Olympic gymnastics coach Tony Smith.\textsuperscript{334}

3.6 Mediated Citizenship: Flipsides of Support

“…turned into no better than defenceless children by the tragedy of their country, and, like children, deserving all the help the world can give.”\textsuperscript{335}

“Sometimes we’re treated as if we were children. You don’t speak English; you’re in poverty. So the government has to take care of you. You’re like children. Decisions are made for us.”\textsuperscript{336}

There’s so little accuracy to this [portrayals of criminality]. We have friends who have a mushroom farm. And all of these stories around drugs and stuff. And it really affects their business. They have cops sniffing around there all the time. And when they get a new car or have a good business everybody talks. They think all the money must be coming from drugs. There’s some of that here. I think a lot of the people who are involved in it are into it because they can’t get a job with decent pay because there’s money in drugs, you know. But maybe we feel it more. Because they’re our people. We sponsored them. We protected them. We did everything for them. And we feel like they’re our babies. And then we see their name in the paper or something. And then you feel like – it becomes bigger. Maybe this is what’s going on.\textsuperscript{337}

\textsuperscript{333} Verna Loverock. “Now it’s their turn to share what we have.” Letters: The Boat People. \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 31, 1979, p. A5.
\textsuperscript{334} George Johnson. “Skullduggery alleged at the Olympics.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. August 24, 2004, p. A1. Here Canada is asserted as moral, fair, enlightened, to the discursive detriment of apparently all other nationalities.
\textsuperscript{335} “Why Indochina’s boat people get a cool reception.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 5’ 1979, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{337} Interview, W2. April 5, 2005.
"The very act of acceptance operates as an exclusionary force on the accepted." In a continuation of a long heritage of minority/majority effects in white settler society, and in the context of official multiculturalism, Vietnamese people were offered a circumscribed citizenship position placed close yet in opposition to the revalued identity of the moral and progressive Canadian. Thus, in the transfer of value from the refugee to the citizen, boundaries around Vietnamese identity were strictly limited and disciplined not only by the state but also through the actions and beliefs of its ordinary citizens. This identity transfer also heightened the visuality of the Vietnamese people and projected them across the moral terrain of the Private Sponsorship Program. These ‘boat people’ were in the public domain and, through the workings of discursive mimicry, while their integration was the project of all “renewed Canadians”, they could never quite live up to the enlightened potential of their ‘sponsors’, at least at the level of public discourse. Almost 30 years later, we see local Vietnamese humanitarianism still couched in terms of sponsorship rather than sourcing from any kind of natural enlightenment potential of the Vietnamese themselves, despite the obviously strong ethical background in any of the world’s cultures.

Placed in the position of ‘dependant’ to a prosperous, humanitarian whiteness, the Vietnamese are constantly infantilized as “my group’s family/their little Vietnamese family” and as “charges” by sponsors, churches and employers, for whom their skills are downgraded and capabilities anomalous as contrasted with a generalized impression of ignorance and childlike incapability. “They have been turned into no better than defenceless children by the tragedy of their country, and, like children, deserving all the help the world can give.” Thus, the initial presences of Vietnamese people in Vancouver society were limited to specific projected roles and positions.

Ok – I admit it. I may as well just say it. They were my babies; my children. Yes I saw the images on TV and wanted to help these people escape from the horrible things that were happening to them, but I just saw these people as my...

---

340 “This response must have brought a richness to many people this Christmas, both new and renewed Canadians.” “How Canada Met a Challenge.” Editorial. The Victoria Colonist. December 27, 1979, p. 4.
babies who were so grateful to me and so happy to be in this country. They had a lot to learn.344

The frameworks for support of these infantilized refugees revealed dynamics of how their identities were considered in relation to the ontological body of whiteness; proximate in the value they added to white moral Canada yet peripheral in the spaces they were welcome in society. The first plan for ‘welcoming’ the refugees to Canada had been to create settlements for them in remote locations on islands up the coast of British Columbia. This is an obvious continuation of the approaches to integration/assimilation that had been developed through programs designed to strip First Nations people and transform them into (not quite) Canadians. Interestingly, this plan was hatched by a Father Merveille who, admittedly, was “not born yesterday in this business.”345

Supported by the Catholic Church, he continued to promote his theories of resettlement despite the revelation that most of the refugees were not fishers and farmers but rather small businesspeople from Saigon. His proposal was then to send Canadian agents to the settlements in order to teach the newcomers how to herd goats, fish and farm orchids in the extremely isolated environment of the westcoast rainforest. “Are we supposed to leave them on the boats because they’re merchant class? They’re human beings. This project depends on the brotherly love of Canadians.”346 Thus, the Private Sponsorship Program created a shared-homespace paradigm unique in Canadian history but which was nonetheless part of a paternalistic continuum which positioned those who were not of the white, middle class status quo as incapable and dependent.

These dynamics laid the groundwork for a circumscribed citizenship position, proximate to the hegemony in the highly public dynamics of their entry into Canada yet disciplined into a peripheral position vis-à-vis the newly (re)valued society and state. Both Pfeiffer and Beiser found Vietnamese immigrants were more likely to be satisfied with their integration process if they had come here under under-funded, under-resourced state sponsorship. Those adjusting to the Private Sponsorship Program had more feelings of inadequacy, were more likely to become depressed, and had difficulty trying to determine “who these people were and why they wanted to help us, complete


89
strangers.” This, of course, was not true of all those who came to Canada as part of these programs and, in Chapter One, I disputed the reliability of these findings. However, Pfeiffer’s research indicates the level to which sharing private homespaces and resources exacerbated the difficulties Vietnamese refugees had in adjusting to and negotiating with the dominant culture in Canada.\footnote{Pfeiffer 1999.}

Of course, there was a tremendous variation of experience.\footnote{Interview, W3. April 3, 2005.}

When they first come you have no idea. I mean – this is your karma, this is happening to you because you’ve done something. I mean – there were a lot of conversions. There was a fire in one of the refugee camps. Everyone was running away and they saw these white people running towards the fire. And nobody could understand – this was these people’s karma dying because they’d done something wrong and these white people wanted to save them. There were a lot of conversions because of that. You deal with those dynamics when you’re sponsoring. It’s foreign to us. So how do you deal with that? There’s no way we sponsor to get conversions – it’s the farthest thing from our minds. I think some of our sponsoring groups struggled with these issues. I mean, there were issues like, well, you’re gonna eat what I eat. We came across that too, like, we’re not gonna make special food. They’re gonna eat what I eat. I know people who picked up refugees at the airport and took them straight to McDonalds. They’d been starving for months – they threw up all the way home. There was this one woman. She was only allowed to take a shower once a week. There were all these rules and regulations. But the Vietnamese are very clean – that’s not kosher.\footnote{Interview, W8. March 19, 2005.}

**Mervin’s Health**
Mervin has been healthy over the last year.

**Mervin’s Education**
He’s repeating a grade this year because of a lack of interest in studying and so still is in the fifth grade.

**Mervin’s family situation**
There have been no changes to who lives with Mervin.

**The family’s access to basic services**
Mervin’s family are still using a private latrine for their toilet facilities.\footnote{From a report sent to a sponsor through Foster Parents Plan.}

As any debtor, teenager or welfare recipient is keenly aware, receiving support often comes with many strings attached. The above, abbreviated report of Mervin

---

Jiminez exemplifies the kind of surveillance inherent in the management of a ‘ward’ or a ‘charge’ and sheds light on the kinds of dynamics that accompany even fairly anonymous, remote and minimal levels of support. His school, home, brain and even his bathroom are invaded by the seeking eyes of the concerned Western subject, though the chances of them ever actually meeting are extremely slim and closely managed by the aid organization. “I’m tempted to write the program and ask if there might be someone more appropriate for my support,” said the sponsor, one of my interview participants, on receiving this report. “I’m not very happy about continuing to give money to someone who has to repeat grade five.” Thus, armed with the ambivalence between, on the one hand, the limited and mediated information gained across cultures and through the administrative confines of the sponsorship program and, on the other hand, the moral, ethical and cultural superiority granted through the enlightened, benevolent, historical, geographical contexts surrounding the support given, the ‘giver’ is able to assert authority across boundaries while expecting the kind of gratitude due to the central subject, upon whom survival, progress, and enlightenment apparently depend. As part of the arrangement, the receiver agrees to remain on the periphery, accepting the limited and bounded nature of their citizenship position and existing, for his sponsor, fixed within a set system of evaluation.

Supplying relief...morality was systematically linked to the economic factor, involving a continuous surveillance of the family, a full penetration into the details of family life... Charity either sanctioned an individual's loss of autonomy or maintained him short of beggary on the basis of criteria of externally manifested associations, including the practice of religion, and family respectability.352

They [Vietnamese refugees] will be quiet and subdued, well-behaved and work their way into jobs. The people who object to them will create all the problems but that can be coped with. It is no reason to back away.353

The real threat is from those who would deny Canadians the opportunity of conscience to help these people and would weaken the perception Canadians have of themselves as motivated by the finest of humanitarian principles.354

352 Donzelot 1979, p. 72.
353 “They will be quiet and subdued, well-behaved and work their way into jobs. Refugees’ fees called biggest problem.” The Province. July 19, 1979, p. 2.
“Often tolerance is structured around a discourse highlighting the ‘value’ of the other to be tolerated in the sense of the capacity to exploit this other, a capacity closely linked to that of being able to position such an other.” There were several instances reported in the media when the Vietnamese-Canadian citizenship position became extremely proscribed within the rapidly-evolving relations between globalized labour and capital. For instance, there was an extended debate about a group of berry farmers in the Vancouver suburbs who tried to sponsor several Vietnamese families to provide cheap labour as protection against the unionizing workers who had themselves recently immigrated to Canada\textsuperscript{355}. Several of my interview respondents felt they had been brought here as cheap labour and had been disciplined as such.

Holy shit! We came here for this? Our sponsors wanted a family of 11 to take care of their farm. We had lots of young kids. The sponsors were disappointed because they were too young to work. It was already too late, so we helped out. They were put to work – the kids. We had a family of 11 in 3 rooms. There was an incredible range in experience. We had to milk the cows at 5:00 every morning and tend to the rest of the maintenance of the farm before working a 12-hour day in a completely different part of town. I was 14. I learned as fast as I could”

Despite this experience, ..... maintains, “We love our sponsors like our family. Milking cows was kind of fun as we’d never done anything like that before. But we couldn’t wait to get off that farm.”\textsuperscript{356}

Vietnamese identity was initially formed around their willingness to work hard\textsuperscript{357} and their lingering identity as ‘boat people’\textsuperscript{358}, two moments where the ‘tolerance’ necessitated by the cheap labour requirement of industrialized nations defined the citizenship position for the Vietnamese immigrant. However, the Private Sponsorship Programme carried more identity effects than just the creation of a supplicant, immigrant working class. Canadians were at least symbolically “opening their hearts and wallets”\textsuperscript{359} to people floating on un-stated oceans, something which many have described as a “humanitarian highpoint” for Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and the Western

\textsuperscript{355} “Farmers eyeing refugee labor.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. August 2, 1979, p. A1.

\textsuperscript{356} “Hard work helps Vietnam refugees to fit in.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 21, 1977, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{357} “They are gradually changing from boat people into citizens of Vancouver: The winning world of Janet Tran.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 25, 1980, p. A12.

\textsuperscript{358} “Hearts and pocketbooks are open to Asian families fleeing persecution.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. June 30, 1979, p. 1.
World and as a juncture in asserting the centrality of Canadian participation in the control functions of international foreign policy initiatives. Thus the exploitable value in these immigrants was not merely in the cheap and skilled labour they would undoubtedly provide and the legacy of which lingers to this day. The bodies of Vietnamese refugees, neatly positioned as infantile, receptive and Other in relation to the generosity and discursive maturity of the Western subject, added value to the bounded identity of Western, white, humanitarian, enlightened, progressive, tolerant and probably Christian full-blooded Canadian citizen.

-There was this Viet guy at work. He seemed like a really nice guy. Then he just disappeared. That’s the thing. They’re secretive people. They keep to themselves. That’s why it’s so hard to infiltrate them. The police have got to hire Vietnamese undercovers. Why is that?
-Well, think of where they come from. They learn to kill when they’re five.

3.7 Conclusion: Set-up for Threat

The hardest thing to understand is why the Indochina refugees, who seem so pathetic to the Western world, are thought so undesirable both by Vietnam, the country that is getting rid of most of them, and nearby countries to which they are fleeing… Their culture is different, their language impenetrable. They eat odd food (which in Moslem countries like Malaysia and Indonesia may also be taboo) in an odd way, with chopsticks. Their puritan attitudes to work, education and family make them formidable Communists and equally formidable capitalists… Foreign opinion and diplomacy can only try to make a dent in Vietnamese stubbornness and petulance. But surely there is a case for a special international operation to help the Vietnamese, turned into no better than defenceless children by the tragedy of their country, and, like children, deserving all the help the world can give.

In the hearts and minds of the Canadian liberal mainstream, the Private Sponsorship Program represents both a humanitarian highpoint and evidence of the moral superiority of Canadian immigration policies and the Multicultural state.

Australia can’t give much help to these Vietnamese because of a racist immigration policy. Malaysia and Indonesia don’t want to help because of religious bias, and because of a congenital Asiatic aversion to giving help to any outsider down on his luck. Centuries of survival support these Asians in their selfishness. But for me the current needs of the refugees are more important than

---

360 Beiser 2003
361 Simich 2003
362 Conversation overheard at the corner of Main and Broadway, June 22, 2004.
the ancient attitudes of several hundred million muslims and a handful of racist Australians.\textsuperscript{364}

Does it occur to us that in the years ahead other Canadians might look back to see what we did on July 1, 1979, that was distinctive, that said something about Canada? We are nation of 23 million, most of us quite comfortable, in a vast and rich land. If this was the time of Auschwitz, would we make room for more than 8k people who would otherwise die in the gas chambers? Of course we would.\textsuperscript{365}

Of course, we all know that Canadians, in fact, did not welcome Jewish refugees during World War Two. Thus the above editorial is a potent moment in the use of the 'boat people crisis' in a cycle of collective forgetting. Placing this created western figure as central in constructions of humanitarianism stripped value from Vietnamese culture and people, as well as from landscapes of apparently Australian and Asian racisms, added it to the white, middle class hegemony, and used it to reassert dominance over the shifting natures of a world in the throes of massive change and doubt. Churches, communities and families were re-valued as a result of the "magical foreignness"\textsuperscript{366} brought to the Canadian landscape through identities and citizenship positions that were closely managed by the people, the media and the state. Through the success of the Private Sponsorship Programme, a history for Canadian humanitarianism was re-visioned in which Canadians assumed world leadership in refugee sponsorship. Under such a watchful eye, imbued with such moral authority and patriarchal responsibility by the very bodies it surveilles, it is no wonder that levels of Vietnamese criminality have been exaggerated and granted far more weight than they deserve.

Those who say "Canada is for Canadians, please do not let the boat people ruin our country" should read Mein Kampf.

We have grown and prospered by this varied mixture of people striving to better their and their children's lot in life. We have been so successful in looking after our basic needs that we have been able to extend our help to others. In fact, we have gained international recognition for our readiness to help those in need. The Canadian identity is recognized as being imbued with human compassion and dignity; some of us have forgotten that.

Those who condemn acceptance of the boat people are flaunting their prosperity, developed for them by immigrants of the past. Their warped

\textsuperscript{364} Orchard, Malcom. Call to action for 'boat people.' \textit{Victoria Colonist.} June 27, 1979, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{365} "Today a birthday tomorrow history." Editorial: \textit{Victoria Colonist.} July 1, 1979, p. 4.

reasoning and selfish patriotism are eroding the humanitarian cornerstone of our Canadian identity. They are like a cancer eating away at a healthy boy.

As a Canadian who is proud of his heritage, proud of his national identity, and grateful for the opportunities this country has afforded me, I say help the boat people. Let this country embrace them, and give them the chance at a fulfilling life. Would you turn a hungry child from your door? God bless you who understand what Canada will gain from accepting those people; God help those of you who do not.367

In the following chapter I examine how arguments like these, emphatically supportive of the Vietnamese yet placing them in limited positions against hegemonic definitions of the multicultural state and people, so easily switched from the fetish of infantilized Other as diligent and manageable to fear of the violence at the margins.

“In order to rally people, governments need enemies. They want us to be afraid, to hate, so we will rally behind them. And if they do not have a real enemy, they will invent one in order to mobilise us.”

4.1 Introduction and Literature Review

Humanitarianism is extremely complex, with its interplay of power/knowledge effects and personal projects. It very often quickly obscures the priorities of the receiver.

How was it possible to ensure the development of practices of preservation and formation of the population while at the same time detaching it from any directly political role and yet applying to it a mission of domination, pacification, and social integration? By means of philanthropy.

We are just dragged through the press all the time. I can understand – it takes a long time to establish ourselves. We lost so much. But it doesn’t seem fair. It makes it much harder. My son put some pot plants on my balcony. I got crazy. I was like, “don’t you realize we’re Vietnamese? Don’t you know what people will

368 Thich Nhat Hanh.
369 Kennedy 2004, p. 357.
370 Donzelot 1979, p. 56.
think of us?” He’s fought it so long he just ignores it. I’m afraid to read the paper. I’m afraid what they’ll say about us today.\(^{371}\)

In the first three chapters of this thesis, I have examined how identity is created in relation to its other, specifically through media representations surrounding Operation Babylift (Chapter 2) and the Private Sponsorship Programme (Chapter 3). I have employed a wide range of literature, focusing on production of the Nation at many scales through media analysis and public opinion around minority issues and immigration. In this chapter, I determine some of the ways these dynamics have dovetailed around the subsequent/concurrent criminalization of Vietnamese identity in the transnational spaces of Vancouver and British Columbia (BC) from 1985 to the present. This traditional transition of hazing newcomers is part of a global terrain of othering which objectifies, marginalizes and reifies oppositional identities within the context of the modern sovereign/disciplinary/biopolitical state. This chapter’s analysis is the next step in ‘unmapping’ colonialist paradigms around self/other, us/them and ours/ theirs. I write it to aid the imagination of a true diversity and a multiculturalism that is more expansive than merely inclusive.

