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Negotiating Belonging: Bordered Spaces and Imagined Communities in Vancouver, Canada

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Negotiating Belonging: Bordered Spaces and Imagined Communities in Vancouver, Canada[1]

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Abstract: Drawing on focus groups with women who migrated from sub-Saharan Africa, and multiple interviews over five years with a diverse group of immigrant families, this paper explores the negotiation of belonging in Vancouver. In spite of discourses of Canadian nation-building that imagine community through narratives of a multicultural immigrant society, I argue that ‘Canadian’ remains a bordered space that only partially admits immigrants of colour. Thus, for immigrant women of colour, belonging is often ambiguous, contradictory, and at best, partial.

Keywords: belonging, bordered spaces, labour market, citizenship, identity

Introduction

Transnational migration creates new forms of multiply-positioned subjects and cultural hybridities that, in so far as they destabilize national boundaries, may be potentially transgressive (Anthias 2002a; Fortier 2000). Identity is negotiated in specific material sites – gendered, classed, racialized and sexualized 'diasporic spaces' that migrants move through as they define and redefine their identities (Brah 1996; Dyck and McLaren 2002). These sites can be conceived as bordered spaces – from coercive regulatory regimes to 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) embedded in national discourses and institutional arrangements. Migrants navigate shifting and multiply constituted borders – from 'other' to 'us,' from 'migrant' to 'citizen' – across different material sites in the fluid process of negotiating belonging (Anzaldua 2000).[2]

Feminist debates on citizenship help us rethink more complex and multi-layered notions of belonging in increasingly multicultural spaces pointing out that belonging is negotiated in the context of local, national and global power relations.[3] Like citizenship, migration is an inherently gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed process. In the Canadian context, for example, feminist scholars have documented how the selection criteria for immigrants excludes many women and relegates others to 'dependent' status (Abu-Laban 1998; Boyd 1997, 2001; Thobani 2000); the way the provision of settlement services limits women's access, includes few gender-specific services, and helps to create low-wage job ghettoes for immigrant women (Creese and Dowling 2001; Lee 1999a, 1999b; Ng 1990); the multiple processes that reproduce immigrant workers in the lower echelons of a gendered and racialized labour market (Dossa 2002; Giles and Preston 1996; Lo *et al.* 2001; Ng 1990 1998; Preston and Giles 1997); and the expansion of (middle class notions of) 'motherwork' involved in (re)settling families, especially children, in a new environment (Creese *et al.* 1999; Dyck and McLaren 2002; McLaren and Dyck 2004; Walters and Teo 2003). Not surprisingly, these experiences of migration shape ways in which women negotiate identity and belonging.

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[2] As Gloria Anzaldua argues, those who inhabit the 'borderlands,' or 'the spaces in between,' shift back and forth across borders, never fully belonging in any space (2000).

[3] Feminist debates on citizenship point to the limitations of both liberal and communitarian notions of citizenship that frame rights as nation-state-bounded in an era of globalization, and that are unable to forge meaningful accommodations recognizing the complex terrain of difference in multicultural states (Anthias 2002b; Assiter 1999; Lister 1997; Pettman 1999; Werbner & Yuval-Davis 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997). At the same time, the dual nature of inclusion and exclusion through the reproduction of borders and boundaries focuses attention on the continuing power of nation-states to define who gets to become a citizen, under what conditions, and with what consequences for different groups within and without the body politic (Pettman 1999). Theorizing new feminist approaches to citizenship has centred on ways to reconcile universalism and difference, and local and global power relations, leading to the formulation of multi-layered and active conceptions of citizenship such as Ruth Lister's "differentiated universalism" (Lister 1997:28) and Nira Yuval-Davis' "dialogical transversal citizenship" (Yuval-Davis 2002:45).

As Anthias (2002b) has argued, belonging is not just the literal sense of a place where we feel 'at home,' but also a home "in the imagining of a collectivity" (277). Belonging implies recognizing spaces in which one knows one does not belong (Sandercock, Dickout and Winkler 2004). Belonging is negotiated in everyday material practices and cultural imaginations, bordered diasporic spaces where 'otherness' and difference is often simultaneously transcended and recreated.

Nation-states are bordered spaces par excellence, typically imagined through homogenizing nation-building discourses. As Eva Mackey (2002) has argued, however, in the Canadian context, in contrast to the European experience, discourses of nation-building do not rest on a homogenized 'Canadian' to which migrants are compared. Instead, multiculturalism and difference are deeply embedded within national images of Canada. As most Canadian school children can tell you (except for the First Nations) "we are all immigrants in Canada."[4]

Multicultural discourses mediate Canada's complex colonial history: simultaneously displacing the First Nations, maintaining Anglo dominance[5] over Quebec placing ongoing immigration flows in particular hierarchical relations that emphasize cultural pluralism over substantive equality, and distinguishing Canada from the United States as an ostensibly more tolerant and pluralist society (Mackey 2002:16).[6] As Mackey demonstrates, discourses of multiculturalism contain and regulate difference. Images of 'multicultural Canadians' have a central place in the public imagination, but these tend to be gendered images, with women either absent or cast in conservative cultural roles.[7] Multicultural images are also racialized in complex ways. Common-sense discourses construct people of colour as immigrants, and immigrants as people of colour, thereby implying that white[8] (albeit multicultural) Canadians have a longer lineage that somehow makes them 'more Canadian' than others (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Bannerji 2000; Ng 1990; Razack 1998; Thobani 2000)[9]. At the same time, however, discourses of multiculturalism shape debates over immigration in Canada and arguably lead to more subtle forms of 'othering' than may occur in contexts purporting to produce a homogenized national identity (Mackey 2002).[10]

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[4] Not every school child is so aware of colonialism. Moreover, this construction only holds within English-speaking Canada. Quebecois children have a different nationalist discourse.

[5] Recent research on restructuring the 'vertical mosaic' - identified by John Porter in the 1960s as a clear pattern of both ethnic and racialized power and inequality that placed those of British origin at the top – shows that ethnic differences among European groups have largely dissipated, but what remains is a racialized hierarchy with those of European origin still in positions of dominance. See for example, Lian and Mathews 1998.

[6] Colonization and nation-building in Canada is no less assimilationist and racist than in the United States, though it has been configured somewhat differently given different histories (especially the predominance of slavery in the United States and the presence of Quebec in Canada). In spite of a long assimilationist history in Canada, popular ideologies often contrast Canadian pluralism with American assimilation. See Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (1995).

