

CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

The gap between borders and identity

The 2016 Robarts Centre Graduate Student Conference, "Canada: Homeland or Hostile Land?," anticipated the country's 150th anniversary in 2017 with an outpouring of critically engaged considerations on the status of our nation-state. The success of the conference is a testament to the professionalism of our graduate students and their colleagues across the country. This next generation of activist scholars speak from the gap between borders and identity, between diversity and a new globality. In so doing, this issue of *Canada Watch* bears witness to the productive

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tensions of Canadian Studies embraced by the Robarts Centre.

Since its founding in 1984, the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at

York University has sought to support increasingly interdisciplinary research pertinent to the study of Canada and "Canada in the world." Our greatest measure of success is the students we gather and mentor and from whom we appreciate contemporary concerns.

I would like to thank two exceptional doctoral students for their organization of the 2016 conference and this issue of *Canada Watch*: Jennifer Mussell and Erin Yunes. Thanks are also due to our Centre Coordinator, Laura Taman, and to all of the contributors to this issue for their keen engagement with social justice. 🍁

CO-ORGANIZERS' INTRODUCTION

Canada: Homeland or hostile land?

In April 2016, the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University hosted its third annual graduate student conference, entitled "Canada: Homeland or Hostile Land?" Over the course of the two-day conference, more than 50 students from universities across the country presented their work and engaged in critical exploration of inequalities in Canadian society. Panels and papers ranged in subject from Canadian settler colonialism and its legacies, to multiculturalism, to state policy and its impacts on minorities. Despite the diversity of topics and range of perspectives, all the discussions that ensued featured a common conclusion: that Canada has both a history and a present characterized by deeply entrenched

BY JENNIFER MUSSELL AND ERIN YUNES

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social and economic inequalities along lines of gender, race, indigeneity, ability, region, socio-economic status, and migration status, among others. As Canada approaches its 150th birthday celebrations, there is no better time to reflect on the fact that, for some, Canada is more hostile land than homeland.

This issue includes 11 essays, each of which was developed from a presentation given at the conference. The first

section, "A Legacy of State Oppression," examines events in Canada's past and present in which the Canadian state has perpetrated acts of oppression against its citizens. The essays by Peltier and FitzGerald examine the legacy of settler colonialism and the temporarily relevant issue of Indigenous people's human rights and security. Gibbs's essay focuses on the use of language in the construction of narratives

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Internment narratives and redress politics

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to consider whether such language is used inclusively or exclusively, though the two uses are not easily distinguishable. Literary and cultural theorist Jennifer Henderson points out that neo-liberalism itself frames how historical wrongs are articulated, restricting the language of redress to “discursive exchanges” because “it is only through this trading of tropes that redress movements can speak to each other and to the dominant political sayable, which they also, unwittingly, sustain” (2013, p. 64). As examples, Henderson compares the use of the carceral trope and the deserving-child trope, both symbolic infringements of liberal notions of freedom, in redress movements around residential schools for Indigenous people and around First World War internments of Ukrainian Canadians. She demonstrates how con-

flated the claims between the movements have become in order to achieve currency in the dominant neo-liberal discourse of reparations. It is thus important to examine particular tropes in specific redress contexts in order to determine whether figurative language reinforces constraints on articulations of injury and reparation captured by neo-liberalism, as described by Henderson, or whether it can signify a “poetics” of redress whereby racial and national identities are destabilized, as promoted by Miki. 🍁

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about the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, another example of state oppression from Canadian history. This is followed by Morais’s essay on the death of Ashley Smith while incarcerated in a Canadian institution. Each of these essays highlights the sometimes invisible role of the state in perpetuating existing inequalities.

The second section, “(Critical) Perspectives on Canadian Multiculturalism,” analyzes the implications of Canada’s perceived multiculturalism. Khan’s essay looks critically at the official policy of multiculturalism, first implemented by the federal government in the 1970s. This is followed by two case studies of multiculturalism: Little’s essay examines Muslim-Canadian women’s response to the proposed niqab

[F]or many, the Canadian homeland can only be a myth.

ban put forth by the Conservative government in 2011; and Kotchapaw’s study focuses on racialized social workers in the predominantly white space of Canadian public policy. Along with Khan’s essay, both case studies highlight the tensions between the rhetoric and official policy of multiculturalism and the lived experiences of minority groups within Canadian society.

The final section, “Overseeing Outsiders: The Canadian State and ‘Foreigners,’” examines the Canadian state’s

relationship with individuals considered to be, in some way, non-members of Canadian society. The essays by Yasin and Henley discuss the high barriers to immigrating to and working in Canada that are faced by non-Canadians. Poggi’s essay examines the competing relationships that second-generation immigrants have with the Canadian state and their parents’ countries of birth, specifically Italian Canadians during the Second World War. The final essay, by Callon, critically examines Canadian foreign policy through a gendered lens. Together, these essays conclude that Canada’s interactions with outsiders are characterized by hostility rather than hospitality, suggesting, for many, the Canadian homeland can only be a myth. 🍁



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