The most obvious truth about nature/culture is its limitless subjectivity. Because our cyborg technologies of observation are rooted in diversity, everything and everyone is constantly (re)created through the incredibly diverse power-knowledge effects of the dissimilar observer. Thus, (flawed) consensus always requires its (flawed) dissidents, and to examine every facet of a discourse is beyond the scope of any project (always inherently flawed), whether it be a short poem or a lifetime passion. To indulge in a truism; immigrant resettlement is rich with the glorious complexity that overrides all of life’s realms. My intention is not to rip to shreds any possible claim to compassion or tolerance among our infinite minds and hearts. Chapter 5 contends that diverse spirits of goodness are significant elements of all space, time and experience, and thus inform some of the greatest everyday projects of hope and humanity. It may sound ludicrously nostalgic, but I believe this is where most of the hope resides in earthly experience; not in economy nor physical health but in the constancy of the human capacity for true compassion and the search for a richness of knowledge. I contend that the stereotyping

of Vietnamese people as criminals and degenerates in Vancouver media and popular discourse acts as a barrier to accomplishing the goals and intentions of diverse subjectivities and collective possibilities.372

We all have addictions and susceptibilities which feed each other in the ways we understand the world. Vancouver has a susceptibility to doubt its foundational identity and has a long tradition of subjecting newcomers to projections of degeneracy and threat.373 These border effects are mapped all over every aspect of Vancouver. Physically, we have a West/East divide where real estate differentials still determine who can live in certain spaces.374 Minorities still feel politically marginalized despite long histories of involvement in most realms of local society.375 And global events like September 11th and the SARS crisis quickly ignite supposedly buried notions about race and ethnicity in Vancouver spaces. For this chapter, I started with RCMP Crosscultural Module D: The Vietnamese as a guideline to the institutional creation of a Vietnamese criminal identity. I have analyzed all the Vancouver and Victoria newspaper articles from 1985 to 2005 that contain the words Vietnamese or Vietnam. From 1987 to present, this has also included smaller papers from throughout BC. All told, this amounts to over 20,000 articles. At times, this has been an unpleasant and laborious task, as I am proud of both my Canadian heritage and my connections to Vietnamese people all over the world; some of the hatred and racialization that spoke through the media was discouraging to what I thought Canada could be. My interviews, discussions and email correspondence with 27 people from all sides of this sponsorship, most of whom have become long-term refugee advocates, has been not only instructive but also inspiring, helping to dull the effects of reading 20 years of articles about gangs, drugs and criminals. Recognizing and appreciating all of our flaws has helped in exploring the dynamics of Vietnamese identity creation in Vancouver and BC. Through positioning ourselves within a deep understanding of the inherent vulnerability of all human existence, we can look beyond hatred and racism to find clues to the unmapping of local/transnational border effects around immigration and diversity. This is the kind of

372 Kennedy 2004, p. 357.
work that needs to be done if we are to break the cycles of minority marginalization and rethink the way immigrants and refugees negotiate membership in the national imaginary.

Although these [strategies] support the construction of the migrant as inhuman, they also support a discourse in which the North’s humanity is defined through its “benevolent” acceptance of immigrants and refugees.376

Let’s say very briefly that through studying madness and psychiatry, crime and punishment, I have tried to show how we have indirectly constituted ourselves through the exclusion of some others: criminals, mad people, and so on.377

Foucault outlines the various strategies he sees as productive of objects accessible to power-knowledge.378 This is not, as he writes, a conceptualization that sees sovereignty determining and enforcing specific identity and the variable right to express that identity over space. Rather, identity moves at multiple nodes in the diverse and dovetailing power-knowledge effects of the liberal consensus. In Chapter Two, I refer to this as contrapuntal rather than merely contrasting.

So the question is not: Why do some people want to be dominant? What do they want? What is their overall strategy? The question is this: What happens at the moment of, at the level of the procedure of subjugation, or in the continuous and uninterrupted processes that subjugate bodies, direct gestures, and regulate forms of behavior? In other words, rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects, or as the subject.379

These power-knowledge effects fall into three diverse yet multiply-constituting realms. Sovereignty constitutes the subject through the ability to kill – the power to take life – from above. This is the strategy that Arendt explores when imagining the need to become a criminal merely to be legally constituted within the discursive realm of the state.380 The only point of management under pure sovereignty would be this power to kill, to be subjected by the sovereign. Thus, to enter into this field of power means to place yourself under its absolute control. Sovereignty is the crux of Catherine Dauvergne’s analysis of the subject-constituting effects of the liberal humanitarian

377 Foucault 1988, p. 146.
378 Foucault 2003.
379 Ibid, p. 28.
consensus. Focusing on the juridical, Dauvergne’s work reveals the depth of meaning created for the multicultural state through a temporary, compassionate relaxing of sovereignty in the admission of refugees. However, this is only a start in understanding ways in which the refugee object is created in the poly-vocal and polyvalent terrain of identity politics. “Humanitarianism is more than is expected, more than justice demands; it tells us several things about those who offer it and little about those who receive its benefits.”

While I agree that the context of refugee admission allows for only a limited identity projection, we should not discount its effect. The Private Sponsorship Program most certainly allows for a richer interpretation of Vietnamese presence in Canadian space.

Relations between parents and children belonged to the sphere of benevolence, not that of legal charity. Its responsibility was moral, not juridical. The family constituted its own government, accountable for the social effects of its members, not its private behavior.

Encountering Canada, as they did, in direct contact with the spatial and discursive homespaces of the self-constituting Canadian subject, the relationship between citizen and sponsored refugee entered the moral realm of benevolence, not merely the distant territory of statistical and juridical policy. Working with Foucault’s notion of governmentality, the proximity of the Vietnamese body allowed for close “contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self.” These technologies of domination, according to Foucault, involve the ‘power games’ through which we structure the field of action of others, far beyond the limited notion of pure sovereignty. “This can take many forms, e.g. ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation.” The media coverage of the boat people crisis, along with the Private Sponsorship Programme created a visibility of Vietnamese identity in direct proximity to the technologies of governmentality that define and discipline both self and other into certain realms of possibility. “It was the visibility of the issue that provoked the backlash, though this visibility was necessary at first to

---

381 Dauvergne 2005, p. 63.
382 Donzelot 1979, p. 74.
stimulate the compassion and response of Canadians."³⁸⁵ "Oh – they were the ultimate in visible minorities. I don’t know much about other immigrants – before or since."³⁸⁶ This heightened physical-discursive contact between self and other highlighted the moral realms of identity creation as a disciplinary effect on both self and other. The discursive proximity of the Vietnamese object of power-knowledge, gained through the publicity of their arrival and the direct contact of Operation Babylift and the Private Sponsorship Programme, attracted the attention of the nation, highlighting the struggles of individual people in the daily practice of living and placing them in negotiation with other concepts of daily life.

The third major technique of power, after sovereignty and discipline, is the presently dominant paradigm of ‘biopower’. Where sovereignty has power over death, biopower grants and regulates life. Biopower represents the desire to achieve security (physical/discursive) through control over life’s random events. Thus, though disciplinary power is obvious in the ordering, policing and education of the individual subject, biopower brings control to the mass effects of population. Through collective definition and regulation of identity, biopower regimes produce a kind of homeostasis aimed at protecting the whole from the dangers within.³⁸⁷ This concept allows us to conceptualize the leap in scale from the individual criminal (produced and disciplined in any community) to a blanket identity for Vietnamese people as delinquent and dangerous. However, in focusing on the regulation of identity, Foucault implies that the Other is encircled and their effects are minimized by the majority group; that sovereignty, discipline and biopower dovetail in minimizing the aleatory, or unanticipated events that challenge society. I prefer his earlier repudiation of the ‘repressive hypothesis’,³⁸⁸ which argues that, rather than minimizing the unexpected, there are elements in power that proliferate the other, granting them inordinate ‘life’ through the media and concurrent public discourse. The multiple technologies of meaning-creation and manipulation produce and collectivize the Vietnamese through the twin processes of criminalization

³⁸⁷ Foucault 2003.
³⁸⁸ Foucault 1978.
and racialization. The Vietnamese body, thus categorized and proliferated, fills Vietnamese spaces and identities with the kinds of degraded thematics that threaten all boundaries of what we assume to expect from the grateful refugee. The efforts of individuals to define and regulate the Vietnamese body, on a mundane level, in turn creates, proliferates and naturalizes what comes to be known as a specifically Vietnamese brand of criminality. This boundary object, in close proximity through its constant repetition, adds value to the management capabilities of the biopolitical liberal consensus, as here is an object of power-knowledge that required advanced technologies of discipline, regulation and control. Thus, creating an expectation of the Vietnamese as criminal, unpredictable and threatening, we gain confidence and stability in the shifting sands of colonialist ontology; through exaggerating the perception of threat, we regain faith in the Western ability to manage the unruly Other. We need to break away from this epistemological dependence on the self/other dichotomy to examine ways in which we can achieve a sense of stability born less of exploitation and more of the jubilation of which diversity is capable.

4.2 Studying Minorities

When interviewees were asked about the ‘Vietnamese community’ now, every one of them shook their heads and talked about drugs, gangs and other forms of criminality. This was not the result of leading questions or suggestive language, as my Ethics Review specifically forbade me from establishing any connection between ‘Vietnamese’ and ‘criminal’. One could attempt to construct a neat continuum between, perhaps, the fetishization of the Vietnamese identity object as alternately docile/diligent and violent/irrational/threatening. Going deeper than a standard analysis of media-immigration discourse, one could equate positive attitudes toward immigration with reporting of spring rolls, noodle soup and success stories (of which there were very few). On the other hand, backlashes around immigration could be paralleled to stories about gangs, violence and grow-ops. This would allow for a more fulsome interpretation of the media’s role in discourses around immigration than Lanphier’s work, for example, which merely measures the amount of articles about refugees and sponsorship while not examining the content. He thus uses the huge spike in negative reporting of the Chinese
boat arrivals in summer, 1999 as evidence that private sponsorship increases awareness of refugee issues.\textsuperscript{390} I feel the heightened proximity of sponsored refugees exacerbates the permissibility of open racialization in the newsmedia; when events allow a backlash against immigration policy, journalists are much freer in their ethnic labeling of the criminal threat and thus clearer in the intention to jump scale from the individual criminal to embrace a biopolitical commentary of the entire populace. I attempted to quantify and graph some of these effects but realized, in the process, that not only are many others doing this kind of work very ably\textsuperscript{391} but that representations in the newsmedia are decidedly only one element of a much greater problem, and the strategies of power-knowledge can never be calculated along a simple x-y axis. For example, when protest or public opinion encouraged journalists to refrain from centring on the Vietnamese gangster as frame of analysis, ethnic identification, often spurious, was relegated to the final line of the article or insinuated through other means. Interacting with previously-held prejudices and insecurities through their very proximity, these strategies were perhaps even more effective at creating and reinforcing the assumption of Vietnamese guilt – that they were somehow a diseased population, performing a cultural-biological inheritance that has always set them apart in the world.

Several of my interview subjects said they would only scan articles and letters about criminality, not really interested in those kinds of issues, reading them in detail only if they somewhere mentioned the word ‘Vietnamese’. Thus, the proximity gained through the Private Sponsorship Programme created a market for reporting about Vietnamese criminality – a market that exists to the present.

When “Vietnamese gangs terrorize city” was on the front of the paper, I called the editor. From the content of the article and my experience with the community, I knew it was clearly not a Vietnamese gang. I asked why they didn’t print more positive stories – I knew so many people who were doing well. The Editor said he needed to print the stories that sell papers and, if that hurt a community, that wasn’t his problem. The Chinese gangs have power – you can’t drag them through the press any more. East Indians too. The Vietnamese don’t have enough power yet to pressure the media to be fair.\textsuperscript{392}

\textsuperscript{390} Laphier 2003.
\textsuperscript{391} See literature review, Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{392} Interview, refugee advocate (M10). March 20, 2005.
People hear about this stuff because that's what they crave. Who wants to hear about a boring old family doing boring old things? So what you get is the white man’s version of the story... A lot of gang problems were blown out of proportion because the police saw they could get budgets, get money out of this. I know this because I was part of the process at the time. You know – there are problems. But street level stuff – no I know it’s there but it’s not nearly what they said. Not nearly what it was with the Scots Irish. That was what overwhelmed me the most – trying to fight the media and police on this. It was frustrating when they worked so hard against us. I was overwhelmed but I never said no to sponsorship.\textsuperscript{393}

Of course, there is a significant problem with crime amongst people of Vietnamese heritage, and it is a great source of concern for many in the Lower Mainland. However, the self/other dynamics around Vietnamese entry into Canadian discursive space inflate the nature of specifically Vietnamese transgression and create barriers for the success of the very people we have tried so generously to support. They also display some of the contingencies in any kind of humanitarianism, revealing spaces for intervention in the multiple arenas of refugee resettlement.

Examining dynamics like these thus requires far more than a simple graph. In fact, I believe a teleological, quantifiable analysis would merely silence diversity and reproduce the discourses that proliferate long-established relationships with the abject other. Chan and Mirchandani and others believe academic studies that employ standard ethno-racial categories merely repeat and reinforce these categories onto history, space and identity.\textsuperscript{394} This, again, is why I believe Beiser’s report of Vietnamese success, along with all similar articles in the local newspapers, merely reproduces widely-held beliefs despite its good intentions. As it speaks against the grain of common opinion, yet reifies race-culture as a category of analysis, laudable commentary is quickly and easily relativized within the multiple strategies of power-knowledge that we all hold at our disposal. Thus, in this chapter, I attempt to speak with the articles and discourses that I have found in 20 years of newspaper reporting about Vietnamese people, while also placing them in interaction with other issues around immigration and identity. I hope to unmap and, thus, denaturalize, the discursive terrain that marginalizes the object of biopolitical surveillance, although this kind of analysis necessitates presenting a vast

\textsuperscript{393} Interview, Ml. January 29, 2005.
\textsuperscript{394} Chan and Mirchandani 2002.
array of primary\textsuperscript{395} and secondary material. You, the reader, as also complicit in the framing of identity and space, are expected to read deeply into the material, while taking some of it at face value rather than relying on my interpretation. Thus, I call on the reader to be active, to participate with the material, as we all contribute to the imagining of a nation.

4.3 Land/Body, Benevolence/Backlash

I hear that the federal government is going to allow 16,000 Vietnamese into Canada. Does Prime Minister Brian Mulroney not understand democracy or decency? Why is the government so racist as to discriminate against Sikhs, yet allow many orientals in? We Sikhs do not plunder shellfish beaches, we do not eat roast dogs! We are good hard-working people, very intelligent, do not have gangs, and also speak English. We are never drunk in public and you know we are genuine entrepreneurs! We demand equal treatment and also demand the ratio of Sikhs to orientals must be met. We are now very angry as all other minority groups must be.\textsuperscript{396}

This letter, based on the misunderstanding that the boat people sponsorship would affect total immigrant quotas\textsuperscript{397}, claims the capability to manage national space through identification with supposed Western ethical norms. In his positioning against an assumed set of Vietnamese traits, the author provides a neat rundown of the various themes chosen to define Vietnamese identity through media and public discourse. While protesters successfully limited media connecting Vietnamese people with dog meat, discourses around fisheries, gangs and aberrant behaviour still feature high in the Canadian-Vietnamese imaginary. This article is also appropriate in emphasizing that these dynamics were in no way exclusive to a discriminatory structure between White and Other. This represents a significant shift from earlier positionings of Vietnamese orphans, as analyzed in Chapter 2, in the arms of the exclusively white representatives of the Canadian domestic realm. As people from many heritages sponsored and supported the refugees, and their bodies were delivered into all our homespaces whether physically or through the media, we all were also complicit in their marginalization. The agency of Vietnamese-identified people, in the thirty years since their arrival, of course, has also

\textsuperscript{395} Primary material is all copied directly from microfiche or internet newspaper indexes. I have not corrected any technical errors nor noted them with a [sic] as I believe them to be part of the document.


\textsuperscript{397} Adelman 1982.
been a significant factor. The following discursive moments in the BC media provided structures from which to circumscribe Vietnamese citizenship in Vancouver.

4.4 Persecution/Prosecution: Threat from the Outset

The bleeding-hearts attitude toward the Vietnam refugees reminds me of an elderly widow I knew some years ago. When we first met, she was living comfortably with a dearly loved dog and cat. But this happy state of affairs didn’t last, because somewhere along the way the kind-hearted widow took pity on one stray pet after another. They multiplied with amazing speed until she could no longer afford to feed either them or herself. Her once attractive home became a nightmare of noise and confusion. Then one day a neighbour found her lying in a pool of blood – savaged by the very dogs she’d befriended.398

In Chapter 2, I use Bhabha to explore the dynamic nature of mimicry/menace as it expressed itself through Operation Babylift. In the early reactions to the boat people crisis, as the first instance since 1975 when Vietnamese identity was placed proximate to the nation, menace was almost forefront in the media. Obviously dehumanized, as in the above letter and quotation from the Vancouver Police Cross Cultural Communications module, they were also objects positioned within the biopower of the Canadian home and state, here viscerally betraying a defenceless widow. Letters reacting negatively to the successive waves of Vietnamese arrivals display impressions of menace (Asian, Communist, vicious, primitive, prolific), connections to earlier narratives around Chinese presences in Vancouver (dirty, secretive, mysterious, lascivious, criminal)399 and the assumed thus exploited significance for the everyday Canadian of the Vietnamese entry into national/domestic space.