[7] As Abu-Laban and Gabariel (2002) and Das Gupta (1999) point out, public/private dichotomies and homogenized ethnicities are embedded in multicultural policies such that women, when visible at all, are cast in conservative stereotypes.

The centrality of the 'pluralist immigrant society' in the national imagination creates a stark disjuncture for immigrants, caught between multicultural discourses of inclusion and exclusionary material practices. Tropes of multicultural inclusion notwithstanding, immigrants have to negotiate shifting boundaries of 'Canadianness'. This paper explores some of the ways these boundaries are negotiated by immigrant women of colour in Vancouver, one of Canada's largest cities. It draws on two research projects: a 5-year longitudinal study of settlement experiences among diverse immigrant families in a working-class neighbourhood,[11] and focus groups with women who migrated from countries within sub-Saharan Africa.[12] Both projects involve legal immigrants (or landed immigrants in Canadian parlance) who came through a variety of immigration streams: refugees, independent immigrants, and family class.[13] The longitudinal study interviews women and their families several times (in most cases four times) over five years, exploring the ongoing processes of migration and settlement. The focus groups opened up a dialogue among women about their experiences of (not) belonging. Both projects illustrate the uneven and contradictory ways that belonging is negotiated in material practices in the labour market and in reflections on 'home,' identity and citizenship.

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[8] As many North American scholars have pointed out, whiteness is an unstable, historically contingent and contested category. See for example Frankenberg 1993, Jacobson 1998, and Rasmussen, *et al.,* 2001.

[9] As Wenona Giles has demonstrated in her study of Portuguese women in Toronto, some non English-speaking migrants from some parts of Europe are racialized in ways similar to migrants of colour (Giles 2002). See also Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People* for similar arguments about Italian immigrants.

[10] At the same time, exclusionary discourses and regulatory regimes confront those who are not considered potential Canadians such as those on temporary work visas (Sharma 2001), the Live-in Caregiver Program that supplies domestic workers (Bakan & Stasiulis 1997; Pratt 2004), and discourses about 'bogus' refugee claimants (Creese 1992; Sharma 2003).

[11] This research was conducted with Daniel Hiebert. We conducted multiple interviews over 5 years with 14 families in East Vancouver, a working class neighbourhood with a high concentration of immigrants. Our research forms part of the broader Vancouver Community Studies Project assessing immigrant settlement in five lower mainland neighbourhoods. Other members of the research team are: Isabel Dyck, Tom Hutton, David Ley, Arlene Tigar McLaren and Geraldine Pratt. The research was funded by the Vancouver Centre for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis (RIIM). For an introduction to the Vancouver Community Studies Project see Hiebert et al 1998.

[12] This pilot project, involving 2 focus groups with 12 women, was undertaken in collaboration with Edith Kambere, and funded by the Vancouver Centre for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis (RIIM). We are now engaged in interviewing 60 African immigrant women and men in a larger project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

[13] Independent immigrants are assessed through a points system that focuses on education, occupation, and knowledge of the two official languages, English and French (as well as a sub-set of business immigrants assessed largely in terms of investment capital); family class immigrants are immediate dependents of Canadians/landed immigrants and are not assessed through the points system; refugees are either selected abroad from among those designated as refugees by the UNHCR, or travel to Canada to make an inland refugee claim (which may or may not ultimately be successful).

This study takes place in Vancouver, Canada's third largest and, after Toronto, its most diverse city.[14] A recent United Nations report ranked Vancouver fourth in the world in terms of its percentage of foreign-born population.[15] According to the 2001 Census, 37.5% of the population of the greater metropolitan area are immigrants,[16] and 37% are visible minority background, or people of colour (Statistics Canada 2003a:35 and 58).[17] Within the City of Vancouver proper (where our research neighbourhood is located), 46% of the population are immigrants; and 49% of the population identity as people of colour, the largest group of whom (30% of the city's population) define themselves as Chinese origin.[18] Shifting immigrant flows since the 1970s mean that immigrants who arrived prior to 1980 are more likely to be white, and those who arrived since then are more likely to be people of colour.[19] In this context of embodied diversity within Vancouver,[20] where to be a person of colour and/or of immigrant background is truly part of the material, if not the 'imagined,' mainstream, and where multicultural tropes of a pluralist immigrant society are central to the national imagination, how is belonging negotiated?

As part of the Vancouver Community Studies project, of which our neighbourhood study is one part, a survey was conducted of attitudes toward immigration, multiculturalism and belonging among both immigrant and native-born residents of the Greater Vancouver area in the summer of 2001.[21] Overall, residents expressed high degrees of 'belonging,' though women less than men, immigrants less than native-born, and people of visible minority background less than those of European background. Compared to 100% of Canadian-born respondents, only 80% of immigrants[22] agreed with the statement "I belong in Canada"; and compared to 96% of white respondents, only 78% of people of colour agreed that "my culture is accepted" (Hiebert 2003:27). The significantly lower levels of belonging reported among immigrants and people of colour suggests that the boundaries of 'Canadianness' are less permeable than multicultural discourses imply. The discussion that follows explores how some immigrant women of colour experience these boundaries: I begin with a discussion of negotiating belonging in one material site, the labour market, and then turn to women's reflections on citizenship, identity and belonging.

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[14] For a good overview of issues of immigration and diversity in Toronto see Siemiatycki et al (2001), *Integrating Community Diversity: On Whose Terms?*

[15] Toronto ranked second only to Miami, followed by Los Angeles and Vancouver (Conway-Smith 2004).

[16] Here, the term immigrant refers to all those who are not Canadian-born. Landed immigrants (the legal term for those granted permanent residence status in Canada) are eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship after three years. The vast majority of immigrants, therefore, are also Canadian citizens.

[17] Visible minority is the government terminology for people "other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada 2003a:10). The term 'people of colour' is more commonly used by those racialized as 'non white.' To put trends in Vancouver in a national context, 18.4% of the total population of Canada are immigrant background and 13.4% are people of colour (ibid:5-10). Three-quarters of immigrants settle in the largest urban centres of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

[18] Figures for the City of Vancouver, also based on the 2001 Census, are drawn from Multicultural Profiles for BC Communities, British Columbia Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/amip/rpts/profiles.htm (downloaded July 9, 2004).

[19] For example, 73% of immigrants who arrived between 1990 and 2000 were visible minority background: 58% came from Asia, 20% from Europe, 11% from the Caribbean, Central and South America, 8% from Africa, and 3% from the United States (Statistics Canada 2003a:6-10).