Good causes become fashionable from time to time in our country. Will helping the hordes of boat people fleeing Vietnam prove to be such a passing fad? This is an awesome people-saving-people opportunity, one we shouldn’t try to dump on our government alone.400

The enthusiastic welcome by Canadians of the boat people poses some questions. Are we really being noble, or are we simply on an emotional binge that may degenerate through future circumstances into something less than a love match? Our living standard, in the eyes of many other nations, is enviable, but we are warned that because of increasing energy shortages that standard cannot be

maintained. Instead we reduce the quality of life, plunge towards ultimate destruction of our species.\textsuperscript{401}

These people are Asians, their ways are not our ways: their food is different, their train of thought and outlook on life is different, but we are being asked to take them into our homes to mix with our children. These people are from a Communist country; one cannot help but wonder if among them there are not some Communist “plants” posing as refugees, who may cause us untold trouble eventually.\textsuperscript{402}

Their soaring birthrate is well known and with this number it won’t be too long before Canadians will be vastly outnumbered. They won’t thank Canada either. They will really take everything as their due. All this money being spent on them should go to our own poor, sick, destitute, and old people. I still think most of this is a racket anyway. They look remarkably healthy and well fed to me, and once they get a toehold here they won’t care who they step on to get what they want. If those people are let in the results will be disastrous.\textsuperscript{403}

These letters all mobilize a Canadian land, nature, politics and heritage which are placed under threat by the arrival of the refugees. In turn, these authors discipline the refugees into very specific categories reflecting the threat they are assumed to hold for the imagined Canada. They are considered too well-fed (thus undeserving), as potential Communist ‘plants’ and as wily foreigners set on exploiting the generosity and prosperity of the Canadian people and nation. Dauvergne writes that “the refugee is constructed as the ultimate other to the nation in order to be permitted entry. Refugees are the most unlike us, as well as the most unknown, facilitating our imaginative construction of their identity.”\textsuperscript{404} Any identity construction certainly interacts with local contexts, but it also draws established prejudices from discourses such as the Cold War, economic downturns and reactions to official multiculturalism. Lumping together a particular conception of the ‘refugee’ creates not only an extremely unwieldy blanket category, ignoring the incredible diversity in persons seeking refuge, but also lays the ground for an outraged and far-reaching backlash when the myth is exposed. The polarities of human perception always provide a backlash to charitable participation, as both positive and negative opinions of the Sponsorship hinge on similar tropes around

\textsuperscript{401} Betty Iredale. “Boat people’s fate: it’s a house divided; Letters.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 20, 1979, p. A5.

\textsuperscript{402} Louise Jonson. “Refugee influx makes little sense.” \textit{The Victoria Colonist}. July 25, 1979, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{403} Margaret Thomas. “The Boat People; Letters.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. July 31, 1979, p. A5.

\textsuperscript{404} Dauvergne 2005, p. 81.
nation and population. Thus, throughout the coverage of the boat people crisis, we set up not only the myth of the refugee but also the expectation of betrayal, as few immigrant groups have ever been so immediately proximate to the ordinary citizen. “The focus is on the gap between our good impulses and their bad expression. A central idea is betrayal – of an original impulse, purpose, or objective.”

Many of them come to Canada to seek a new life – a life of crime. One out of every 10 people landing here without the proper papers winds up a criminal, says a government report. And another 10 per cent were either charged or strongly suspected of being involved in crime, mostly breaking and entering, theft, assault and drugs. “These so-called fugitives from persecution are actually fugitives from prosecution,” B.C. Attorney General Brian Smith said, adding the findings only apply to “spontaneous” refugees, who jumped ship, defected or somehow arrived on our doorstep illegally. He said the findings showed Ottawa’s screening process was “hopeless.”

As the ordinary citizen is not aware of refugee categories of admission, the State’s entire screening process is highlighted then placed in doubt, and the headline screaming “Refugees linked to crime” is pejorative in its message; the differentiation between groups of refugees is less than conclusive. “The absence of a liberal justice standard for immigration decision making means that migration laws can be assessed only in terms of the values they inscribe along the “us-them” line – the things they tell us about ourselves.” When the media place their attention on a constructed group like ‘refugee’, the visibility created is specific in its interactions with established prejudices and the colour/class lines between us and them. Thus, reporting about the boat people, both positive and negative, created an almost inevitable and palpable backlash.

4.5 Backlash

A few days ago when I stood staring at the front page picture of a daily newspaper from a sidewalk news stand, I was not alone. Passers-by gathered. Some shook their heads and sighed. Some whispered their curses. Damn those aliens, yes. Stupid government policy – I heard that too. I walked on, but the image lingered.

In television newscasts, I see little migrant children in handcuffs, I see angry crowds calling them and their parents criminals. In the newspapers, I read about a

---

408 Dauvergne 2005, p. 53.
courtroom where people wear masks. Images of the dilapidated ships on which the migrants came appear. I look, and I remember the high school lessons of history. I remember the derided Komagata Maru and the ill-fated ships carrying asylum-seeking Jews – the pages of shame. I turn more pages and see joyous boatloads of British and Italians and Ukrainians, of Scandinavians and of all ethnicities from all corners of Europe. None had come invited by people of First Nations. We are all immigrants – why do we forget?

I am a peace officer and I believe in Canada's humanitarian heart. In face of the present refugee crisis, I join my friends and neighbours urging for an effective change of the country's immigration policy. I hope for a change that results in no children in handcuffs, no courtrooms where people wear masks, and no more crowds condemning those to whom they should lend moral support and compassion. I hope for this change because I still shudder at the memory of my harrowing voyage, and wish that experience on no one.409

"I know we [former Vietnamese refugees] had a role to play in this really ridiculous backlash against ‘boat people’. That was what made it extremely difficult to hear what people on the street were saying about the Chinese boat arrivals. I cried about it. How can I be responsible for such hate?" said Tam Tran, the author of this article.

Howard Adelman, among others, anticipated this kind of immigration backlash from the outset, exploring the dynamics of the discursive shift between refugee proximity as productive of a sacred, stable central subject to this arbiter of national histories becoming scared of the threat of the other.

The essence of the vocal backlash is not primarily intolerance of others different from oneself. It is insecurity about one's own way of life, an insecurity which breeds defensive reactions and false projections. In such circumstances, honest pride in past cultural accomplishments becomes transformed into a false pride, which closes off self-critical scrutiny and the willingness to accept new challenges.410

One of the standard techniques for categorizing and thus dismissing this discursive regime is the concept of ‘compassion fatigue’:

"It's frightening really to look this in the face. It's compassion fatigue." Reports about welfare fraud among refugee claimants and phoney documents have also created cynicism. "There's a bit of a perception that exists in the general public that maybe not all of these (refugees) are so deserving," says Glynis Williams,

409 Tam Tran. Voices from the High Seas. Courtesy of the Author. He is reflecting on undocumented Chinese arrivals, intercepted on the BC coast in summer 1999, in the context of his own experiences.

coordinator of a group of Anglican and Presbyterian churches in Montreal that has sponsored more than 200 refugees over the last five years.\footnote{Jacquie Miller. "Racism, stereotypes sour refugee-sponsorship plan." \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. April 18, 1994, p. A6.}

Through the categorization of a syndrome like 'compassion fatigue', backlash becomes normalized. So is a retreat to established concepts of common values as expressed not only in the realm of the law but also by calling to a supposed standard by which all citizens are equally and publicly judged:

One way Canadians express their values is through their laws, which everyone, newcomer and oldtimer, is expected to uphold. Most Canadians also adhere to broader principles such as equality of the sexes, individual freedom and protecting the environment. The most just thing for Canadians to do is clearly spell out, from the moment someone seeks to emigrate here, just what values all Canadians are expected to uphold. You have to be very clear. If someone comes here and engages in an irksome act, which they had not been told is irksome, then you get into some ethical difficulty. You have to clearly specify what is permissible and not permissible.\footnote{Douglas Todd. "It's not racist to discuss our differences." \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. Nov. 4, 1995, p. D11.}

Such discourses, again, place value in the disciplinary capability of the central individual and also in the biopolitical power of the state to regulate, on a population level, the threat inherent in the relaxing of sovereignty for an infantilized other. It is through these dynamics (not) permissible, (not) irksome) that the individual incursion gains significance not just in exercises of sovereignty but in the meta-narratives of race and ethnicity that, if we are to believe Foucault, are essential elements to the concept of nationhood.

[A] growing public ambivalence not only threatens this generosity, but makes the strangers allowed to pass beyond the country's gates increasingly less welcome. At least four factors help account for Canada's overall swing from generosity to ambivalence: misinformation, lack of information, realistic concerns, and myth.\footnote{Beiser 1999, p. 165.}

Of the elements that contribute to the compassion fatigue, ambivalence or marginalization of generosity's other, the four factors mentioned by Beiser are all well-represented in the myth of the Vietnamese criminal. Adelman and Beiser both fault the sloppy and presumptuous work of organizations which feed both the media and government with guidelines for policy.
Outside Vietnamese gangs try to link up with local criminals

By BRIAN POWER

rose from the audience to denounce Mayor Mike Harcourt, saying there is no evidence the killer is Vietnamese and the mayor "has no right to say anything about us before charges are laid."

HARCOURT

After the bodies of Jimmy and Lily Ming were found below the Squamish Highway on Sunday, Harcourt declared Asian gangs "public enemy number one." He described them as Vietnamese "of Chinese extraction."

An international brotherhood is being formed, said one source who knows the gangs well. "It could all happen within a couple of months."

Vancouver police Supt. Ray McInerney said gang activity has slowed down in Chinatown since last fall's crackdown by a police strike force.

Sources, who work in Chinatown and can't be named, say the Chinese gangs have been curbed by the strike force and pressure from the Chinese business community. The Vietnamese, they add, don't follow the same rules and are bold in their...
[One] of the significant stimulants to fear was the draft Gilbert Report, commissioned and released by Mayor Sewell's office of Toronto. The report spoke of a "nightmare" situation in Toronto if 12,000 of the expected refugees, including large numbers of juvenile delinquents and drug addicts, arrived in the city. The report forecast a racist response. The headlines covering this totally unfounded and hastily written report were equally hyperbolic.414

Blatant misinformation, like Vancouver Mike Harcourt's quick blame of 'Vietnamese gangs' for the kidnap and murder of Jimmy and Lily Ming, can generate unity among like-identified individuals driven to protest against such pejorative and hasty conclusions (Fig 4.2). This protest, as an attempt at the inclusive negotiation of identity, however, did not prevent the naturalization of the 'Chinatown murders' as a result of Vietnamese gang activity. The protesters themselves, as shown in Figure 4.2, merely become peripheral to the centrality of the threat they represent. Despite the fact that the Mings were not kidnapped nor murdered by people of Vietnamese heritage, this became a foundational moment in the formation of Vietnamese criminality in Vancouver, used as reinforcement for many of the contentions of the backlash.

If a day could be picked when the metamorphosis from peaceful anonymity to lurid gangsterism occurred for this community, it would likely be March 10, 1985, when the bodies of restaurant owners Jimmy and Lily Ming were found in Squamish.415

In Harcourt's pronouncement of Vietnamese/Asian gangs as 'public enemy number one', he merely confirmed the fears and suspicions bubbling under the overriding theme of the boat people as 'peaceful, anonymous' receivers of generosity. This is a common theme of refugee adaptation as, following Dauvergne, the refugee body is relabeled from 'naked, non-political' to 'threat'. This kind of shift can produce justification for the most extreme sort of reactions, inflating the meanings attributed to the Vietnamese subject and exaggerating the threat they represent.

EDMONTON -- A Vietnamese man who killed a local university student in 1981 is still in Canada and walking free 10 years after being ordered deported. "We can't even put him on an airplane because an airline won't accept him without a travel document," said the official. "It's not like you can just drop them from an airplane at 30,000 feet."416

416 "Killer of student still here." The Province. May 6, 1994, p. A34. (My emphasis.)
The violence acted upon the anonymous local university student adds breadth to an individual crime, thus raising the significance of a single event into a crisis that goes beyond the unique, implicating also the collective and the State. "It... parallels a familiar trick of liberal legalism: the focus is on the individual but the labeling of individuals creates a group identity and regulates the boundary of that identity." Figure 4.3 is a crystallization of how transgression invites and encourages backlash within established and inflamed discourses of politics, the State and public management. Inviting the regular taxpayer to determine between the 'bogus' and 'legitimate' refugee, also a common maneuver during the 'boat people crisis', creates and naturalizes an atmosphere where the generosity of the everyday citizen is exploited and abused by the assumed inappropriate-ness of decisions made by the State, as shown during the later Fujian boat arrivals.

Figure 4.3: "Bogus Refugees." Times-Colonist Magazine. August 1, 1999 p. 13.

417 Dauvergne 2005, p. 87.
4.6 Vietnamese Criminality and the Refugee Determination Process


The everyday politics of the compassionate relaxing of sovereignty grant agency to the ordinary citizen in adjusting the microscope through which state representatives visualize refugees. Surveillance and disciplining techniques, as they are here enacted upon the individual applicant, speak to the larger biopolitical determination of borders between who we are and who we expect them to be in order to gain entry. “Migration law literally constitutes the community, setting out the rules for who will be members of the community, who will be eligible to become members, and who will be excluded.”

While Dauvergne’s point is central to her very fruitful analyses, as the juridical backdrop determines membership at Canada’s external boundaries, everyday distinctions between self and other also create discursive boundary effects at levels within the city and various communities. Impressions about the behaviour of Vietnamese refugees created commentary at several scales, from criticism of government policy to calls for more assimilation to an assumed norm. These complex arguments, dovetailing between the rights of the individual and the priorities of the collective, were mobilized around issues of refugee intake and norms around who was considered acceptable and worthy of

---

418 Dauvergne 2005, p. 50.
exception/acceptance (good) versus those deemed unacceptable/threatening (bad). As
border effects, however, linger around the exceptional body, determinations of belonging
are in constant states of flux.

The neighbour, who wished to remain unidentified and feared for his safety,
called on Canadian immigration officials to tighten their screening process "to
block bad people from coming in."419

Lower Mainland MPs are being flooded with an unprecedented number of calls
from British Columbians upset about the entry of 174 Asian refugees into Canada.
Legislative staff indicated that no other recent issue - including capital
punishment - has prompted constituents to contact their MPs in such numbers.
"People are not against immigration but they don't like people jumping ahead of
the line. People are angry."420

"Through my experience, I can say that with confidence. A lot of these criminals
who enter Canada have perfected their crimes in the Far East and just transplanted
it into North America." He said he hopes new, stricter immigration laws will help
battle Asian crime.421

Vietnamese refugee claimants were subjected to a long and very public
determination process to decide whether they were 'political refugees', deserving of
resettlement, or 'economic refugees', merely looking to take advantage of other
countries' prosperity, generosity and social welfare systems. These discussions were
publicized through the media, encouraging diverse participation.

"They are not refugees, they are illegal immigrants," said Elsie Tu, an outspoken
member of the colony's Legislative Council. "Why should we tolerate this large-
scale immigration? "They are young and healthy, not starving refugees. We
should take them back to Vietnamese waters and leave them. That way the stigma
would be on Vietnam."422

Fate of Vietnam's boat people spurs international concern. Discuss this in class:
* Canadian regulations allow the entry of unlimited numbers of Southeast Asian
immigrants who have promises of private groups here to support them. But Hong
Kong, apparently trying to discourage an influx of phoney refugees, will allow
only genuine refugees to come to Canada. Is that reasonable, or not? Why?
* Should Britain forcibly repatriate Vietnamese boat people now, or not? Why?

419 Brian Power. "Youth gang linked to killings: More violence to come, note warns." The Vancouver Sun.
A1.
422 "Hong Kong governor defends asylum for Vietnamese boat people." The Vancouver Sun. May 16,
* Should Canada, which admitted 60,000 Southeast Asians in 1979-1980, press Hong Kong to allow more Vietnamese to settle here now to offset our declining birth rate, or not? Why?423

This process, and the continuing visibility of the Vietnamese refugees themselves, heightened public discourse around refugee determination and placed an emphasis on perceptions of Vietnamese criminality in debates around subsequent groups of applicants.424 The performance of the Vietnamese refugees, thus, became a matter of public record, mobilized as threat to the restated myth of Canadian generosity, and based upon the forgetting of persistent histories of marginalization and racialization.

I don't recall any objections to opening the doors to tens of thousands of Vietnamese boat people some 20 years ago. These people were truly suffering refugees. Churches across Canada sponsored their transition into Canadian society and ordinary people were glad to help. The picture that has, thus far, emerged for our "boat people" includes organized crime, prostitution, debt slavery and non-co-operation with immigration authorities. In view of this, the Times Colonist's survey [massively opposed to the resettlement of Chinese boat arrivals] is no surprise.425

Crown counsel Brian Manulak told the court two police squads have been developed to deal specifically with Asian gangs and the problems created by some refugees and recent immigrants from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos. "A clear message should be given to those beyond our shores if they are considering coming here to behave in this manner," said Manulak.426

Constructions of self/other around Vietnamese identity did not just prove useful in discursively justifying less-than-generous reactions to subsequent refugee movements. Deportation was a constant theme in reporting of instances of Vietnamese criminality. Going beyond Dauvergne's assumption that communities are determined at national borders, deportation allows these boundaries to be enacted upon bodies already occupying national space, reinstating the liminality of the refugee. This boundary-shifting is available at both physical and semiotic levels, as doubt is placed around the citizenship position of the identified group as a whole.

The sane thinkers will applaud Vancouver Mayor Mike Harcourt’s statement re the problems brought on by Asian youth gangs in that city. Asian, in many instances meaning, Vietnamese. Harcourt decried the fact they accepted Canadian haven and friendship and repaid us with violence. “They will be found, punished and deported,” Harcourt said. About time somebody in a position of power made such a statement – average Canadians have been insisting such punishment should have long ago been meted out to immigrants who failed to keep the laws of our land.427

4.7 A Frontier Press: BC Media and the Creation of the Vietnamese

Racial and national identities, it could be said, are identities of anonymity, identities of distance and alienation, at once prelude to and expression of the drive to marginalize and exclude, to dominate, and to exploit.428

The press creates a sense of moral panic429 in which isolated cases of violence are represented as an indication of a profound societal crisis that imperils the nation. The linking of race and crime by the media becomes a wake-up call to all Canadians, and especially politicians, to re-evaluate their ideas about authority, control and public policy.430

BC people and spaces have been discursively criminalized through a racialization of the category of the Vietnamese criminal, focused and dispersed across the micropolitics of popular opinion. The strategies are extensive and pervasive, thus providing insights into some of the ways in which we construct ‘alien’ identity in Canada. Due to page limits, I will only cover here the three most prominent methods of racialization in the reporting of a specifically Vietnamese brand of crime: cultural, procedural, and spurious.

In Canada, normally so open to immigrants, a blatant ethnocentricity condemns people of color to the sidelines: eternal immigrants forever poised on the verge of not belonging. The move from race to cultural difference carries with it a profound risk. As Said writes, imperialism has always depended on the view that peoples to be dominated are culturally (rather than biologically) inferior.431

Culture serves as a convenient vocalizer of difference from the morally defensible place of non-racism. Language is a way of recognizing the Vietnamese as different; having an ‘accent’ provides clues to an alternate identity. The presence of ‘Vietnamese

429 For more on moral panic, see Cohen 2002.
430 Frances and Tator, 2000, p. iv.
videos’, a Tet celebration, or stereotypes of the gambling, ‘whoring’ Asian male allow access to the kinds of cultural commentary supposedly discouraged in the Canadian mosaic.

Her body lay on her bed and above her on the wall a message in Vietnamese was written in her blood.⁴³²

Officers found a few mattresses where a grower might spend the occasional night, some children’s books, a television, VCR and heaps of Vietnamese videos.⁴³³

"It's quite disgusting," he said. "They say that to make love to a virgin every year is good luck."⁴³⁴

She said the suspect with the gun was in his 20s and spoke with an accent that was possibly Vietnamese. It may have been a Chinese dialect like Cantonese or Mandarin, she added.⁴³⁵

Criminals are also identified under the category of ‘Vietnamese’ through the kind of details apparently expected of crime reports. The following letter, as recent as 2003, decries this as blatant racialization.

I would like to comment on the Prostitute Murder Charge Laid story in the June 6 newspaper. I have noticed that your paper keeps throwing in references to an individual’s nationality when it appears irrelevant. Does it really matter? Do I need to know that accused murderer Jatin Patel is of East Indian descent or whether a Vietnamese translator was needed in court for someone in one of the A Day in Court blurbs? I thought we were trying to teach our kids that racism should not be tolerated nor should race be an issue. Let's try not to label everyone. All East Indians are not killers and all crab poachers are not non-English speaking people from Vietnam! Give us a break! Let's stick to pertinent facts and leave race out of it.⁴³⁶

Immediately following such protests from concerned readers around what was seen as “inappropriate labeling and singling out of ethnic groups,”⁴³⁷ ethnic identification is

relegated to the last line of the article, until the discourse heats up again. In longer pieces, this draws the reader’s glance back to the body of an article they might otherwise not have read. In shorter pieces, like a listing of court cases, this ethnic identification constitutes a large percentage of the text and is thus a focal element, quickly connecting ‘Vietnamese’ with a wide range of crimes while effectively silencing any ‘White’ crimes, as ethnicity is only identified for the other. In many cases, this potentially leads the reader to believe that all the ‘crimes of the day’ had been committed by Vietnamese criminals. In all cases, ethnicity, however it may be defined by the author of the article, becomes a highlight of the article, thus creating the figure of the Vietnamese criminal, and adding strength to my argument that, in Canada, ethnicity sells papers.

Asked if the names indicate this grow op could have Asian or Vietnamese gang connections, Aucoin said it's possible.\footnote{438}{“Massive pot bust.” 
_Chilliwack Times_. Jan. 21, 2003, p. 3.}

Police are looking for 24-year-old Imronn Ismael on one charge of aggravated assault. He has had previous dealings with police and is described as being of Vietnamese descent, five-foot-three and 141 pounds.\footnote{439}{“Nanaimo RCMP issue warrant for suspect in stabbing.” 
_Victoria Times-Colonist_. Sept. 16, 2003, p. D2.}

Campbell River RCMP have arrested two males and a female, all of Vietnamese descent, in connection with a five-month investigation and seizure of cocaine. A complaint of a suspicious vehicle led to a seizure of marijuana plants from an outdoor growing operation on Salt spring Island on Tuesday. Ganges RCMP said officers were investigating a derelict car when they saw two men run out of the nearby bush carrying garbage bags.\footnote{440}{Stan Cooper. “Around the Island.” 
_Victoria Times-Colonist_. Sept. 23, 1994, p. 1.}

Thus, incidence of ‘Vietnamese criminality’ is not only overemphasized but also over-reported, adding to the cycle that began with massive public visibility from the outset.

The third strategy I mention here is ‘spurious’ positioning of Vietnamese ethnicity in relation to criminal activity. Often, the Vietnamese label was given to events where ethnicity could easily be proven irrelevant. Also, the adding of ethnicity to the reporting creates connections with criminality that, because they remain unexamined, exacerbate the distancing effect of self/other dynamics. The category of ‘Vietnamese’ thus becomes equated with certain local crimes, to the point where people even begin to believe this specific group responsible for all criminality.
Police said the bomb was possibly a Vietnamese war-surplus anti-personnel mine.\textsuperscript{441}

The 17-year-old is charged in a Nanaimo investigation that has seen 36 former Vietnamese refugees charged with conspiracy to traffic heroin and cocaine.\textsuperscript{442}

TORONTO - Undercover city police seized an automatic pistol loaded with 32 armor-piercing bullets during a raid of a drug-selling operation. A 20-year-old man was arrested. Acting Staff Sgt. Rick Rolfe said yesterday the gun is similar to a pistol found at a Vietnamese restaurant after a triple homicide there in March [yet the crime in question was not committed by a Vietnamese person].\textsuperscript{443}

The Vietnamese community is upset over an apparently false allegation of sexual assault which RCMP say an 18-year-old girl has now withdrawn.\textsuperscript{444}

These spurious racializations are constantly repeated in BC newspapers. Hobsbawm and Douglas write about the way traditions and hegemonies are produced, enforced and naturalized through repetition. "...each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. As time goes on and experiences pile up, we make a greater and greater investment in our system of libels."\textsuperscript{445} While there is change and growth built into the formula, the libelous tradition in media racialization is not the marginalization specifically of the Vietnamese Other but the tendency to criminalize groups easily regarded as abject from a position of centrality. This happens in all cultures and across all geographies, but it behooves us all to try and do better. "A conservative bias is built in. It gives us confidence."\textsuperscript{446} This is what needs to be unmapped and rethought.

The national mythology has always depended on race. It is informed by the notion that 'we' know about democracy and 'they' do not; 'we' have values of integrity, honesty, and compassion that 'they' do not; that 'we' are a law-abiding, orderly, and modest people while 'they' are not."\textsuperscript{447}

\textsuperscript{442} "B.C. briefs: No 'cell' for teen suspect." \textit{The Province}. May 20, 1994, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid 1970, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{446} Ibid. p. 49.
\textsuperscript{447} Razack 2004, p. 13.
Racialization, however, is not a phenomenon limited to national borders. Local media utilized international press feed to establish the Vietnamese criminal as a supposedly new and particularly threatening brand of transnational villain positioned against a bucolic, conservative notion of a ‘pre-non-traditional-immigration’ North American past. Emphasizing connections both within and beyond Canadian borders has contributed to perceptions of Vietnamese people as international problems, privileging concepts of race/ethnicity/culture readily available in the context of modern Vietnamese history. As Vietnamese ethnicity creates international markets for crime reports, Vietnamese-identified criminality adds value to isolated incidents, raising the disciplinary technologies of surveillance to the level of a transnational, constructed group identity.

WINDSOR, Ont. - A 12-year-old Vietnamese boy who spent more than three years in a refugee camp has been placed on probation for stabbing a neighborhood bully.448

WASHINGTON POST: Local officials doubt, however, that more cops alone will solve the problem. Last spring, police in Nanaimo ["idyllic Canadian city"] and nearby Victoria staged a major bust, arresting 40 people, 15 of them Nanaimo residents. All were Vietnamese. According to [RCMP Staff Sgt. Phil Humphries], drug activity was virtually uninterrupted. Local officials say they are frustrated that the local Vietnamese community has for the most part been of little help.449

Inspector Brad Parker, formerly with the Vancouver police and now head of the OCA’s Asian Organized Crime section: "We can't blame Canada immigration because they've done the same in the U.S. For instance, their Vietnamese problem goes right across the country from San Francisco to Texas and the Eastern seaboard.450

This mobility, coupled with a total contempt for what they perceive as a weak and ineffectual criminal justice system, and a benign sense of concern for their own safety, as well as a preparedness to use vicious and brutal methods to achieve their aims, makes them a dangerous adversary. Other countries most notably, the United States and Australia also have well established, equally effective and deadly, Vietnamese criminal networks and street gangs. The traffic in heroin is widely connected with Vietnamese criminals today throughout the world.451
Those shootings and things - those weren’t ‘organized crime’. Just a bunch of hotheaded youngsters. They always make it seem like it’s organized and very sophisticated. There weren’t huge international links or anything – I don’t think so. Just people being stupid.452

The thematic, geographical and moral breadth of arguments grants legitimacy and, thus, normalcy for the idea of Vietnamese criminality. This projected identity in turn imposes itself onto spaces or presences identified, and thus contaminated, as Vietnamese.

"At one time he was a good manager, then his partner, Leah, passed away. He got into addiction and depression and it's ended up quite a bad operation," said Sullivan (Vancouver City Councillor), who drove past the hotel last week and was approached by two Vietnamese drug dealers.453

The presence of Vietnamese drug dealers signifies the degradation of the neighbourhood, the hotel, and a potential threat to the public official/private citizen. In the following two images (Figures 4.5 and 4.6) we see urban spaces being visualized and contextualized within the greater landscape of Vietnamese criminality:

Figure 4.5: “Public At Risk.” The Province. Feb. 27, 2000, p. A3.


Picturing criminality in the distinctive yet mundane spaces of Vancouver – a Chevron station and an alley with forests of utility poles – projects upon them a virulent sense of the contamination, the invasion, the generalizable threat of the Vietnamese criminal. These spaces of visuality have been degraded by the presence and activities of Vietnamese gangs as isolated incidents are repeated to form a trend and a truth. Thus,
threats to generalizable public space imply threats to each and every private individual with stakes in national/municipal space.

4.8 Destroyed People Destroying the Land

Refugees are constituted, in Douglas's sense (1966), as a dangerous category because they blur national (read: natural) boundaries, and challenge "time-honoured distinctions between nationals and foreigners." At this level, they represent an attack on the categorical order of nations which so often ends up being perceived as natural and, therefore, as inherently legitimate.

Rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience. So, far from being aberrations from the central project...they are positive contributions to atonement. By their means, symbolic patterns are worked out and publicly displayed. Within

\[454\] Arendt 1973, p. 286.
\[455\] Malkki 1995, p. 8.
these patterns disparate elements are related and disparate experience is given meaning.\textsuperscript{456}

In the Hong Kong camps – one of them – there were 2 big sheds – barn-like structures. In there, there were bunk beds running about 4 beds high. Two people per bunk. Each one inhabited one side of the bed. There were washrooms one to each side. The urinals were open. They could see each other pee. They are extremely modest people so they just didn’t see, somehow. I didn’t know humanity could reach that level. I couldn’t see any humanity in them. It’s like time and water and wind chipping away at stone.\textsuperscript{457}

As Razack contends, we must try and understand what is projected upon bodies and landscapes in order to determine how they are mobilized in the production and maintenance of the white settler society.\textsuperscript{458} Vietnamese criminality has been given meaning in local media through discourses emphasizing the proximity of Vietnamese identity with national space, positioning them against each other to manufacture and maintain a sense of ‘threat’. This section concerns the ways in which the Vietnamese were constituted as dangerous through their destruction (Sovereignty), denaturalization (discipline) and dehumanization (biopower) in the exceptional\textsuperscript{459}, liminal\textsuperscript{460} spaces of migration.

As in Figure 4.7, from the outset the Vietnamese refugees were entrenched in the kind of water metaphor that sourced them in the nowhere spaces of the refugee exception – the de-nationed/denatured subject ready for identity projection.

If a place is meaningless without a subject, so too a person removed from his own place is a man of uncertain identity.\textsuperscript{461}

Violated, broken roots signal an ailing cultural identity and a damaged nationality. In this logic, the ideal-typical refugee is like a native gone amok. And in uprooting, a metamorphosis occurs: The territorializing metaphors of identity – roots, soils, trees, seeds - are washed away in human flood-tides, waves, flows, streams, and rivers.\textsuperscript{462}

\textsuperscript{457} Interview, Ml. January 29, 2005.
\textsuperscript{458} Razack 2002.
\textsuperscript{460} Malkki 1996.
\textsuperscript{461} Ley 1977, p. 507.
\textsuperscript{462} Malkki 1995, pgs. 5-6.
The ‘boat people’ moniker and the media focus on that particular paradigm created a discourse rife for the liquid metaphors of the sea and a slippery Vietnamese identity as something less than human.

The tide of human misery continues to wash up on Hong Kong’s shores.463

When it comes to dealing with the world’s human flotsam and jetsam, hypocrisy is a good deal easier to find than sympathy - almost anywhere.464

HONG KONG - This British colony sent a flock of Vietnamese boat people to an island yesterday with no shelter and only basic rations.465

Anonymous and abject amongst the waves, the Vietnamese people were often dehumanized as pigs466, dogs467 or simply as ‘wards’ or ‘charges’ of the middle class468. This placed them in the realm of ‘those to be managed’, as drains on the educational, juridical and medical capacities of the welfare state. Thus, the benevolence and prosperity of the sponsor, created as History, is placed against the time-honoured conception of the dependant migrant. Neither of these categories, however entrenched, is able to withstand serious scrutiny.

The ongoing saga of the boat people crisis, which continued to be covered in the media until the closing of the bulk of the refugee camps and the repatriation of Vietnamese people into the late 1990s, reinforced the degradation of the Vietnamese subject. Images and stories dramatized and rationalized the threat posed to local Vancouver spaces, as the camps were portrayed as liminal spaces of violence, corruption and danger and the Vietnamese were seen as costly burdens to the state.

Sixteen Vietnamese refugees ate the flesh of dead companions to survive as they drifted in the South China Sea for almost a month, Malaysian relief officials said today.469

Hong Kong, which has taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees since the exodus began in 1975, still has almost 18,000 Vietnamese in its camps. They are now seen as a costly burden who have no business to be in the colony.470

On an island camp, reporters are told of fighting every day, for food, cigarettes and life. An 18-year-old woman has been missing for two days, and some boat people fear she has been raped and murdered. In the city, a Belgian television crew captured a murder on film that erupted when one man threw a chair at another. In one camp, after a resident was chopped to death by a gang, searches turned up hundreds of makeshift weapons.  

These stories and images produced an idea of Vietnamese identity as degraded, dehumanized and inherently prone to violence – as threats to national space. Interacting with concurrent reports of Vietnamese criminality in local and transnational spaces, and decades of impressions about Vietnamese culture and history, the lengthy boat people crisis helped naturalize a very particular view of the Vietnamese body.

“[Biopower] applies primarily to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces.”472 However, the biopower exercised to the body also emanates from the body to the land, as meaning is imposed onto space. Several diverse discourses
combine in the media to produce a Vietnamese effect on national/natural and urban land. From the shameful, wasteful and murderous failure of the Allied War on Vietnam, the very name of the country became significant of a richly moralized sense of disaster placed across numerous spaces and events. "It looks like Vietnam at the top end of Vancouver Island" reads one article criticizing aggressive BC forestry practices. "We have a Vietnam in traffic every year," said Brazilian Justice Minister Paulo Brossard, in announcing a National Traffic Safety Program proposing tougher treatment of bad drivers.474

Vietnamese presences are also commonly seen as having detrimental effects on the places they live, work and play. The following article sees the Vietnamese as a foreign culture invading the residential spaces of Vancouver. We are comfortable where the immigrant is useful (working in the 7-11) and threatened where they are not (in our neighbourhood). Too many presences strain our tolerance, shifting mimicry to menace as particular stories become generalizable over urban space.

A Vancouver lawyer says the arrival of Asian crooks undermined the stability of east-side neighbourhoods. Vancouver lawyer Craig Paterson has long favoured immigration, multiculturalism and a generous refugee system. But his tolerant views were strained when an Asian gang, made up mostly of young Vietnamese males, took over a house on his block in east Vancouver. "Life in Vancouver has changed and it's changed partly because we have a new criminal element that doesn't come from our culture," said Paterson. "But you only have to look at the people working in the 7- Elevens to see the incredible benefits Canada gains by getting immigrants," said Vancouver police Inspector Gary Greer.475

Their contributions to local cityscapes are also seen as primarily negative, suggesting at a conservative notion of what the city used to be like before the Vietnamese arrived. Identifiable as representing the Other, they are open to scrutiny and interpretation by the discriminating observer. "The restaurants with their indecipherable Vietnamese -- nothing more than English backwards. These edifices erect only a feeble pretense against the void. They don't delude you."476

Finally, local fisheries became a focal point for the rocky and highly-publicized commentary around Vietnamese integration. This discursive node offers all of the features of the diverse impressions of Vietnamese impact on national space. Through advanced modes of surveillance and racialization, they are visualized and naturalized as inherently criminal and violent, negligent of any form of environmental stewardship, contemptuous of local laws, regulations and customs, oblivious to the meanings inherent in coastal spaces and tainted by stubborn linkages to their primitive and backward homeland. The moral privilege in the Western ability to manage through foresight enforces “...the capacity of the central subject to dehumanize... from their understanding of the racial Other whose degradation confirmed their own identities as white – that is, as men entitled to the land and the full benefits of citizenship.”

When I asked one of the former Sponsors what she felt about Vietnamese people now, she responded, “Just look at those Fisheries signs in Vietnamese. It’s obvious they haven’t been respecting our laws. I see it in Brittania Beach, every time I’m driving to our place in Whistler.”

Our beaches. That’s the crux. They’ve been our playgrounds and a source of picnic food. A bucket of clams, a sack of oysters, a fire, some beer: paradise now. Recreational clamming, we call it. We have a limit, 75 clams each, more than enough for all, and no danger to the stocks. Who wants more? The Vietnamese do. Accustomed to long hours of stoop labor, toughened by life and driven by the desire to succeed, the Vietnamese took one look at the food that was there for the asking, and asked. Result: short tempers, threats and a change to Our Way Of Life.