[20] For more on the changing diversity of Vancouver see Hiebert 1999a and 1999b.

Material belonging: the labour market

Belonging invokes a range of experiences and memories, negotiated across many sites, that shape multiply positioned subjectivities. Some of the ways experiences in the labour market shape belonging are made clear in focus groups with women who migrated to Vancouver from sub-Saharan Africa. The first focus group[23] began with participants asked to think about the issues in Canada they found more difficult to deal with than they expected. The opening exchange among participants highlights multiple and complex ways that belonging is embedded in material relations in the labour market, and is worth quoting at length:

> (Focus Group 1)
>
> **Mapendo:**[24] I think for me, the most difficulty has been finding your place within the community, as to where are you in this community, are you really a member of this community? Do you really feel that you belong, do you really see a future for yourself? You know those kinds of things. Of course finding what you really want to do and being happy in it, the right job, employment. I will say the opportunity to

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[21] For details on the survey see Daniel Hiebert, "Are Immigrants Welcome? Introducing the Vancouver Community Studies Survey" (2003).

[22] This refers to immigrants who arrived in Canada since 1991.

[23] Two focus groups were conducted in the summer of 2002. The first focus group involved six women, all with university degrees (5 of whom have Masters Degrees), who had been in Canada between 3 and 13 years.

[24] All subject's names used in the text are pseudonyms.

> highlight my skills. I think it is difficult finding a place you can actually be able to utilize your skills and excel. Different barriers or maybe perceived ones, but I also think it is about how to be established in the system of others, to be successful whether it is a need of information or a network. (8 years in Canada; American M.A.)
>
> **Kathy:** For me, who has been here for about three years now, I think that there is no sense of belonging. I feel that the skills that I came with, these skills are unrecognized. I feel there is no future for me. I struggle with this every time to overcome this situation. But the more I struggle the more it becomes harder and harder. One thing is that you can not find a job, you don't know where to start, and you don't know where these connections and networking are. (3 years in Canada; Sudanese M.A.)
>
> **Carolyn:** The most difficulty is unemployment. When you are trying as much as you can to improve yourself. You are tired because of all the things that are pulling you back like paying the bills, especially for single parents. It is very tough. You can not improve yourself and do what you want. (5 years in Canada; Nigerian M.A.)
>
> **Mabunda:** I think it is the fact that you remain an immigrant which is the main obstacle because you never become either citizen or Canadian. This remains a big block, because you really have to belong. It is a kind of stigma, it is how I see it. So you are not in although you are among. But on the other hand, it is ok, because I am an immigrant, so I have to live as an immigrant despite [it] and find a way to be an immigrant, which is new status to me, because I have never lived as an immigrant. So now I have to live as an immigrant. (13 years in Canada; Canadian M.A.)

This exchange highlights the importance of belonging to the community in which one lives, and the painful reality of feeling marginalized and excluded. As women speak about their experiences it becomes clear that belonging is rooted in a range of material practices, institutional arrangements and discursive constructs: access to employment; access to desirable jobs; scope to develop skills and potential; to have pre-migration educational credentials recognized; to be able to develop good networks of support and information; to leave behind the perpetual 'immigrant' label; as Mabunda expresses it so eloquently, the quest to be imagined as *in* and not just *among* the community. For these women, feelings of not belonging have less to do with transnational subjectivities and cultural transitions, and more to do with material and discursive forms of exclusion in local spaces. Indeed, in this context of local exclusion new subjectivities are being formed, with the emergence of a new 'pan-

African' identity.[25] Their exchange invokes a language of frustration and anger at the barriers they encounter; perseverance and strength to negotiate bordered spaces; and hints of resignation as Mabunda suggests she should lower her expectations and "find a way to be an immigrant." For these women, there is little expectation that 'being an immigrant' is a transitory phase in the settlement process. Notwithstanding the diversity of women's experiences, the themes highlighted in these focus groups, and the centrality of employment to broader processes of belonging, find strong resonances in our longitudinal interviews with a diverse range of families.[26]

To understand why labour market experiences are so central to belonging, we need to consider the disjuncture between discourses of immigration and multiculturalism, on the one hand, and labour market practices, on the other hand. Immigration policies focus on recruiting skilled workers, professionals and entrepreneurs (the 'independent' class of immigrants); multicultural tropes celebrate the pluralist immigrant society; but the labour market valorizes all things Canadian while devaluing all things, and people, defined as 'foreign.' A recent report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, *Settlement and Integration: A Sense of Belonging, Feeling at Home* (2003), for example, highlighted the common immigrant experiences of under-employment and deskilling and concluded that the stated goals of Canada's immigration policy are being derailed by employment practices:

> The current underutilization of human resources is at odds with the country's immigration goals and, in particular, the goals of our skilled worker and provincial nominee programs. Equally important, the impact on the individuals affected – the PhD who ends up driving a taxi, for example – is profound. (p.13)

Immigrants' central focus on employment is all the more critical in an era of neo-liberal restructuring where individual self-sufficiency has become paramount. As McLaren and Dyck argue:

> The narrative of the 'ideal immigrant' – who deserves to become a citizen and belong to the nation state and the counterpart 'deficient immigrant' who does not –

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[25] Quiminal (2000) argues that in France an 'African identity' has emerged as women from diverse African countries organize together in France. To some degree this can also be observed in Vancouver as African women organize collectively, although the idea that a single 'African community' exists is still a matter of some debate.

[26] We interviewed 14 families, most of whom were interviewed 4 times over a five year period (1998-2003). Families came from Bolivia, El. Salvador, Hong Kong, India, Peru, Philippines, Uganda, and Vietnam. In six cases we interviewed both wives and husbands; in three cases we interviewed wives only because their husbands chose not to be interviewed; three women were single mothers; one family consisted of two sisters, both unmarried when we began the interviews; and one man was single. In addition, in several cases teenage and young adult children participated in interviews with their parent(s), and in three cases children were interviewed separately.

> contributes to the construction of an ‘imagined community’ of belonging in Canada (2004:42).

In this neo-liberal narrative, ‘good immigrants’ are those who contribute to the Canadian economy by bringing and developing new skills, capital and other resources. Perhaps not surprisingly, in this context immigrant women “used paid work as a primary entry point for negotiating their positions as mothers, immigrants and citizens” (McLaren and Dyck 2004:44). Discourses of ‘good’ immigrant women, then, centre on interconnections between mothering work and paid work, while local employment practices present obstacles to becoming this ‘ideal immigrant’.