(In response to an earlier, lengthy, very descriptive letter in The Vancouver Sun): More disturbing, though, was the unnecessary reference to the Vietnamese clam harvesters. It has become trendy, even acceptable (judging from the paucity of rebuttal), to attack these industrious people, whose only crime, it seems, is that they work harder, work longer hours, and take more risks than many of their fellow fishermen. They are subject to the same laws as the rest of us and are engaged in patently legal enterprise in harvesting clams on beaches under federal jurisdiction. I found the reference to them pointed, rude, and spurious, and would suggest to the author that she rethink her approach of singling them out for criticism lest she leave herself open to a charge of ignorance or elitism, or worse.

---

477 Razack 2003, p. 126.
478 Interview, prolific sponsor and refugee advocate (W9). March 2, 2005.
Other crab fishermen in the area got the idea they are Vietnamese and use that as a taunt, he said. Other people just made bad jokes about "No dogs allowed" on the dock. "There is definitely a race problem in this town with some people," said Thi. "We are considered the newcomers and they are considered the local guys and they think they own the whole water," he said. (This letter garnered a flurry of rebuttal, mobilizing the benevolence of the sharing Canadian, showing the danger of the immigrant speaking up/out of place.)

Ignoring the long history of conflict over harvesting rights and the fact that the 1980s saw a massive increase in the consumption of local shellfish, the Vietnamese fishers were quickly naturalized as responsible for long-term declines in stocks and conflict with U.S. fisheries: "Earlier in the week, Tofino area crab fishermen were lamenting another poor season, the third year of slim returns since Vietnamese-Canadians arrived there." "That was mainly a huge misunderstanding. They just took all the decline in fisheries – all those problems – and blamed them on the Vietnamese. Totally not fair."

As part of this process, fishers were surveilled and divided into racial categories, "Edward Wightman, special agent with the National Marine Fisheries Service, testified officers using a telephoto lens between Aug. 4 and Nov. 4 recorded 13 fishing violations by ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese-Canadian fishermen" and the press made transnational linkages to naturalize a Vietnamese tendency to violate dehistoricized fisheries norms: "NEW YORK -- Vietnam's ambassador to the United Nations is claiming diplomatic immunity after being accused of illegally digging for clams on Long Island." All of this adds to the impression that a previous "peace and solitude" had been violated by an invasion of the dehumanized, degenerate other. "These people made it seem like, before the Vietnamese came here, everything was OK for the fisheries. We all know that's not true. What about the First Nations people? It's not like, before the Vietnamese got here, it was all about a man and his crab bucket."

---

4.9 Conclusion: Public Health and Enlightened Management of the Other

In ancient times, the presence of strangers seemed so perilous to the native-born of a locale that such travelers were routinely shunned or harmed with socially sanctioned violence in the communities they entered. The Bible warned against such behavior... Despite this admonition, immigrants often have been despised and feared as harbingers of disease, debility, or even death to the native-born.\textsuperscript{489}

The Western city is "a privileged cultural entity...it is a place which is colonized by lethal diseases coming from elsewhere. [The West] is assumed to be by rights free of disease."\textsuperscript{490}

Let's agree that the treatment of the Vietnamese by the media has been extremely disappointing, with streams of vilification sporadically interrupted by feel-good articles to suggest an appearance of balanced reporting. In contrast, though, I find Canadian people as a whole a generous bunch because of people. I've met too many kindhearted, thoughtful, prudent people in the course of my blessed Canadian life to ever miss the fact that many of the underdogs of the world and I wouldn't be here otherwise. I'm keenly aware of the paternalistic attitude, the colonial mindset, the mean spirit, the selfishness all around us. We're all to blame -- the local-born, the refugees, the immigrants. Remember the Chinese-migrant episode? Joining the extremist voice in Canadian politics, a shockingly loud and large number of Chinese-Canadians demanded the migrants' eviction from Canada. But every moment of my breathing life I'm reminded of my blessings by the genuine smiles of my neighbours, their sense of civic duties, their belief in environmental stewardship, their simple, good, and honest reactions to tyranny, calamities, and miseries in the international scene. And I'm compelled to believe that I must celebrate humanity and thank God for his creation. We're a worthy bunch. Christ must have believed it when He gave us the ultimate sacrifice, I suppose.\textsuperscript{491}

The Vietnamese other, imbued with meaning as s/he moves through Canadian spaces, is variably perceived as a threat to a supposedly pure, unsullied, imagined Canada. Disease, like crime, is often an effective mode of entry for comment on the other, as it quickly becomes metaphor that reaches far beyond the available evidence, creating a moral landscape to which the perpetrators are held accountable,\textsuperscript{492} powerfully contributing to the "excommunicating of the ill."\textsuperscript{493} In the case of the orphans and boat people, discursive and social death, created and proliferated through public discourse,
created a geography of potential contagion from the other to the self. Again from Sontag, in times of apparent epidemic, society authorizes itself to fight back by any means whatsoever, making Western middle-class values (here (re)valued through adoption and Private Sponsorship) the only morally defensible position.\textsuperscript{494} There remains an impression that the Vietnamese are somehow inferior; their highly publicized arrival into this country has them pegged as requiring heightened levels of State support.

Most of the Vietnamese had to be carried up the gangplank like babies: Minh Hong and Son Vu made their own way up, then collapsed on deck unconscious. The ship's hangar was transformed into a hospital. For four days, the ship's crew worked tirelessly, feeding, laundering, healing ulcerations, doing what they and their ship did best. They provided. The mother ship gave new life. It was, of course, the only humane thing to do. We would expect nothing less from our navy.\textsuperscript{495}

As Beiser writes, Vietnamese people still retain the stubborn impression that they live as wards of the State, thus are still not granted the benefits of full citizenship.\textsuperscript{496} From the above analysis, we can see that Vietnamese performance in BC has been measured discursively far beyond the realms of income, employment and mental health. Despite the many difficulties faced and created by Vietnamese people since arrival, the focus on and inflation of specific ideas of Vietnamese identity have acted both as barriers to success and disappointments to the initial atmosphere of generosity and high hopes. As long as we continue to regard newcomers as contagion, as costly and threatening wards, and productive of the supposedly pure states that existed before their arrival, we will never achieve our lofty but achievable goal of being a truly inclusive and enlightened nation – “kindhearted, thoughtful, prudent.” No matter how many experts and policymakers insist that immigration is good for Canada, nor the continued success of a great majority of Canadians new and old, the racialization and criminalization of Vietnamese identity and space reveals a continued reticence towards refugee settlement among the popular discourses of the ordinary Canadian.

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{496} Beiser 1999.
“Canada is a promised land. If you know what you want to do, something that you dream about and put all your effort into it, you are going to get it. I want to thank Canada for that.”497

Nothing about land or identity are promised. They require work and participation. But dreams are a distinct possibility. In Chapter 5, in conclusion, I encourage a ‘public dreaming’ about what kinds of efforts could lead to a more expansive vision of land and identity in Canada.

---

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Hopes, Dreams, Possibilities

5.1 Introduction: Speaking from our Inherent Vulnerabilities

The first thirty years of Vietnamese settlement in Vancouver, like all human experience, has been full of successes and failures. So far, I have explored many of the flaws and shortcomings in both the reception of these newcomers and their ability to negotiate identities and spaces in Vancouver. The experience of these three decades of adjustment shows that no place is perfect, nor is any identity free from manipulation under countless discursive regimes, both dynamic and sedimented, which strive to determine, to separate and to stratify. This impulse – the need to make more of ourselves and less of others, is a societal addiction that leads to and emerges from the worst, most self-destructive elements of our common humanity. In this final Chapter, I attempt to speak from a humility that acknowledges our flaws and our vulnerability (including, of course, my own) while seeing the self beyond simple self-interest. In many of the world’s religions, as in the essence of spirituality itself, lies our vulnerability in the face of the unknown. “I believe all religions pursue the same goals, that of cultivating human goodness and bringing happiness to all human beings. Though the means might appear different the ends are the same.”

This vulnerability, from the susceptibilities of the individual to potential exposure on national and global scales, is expressed and experienced in infinite ways. It possesses, in itself, a beauty that speaks to higher laws and higher purposes for every living being on this planet. Perhaps one of our greatest downfalls is to expect that this concept of higher law means we either need to be exceptional, to drive ourselves to perfection, or to languish in the regretful materialism of our failed possibilities. As quoted in Chapter One, Mother Theresa, one of the greatest recent examples of someone who was extremely aware of her higher purpose, observed that it is not the great achievement but the small gifts that allow and encourage greatness. Part of this beauty lies in the common directive and impulse to ‘love our neighbour as ourself’. In the cycles of human experience, a generalized humanity, as constructed and reflected in public discourses, shifts between true embraces of the unknown – of the neighbour – and fears of everything and everyone we feel is outside of our experience. If

Canadian people are to move closer to our goals and oft-stated identities of humanitarianism and diversity, this requires a very strong revision of our attitudes towards the stranger, towards the other, towards the unknown. It is an unacceptable situation when fear drives emotions, actions, and policy with a flimsy humanitarianism as the gatekeeper of national pride, space, land, history and identity. As shown in the voices and stories I include in this chapter, there are so many more possibilities when we connect instead of divide. In our common possibilities, flaws and vulnerabilities, it becomes easier to believe that humanity has no Other. Finally, after decades dedicated to cultivating the individual, with a security rooted in the constantly-threatened boundaries around personal space, we need to look beyond our fences, not in a spirit of superiority and entitlement, but from the vulnerable and shifting terrain of diverse needs for a healthy planet.

This chapter begins with voices and stories from people who have dedicated much of their lives to refugee sponsorship and advocacy. These stories, with elements of nostalgia, humour, disappointment, triumph and joy serve as evidence that some of the most shining moments of humanity are found when in positions of greatest vulnerability. It is through the emotions and struggles of our most vulnerable moments that humanity explores and enacts its higher purpose. Section 5.3 concerns the continuing predominance of racialization and criminalization in BC media, as stories about the Vietnamese are spread through news systems from one locality throughout the entire province and beyond. Part of the reason for continuing my media analysis into this conclusion chapter is to try and temper its celebratory tone with the daily reminder crime reporting provides of the negative sides to Vietnamese immigration. To begin suggesting alternatives to these kinds of racializations and criminalizations, I next revisit some of the literature from early in the thesis, while examining the viewpoints of other academic and spiritual writers on themes of nation, identity and space. Finally, I conclude with policy suggestions culled from various interviews and correspondence, while offering the many experiences of Private Sponsorship as a celebration of the remarkable possibilities of mundane human experience.
5.2 Stories from the Waves, from the People.

There are countless stories of migration. They often begin with struggles and successes in a ‘home’ country, include harrowing experiences of illegal departure and arrival, and conclude with struggles and successes on adopted shores. Most people expected the harrowing departures to be the stories I wanted to hear, and the newspapers were certainly full of stories about rape, murder and pirates. In order to hint at the remarkable humanity of these stories, including elements of departure, arrival, adjustment, nostalgia and criminality, I include here, in full, a section of Tam Tran’s memoirs. Tam is one of my interview respondents and has been a tireless advocate for refugee support in Vancouver since soon after his arrival.

Refugee sponsorship can be a very genuine way to express oneness with the human spirit. It is not something you do so you can make money, though there apparently were a small minority who got their tax deductions and kicked the newcomers out.\(^{499}\) And two priests were allegedly accepting bribes to sponsor relatives.\(^{500}\) But for the vast majority, sponsoring refugees from Vietnam was a vast collection of acts of humility and sacrifice. And most of the sponsors who helped in my research feel this is the most spiritual, most rewarding thing they have done in their lives, and it yielded the strongest friendships.

You have no idea, brother (crying in a Starbucks, speaking in Vietnamese), what it was like to be here with what was nothing but we thought it was everything. We didn’t know a word of English. I was 14. We were living in a church basement – out in Coquitlam. We were afraid of them, they were afraid of us. They didn’t want single teenage guys, they’d wanted a family. But we just wanted to impress them and thank them. But it never worked. They kicked us out for something really petty. We had nowhere to go. I’m not saying it’s an excuse or anything but it’s pretty hard to do the right thing. I’ve had to fight for everything I’ve done. [More information of a personal nature.] Fight like a fucker. I’ve made lots of enemies. But you always know who to trust. We are so thankful to those people. We take them gifts, go to Church at Christmas. My wife and three kids all know who they are and celebrate them. We are so lucky to be here.\(^{501}\)

Tam then said he would send me this email, something he had written when he was 24 years old:

\(^{499}\) Interview, M4. March 17, 2005.
\(^{500}\) Interview, M2. April 12, 2005.
\(^{501}\) Interview, Tam Tran, refugee advocate, April 2, 2005.
It was raining lightly when we came out of the Concord Newspaper’s meeting. Despite the bad weather the Dragon Boat Festival, now in its second day, still attracted a large crowd. At vantage points along the shore of False Creek people thronged, their cheers occasionally interrupting the to-and-fro glide of umbrellas on the sidewalks of adjacent streets. It was late and people were rushing to watch the day’s final races.

We hurried into our car and headed down Beatty Street. Traffic was light. All the better. I needed more space, more of the sea breeze, perhaps a hot cup of tea. The meeting had taken its toll, sapped us still, listless. Beside me, Van looked dazed, his hands wrapping the headrest. At one point I thought I heard his sigh. Or was it the wind? Again green lights. Quiet intersections. On the windshield raindrops tapped, incessant and soundless; the wipers waved, rhythmic, hypnotizing.

Memories, vivid and raw, surged back in torrents as I lowered the window, breathing in the whirling droplets laced with sea scent. That day on a Lantao Island dock I stood waiting for the ferry from Hong Kong. The sea was misty. The monsoon drizzle felt soft on my wool jacket. By my side, a guard impatiently paced his steps, repeatedly fixing his permanent frown upon his watch. Behind me, waves and pebbles whispered as they swept and rolled each other in their timeless play. A few yardsticks away from the tidemark to which the waves were competing, lay the Chimawan refugee centre with its small cluster of rusted tin-roofed huts. Besieged by a jungle of barbed wires and spiky watchtowers, the compound evoked a POW camp image. Every day the thorny wires seemed to grow longer and the siege tighter. Stuffiness turned into suffocation. People shrieked. In their nightmares the monstrous vines tightened their stranglehold.

But I was free. Out here by the wharf the air was fresh, the breeze pure. No longer the dampness of sweat, the odor of baby urine. On this side of the metallic hedge even the saltiness of tears was welcome. A short while before, friends and acquaintances formed a procession on the other side. Some smiled. Some waved. Some shouted farewell, their eyes wet. Hard to tell if it was the rain. I vowed that I would write them about my adoption experience. And my new life in a new land, of course. Like other young souls who had left the camp before, adoption was my ticket to freedom – and at this instant, my pass to the ferry, now docking with a loud whistle.

"Are you okay, anh Tam?" asked Van as I slowly pulled the car away from the intersection. It had been a red light. On my left a driver honked again, irritably. "The meeting," smiled Van, "the meeting, right?" I turned and met his anticipating grin. We burst out laughing. The day had been too long. The meeting's mixture of coffee and emotions now felt like a lumpy decoction in our throats.

For four hours we had sat in the darkened room of The Quick’s House of Arts and Jazz, joining some twenty others on the unlikely topic of adoption. Mostly, we listened. A young birth mother soft-spokenly pondered a replacement for the

502 Anh means 'older brother'.
word "given up". A very hurtful stigma, she said. *Relinquish? Let go?* "I was an adopted child," said a young man. Poignantly he went on, but was soon overwhelmed with emotions, speechless. For many others, the struggle with words continued. Feelings seemed condensed, thickened inside the meeting circle. Sighs and frowns. A woman recounted her Native experiences. We heard about a people's sufferings, a country's legacy of racism. A slapping shame.

But then there was joy and jubilation. Having outlasted bureaucratic hassles, a couple awaited the arrival of their adopted baby girl from China. A black man, aghast that his white ex-wife clothes-pinned their boy's nose to alter its Negro appearance, discovered humor nevertheless. "But the genes work wonders, brothers," he said dryly. The room broke up with laughter.

Van, too, had his story. Among the many articulate narratives, his was rather simple, matter-of-fact. I had heard it many times – a tale of death, refugee camp, Skid Row, and prison. Quite often, he would pepper it with his loudest complaint of all: Kraft Dinner and potatoes – meals frequently prepared by his adoptive parents. Today, as usual, he told his story like a string of events, little drama, minimal gestures, his style laconic and terse.

It began like a dim red haze. In the twilight of dawn, an engine roared. Rapid gunshots. Blood. Screams. Police and soldiers swarmed the trembling boat. Amidst the chaos, a shirtless man writhed, his body lashed to the shrieking exhaust funnel. The stench of burning flesh filled the air. The smoke engulfed their runaway boat. Van was two years of age then. That was the last he saw of his father. In the deadness of the jailhouse he often cried deliriously. His mother hugged him tight but the nightmare continued. Again he saw his bound father slumped over, jerking spasmodically in a crimson fog.

His mother told him that their prison stay lasted for a year. She then toiled over odd jobs in the city, leaving him in the care of his grandmother. He remembers the immense paddies of the Mekong delta, the silty water of the village's canals, the lush green gardens laden with fruit. He seldom met his mother. Her visits were occasional, dependent on certain ancestral ceremonies. One day when he was twelve, she came. Despite the begging tears of his grandmother, and tears of her own, she led him away. He recalled waving goodbye to her one night, boarding a river sampan in the dark. Vivid memories of his father rushed by. But in the company of many others, he made it to the open sea. A few days later he landed on the white sand of Indonesia. Next came refugee camps, food rations, uncertainty. The days were twice as long. Waiting. Everybody was waiting. Endless waters. Blue sea. Creepy loneliness.

Like a fugitive, I too fled Vietnam on a boat. Friends call it a storybook odyssey: my maritime escape featured a chase, marooning, Chinese prison, typhoon, and shipwreck. Plucked from the sea by Hong Kong police, I was tagged with a number and thrown into the island camp. To my dismay, the former army barracks had long surpassed its hold. In the perpetual filth of human waste and raw lye, I found myself wandering among hundreds of youngsters awaiting luck.

But luck, being luck, seldom came. There were few foreign adoptive and foster parents for all of us. Life became a test of sheer endurance and sanity.
Every evening after the procession for food rations we gathered by the fence, fixed our stares toward the twinkling city of Hong Kong on the horizon. In this wiry cage called a refugee centre, we gazed, mesmerized by the open sea, the dazzling metropolis, the intercontinental flights overhead. Frenetic. Yet lonely. Then came madness, anxiety, resignation. Violent brawls often erupted amidst the ever-looming lethargy. For us young teens, bedtime stories were about those fortunate enough to be adopted to a western country. We listened and retold them many times, then went to sleep hopeful that the next day our names would be called for the good news. Story lines drifted into our dreamscapes rhythmically, soothingly, like a chanting of prayers. I awoke and heard my own good news one wintry morning. That was over a decade ago.

Having hastily parked the car on Kingsway, we walked into a café and sat by its street-facing window. The shop felt empty, no other customers. Cupping a glass of tea in his hands, Van beamed a grin at me and turned to the waitress for an order of pho. He seemed to have regained his usual liveliness. He often comes here for lunch from his workplace at the Youth Court, where he has been doing exceptionally well as a court worker for the John Howard Society. The storm has probably gone — the storm which tossed his life about on Vancouver streets.

Several years ago, a retired couple adopted him into their home. Like him, I enjoy Walter's witty humor and Inga's romantic stories. "They're good people," often says Van. He liked the new living arrangement, but abhorred the food. "Too much potatoes," he complained one day. "Would be nice if Inga also cooks some rice." It would be, I agreed. Rice means the paddies, the water buffalo, the bamboo thickets, the thatched huts. It carries the saltiness of sweat, the sweetness of harvest songs. It brings back memories of loved ones now on the distant shore. It must be more, much more. I wonder if he could ever relate that to his new parents.

But trouble began not with the food. He was a bitter and stubborn kid back then. He blamed English, then schoolmates for his classroom sufferings. Soon he turned to fighting. As schoolyard brawls escalated, posing threats of homicide, he quit school and started his romance with the streets.

He lived in a run-down basement with a bunch of kids — the likes of him. Together they bullied their way to a petty share of the drug trade. "Real trouble began then," he says. Money flowed in, but many of the kids became addicts. Life was like a roller-coaster, swinging from night-long parties soaked in heroin smoke to chilly bouts of drug withdrawal. The gang lost its turf to rival kids when addiction crippled more than half of its membership. After a police crackdown on the slimy, unfurnished basement, the gang dispersed. But Van remained a hot-headed bully.

My life in Canada lacked Van's whirling turbulence. My white father was a big help. I never called him "dad" — we believed that language of the heart was best left unspoken. When homesickness wet the eyes, when loneliness chilled deep inside the bones, he was there for me. I remember with fondness our nightly English lessons, my chaffed tongue, teeth-grinding frustration, and laughing happiness. So much just to say "the" correctly! We shopped at second-hand stores and received Christmas hampers. He liked pho — a Vietnamese traditional
noodle soup – and keenly enjoyed my version of homecooking. But that sort of died out after our family doctor diagnosed diarrhea parasites in his intestinal tract – an infection most likely a consequence of my unsanitary kitchen practices. His patience in teaching me English endured, however, and was paid off when I made the university admission list. I knew he was proud of me, albeit neither hugs nor congratulatory gifts.

I had a tough time doing university, many semesters in duet with full-time jobs. But sheer stubbornness seemed to help. I graduated with an arts degree, and soon after, hit the street as a youth counsellor and a hot-blooded activist. That was when I met Van, a prowling nuisance with babyfat still. I fared well with him, taking care not to offend his carefully cultivated macho image.

He has changed since then. His handsome looks bear a mixture of confidence and eagerness. The babyfat has gone, replaced by the rough edges of the streets. His heart is kind. Of those who know him, some have felt his tight hug when the pain of heroin withdrawal convulsed their bodies. He is helpful. Jobsite supervisors laud his volunteer record. But at twenty, his life diary has also included petty drug trafficking, pool hall fighting, and a summer in lockup awaiting trial for assault. Time must have been dead still that day – Van stood in court, shaken. The prosecutor took her time. Her persuasion was eloquent. A three-year jail term loomed . . . . But there also stood gray-haired Inga, her gentle Danish voice pleading. He felt the tears then. Tears of appreciation. Redemptive tears.

I don't remember whether we talked much about the Concord newspaper's adoption forum that afternoon. But we talked a lot about the ones who had adopted us. About potatoes and pronunciation. House-cleaning routines and secondhand shopping. The day was long. When we left the café, sunlight still enwrapped the high-rises downtown. The western sky was hazy and red.503

These are recollections which explore a richness of human experience and emotion. Through all of these moments – through the difficulties, challenges and triumphs – it is the element of mundane human connection which brings people together within common elements of struggle to make life bearable and adjustment possible.

Such connections across discursively surveilled and policed boundaries between a sense of self and an idea of the other are also the kinds of linkages which encourage us to transition from our own struggles to becoming supportive of others, through advocacy, assistance, or both. The interview respondents from one church in New Westminster, in the thirty years since their first experience with refugee sponsorship, had become extremely knowledgeable about the technicalities of immigration. Their often deeply personal connections with the over 1200 people they had sponsored from Vietnam had

503 Email correspondence Tam Tran.
led them to greater understandings of their roles as human beings beyond the simple ontologies of 'mine' and 'theirs'. Mary-Anne and George's living room was warm with Dutch apple pie and lively laughter, with their parish's 7 individuals most committed to refugee sponsorship sitting around a warmly-lit room.

Many Canadians have a very soft spot for the underdog. Because I think the majority have been in that kind of situation, or their parents have. I mean – the hungry 30s. But then, after a while, when there are some Vietnamese gangs, or some East Indian gangs, or whatever, and there may be a hundred in the gang and there are 10,000 refugees here, and they all get painted with the same brush, you know. That happens very easily. Even in the church. People in the church saying, “See what you’ve done,” you know. We had that. But it did have to be done. And it’s their responsibility to make a life for themselves, not ours. Well – we did what we had to do. What was our responsibility as a Christian towards these people. You see, it says, you gotta take care of your brother, you know, it’s part of the bible, you gotta take care of your neighbour. But I saw these people as our neighbours, even when they were in Vietnam, you know, and that’s how I presented it to the congregation at this time, in 79/80.504

He and others of his group estimate they have spent about 20 hours a week for 30 years, since they sponsored a Vietnamese family in 1975, working on refugee sponsorship – either as advocates or sponsors themselves. Here is an example, from the same group, of some of the experiences this role has included.

I had to talk to them about the birds and the bees. About a year later, when she was pregnant, I went down there with my Vietnamese dictionary and tried to prepare her pre-natally for what was going to happen. I had to try and prepare them in case they had a boy. The doctor might ask for the child to be circumcised. But there was no word in the Vietnamese dictionary for circumcision. Do I sort of descriptively, with hand gestures. They thought they were going to cut it off. And they sort of looked at me horrified. When the time came they asked me to help birth the baby.505

And the experiences, of course, were reciprocal.

All the refugees thought we didn’t have enough lamps in our house, so we got all these touch lamps. We got clocks one year – we got all these clocks! We took them all to Vietnam when we went to visit.506

From another sponsorship group:

Mr. Khoa said, “I will come to you every Christmas as long as I live and when I die my children will come to you at Christmas. They bring tea and biscuits and mushrooms and he died two years ago. The amount of children that come to my door every Christmas... Another thing is, they began to contribute to the community as time went on. I’m always so grateful when I see their involvement in the community, whatever it might be. And that seems to be a significant response.”

I always knew they were there, when I really needed something – even friendship. They supported me and I still regard them as parents. I worked hard for them. I cleaned their houses. But it was nothing. It was incredible what we’d do then.

Again, the question to another prolific sponsoring group: “Do you think it could happen again?”

People respond according to the need. If there were another wave of refugees, I can’t predict the response. I think there’s a lot of skepticism. Who is playing what political game? It’s very uncertain as to why it was happening. I don’t think there’s the money around either. I don’t know if they would be generous or not. In most groups it did end up being the job of one or two people, not the whole group. Often, in my experience, it was the women as well. They were the ones that took the mother and kids to school, took them shopping. They weren’t working. I think Immigration Canada has to change its philosophy of some things. You know they want immigrants that speak English that have skills, whatever. They get them here. They don’t give them accreditation. There’s racism in hiring and language. There are so many things about the whole immigration programme that need to be changed.

Another respondent, a prolific sponsor who had had no experience of immigration before 1979 but who has become a prominent refugee advocate and senior member of the Interfaith Action Committee for Refugees, who does not agree with conceptions of a sustained Canadian proactiveness towards refugee sponsorship and humanitarian action, echoed the above sentiment as all of the sponsors lauded personal experiences while disparaging both the collective impression of a Canadian humanitarianism and criminality in the “Vietnamese community.” She lives in a suburban bungalow, drives to the local United Church and has books like *Barren Lands, Pioneering Stories* and *Young Interview*, former Head of the Mennonite Central Committee for Western Canada and member of the Interfaith Action Committee for Refugees, April 3, 2005.

References:

507 Interview, former Head of the Mennonite Central Committee for Western Canada and member of the Interfaith Action Committee for Refugees, April 3, 2005.


Fu of the Upper Yangtze on her shelves. She served me ham sandwiches, a glass of milk and delicious homemade cookies for lunch.

I wanted to be a missionary. But it’s better to be partners. I can do this right here. Express my belief. It’s a Christian directive – part of living your faith. I’m proud of what Canada has done. I have a lot of respect for Immigration, especially Adrian French.\textsuperscript{510} from Vietnam is employed there now. He’s another of those ones who feels he needs to say he’s from Hong Kong.

The sponsorship of Vietnamese Boat People was the first experience of Private Sponsorship of refugees for the churches that I know of. It was in the best sense of the words a "team effort" involving many people, organized by a few leaders. Government and other publicity made it a recognized and an applauded public service. The Vietnamese people themselves turned out to be very adaptable and practical new Canadians.

All things taken together it was a very positive experience which encouraged churches to continue with private sponsorship efforts for the next 25 years. Two other things in my mind made the Vietnamese sponsorship successful:

\begin{itemize}
\item Quick response time between application, acceptance and arrival times.
\item Close, sympathetic and knowledgeable relationship between sponsor representatives and CIC. Government people understood who we were and how churches work -- on faith, not on a corporate model.\textsuperscript{511}
\end{itemize}

By relying on and cultivating diverse and expansive notions of faith, reciprocal involvements in strangers’ lives can be great sources and results of goodness.

The person who led the effort at her church, but was too ill to participate in my study, was a pilot who retired early so he could devote himself full-time to refugee sponsorship. His archives are immense – rich with handwritten stories and pleas and years of subsequent ‘thank you’ and Christmas cards. As in many other of the sponsors’ experiences, Mirv Harper fought tirelessly, with typewriter and postage stamps and the assistance of Adrian French, to support and sponsor people who had been refused admission by Canadian overseas missions. He has all this correspondence on file, along with carbon copies of his pleas to missions across Asia, pledging his personal responsibility for these unwanted refugees’ welfare for the first year of their time in Canada.

\textsuperscript{510} Adrian French was the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (C.I.C.) contact for most of my respondents. I mention him in my acknowledgements as an exemplar and catalyst to refugee sponsorship in Canada.

\textsuperscript{511} Interview, W9. March 2, 2005.
There was this one couple – they married in the camp to help get them in and were not compatible at all. But it was who they had. She went a little crazy in Canada – crazy for it all. The car from the Casino used to come when her husband was still at work. Mirv marched down to the Casino and told them not to send that car. This was 20 years after we had sponsored them. There was one guy who just wasn’t learning English. Mirv had enrolled him at these lessons they were having at the Community Centre. He marched right down there and this kid wasn’t in class. Well…. We would all get calls from hospitals in the middle of the night. These people are like family.\textsuperscript{512}

Another sponsor, only involved in one sponsorship but who feels it was a life highlight, describes her experience of being part of a family’s adjustment to Canada:

\begin{quote}

When ................ got laid off he walked all the way to Kits.\textsuperscript{513} That must have been hours. But he didn’t want to spend his money on the bus. He was broken. He was humiliated. We had really just wanted to do something good – everything seemed to have gone so bad. So we found this church group and we sponsored. I was responsible for the school – where they were going, what programmes they were in. I would go check on them – make sure they were doing alright. I have an in – being a school teacher – I could check on them. Mary’s job was ridiculous – how to work a washing machine. We thought they wouldn’t know anything – but they were amazing. And they were from the city. I remember the day they arrived. We waited at the airport. We expected to see these thin, starving people. They came off the plane giggling and laughing loudly in the huge fur parkas they’d been given. Somehow, we didn’t really need a translator much, even in the first little while. But we communicated. They were totally on their own in , I don’t know, 3 to 5 months. Incredible people. Things worked great with the Vietnamese culture. But there are problems. ................ and .............. have never really had the chance to learn English. They’re always either working 3 jobs or looking for 3 jobs. Their kids were really affected by stereotypes. They had a tough time in schools. They had lived through the refugee camps – they had to walk a straight line. And there were tough Vietnamese families in schools – grow ops. All the Asian gang movies. You know – the way Asians are portrayed – foreign, unknown, secret. We need to recognize that a refugee is necessarily not a saint, in order to continue the flow of kindness. It’s probably the greatest thing I’ll ever do in my life.

That the experience of sponsorship was so life-changing, such a zenith moment in this schoolteacher’s life, points to the wealth and learning available when we think beyond stubborn categories and precedents. The following respondent, with her family, had sheltered draft dodgers and has since adopted several refugees into her home. She

\textsuperscript{512} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{513} An area at least one hour’s walk from where most Vietnamese people have settled.
became responsible for interviewing potential sponsors Province-wide, despite having had very little experience, and no education, with refugee issues. “My family are something like fifth or sixth generation. I don’t even know.”

She returned to the sponsors’ homes after a month on a follow-up to see how things were going with the often very difficult, lonely and traumatic adjustment to Canada. In what she says about her experience and advocacy, you can clearly see the kinds of catharsis and advocacy encouraged through equivocal contact with the newcomers.

-One thing I recall very clearly is, when we came into the house the sponsor would be there. The men would be there. The women were in the other room looking around the door, which I reacted against very strongly. The interpreter said the women must be included in this. The women would come in and be part of it. The same thing happened with Manpower. There were only English classes for men at the beginning. And I went to Manpower and said this will absolutely not work. Nobody can make money from the kinds of jobs they’re gonna make. So I said we need classes for women. And we got English classes for women very quickly. And the women really took leadership in the family. The mushroom farms... An amazing family. The first family that came to Abbotsford was a family of husband, wife, 2 kids, the wife’s brother and sister, the man’s sister and a young boy. They were sponsored by our church. 4 single people that were government sponsored. They’re from just the most fabulous family, those 2 young men. Shortly after they arrived they came to us and asked if we could find a sponsor.... There were 10 young adults. We found 5 different churches to each sponsor a unit of that family. All together there were probably about 50 people after we got everybody here. The grandmother couldn’t come because she had TB. I finally got her here. They were down on their hands and knees – so grateful. The father of that family – he died 2 years ago. He was on kidney dialysis. And the nurse gave him a double dose of .........., some drug, before the treatment. And she realized she had made the mistake. He died. That family told me, “go to the dialysis clinic and invite those people to his funeral. Tell them there are no hard feelings. We know they made a mistake; they know they made a mistake. Tell them we’re not going to go any further with this.” Incredible family. They could have sued that doctor, that nurse. In that family there’s a lab technician, there’s a nurse, there’s one that studied nuclear medicine. There was a group from this family, they were not able to come to Canada because they had a retarded child. Switzerland took them. Canada doesn’t know what it missed, not taking this family. But this man was in his 60s when he came. And he learned English. Now that’s impressive. Just an amazing family. They have this mushroom co-op now. He started it. He was the CEO of it, up ‘till his death. They were the first ones we sponsored.
-What is your impression of the difference between government and private sponsorship?

Well – the government chose the ones that were going to adapt. They chose the easiest. The educated. On the other hand, they selected the more able, the more educated. Greater capacity to adapt. Just generally I think they were all educated, or came form the entrepreneurial class. Communism didn’t want them and they didn’t want Communism. But a lot of them that did come were single men. And that was very difficult. And they didn’t have the support they needed in government sponsorship. And there were problems. There still are.\textsuperscript{515}

Many of my respondents have turned their own experiences as a refugee into lifetimes of commitment for supporting newcomers. When I asked a former Catholic priest who has personally sponsored 1200 refugees, whether he felt Canadians would sponsor again, he snapped at me from behind the wheel of his car. “Have you no faith in humanity? Of course it could happen again.” He had written a book of the history of Vietnamese people in Vancouver and is still sponsoring ‘boat people’ still stranded in Hong Kong and Palawan. People like this sponsor and those stranded migrants explore the limits of knowability; they enter and explore a level of commitment to life that has become increasingly uncommon in our world. These are the kinds of stories that need to be celebrated, that need to be in our media, that should not escape public awareness. Without coverage, without publicity, things in our world become unknowable. Random success profiles in the back pages enter the edge of knowability. And criminality of a generalized racial-cultural category becomes the norm/known.

Countless times, I have heard people in British Columbia complaining about immigration red tape. People feel free to complain that, “We had a friend from Germany who had to wait two years to get his status.”\textsuperscript{516} It is a grave irony that many of us tend to advocate laxer regulations for Europeans ‘wanting to work in a winery’ while arguing an ill-informed and myopic distinction between Economic (Bogus) Refugees and Political (Legitimate – Convention) Refugees if they are from other places and more needy. Small mention of Economic Refugees – i.e. people desperate enough to migrate, sometimes extremely dangerously, in search of more economic opportunity – can elicit an extremely negative response as seen in the boat arrivals of summer 1999 (and as shown in Chapters Three and Four). Though the parallel is certainly less than perfect, it is still worth the

\textsuperscript{515} Interview, W2. April 5, 2005.
\textsuperscript{516} Overheard on the ferry from Vancouver to Victoria and also present in many newspaper articles.
question. Why have we ended up once again sending people back? Just because some of the ‘boat people’ committed crimes does not provide justification for a policy of fear. Many of my respondents actually blamed their difficulties at least partially on their relationships with their sponsors, adoptive and foster families. Especially, it seemed, kids who had not fit the mould of the successful refugee, thus ended up in a foster home and/or on the street. This category included mainly younger single men, predominant in a migration strategy based upon who was most likely to survive the migration and also fear of being conscripted into the vicious war between Vietnam and Cambodia.

fell asleep as a 6 year-old on his father’s boat – common in a hot climate and during a political situation where boats might be stolen – and woke up on the South China Sea. His experience with adoption was horribly abusive and his life is a constant struggle as at least a partial result. Government sponsors say it is the lack of guidance from a place of respect and understanding that compromises possibilities of successful adjustment, just like in any other family. This attitude of mutual support was a factor and priority to most good relationships between private sponsors and newcomers, but was much less likely without one.