Immigrant women encounter a gendered and racialized labour market that relegates most to low paying jobs. Like most labour markets, the Canadian labour market remains fundamentally gendered, with women concentrated in ‘traditional’ women’s jobs, particularly in the clerical and sales and service sectors, and earning substantially lower pay than men across all occupational groups and educational levels (Statistics Canada 2000).[27] Aboriginal women, women of colour, and recent immigrants fare much worse in the labour market than their white, native-born, and non-Aboriginal counterparts. The former have lower rates of employment, higher rates of unemployment, lower wages, and are concentrated in less desirable and more ‘non-standard’ jobs (Fudge and Vosko 2003; Statistics Canada 2000, 2003b). A significant body of research documents a large and growing wage gap between immigrant and non-immigrant Canadians that particularly disadvantages recent immigrants (Aydemir and Skuterud 2004; Badets and Howatson-Leo 1999; Chui and Zietsma 2003; Frenette and Morissette 2003; Hiebert and Pendakur 2003; Li 2000, 2003; Picot and Hou), and a wage gap between Canadian-born people of colour and whites that disadvantages people of colour, even when controlling for differences in education, occupation and other ‘human capital’ (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998, 2004; Tran 2004). Thus the ways in which immigrant women of colour are integrated into the Canadian labour market provides an example of what Anthias has referred to as ‘disempowering’ inclusion (2002b:285).

Immigrants must successfully negotiate the labour market to become ‘good’ citizens, yet quickly discover that this is a ‘bordered space’ designed to restrict entry. The first experience of most new immigrants in Canada is the need to demonstrate ‘Canadian work experience’ before being offered a job by a local employer. In most cases, years of work experience attained elsewhere are summarily dismissed as meaningless. Aydemir and Skuterud (2004) argue that “roughly one-third of the deterioration [in entry earnings of Canadian immigrant cohorts] appears to be due to a persistent decline in the returns to foreign labour market experience which has occurred almost exclusively in non-traditional [non-European] source countries"(3). As Neema, a participant in one of the focus groups with African women, poignantly asks:

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[27] For full-time workers across all occupations, women average 72.5% of men’s earnings; for women with university degrees, they earn 73.6% of their male counterpart’s earnings (Statistics Canada 2000: 156).

> "If you don't give me the work, where would you like me to get the Canadian experience?" (Focus Group 2)

Our research points to several strategies used to negotiate initial entry into the labour market. Most immigrants quickly learn that unpaid volunteer work is the route to 'Canadian experience' and commence to look for volunteer work. The requirement to perform volunteer work as a prerequisite to paid work marks the boundaries of local experience as somehow superior, and helps to maintain immigrant labour as cheap and subordinate. Although both women and men encounter the boundary of 'Canadian experience,' it is particularly difficult for mothers to perform unpaid work and pay for childcare. Once volunteer work is attained immigrants typically provide free labour for several months to build up the necessary 'Canadian experience' on their resumes. Some choose instead to enroll in courses in local colleges, hoping that Canadian educational credentials will override the demand for Canadian job experience. Others choose one of the limited work venues that do not require Canadian experience, job ghettoes from which it is more difficult to move on: working for temporary office or labour agencies (where reference letters are not supplied),[28] seasonal and other unskilled labour,[29] or home work.[30]

Many women combine a range of strategies to negotiate entry into the paid labour market. The employment histories of five women drawn from our family interviews illustrate these complex and multifaceted strategies:

> Leena, a young single woman, arrived in Vancouver from India with a Masters degree in Commerce and experience as a teacher. After a fruitless 6 month search for paid employment, she enrolled in a 6-month 'office skills' program at a local business college. At the same time, she volunteered at an accountant's office to gain some 'Canadian experience.' When the course ended Leena held a 3 month

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[28] Reference letters are required by most employers in Canada. For a discussion of temporary work agencies in Canada see Vosko, 2000.

[29] For example, common seasonal labour in the Vancouver area includes fish packing plants and berry picking.

[30] Home work is most commonly associated with the garment industry, which is in decline due to NAFTA. Although this work is commonly performed by immigrant women, none of the participants in our research mentioned their involvement in home work.

temporary position at the accountant's office; followed by several months at a software company; several months at another accounting company; 1 year at a bicycle company (that went bankrupt); several months with a funeral company (that also went bankrupt); and finally got a 'good job' (with more security and better pay) at a property management company. She married and was on maternity leave from that company at the time of our last interview. Throughout the 5 years of our discussions Leena was taking night courses to become a certified Chartered General Accountant, a designation she attained just before her daughter was born. (EV 13)

Muhindo, married with 4 children, arrived with her family in Vancouver from Uganda (via 5 years in a refugee camp in Zaire). She had been an elementary school teacher in Uganda. She enrolled in ESL courses to upgrade English skills and attain her high school equivalency, before seeking enrollment in a community college to attain a diploma in Women's Studies and Social Work. The program required 60 hours of volunteer experience, and it took Muhindo 1 year to find a place that would let her volunteer. She finally found unpaid volunteer work in a multicultural immigrant service agency and was then able to enter the 2 year diploma program. As part of her program in Women's Studies, Muhindo did a 2 month practicum at another immigrant service agency. Several months after graduation, she got a part-time paid job, 2 days a week, working with immigrant women at the same organization. Muhindo transferred to the university stream and completed the last 2 years of a Bachelor's of Social Work Degree while working part-time. After graduation she remained part-time at the immigrant service agency and was unable to find employment in social work. At the time of our last interview she was still working part-time at the immigrant service agency and planning to pursue a Masters of Social Work. (EV 7)

Maria, her husband and 3 children arrived as refugees from El Salvador. Maria was a nurse in El Salvador. She enrolled in an ESL program and after 3 months found a job as a janitor through a Spanish-speaking friend. She worked briefly in a flower shop; then baby-sitting and cleaning individual homes. Maria found working on her own harder, so she returned to the janitorial job. A year later she asked her boss to lay her off so she could retrain through the Employment Insurance system. She took a course to retrain as a resident care attendant in a nursing home for seniors. Maria attained a job in a unionized nursing home and was working almost full-time, but on an on-call basis. After three years Maria got regular full-time work, 3 night-shifts a week. She enrolled in English classes at a local college to improve her chances of moving to day-shift, which would mean lighter duties and a raise in pay. To earn more money (after she became the sole breadwinner) Maria added shifts at another nursing home (on-call) to her full-time night shifts at the original nursing home. At the time of our last interview she had been laid off from her full-time job due to government restructuring but was still working full-time, though now on a temporary basis, replacing a colleague on long-term disability. (EV 9)

Nora has a BA in Business Administration from the Philippines. She arrived in Vancouver (via several years in Hong Kong) through the Domestic Worker Program to work as a live-in nanny. After completing the requisite 2 years as a nanny Nora moved in with her 2 sisters (who had previously come as domestic workers) and enrolled in a 6-month course for nursing aids. It took a year to find a job in that field, at a private non-union hospital for the elderly. It closed a year later and she moved to another non-union nursing home. Several months later Nora found a job as a patient care aid at a unionized hospital site. The wages were better, the work was full-time, evening shifts, but she was casual (not regular) so she had no benefits. The evening shift suited Nora's child care needs since by then she was married with 1 child (and soon to have 2). By the time of our last interview she had a regular part-time job (with benefits but slightly fewer hours) at the same unionized hospital, attained after 7 years of casual employment. However, she informed us that this would not last long. Government cutbacks had already eliminated her job and she was unsure what kind of position she would end up with. (EV 14)

Anna was a chemical engineer in Bolivia. She immigrated to Canada to be with her husband, who had previously migrated from Peru. She was unable to find work right away and, with the birth of her son, concentrated on ESL classes. Anna then enrolled part-time in a 2-year technical program. She did volunteer work with a community organization to get some experience and got her first Canadian job through a friend as summer replacement in a store downtown. This was followed by a part-time job at a large grocery store. At the time of our last interview she had a part-time job as a lab-assistant at a research company, and maintained 1 shift a week at the grocery store. Problems scheduling courses meant Anna did not complete the technical

> diploma, but she still considered it critical for attaining the job as a lab-assistant. (EV 3)

These employment narratives illustrate the shifting borders encountered as immigrant women negotiate the Canadian labour market. The narratives emphasize the resourcefulness necessary to carve out an acceptable place in the labour market and provide for their families. If these narratives are read as settlement 'success stories' (and for most, their own perspective is that they have successfully settled in Vancouver), it is very much a credit to this resourcefulness rather than a testament to the pluralist nature of Canadian society, a claim belied by the parochial and exclusionary nature of labour market practices.

'Canadian experience' is the first border to be negotiated on the road to paid work and, once attained, it provides contingent entry to the local labour market. In contrast, demands for 'Canadian educational credentials' typically remain non-negotiable. Although independent immigrants are admitted on the basis of their educational and occupational qualifications, most quickly find that they cannot practice their professions within Canada because their educational qualifications are not recognized by Canadian employers or professional associations (Basran and Zong 1998; Bauder and Cameron 2002; Geddie 2002; Henin and Bennett 2002; Li 2003; Reitz 2003). Issues of credential and skill recognition in Canada imply much more than limited transnational knowledge of educational systems, since some 'foreign' degrees (attained in Britain, the United States, and sometimes western Europe) are accepted at face value while others (attained in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Caribbean) are not. This racialized 'discounting' of immigrants' educational credentials and skills has increased over the last two decades (Reitz 2003). Moreover, Li's research (2003) shows that the undervaluation of university degrees (relative to white native-born Canadian degree holders) is greatest for immigrant women of colour with foreign degrees, and a significant wage gap even exists for immigrants of colour who earned their degrees within Canada.

The result of degree 'discounting' by employers and professional associations is deskilling and downward social mobility for highly skilled immigrants. Trained doctors, nurses, engineers, computer specialists, teachers, social workers, accountants, mechanics, and other skilled workers are all required to retrain in Canada before they will be considered for jobs in their fields.[31] For many, retraining involves years in university, a cost which is often prohibitive. The erasure of educational credentials, and the professional expertise associated with it, denies more than a person's human capital (theoretically so valued in neo-liberalism); it denies a person's value as a citizen (McLaren and Dyck 2004) and helps to reproduce immigrants of colour as cheap labour.

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[31] Exceptions involve people whose training is from the United States, Britain, and in some cases other parts of Western Europe.

As the above employment narratives suggest, economic survival may mean taking whatever work is available no matter how unrelated to training or how poorly paid. At the same time, most women in our research continued their education in Canada, usually through part-time studies fitted around their paid work schedules. Few retrained to the level of their pre-migration professional qualifications; instead, for example, nurses become nurse's aides (Maria) and engineers become technicians (Anna). Some moved into completely different areas by taking specialized courses (such as Leena, Nora and Muhindo); and others accepted work that does not require post-secondary training (for example, clerical work). Still others sought to improve working conditions, job security, and pay by finding employment in a unionized setting (for example Maria and Nora). In addition, some immigrants decide to leave Canada, either to return to their country of origin or to go south of the border to the Untied States where 'foreign' educational credentials are perceived to be more readily accepted.[32]

Whatever direction further education takes, most immigrant narratives emphasize continuing education as a primary strategy to improve labour market prospects and gain a more respected/respectable place in the community. The combination of paid work and continuing education over a long period of time is particularly hard for women raising children. Several women in our study (including Maria, Nora and Muhindo) alternated night and day shifts with their husbands to accommodate child care and rarely had any time with their spouses. Few found time for the kind of community involvement that might produce a greater sense of belonging. As they negotiate their belonging in the labour market, then, immigrant women simultaneously negotiate *the central way* to place themselves within the nation, in an institutional context that persistently denies their value because they are not 'Canadian' enough.

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[32] I am not aware of research comparing the differential acceptance of 'foreign' credentials in Canada and the United States, but we were often provided anecdotal evidence to support these assumptions. There is not much research on emigration from Canada, though some recent research suggests that only a small percentage (4.3%) of immigrants who arrived in the 1990s have since left Canada; a figure that is higher in some occupations than others (11.7% among physicians and health managers; 6.9% in information technology; and 3% in skilled trades) (Dryburgh & Hamel 2004). Of the 14 families in our study, 1 family moved to the United States to pursue better employment opportunities (after the study ended), and another family adopted the 'astronaut' strategy of the husband returning to work in the country of origin while the wife and children remained in Canada.