I joined the Cadet club and I did ESL. My ESL teacher, Mrs. Habib, was amazing. I wished she was my mother. Then I had no time for school – I had to get a job. I was working constantly after 6 months. It felt like survival and freedom. So the Golden Triangle made me feel undefeatable. English was a BIG problem – we felt we were misrepresented, mistreated. I just went from school to a job. We were a family of 9, with no subsidized housing. We were earning below minimum wage. We were abused by – oh yes and we abused the system – because we were never taught. It outsmarts you. We had to do the ESL and it took three years to become citizens. We even had follow-up interviews. You’d get a job and it would be luxury for 6 months. You’d get burnt. It was a pattern. Then you’d go find a job. It’s the money and the greed. It’s kind of like a woman’s condom – you need to support them. For every $8.00, it’s 50 cents. It’s a politics of ignorance and being stupid – setting up a programme then not supporting it properly. You need teaching, mentoring – you need to learn. You need to know how to use all the amazing tools available in Canada. The free education was the only good thing. There’s no-one to assist with the language barrier. Kids need guidance. Explain to us – why is Canada so great? We need to know. We need an interpreter to really communicate. With the language barrier and no guidance, there’s no follow-up. They only visit homes when you’re doing bad. Why not refugees? The government accepted us, not the private. We had to work to pay off that airplane ticket – and we wanted to as soon as possible. How did my family end up? Nobody graduated. We dropped
out early – we worried about money. You can’t compare us to other people. You
guys take it easy. You can fuck up in school and you still do fine. You can’t
compare the age. You can’t compare. I was born rich. I want my money back. I
can’t fix a broken glass, goddammit. We were the hard, cheap workers.
Independent. We needed guidance, openness. Teach with respect – how to be a
human being again. We didn’t have the mentors. Our parents were busy working
– worrying about money. Your former life is different to here. You need to find
a job. And when you’re a refugee, you’re nothing. I wanted to be a social worker
– to work with First Nations and child abuse. But we were on welfare – underage.
I never got caught but I sold drugs for years. I was bigtime. I’d have a garbage
bag of the shit. Those were crazy times. Kids didn’t have the knowledge to
support their new lives. The government just won’t spend the money. Female
condoms because you don’t know. Sponsorship is a big thing to do. You need
knowledge, follow-up. We got these slavery jobs – like a whole bunch of scrap.
The government knows what to do but just won’t commit. And you don’t like to
depend on people. A year later we bought a house. No time to catch up – what
about the kids? There was no taking the kids to the park. We got an allowance
and that was it. Ignorant idiots – that’s how we were treated. But those who bitch
bitch, those who do do.517

Though not identifying as a ‘defender of Vietnamese culture’ nor an avid
Orientalist, I would be remiss in neglecting to relay my respondents’ comments that,
“The Vietnamese were incredible doers. They had barely touched ground and they were
on their feet. Truly remarkable.”518 Reminding me that their commitment to refugee
sponsorship had not ended with the ‘boat people crisis’, but has continued to others from
diverse backgrounds such as Kosovo, Iran and the Sudan, the following respondent
shares her opinions about the ‘boat people’.

Of all the refugees we sponsor to Canada from a variety of countries, the
Vietnamese have proven to be the easiest, the least complaining, the most co­
operative, the most grateful, and the easiest to work with.519

This quotation speaks not only to a remarkable level of success in many aspects, but also
to the incredible hard work but into the sponsorship process. These migrants and
sponsors are remarkable people, and they have shared some remarkable moments; they
remind us we have the potential to be remarkable. Unfortunately, it is also remarkable
that they feel confident enough to freely and openly acknowledge their flaws. Their
flaws are equivalent to any other person’s flaws, including our own. Through realizing

this commonality, embracing and celebrating our infinite but essentially flawed natures, we can together challenge the precarious frontiers of dynamically diverse human souls.

In advocating for the refugees, or claiming refugee identity itself, or in ‘making room’ for so many refugees on such short notice, all sectors of society were implicit in skirting the boundaries of the law. Some of the sponsors, with the help of Adrian French (C.I.C.), were able to sponsor so many ‘boat people’ that these very law abiding and exceptional citizens were able to arouse suspicion from the government. This respondent, for whom English is a second language, learned Vietnamese so he could better communicate with the people he was sponsoring. He, along with many of the other sponsors, has been on extensive trips to refugee camps around Asia, carrying numerous gifts and envelopes of money from Canada.

I was working in my shop, in my house, when some folks from CSIS [Canadian Security Intelligence Service] came by one day. They wanted to know how much money we were getting from these refugees. And they wanted to know why we sponsored so many. They were there for hours. But French always knew what we were doing – always knew it was above board. They thought we were bribing him or something because he was always bending backwards for us. But he has a heart, you see. He knows what it means to be a human being. To be helpful.520

My respondents, who, again, had almost all dealt with Mr. French, described this humanity – this heart – as a flexibility, humility and a feeling of commonality he shared with all concerned; a man who was not willing to break the law, but to “interpret it very loosely, because he knew that was right.”521

Sponsorship relationships offer possibilities to know and to bridge these gaps – to find challenging but fruitful positions for intervention at the stage of knowability – exploring the edges of ignorance in the search for respectful intervention and negotiation. There are plenty of moments in the discursive interactions of adjustment where we each have challenged the boundaries of the seemingly logical. These moments for the Vietnamese have included the hypocrisy of a place where a large percentage of citizens use marijuana yet it is still illegal to grow and sell. There are paradoxes in a land so often defined as a realm of equality that imposes differing standards for foreigners and where immigration is seen as vital to the nation-state yet often the subject of widespread

520 Interview, prolific sponsor (M10). April 3, 2005.
opposition. These are the fundamental hypocrisies of the liberal state – a paradigm assumed superior yet flawed through this denial of its precariousness. Established citizens weaned to very limited discourses of immigration and a short memory were unable to understand, without returning to stubborn prejudices, how the ‘boat people’ could be anything other than hardworking and grateful. Through the closeness and generosity of private sponsorship, in these very fuzzy frontiers of open vulnerability, both sponsor and sponsored learn more about previously and currently unknowable elements of both themselves and the world. These experiences challenged some of the above, mal-informed perceptions between self and other.

When you have dinner with the Vietnamese and you have fish, the guest of honour can have the eye. It’s a delicacy. I just said no. I couldn’t do it. Everything on the table is looking back at you. I know they felt the same way about what we served them. They just couldn’t handle cheese. And we knew they wanted rice.

The same grandma – she was crying so much – she was distraught for weeks and lost a lot of weight and we couldn’t understand why. Because she’d heard that when you get old here you have to go to an old age home. You have these experiences when you’re with others. They’re positive experiences for us. Sometimes it’s like, oh man. But in hindsight, you can tell your kids and your grandkids. And my grandkids say, “We want you to write some of these things down.”

There’s nothing nicer to see than families living way out there in the camps and they’re now here together. It’s just so wonderful. You see the joy. It’s part of the healing and a new beginning.

Many negative reactions come from ignorance of the new person’s culture. In court, I had to get the Vietnamese to stop smiling at the judge. They smile to make the judge’s job easier, but the smile is seen as contemptuous and a sign of a lack of remorse.


Well the East Indian community has a lot of crime. So does the born-Canadian community! Yes. But they’re more visible. So it gets discouraging. It doesn’t

522 Interview, W7, April 3, 2005.
524 Interview, W3. April 5, 2005.
525 Interview, M1. April 8, 2005.
make me doubt, but it makes me think twice. What did we do? Remember they were talking about Vietnamese girls trading sex for drugs? I suspect that was more among the Canadian-born than the Vietnamese. It was on channel 11 yesterday. They were Vietnamese. I think it was an incredible experience. But you can’t help having second thoughts about some of it.\textsuperscript{526}

These stories, concerning the adjustment, support and commonalities between citizens and newcomers, show the kinds of interactions that challenge the negative backgrounds, aspects and effects of the ‘boat people crisis’. The private sponsorship of Vietnamese boat people was truly a humanitarian highpoint for the people, the families, and the national mythology of Canada, and should be celebrated as such. It has allowed countless people to reach potentials on all sides of the programme and is a system for immigrant support that should be proud of its successes. It is a model for the very ways in which citizenship can be more proactive and governments more facilitating.

We’re told we’re a generous country – but nobody’s given an opportunity. The government gave us that and realized there was a lot more support. There started to be momentum and they realized. The sponsorship commitment used to be one year. Now it’s three. On what basis? Why did they cut it off? Were they themselves helped by being responsible for its failures? Is there no political attractiveness left in helping refugees? It’s scary.\textsuperscript{527}

5.3 Local Media and Fixed Sensibilities

With all of these amazing stories, remarkable moments of humanity and adjustment, the media insists on publishing either predominantly negative reports of sponsorship or highlighting a positive identity for Canada as an essential element in every refugee success. After feeling drawn to criminal reports involving Vietnamese people, partially as a result of their participation in sponsorship, respondents began to realize that ethnicity shoeboxing sells papers.

\textsc{Asian} Size: Unknown. Police believe there are dozens of small Vietnamese groups operating in B.C. The most prominent Asian gang in the Vancouver area is the Big Circle Boys, also known as Dai Huen Jai.

Criminal activities: Vietnamese groups control about 85 per cent of the marijuana grow operations in the Lower Mainland and most of the drug trade on Vancouver

\textsuperscript{526} Interview, W3. April 5, 2005.
\textsuperscript{527} Interview, M1. January 29, 2005.
Island, north of Nanaimo.\textsuperscript{528} They have recently branched out into methamphetamine. They also use Big Circle Boys connections to export pot to the U.S. The Big Circle Boys have made the Lower Mainland a hotbed of counterfeit credit card fraud activity. BCB's mainstay is importing and distributing cocaine and southeast Asian heroin. BCB members have been involved in murder, loan-sharking, people smuggling, extortion, home-invasion robberies and exporting stolen luxury cars to Asia.

Propensity for violence:
Vietnamese gangsters are known for being ruthless and unpredictably violent during confrontations. Other Asian crime groups are more low-key, not wanting to attract police attention, but will resort to violence and murder to protect their criminal interests.

Level of sophistication:
High. The Vietnamese have developed a marijuana growing system that has been exported to Vietnamese groups in Ontario and Australia. Big Circle Boys have computer experts for credit card fraud and use offshore accounts and shell companies to launder money and elude police detection.

Geographic reach:
Vietnamese and Big Circle Boys have national networks in such major cities as Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal, and are expanding into smaller cities. BCB has a similar national network in the U.S. Some local Asian gangsters are connected to Hong Kong triads, secret societies of criminals.

Structure/hierarchy: Asian crime groups typically organize in small groups with low-ranking members answering to a crime boss, called a Dai Lo (big brother).\textsuperscript{529}

Some even joked about it, highlighting again the ironies of (in)tolerance in what is supposedly a multicultural nation and society.

The press does an injustice to people by saying what race they are, what colour they are. But they’re really policing themselves now. They’re not saying the cultural background of people who are in trouble. Unless it’s Mennonites. Mexican drug runners. Three Mennonites were found…Ha! Hard to imagine!\textsuperscript{530}

There is a great deal of reporting about immigration and ethnicity in Vancouver newspapers. We need to push the spaces of knowability further – to allow faces for refugees other than what is allowed them by society and the press, to challenge the cycles of backlash against immigration. In a country that supports integration rather than

\textsuperscript{528} Six months later, \textit{The Vancouver Sun} published a more in-depth article blaming ‘Vietnamese’ for 34% of Lower Mainland grow-ops, however sources are not named in that article. “Targeting growers.” \textit{The Vancouver Sun}. March 11, 2005, p. A5.


\textsuperscript{530} Interview, prolific sponsor (M11). April 5, 2005.
assimilation, these are spaces which belie the violences of the settler state and reveal a greater imagining of the possibilities of refugee sponsorship and support. Charting possible courses through a number of diverse voices, I hope, has added a legitimacy to this thesis that goes beyond the constraints of critical theory to identify, acknowledge and appreciate possibility from the realm not just of the public but of the personal. A fundamental assumption about all humankind is the very humanities that link us – and it is through struggle that this often shows its face. Through a greater understanding and embracing of the multiple vulnerabilities that make us no more and no less than human – dynamics very apparent in the stories and opinions of those closely involved in refugee sponsorship – we can all inch closer to a goal for society that uses power more for potential than for punishment. My goal is for a modality of refugee sponsorship that makes no more of us and no less of the refugee. The extravagant deskilling of immigrants in Canada is being challenged in the Supreme Court as a violation of human rights. Dehumanizing, infantilizing, racializing and criminalizing refugees also does a disservice to humanity and fails to comprehend the many potential contributions of the migrant, thus stands counter to any discourse of possibility. This is a significant barrier to immigrant success.

Vietnamese refugees are still being scripted as threats to our land, by calling to familiar prejudices and boosting a superiority of the Self; scaring ourselves through an idea of the sacredness of Canadian history and national space:

What I soon learned when I sponsored Vietnamese refugees was the sad truth that I had been duped. Far from being fervent anti-Communists, I found many were ethnic Chinese, some from mainland China, who were merely coming for economic advantage, under the guise of being refugees. I quickly realized my natural compassion was being exploited to help these people escape the obligations to comply with our own immigration rules. It is clear to me my country is being invaded. It is equally clear that taking immigrants will not solve the troubles in the sea of humanity but will only sink the lifeboat of our own blessed land. It does no favour to anyone to sink a lifeboat by over-crowding. Those in the boat all drown. Those clambering in, who sink it, are drowned also. We did not create the problems of China. We cannot solve them by importing those problems here. If we do so, the sad fact is that those who lawfully came to Canada from China and other Communist and less free countries will have gained nothing by coming here as it becomes more and more like the place they left. The

only people here who stand to gain are those poor benighted ideological Communists here who see vast numbers of well-trained cadre as comrades in arms against us "capitalists," as they call those of us who own our home or business. They are usually the first to sling the dirty name of racist at any European Christian who dares to defend our home or culture.532

Letters like the above display the neo-liberal xenophobia that advocates and enjoys the benefit of globalized markets yet overemphasizes the racial and economic impacts of immigration. Thus, ethnicity and economic otherness become straw figures for fears over the permeability of postmodern boundaries.

As shown in the following beat report, on the front page of Vancouver’s most popular daily, crime is still racialized and being used as a tool for advocating increased budgets for police:

Illegal immigrants arriving by stealth in ship containers. Honduran bandits selling drugs on the SkyTrain route. A crossfire between Vietnamese gangs. Marijuana growing operations inside mansions in some of the finest neighbourhoods. Vancouver has them all, making it the sort of place where one might expect a police chief’s call to arms against organized crime would be welcomed.533

Hondurans have been acknowledged and challenged as the next in line for the hazing of the Vancouver media and police.534 Again, I do not dispute the fact that many immigrants have become involved in criminal activities; in fact, an exaggerated tendency for criminality is almost expected of a large group of newcomers.535 However, the kind of material that repeats assumptions about generalized categories of immigrants is always damaging and often requires little accuracy. Several respondent felt, “They could never say those kinds of things about the Chinese now. And the East Indians are getting enough power too.”536 Again, it was a lack of empowerment that has kept Vietnamese-identified people from being able to consistently and effectively challenge negative stereotyping in the Vancouver media.

536 Interview, refugee advocate (M12), April 27, 2005.
5.4 Academic and Spiritual Literature: Grounds for Support

The starting premise was one of national innocence: a proud legacy dishonoured; a history of innocence remembered. From this point, we could only interpret the encounter as a fresh moment standing in the time of this dreamed history. To truly challenge such national stories... we need to appreciate how deeply the stories shape the subjectivities of the dominant group. What such speculations achieve is a determined looking away from anything systemic. We must look away if we are to preserve our innocence.537

As outsiders... we have an obligation to listen to those who have suffered, resisting the temptation to redeem suffering... Whenever we have contemplated any intervention into the crises of the Third World, we have generally not listened to those who are suffering. Instead, we have used their suffering to reconstitute ourselves as White Knights and as victims, taking ourselves out of their histories... Collective memory has really been ‘collective instruction’ in who we are. Let us then look critically at who we are.538

The essence of the vocal backlash is not primarily intolerance of others different from oneself. It is insecurity about one’s own way of life, an insecurity which breeds defensive reactions and false projections. In such circumstances, honest pride in past cultural accomplishments becomes transformed into a false pride, which closes off self-critical scrutiny and the willingness to accept new challenges.539

Razack believes transnational humanitarian causes are too inherently flawed, with their imperialistic, colonial underpinnings. Overthinking and overemphasizing the coloniality of humanitarianism, she carries these arguments to the extreme point that peacekeeping initiatives, aid missions and the like should be stopped. Though I agree with her contention that there are flawed elements to any act of benevolence, I believe the Private Sponsorship Programme and the successes of migrants of all varieties, all deeply flawed in all of our ways, should be celebrated as a great accomplishment of humanity. Small, everyday acts of compassion and commonality are what makes society strong and helps retain a sense of spirituality in a secular environment. Douglas Roche540 was searching, just before the boat people crisis, for “a better system of sharing as stewards of

537 Razack 2004, pps. 158-159
538 Ibid p. 166.
the planet."\textsuperscript{541} He advocates a spiritual side to the body of the nation – one steeped in love-charity, which he calls justice, as radically different from a charity that "means alms, or the giving of some small surplus to the needy... an identification that misses the wholeness of love and [which] is, moreover, hopelessly overtaken by events."\textsuperscript{542}

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice. It is a protection of a fundamental human right."\textsuperscript{543} Thus, a just society is one where governments do not simply allocate a percentage of their Gross Domestic Product to humanitarian causes,\textsuperscript{544} but where we are encouraged to make sacrifices in times when our globalized neighbour needs support. "A fully developed sense of justice knows no boundaries."\textsuperscript{545}

When senses of time, space and identity are constantly and repeatedly acknowledged as dynamic and globalized, it seems incredible we feel we are ever able to construct such a strong sense of a national, ethno-cultural Self to become a platform for marginalizing the Other as mysterious and on the fringes of belonging. I realized this when my Oma died recently at the age of 95. Her life was so incredibly different from my own that I have rarely been able to use that heritage for any kind of reference points for belonging. She didn’t know how to sign her name nor operate a stove. She had dropped out of school at Grade 8 to work on the farm. She could not work a vacuum and had stopped driving in the 1940s at the end of the War. There was no electricity, at first, and no telephone. Identity and space are constantly in flux and should be freed as much as possible from our multiple and not particularly dynamic prejudices. Without this realization, there could be no negotiation of settler space, as we would be necessarily forever stuck in regimes of colonial exploitation.