In addition to borders enacted through employer demands for 'Canadian experience' and 'Canadian educational credentials,' preference for 'Canadian English accents' forms a third dimension bordering the labour market. Many of the women interviewed in our research pointed to language as an ongoing issue in their struggles for good employment. Some English-as-second-language speakers rightly believe that job prospects are limited for those who do not have high levels of proficiency in English (Boyd 1999; Hiebert 2002).[33] However, expectations of English-language fluency imply more than proficiency in communication. Many immigrants, especially those from former British colonies, are fluent in English before arriving in Canada, and many more develop a high level of fluency sometime after arrival. However, denigrating accents construed as 'foreign' appears to be an endemic feature of immigrant experiences in the labour market and elsewhere (Creese and Kambere 2003; Henry 1999; Scassa 1994). As Willinsky (1998) reminds us, the expansion of English (and other European languages) was part of centuries of imperialism; language "was used to regulate and police access to authority and knowledge among colonized peoples" (191). The legacy of this 'intellectual project of imperialism' is still with us, in a world in which English lays claim to status as a world language, and yet 'native speakers' in predominantly white English-speaking nations remain its privileged purveyors. Speaking directly to those who teach English-as-a-second-language in Canadian classrooms, Willinsky cautions that the 'frame of mind' in which one listens to those speaking English and other languages "may still bear traces of the history of imperial conquest and dominance" (194).

Legacies of imperialism are clearly implicated in the treatment of different English accents in Vancouver. Some extra-local accents (for example, those from African countries) are more likely to be considered 'foreign' than others (for example, those from Britain or Australia) in ways that affect belonging in a wide range of social situations. In focus groups with women who migrated from English-speaking Africa, for example, failure to get jobs, houses, even proper medical attention, were attributed to 'accent discrimination'. As I have argued elsewhere, the imagined nation is "discursively patrolled through accents" (Creese and Kambere: 2003:566). A 'foreign' accent, already a socially constructed notion, appears to serve as a marker that discounts the general competencies of potential employees (Creese and Kambere 2003; Henry 1999; Scassa 1994). The presence of an 'African accent' serves to 'discount' English language proficiency in ways that cannot be separated from the racialized bodies of speakers:

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[33] The exception here may be Cantonese and Mandarin speaking immigrants. With such significant Cantonese and Mandarin speaking populations and business districts in the Vancouver area it may be possible to work and live very comfortably with little use of English.

> Accents signify more than local/’Canadian’ and extra-local/’immigrant’; accents, embodied by racialized subjects, also shape perceptions of language competency. Thus, accents may provide a rationale for (dis)entitlement in employment or full participation in civil society without troubling liberal discourses of equality. (Creese and Kambere 2003:566)

Common-place assumptions connected to the presence/absence of ‘Canadian English’ accents constitute a powerfully symbolic and material basis of exclusion in a multicultural city in which nearly half of its residents were born elsewhere and are thus unlikely to speak with a local accent. Of course this embodied diversity of the local begs the question of what constitutes a local ‘Canadian’ accent in the first place. Taken together with the devaluation of non-Canadian work experience and non-Canadian educational credentials, discrimination against ‘non-Canadian’ English accents signifies, at best, contingent and provisional forms of belonging for most immigrants.

Feeling ‘at home’: citizenship and belonging

Over five years of conversations Leena, Muhindo, Maria, Nora, and Anna, and their families, reflected on their often contradictory and changing sense of belonging in Canada. Experiences in the local labour market constituted one thread woven into the fabric of meanings of ‘home’; other sites included negotiating schools (their own and their children’s), neighbourhoods, community networks, social services, and the like. For some, the decision to become Canadian citizens constituted a measure of belonging, suggesting that Vancouver had indeed become ‘home’. All five women were Canadian citizens by the time we ended our interviews, and for some formal citizenship was a watershed that served as a point of entry to discuss changing subjectivities. For those who came as refugees Canadian citizenship implies safety and security provided through the nation-state, though not necessarily a sense of belonging within the local community. For others, the decision to become Canadian citizens might be a more profound reflection of where they feel they belong, especially in situations where adopting Canadian citizenship means forgoing one’s original citizenship.

Both Muhindo and Maria were forced to flee their homelands, and both became Canadian citizens as soon as they were eligible, three years after arriving. For Maria, even after a decade in Canada, her sense of place remains ambivalent:

> [Interviewer: Do you feel like Canada is your home?]
>
> “It’s hard to say that. You feel it’s home here, because you’re already here…[But] we still miss it [El Salvador] because we can speak our own language, your own people, and very crowded, many people…Here is different. Everyone do their own thing.

> Even sometimes…you can be there in your apartment, nobody knows; you have friends, family, you need something, you don't have priority. We have no choice. In here, it happens like that." (EV 9, interview 3)

Maria feels isolated in Vancouver, isolation that mitigates feelings of belonging. Neither she, nor her husband Juan, has close connections to the Latin-American community, or any other sense of community in which she feels she is included. In order to buy a house they moved to a distant suburb that involves a long commute to work. The suburb they live in has very few Spanish-speaking families nearby (and a much lower density of immigrants than other parts of Greater Vancouver), and they know little of their neighbours. When Juan was laid off soon after purchasing the house,[34] and without community support or extended family nearby, Maria was forced to work two (and for a brief period three) jobs to make ends meet. Restructuring in the public sector also made her job insecure and Maria's health has suffered; she feels marginalized and over-worked to near exhaustion.

Maria expresses no particular emotional attachment to Canada, or to Canadian citizenship. Her sense of belonging is clearly mediated through mothering. Maria's three grown children have been largely schooled in Vancouver; they appreciate their heritage and identify as both "Canadian and Spanish" (EV 9, Interview 1).[35] The political situation has changed in El Salvador and the family has returned for vacations and could return to live if they so chose. As long as her children plan their futures in Canada, which was the case at the time of our last interview, Maria says she will remain in spite of the hardships she is facing.

Muhindo, and her husband Al,[36] have a less ambiguous, but equally complex, sense of belonging in Canada. For them feeling that Canada is 'home' is tied to attaining Canadian citizenship.

> "[Before] we were just landed immigrants so that we didn't belong, we didn't have a sense of belonging. We didn't know that this is our country. We know that we are here as immigrants, but now we don't consider ourselves as immigrants. We consider

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[34] Maria and Juan subsequently separated. By the time of our last interview all three children had graduated from high school and were working, bringing some additional income into the home.

[35] Maria's children exhibit the 'situational identity' that is not uncommon amongst the next generation. For example, in a discussion among the three children about identity there was agreement that they "feel more Canadian when I'm there [in El Salvador]." (EV 9, interview 1). For more on 'situational identity' among the second generation, see Hiebert et al 1998; and Pratt 2004. For an alternative experience, see Pratt 2002, for a discussion of Filipino-Canadian youth who experience a journey to the Philippines as a 'home coming' that strengthens their Filipino identities.

[36] Some couples, including Muhindo and Al, chose to be interviewed together rather than separately. In this first quote Al is speaking while Muhindo nods in agreement. They often finish each other's sentences, making it hard to know how to separate one's views from the other.

> ourselves as citizens of Canada. We have Ugandan origins and we still have that citizenship, but we consider this our home. And we can build this home with children. We think that they would be better off here than there, but we want to keep, to have connection, with their extended family back home." (EV 7, interview 1)

This passage illustrates the shifting meanings of 'home': Canada is "our home" in the present and where Muhindo and Al look to the future with their children; but Uganda is also home – "back home" – pointing to the past and to extended family ties that continue to be critical for belonging in Canada. Their children, they argue, need to know their extended family, where they come from and who they are. Al laments the fact that "my children here don't know my brothers" because visa restrictions in Canada make it extremely difficult for relatives to visit (EV 7, interview 1).

In many ways Muhindo continues to feel marginalized in Vancouver, particularly as she reflects on her difficulties getting jobs in the field of social work in spite of her Canadian qualifications,[37] but at the same time, she has come to see herself as behaving and identifying more and more as 'Canadian'. Muhindo works in the immigrant services field, and Al is also active through community organizations in helping other African immigrants settle into life in Vancouver. "It also makes us feel more Canadian… [to act] like Canadian hosts" (EV7, interview 1). Feeling 'more Canadian*,'* however, is not always a positive reflection. As Muhindo illustrates, being Canadian can mean learning to ignore other people, including ignoring subtle forms of discrimination:

> "You don't mind what happens in the next door, whether so and so looks at you in their resistant manner. That is none of my business. So we feel we don't care, we don't even notice those because we are too busy. [Al: We are too Canadian]. Yeah, we are too Canadian. We are too busy to notice such things." (EV 7, Interview 2).

Becoming Canadian also means feeling out of place 'back home,' If Muhindo were to return to Uganda[38] people would not like how she has changed:

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[37] In addition to 'disempowering' integration into the labour market and struggles with visas for relatives, she reflects on the difficulties of raising Black sons in Vancouver. Muhindo is also eloquent about the marginalization of the African community, lack of settlement services for African women, and accent discrimination that she and others experience.

[38] It has only recently become possible for them to visit Uganda. Although at this point they have no intention of going themselves, a year after our last interview they sent the two younger sons to visit.

> “Because of our social interaction, the way you talk. The way you take things.[Al continues:] The Canadian way. In Africa, in Uganda, it would not work. That would look very strange.” (EV 7, interview 4)

While feeling more Canadian as time goes on, Muhindo equates this with a loss of community-feeling, loss of connection with neighbors and extended family, and little time to enjoy her husband’s company. For them, belonging in Canada has meant adopting a hectic pace where work, continuing education, and parenting that focuses inward on the nuclear family, leaves too little time and energy for other things. Belonging, then, is at best a mixed blessing, premised on behaviour of which she is self-critical, behaviour that in turn makes it easier to ignore social marginalization and be content with a more individualistic existence. At the same time, it should be noted, Muhindo expresses a strong sense of belonging to an ‘African community’ within Vancouver and remains actively engaged with that community both in her paid work and her friendships. Thus, for Muhindo, feelings of belonging vary by social geography within Vancouver.

For immigrants in this study, developing a sense of belonging in Vancouver can be connected to feeling that one understands and acts like other ‘Canadians,’ and the extent to which people are able to tap into community supports and develop friendship networks that make them feel connected within the city. It also relates to the situations people left behind, and the reasons for migrating to Canada in the first place. Nora came through the Domestic Worker program that provided, in exchange for two years of basically indentured service,[39] an entry-route to apply for landed immigrant status, and eventually citizenship, in Canada. For Nora there was never any question of not belonging:

> “From the time I came here I said I will stay here, it will be my home for my family.” (EV 14, interview 1)

Reflecting on her years in Canada at our last interview, seated in the house she and her husband had just purchased, Nora reflected on how happy she is to have come to Canada:

> “I came here, as you said, as a domestic, right. So you work with [your] family, you have more, you have more permanent home as your own. And it’s true that what I see in my life, it’s true that in my life, it makes me happy. From one room to a big house. You know, I’m glad.” (EV 14, interview 3)

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[39] Domestic workers come on a two-year temporary work visa for a specific employer, and are required to live with their employer. After two years in domestic service they are eligible to apply for landed immigrant status in Canada. For Nora, it was still very painful to reflect on her two years employed in domestic service, living in conditions she described as “not for humans.” (EV 14, Interview 1).

Like other mothers in our research, Nora's main attachment to Canada is the place her children will have a better future than she envisions for them in the Philippines. Nora is not integrated into a broader Filipino community, and does not see neighbours or co-workers socially. Caring for her pre-school children during the day and working in the evening, a counter-point to her husband's day shift, leaves little time for community involvement or socializing outside of family. Most of Nora's immediate family members are living in Vancouver, almost all having come through the same route as domestic workers, and she sees them periodically.

Nora became a citizen as soon as she was able and does not anticipate returning to the Philippines for anything more than a holiday. But Nora's sense of 'home' in Vancouver has not changed her sense of identity.

> "I mean, I'm Filipino. I mean I grew up in the Philippines. I think I'm still who I am. Only because I work in the workplace where I work with Canadians, so I deal with them. But deep inside me, I'm still Filipino." (EV 14, interview 3)

Nora draws a clear distinction between herself and 'Canadians,' with whom she has little contact outside of work. In contrast, according to Nora, her pre-school children are already "more Canadian" in their behaviour, adopting that "frank" and "straightforward" manner she (like Muhindo) associates unfavorably with Canada (EV 14, Interview 3). Like Maria, Nora's sense of belonging is mediated through mothering. In her case becoming 'more Canadian' constitutes a kind of generation gap between herself and her children that causes Nora some ambivalence. Vancouver is clearly 'home' because Nora can provide a better future here for her children – though she is critical of what it means for them to act 'more Canadian' – but she does not seem to have a deeper sense of belonging for herself.