It is not inertia alone that is responsible for human relationships repeating themselves from case to case, indescribably monotonous and unrenewed. It is shyness before any sort of new and unforeseeable experience with which one does not think oneself able to cope, but only someone who is ready for everything, who

\textsuperscript{541} Roche 1976, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid, pp. 119-120.
\textsuperscript{543} Nelson Mandela, Live 8 Speech. BBC Website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4646231.stm
\textsuperscript{544} Only 0.28 percent in 2002, compared to the United Nations’ suggestion of 0.7 percent. "Canadians are a generous people – or not?" Burnaby Now, Burnaby, BC. July 20, 2005, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{545} Roche 1976, p. 115.
excludes nothing, not even the most enigmatical, will live the relation to another as something alive.\textsuperscript{546}

That we supposedly believe in ‘integration’ yet are willing to accept the kinds of racializations that occur and are repeated in public discourse, shows that our flexibility and sense of hospitality are unresponsive to change – we are still stuck in cycles of backlash and entente as regards those constructed as other, as new, and as potentially unworthy.

It is this impulse [to racialize and criminalize] and its historical underpinnings that we must question without retreating to the terrain of national mythology... To discuss such things, we will have to move beyond our dreams of innocence, dreams in which naïveté is what marks us as a people.\textsuperscript{547}

We are able to reach common grounds, places of negotiation where we all encourage positive inputs and desire positive outcomes. Several factors noted above, including the racialization and criminalization of Vietnamese identity in the media and public discourse, help keep the mindset in this cycle of fear and marginalization. Nobody is perfect, but with more open minds, a more responsible press and more government support we might break the settler nation from our history of immigration backlash. Judith Butler suggests we “vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered...from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability.”\textsuperscript{548} “Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all... Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.”\textsuperscript{549} She says it well, so here I quote at length.

In the Vietnam War, it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the US public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse, and grief. These were precisely pictures we were not supposed to see, and they disrupted the visual field and the entire sense of public identity that was built upon that field. The images furnished a reality, but they also showed a reality that disrupted the hegemonic field of representation itself. Despite their graphic effectivity, the images pointed somewhere else, beyond themselves, to a life and to a precariousness that they could not show. It was from that apprehension of the

\textsuperscript{546} Rilke 1934, Letter 8.
\textsuperscript{547} Desbarats 2000, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{548} Butler 2004, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{549} Ibid, p. 20.
precariousness of those lives we destroyed that many US citizens came to develop an important and vital consensus against the war. But if we continue to discount the words that deliver that message to us, and if the media will not run those pictures, and if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved. We will not return to a sense of ethical outrage that is, distinctively, for an Other, in the name of an Other.

Without this portrayal of commonality, this commitment to revealing the suffering of others in a compassionate yet respectful manner, not merely to satisfy our own need to feel superior, we are in danger of exaggerating our own custodianship of international space while ignoring our own faults.\textsuperscript{550} This is precisely the failing where identities created through the Canadian humanitarian myth serve to discredit and marginalize immigrants.

But what media will let us know and feel that frailty, know and feel at the limits of representation as it is currently cultivated and maintained?... We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense. This might prompt us, affectively, to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.\textsuperscript{551}

Humanitarian admission does not serve the national need by “filling gaps” in the economy – admitting people because of the value they bring “us”. Nor does it fit in with an ideological vision of community or family – admitting people because they are “us.” It does, however mark the nation as good, prosperous, and generous. This contribution is vital.\textsuperscript{552}

We human beings can suffer immense deprivations with great steadfastness, but when we sense that we no longer have anything to offer to anyone, we quickly lose our grip on life. Instinctively we know that the joy of life comes from the ways in which we live together and that the pain of life comes from the many ways we fail to do that well.\textsuperscript{553}

Vietnamese people have most certainly ‘filled gaps’ in the economy, and much of the value they have brought ‘us’ has been discursive. Humanitarian admission most certainly

\textsuperscript{550} Following Sontag 2003.
\textsuperscript{551} Butler 2004, pp. 150-151.
\textsuperscript{552} Dauvergne 2005, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{553} Nouwen 1995, pp 72-73.
does ‘fit in with an ideological vision of community or family’, not only because their presences have allowed us to feel superior and enlightened, but also because of the small moments of connection that have aided Vancouver’s transition into a more diverse city. If we are to improve sponsorship and support, these discursive dynamics need to be at least acknowledged, despite the fact that they resist quantification, and their importance both to established citizens and newcomers needs to be studied. This is the only way we will be able to move forward with a more responsive media, a more educated public and a more proactive citizenship.

In order to realize their potential, refugees need to be properly incorporated into society, and this cannot happen if refugees are seen as either a burden on society, or as objects of pity. Both views objectify refugees, and impose someone else’s perceptions onto their reality. It is only if refugees are truly empowered that they can contribute to society in a meaningful way, both economically and socially.

Private sponsorship worked against this as refugees had to be placed in each of the human resources’ jurisdictions.554

Thus, the task at hand is to determine paths for inclusivity and empowerment that emerge from places more rooted in a true commonality than the tolerance of the settler state.

5.5 Conclusion: Suggestions for Sponsorship

As Ben Okri wrote, “A dream can be the highest point of a life.”555 So, too, can miracles. Miracles are the world’s greatest gift – they are to be shared by all humanity. The Private Sponsorship Programme, in a way, is such a miracle. The large wave of support for refugees from Indochina was often exceptional; a movement, an expression of what is truly real and good about humankind, and the kinds of actions and priorities we need in order to make our world a better place.

I believe all suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. We need to cultivate a universal responsibility for one another and the planet we share. Although I have found my own Buddhist religion helpful in generating love and compassion, even for those we consider our enemies, I am convinced that everyone can develop a good heart and a sense of universal responsibility with or without religion.

With the ever growing impact of science on our lives, religion and spirituality have a greater role to play reminding us of our humanity. There is no contradiction between the two. Each gives us valuable insights into the other.

554 Kelly 2004, p. 123.
Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things. This understanding is crucial if we are to take positive and decisive action on the pressing global concern with the environment.  

At present, so many people and discourses are so very anti-immigration and migrants are basically welcome if they fit very specific criteria or have specific profiles that we require. Yet, through private sponsorship, there has been long-term mutual support and solidarity. And the huge majority of those who were sponsored have had their ups and downs at a rate at least similar to the general population. And there have been some of the small miracles of greatness. These should not be allowed to be sullied by the disappointments of the few. “You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.” It is in its weakness that humanity shows the most commonality. It is in struggle that we find strength and support. It is in our fundamental unity that we can find places to encourage the greater imaginings offered to society through not just science but spirituality.

Speak to us about the deepest yearning of our hearts, about our many wishes, about hope; not about the many strategies for survival, but about trust; not about new methods of satisfying our emotional needs, but about love. Speak to us about a vision larger than our changing perspectives and about a voice deeper than the clamorings of our mass media. Yes, speak to us about something or someone greater than ourselves.

The boat people experience, not starting nor ending on the waves, at least for those who survived and moved on, was a struggle unlike many known in history, yet something that is now part of our common histories. I will not pretend there is some common human spirit – some definable, quantifiable norm that runs through all of us. But there is connection – and it is through that connection that the world expresses unity and love, not merely through the unity of political, racial, class and community identifications. As academics, we tend to get wrapped up in the grids of achievability, of economic determinants and projections. Of course, these kinds of studies are necessary, as the logistics and themes of war, refugee movement, biomanagement and criminalization are vast. But, in the projections these statistexts place across the spaces

---

557 Mahatma Ghandi.
558 Fred Bratman quoted in Nouwen 1995,
and identities of immigrant settlement, we sometimes lose the miracle of arrival, of the border crossing. "Meeting them at the airport – that was always the shining moment."  

"It was a labour of love."  

"Even though I now have English and I've written books and countless newspaper articles, I will never have the words to express my gratitude."  

"That private sponsorship thing was just the best thing ever. We wouldn’t be here otherwise."  

People have certainly had troubles in adjusting to Canada, and there are all sorts of prejudices that get in the way. But it is the moments of connection – of deeper understanding – of joys and vulnerabilities that remind us of our need and desire to be human. And, even though a human does, a human should not see pictures of anonymous strangers in the newspaper and wish them dead, deported or otherwise. But we are flawed and we do. So we need to ensure that the negotiations between all our deeply flawed subject positions run as smoothly as possible. And the government needs to commit to encouraging, facilitating and supporting the possibilities of refugee sponsorship. By giving in to the current backlash cycle, we are in danger of (re)entrenching an ethos for identity and space which (re)prioritizes separation and protection over connection and possibility.

We need communication, first. We need language. We need ESL classes and time to do them. [All respondents agreed.] Then we can communicate. Second, we need to learn from each other – not cut ourselves off with an invisible barrier. As long as we know how to share what we have, we can survive. You see it all the time – when there are hard times, we share more. We are rich – we can keep what we have here. But sharing and change are normal. It’s a part of being alive.

We need a commitment to ESL, no doubt about it, and a willingness to understand. We need better systems to help people ease into life here, and to help people here understand us. We all benefit if the transition is easier. That six months of ESL – that was just bullshit. Who can learn English in six months, of night classes when you’re working all the time and dealing with the change of life? The language thing is huge – and that’s where we need the better systems. We need them to be understanding, compassionate – like these private sponsors. With the government you’re just chucked in and "fend for yourself." We

---

559 Interview, W9, March 2, 2005.
560 Interview W3, April 3, 2005.
scrambled to our feet but there are definite casualties. And the press feeds on those like a pack of wolves, giving us all a bad name. We need people like Adrian French at Immigration again – people who really care and are willing to go the extra mile. But the government shut him out. When I see what has happened to my community, I want to cry. I’m really disappointed with our community. I keep trying to get people to learn they need to act together to fight the negative press but it just isn’t happening. And now we’ve got a new generation who just don’t care. They don’t have the role models. They only care about themselves.564

As for a means to counter unfair treatment by the news media, and to overcome "scapegoating" for all our sins, the Jewish people have an effective organization in each country that immediately counters false and unfair reporting in the media by providing the truth. Most recently when that native fellow on the prairies (Winnipeg?) made savage comments against the Jews and applauded Hitler, the Jewish Organization was very quick to reply and to demand an accounting. I believe this issue is still current, mainly because the fellow in question keeps opening his mouth.565

Several respondents suggested that immigrant groups be aware and responsible for their representation in the media. I expressed disappointment that in a supposedly diverse and multicultural society, each group of newcomers might need to spend a lot of time and money on their own public relations. I asked if they truly believed a ‘community’ could be so cohesive, could be expected to take on their own defence and publicity at a time with many more pressing issues.

It was amazing, the struggle it took just for us to help people to make a go of it in this country. People, mostly women, banded together and worked extremely hard, all the way from taking total strangers to the doctor – I still do that – to visiting people in prison. At that time, we just did it because we believed in making the adjustment easier – we knew a lot of work was required. But now, people are so caught up in competition, in the fight for resources, that we’re all working against each other. It’s really, really disappointing.566

Perhaps we need] a regional NGO composed of interested ethnic groups to speak on behalf of immigrants/refugees from a foundation of factual/cultural information to make reply to bigoted and inaccurate news stories.567

After decades of struggle, none of my respondents felt media self-regulation was working. Dunn and Mahtani argue that communities subjected to racialised

565 Email correspondence M1, May 17, 2005.
567 Email correspondence with W3, May 22, 2005.
representations should be trained and resourced to respond to mainstream media as well as developing community-specific media. While this certainly is a proactive suggestion, it is my contention that recent refugees need more support in challenging the racializing tendencies of the general public – that confronting negative stereotypes on a case-by-case basis is essentially a stop-gap strategy for a problem that is part of the very framework of the settler nation.

One of the things that came up was that so much government action with regard to ships intercepted related to public discourse and media representations. One NGO rep suggested that migrants who come by boat suffered from a PR problem, and that if we were really savvy, we would hire a PR firm and improve the image somehow. Minelle [Mahtani] and I found something similar in our media analysis – that there were some wonderful positive human interest stories out there that ‘warmed Canadians hearts’. Maybe PR in mainstream media – or elsewhere, eg documentary films – could intervene at the precise moment where one migration or group becomes scripted as ‘bad’ compared to another that is for some reasons seen as ‘good’ for Canada.

As shown in the following excerpts from an article about more recent arrivals from Vietnam, reports still pivot on the relationship between the unfathomable Other and central Self. The refugees are produced as entirely different, foreign and Other to Canadian space which is radically different from their home environment. Almost unbelievably, the article still focuses on what is regarded as a cultural predilection for cat meat. While potentially accurate for some of the migrants, the continued highlighting of this tendency in the local press repeats otherness across a space where the family pet is awarded status either similar to or greater than that of certain immigrants (as shown in Chapter 4). This thus creates the migrant as less than what they are, bodies and tendencies again manageably produced in the space of 7-11, while further construing ‘full-blooded Canadians’ as enlightened in their attitudes toward animals. Again, the central production of the piece is the humanitarian self of the welcoming, enlightened, Canadian, central through our talent at equality, again highlighted by the journalist and made more discursively real through repetition:

Aside from each other’s sun-weathered faces, there is virtually nothing familiar about Canada for a newly landed group of eight refugees from the remote highlands of Vietnam...

---

569 Email correspondence with Alison Mountz, Assistant Professor, University of Syracuse.
But this past week, the group was introduced to barbecues at the beach, large North American grocery stores, and the curiosities of canned food. During a recent trip to a downtown grocery store, Tran says the group was eager to buy canned cat food because some of them ate cats in Vietnam. "They saw the cat on the label and wanted to buy it," said Tran, who is acting as their interpreter. Tran corrected their confusion, but she and her colleagues still face the daunting task of teaching the Montagnards about bank machines, managing the modest monthly sum provided to them by the Canadian government, and finding housing and employment...

"We are very, very happy because the only thing we don't like [about Canada] is we felt very cold," Y said through the interpreter. Cold or not, the Montagnards are getting used to the idea of equality. "Doesn't matter Chinese or Japanese, nobody discriminates. They play together very happily," Y said.570

Through again emphasizing the differences between us through a restricted and repetitive window of knowability, we do a disservice not only to the migrants but also to any hope of becoming better at refugee sponsorship. We are doing a great disservice, not only to the Vietnamese people and all who get caught within stubborn discursive regimes, but also to the committed individuals and organizations that work so very hard to make the transition to Canadian life as smooth as possible. It does us a disservice to produce ourselves as better than we are while producing, picturing and repeating refugee spaces and identities as less than they are. With all our vulnerabilities and imperfections we need to think beyond boundaries – national, ethnic, cultural and otherwise – to embrace less fearsome visions of humanity. In eras of rapidly expanding paradigms of globalization and incursion, with boundary regimes being challenged for some and enforced for others, these are the kinds of rethinkings that need to occur in order to facilitate what my interview respondents have shown and described as great possibilities for humankind. I believe it is a sacred spirit that unites us, that keeps us alive, that encourages us to meet in our times of greatest need. In all the goodness in today’s world, recognizing and prioritizing this spirit will help us all to live a life of more happiness and increased possibilities for negotiation. There will always be Fear in human existence, but the Sacred can provide glorious remedy.

“There’s nothing more precious than Independence and Freedom.”\textsuperscript{571} Ho Chi Minh was an inspired fighter and statesperson who devoted his life to try and achieve sovereignty for Vietnamese land and people. The above quotation is a very useful piece of propaganda for those kinds of aims, and is painted in large, red letters on walls all over Vietnam. We are all able to move our concepts of land and identity beyond the battles for mere sovereignty. However, we continue placing the words “sovereignty” and “freedom” across landscapes of fear, asserting richly historical and bounded notions of superiority and difference. This framework of fear and separation enforces regimes where boundaries are flexible for some and deleterious for others. Getting beyond this fear, understanding that we all have our doubts and are equally capable of managing space and identity, we then are able to focus our attention on the mundane – the connections between humans – as opposed to obsessing over what rips us apart. These small, everyday moments of kindness and generosity are what can be forgotten when we regard history in grand swaths, when we consider immigrants as merely knowable through statistexts, and when we see culture as sets of unworkable differences. Everyday connections and negotiations are the basis of all that we accomplish. They act as sources of power. We should use this rich, spiritual, and deeply human power to revalue our faith in humanity with all of its flaws. With our inherent knowledge of the vulnerability of all earthly experience, we can stretch across boundaries as diverse messengers of peace, in our quests for grace, justice and mercy. We are all capable of moments of greatness.

The wave is also the water. If you take away the wave, there won’t be any water. The water can be the wave, and the water can also be calm. When the water is calm, it can reflect things as they are. Therefore peace is possible; peace, happiness, solidarity, freedom... fearlessness, stability and happiness in ourselves.\textsuperscript{572}

\textsuperscript{571} Ho Chi Minh.
\textsuperscript{572} Thich Nhat Hanh 1998.
Bibliography


Bannerji, Himani. 2000. The Dark Side of the Nation: Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.


Beiser, Morton. 1999. Strangers at the Gate: The ‘Boat People’s’ First Ten Years in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


Malkki, Liisa. Forthcoming. ‘Children, Futures and the Domestication of Hope.’ Received through personal correspondence with author.