Anna came to Canada to be with her husband, Raoul, a Canadian citizen who originally emigrated from Peru. When we first interviewed Anna she had been in Canada 3 years and was not yet a citizen. She wanted to return to Bolivia to visit and had mixed feelings about encouraging others to follow in her footsteps. She had not written home for some time, waiting for things in her life to improve:

> "Right now I will stay. Since I am struggling for job, I don't have, like almost 3 months I haven't written a letter because I don't have the feelings to write something because I am afraid I will put something very sad in the letter. So I have to forgo things, get settled here in Vancouver." (EV 3, Interview 1)

Eventually Anna did find work and nearly three years into our discussions she became a citizen. Over a five year period, and much struggle, Anna attained a significantly better part-time job related to her prior training as an engineer and technical courses taken in Canada; they purchased a car and an apartment, and developed a larger network of friends (mostly from Peru). Throughout the course of our discussions Anna continued to identify Canada as her "second home": "second because I am still learning the culture and haven't finished" (EV 3, Interview 2). Recognizing that Raoul would be better off financially had he stayed in Peru, and Anna would likely have moved from Bolivia to Brazil, like her brother, she is nevertheless satisfied with what they have accomplished in Vancouver. They have considered moving to the United States where job prospects are much better for engineers, but rejected the idea because they believe Canada provides a safer environment to raise their son. Like other mothers, Anna is committed to staying for her son's future more than for her own. She says she feels welcome in Canada, but identifies herself as Bolivian, not as Canadian. For Anna, like Nora, sharp distinctions are drawn between Canadians and immigrants like herself (EV 3, Interview 4).

Leena's experience is somewhat different from the others. As a young single woman who arrived from India with her sister Chandra, having both qualified as independent immigrants, attachment to Canada has gradually deepened over time. For the first year or so she wanted to return to India: "last year I was so depressed, or homesick more like" (EV 13, Interview 1). Once Leena and Chandra found jobs and were able to rent their own apartment (rather than live with their aunt), Leena became more positive about staying in Canada. In contrast, Chandra dreamed of coming to Canada since she was a child and never wavered in her view that Canada was her new home. Chandra became a Canadian citizen as soon as possible and told us early in our conversations: "I'm Canadian from inside" (EV 13, Interview 2). Asked in a later interview to explain what that means to her Chandra said:

> "Yes, I'm still Canadian from inside."
>
> [Interviewer: What does that mean to you?]
>
> "It means like, eh, I'm totally Canadian like. It's hard to explain but I do love India, but that's separate, but I'm Canadian." (EV 13, Interview 4)

From the time of our first interview both sisters expected to remain in Canada; they sponsored the immigration of their brother and mother, and after Leena returned to India to marry she sponsored her husband as well. However, at the time Chandra became a Canadian citizen Leena did not want to give up her Indian citizenship,[40] and suggested that if things did not work out in Canada for her husband she could return to India. (EV 13, Interview 2). Two years later Leena also become a Canadian citizen, prompted by the imminent birth of her daughter. But it was a trip to India with her young daughter that radically changed Leena's conception of home:

> "This time I went to India, that was in March this year… I could totally see myself living in Canada for my whole life. That was the first time I've found India to be not home… I just longed to be back to Canada for the first time in my life." (EV 13, Interview 4)

For Leena, staying with her in-laws made her feel a loss of independence, something she has come to value in Vancouver. Years of pursuing further education at night while working full time in the day has not resulted in a wide network of friends or community connections in Vancouver, but all of Leena and Chandra's immediate family are now settled nearby (the latest additions being Leena's husband's brother who had just arrived, and her brother's new wife who was expected soon). Although Leena does not know what her sister means to "feel Canadian from inside," she had found ways to embrace her multiply positioned identity.

> "I do know that I like living here. I don't want to go back and I like independent life here. That's all I can say. I do love my culture, the Indian culture… that's something that never would go away and going back is not something I would consider. Culture is definitely there, my entire life, but… I think that's something I can contribute to Canadian society too. That's not something that I have to forget to be here." (EV 13, Interview 4)

At the same time, Leena is clear that even though Canada is now home and India is not, she is perceived by other Canadians as Indian. For that reason she rejects the common usage of the 'hyphenated-Canadian' (in this case Indo-Canadian) to identify herself:

> "I never understood that concept [of hyphenated Canadian] actually. The only thing I know is that I look like an Indian so everybody would ask me, from which part of India you are?" (EV 13, Interview 4)

Leena's comments illustrate the multi-layered and contradictory processes of belonging for immigrants of colour in Vancouver. Like Mapendo's earlier comments, Leena's reflections imply that no matter how ‘at home’ or how ‘Canadian’ one may come to feel, the immigrant designation never disappears; and embedded in the term ‘immigrant’ are subtle and not so subtle reminders about who really belongs more than others.

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[40] India does not recognize dual citizenship so to become a Canadian citizen requires giving up Indian citizenship.

Conclusions

In spite of discourses of Canadian nation-building that imagine community through narratives of a pluralist immigrant society, ‘Canadian’ remains a bordered space that only partially admits immigrants of colour. The embodied diversity of the local destabilizes older notions of Canada as a ‘white dominion’ at the same time that it is reconstituted through the ‘othering’ of immigrants. Immigrant/Canadian binaries are deeply embedded in discursive constructions and material sites in the labour market and elsewhere. Exactly what constitutes ‘Canadian’ in this narrative – sedimented through colonialism, racialization, gender, sexuality and class relations – is less clear. As Canadians of colour who are Canadian-born can attest, life-long immersion in the local – bearing the requisite Canadian accent, education and work experience held out to immigrants as the pinnacle of achievement – does not attenuate common assumptions that they too are probably immigrants[41] who have less claim on the national imagination than those of white European origin (who may indeed be, but are seldom perceived as, first generation immigrants).

For immigrant women of colour, even those who reflect on their settlement in Vancouver in largely positive terms, it is little wonder that their sense of belonging is often ambiguous, contradictory, and at best, partial. Women’s experiences in the workplace, and reflections on home, identity ad citizenship point to ways that diasporic subjectivities are reconceived in the context of material exclusions. To paraphrase Mabunda’s observation at the beginning of this paper, immigrants of colour, even citizens for whom Vancouver is unambiguously ‘home,’ remain perpetual immigrants who exist *among but not in* the imagined community of Canada.

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[41] For example, see Pratt’s discussion of Filipino-Canadian youth who “have their Canadian birthright explicitly denied by white Canadians” (2004:141 and 2002).

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