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Reconstructing Canadianness: The Discourse of the Other in Search for Canadian Identity as Represented in *Mothertalk. Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka* by Roy Kiyooka.

Canada has been perceived by some critics (Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood) as a postmodern country. Today attitudes towards treating Canadian culture as coherent and unified are being challenged. Deconstructing the old models of identity and constructing the new ones, the problem of assimilation, difference and belonging, the idea of multiculturalism and cultural mosaic, "visible minorities" as well as ethnicity are the themes that preoccupy the minds of literary critics, writers and politicians. However, it is incontrovertible that Canadians would not "decentralize" Canada if the certain fixed patterns to be followed had not been created throughout the centuries. In order to control otherness, the dominant elite has constructed a whole range of identities and imposed them on the minority groups. Immigrants are, beyond all question, one of the groups whose voice has been silenced and as a result have the power to become a factor behind the process of redefinition of particular notions. As Marie Gillespie pointed in 1995, "The experience of migrant or diasporic people is central to contemporary societies".[1] Furthermore, the record of the first generation immigrants is the most significant, because of the fact that they have had to survive in the hostile environment and more to the point, the nation of Canada rises upon their bones.[2] This essay is to offer an analysis of changing concepts of Canadianness and factors unifying Canadians as presented in

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[1] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker eds*., A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (Forth Edition)* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1997), 231.
[2] Reference to Lindalee Tracey, *A Scattering of Seeds. The Creation of Canada* (Toronto: McArthur and Company, 1999), xix.

a variety of writings with a special emphasis on *Mothertalk. Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka* written by Roy Kiyooka.

At one stage of his life Aldous Huxley wrote that "nations are to a very large extent invented by their poets and novelists".[3] In addition, in 1970 Robert Kroetsch said, while being engaged in a conversation with Margaret Lawrence, that "In a sense, we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real".[4] Since the Colonial Period writers have been "inventing" Canada using as a tool obviously literature, which is still a powerful force of shaping consciousnesses and context in which people live.[5] In order to feel comfortably in the new land and control "otherness", people in charge of the dominant discourse produced the models of certain identities. Owing to the fact that Canada was believed not to have "ghosts", legends or even history as well as it was the responsibility of the writer to create the mythology, which served as a unifying factor, the construction of Canadianness was initiated in spite of the Native cultures. Geographic determinism, close connection with the land, wilderness, doom, gloom and the lack of success, preference for the negative, garrison mentality, idea of the survival (which according to Margaret Atwood has been the central symbol for Canada), romanticization of the Natives and history seen from only one angle – of the dominant culture – contribute to established model of Canadianness. The presented attitude had been regarded as constant till the 1950s when artists from different ethnic groups began to undermine the earlier representations of Canadian identity.

Apart from the aforementioned features, there are also other unifying factors for Canadians. Canadian Pacific Railway (which even physically brings the whole nation together), Trans Canadian Highway, flag, national anthem, not to mention the myth of the north as well as the myth of Royal Canadian Mounted Police count among them. Strange as it

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[3] Frank Watt, "Nationalism in Canadian Literature" in*: Canadian Culture. An Introductory Reader* Elspeth Cameron ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1997), 220.
[4] Donna Bennett, "English Canada's Postcolonial Complexities" in: *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 51-52 (1993), 171.
[5] Reference to Frank Watt, 213.

may seem, disunity is one of the most significant consolidating elements, although it is quite new idea that has originated in postmodern theories.

In the age that is characterised by the crisis of identity, the question of who the true Canadian is constantly arises. Some people believe that only those who trace their ancestry to Britain or France are 100 per cent Canadian.[6] But what about one third of people living in Canada who cannot do so? Since the dominant discourse tries to impose identities on marginalized groups, the notion of a "hybrid" (being not of one culture) emerges. More importantly, the sense of having hybrid identity increases among those who are neither White nor francophone or anglophone. As the immigrants tend to relate themselves to ethnic groups rather than to Canadians (especially second and third generation Canadians refer to themselves as Asian, even when they have never left Canada) the notion of "hyphenated selves" (e.g. Japanese-Canadians) have been introduced. Many newcomers as having not only non-European and non-aboriginal origins are classified as "visible minorities". Being constantly "visible" makes the complete assimilation impossible for people of colour. Moreover, the whiteness has been constructed and established as "a non-race, i.e. as a normative and universal category with regard to which other races are defined".[7] Thus other races are sentenced to be Other and inferior. Racial minorities are treated as foreign regardless the effort they make to adapt to the society. Much as the authorities would like such labels to be inclusive and encompassing all people living in Canada, it is only their wishful thinking. Officially constructed identities, no matter how they are named (e.g. visible minority, new Canadian, ethnic, hyphenated Canadian, immigrant), give rise to confusion and uncertainty, leading in turn to creating distance from "true Canadians". Hence, those who do not belong to

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[6] Reference to Karim H. Karim, "Constructions, Deconstructions, and Reconstructions: Competing Canadian Discourses on Ethnocultural Terminology" in: *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1993): 5 Jan. 2005 <http://www.cjc-online.ca/viewarticle.php?id=167&layout=html>

[7] Wojciech Kalaga, "Culture and Signification" in: *Britishness and Cultural Studies. Continuity and Change in Narrating the Nation* Krzysztof Knauer, Simon Murray eds. (Katowice: "Śląsk" Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000), 66.

the coined definition of 100 per cent Canadian can only partially participate in the social life. Preceding matters are beyond doubt connected with the multicultural policy introduced in the 1970s by Canadian government. Here another type of "self" emerges, mainly a multicultural one.

Pierre E. Trudeau announced on October the 8th 1971 a "Policy of Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework":

> For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian.[8]

The government committed itself to support various cultural groups as to enable them to contribute to the development of Canada. Multiculturalism within the bilingual framework was supposed to be the basis for national unity and the essence of Canadian identity. It challenged cultural pluralism and encouraged Canadians to participate fully in the society. Contrary to the idea of American "melting pot", Canada was to be a mosaic, where the particular elements are clearly visible. However, Trudeau did not intent to increase the progress of ethnic cultures themselves. One may also notice a contradiction within his policy, i.e. barely is it possible to preserve the multiplicity of cultures and at the same time succeed in unifying the whole society. Yet the fact remains that multiculturalism has some advantages and there are people who defend it. One of the opinions is that "Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging".[9] To take the argument further, Peter Caws suggests that having multicultural identity is equal to praising the best qualities and values found in "all the human products and practices with which one comes in contact".[10] The term also implies openness, liberation from prejudices and enlargement of the *Weltanschauung*.

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[8] Donna Bennett, 184.
[9] *Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship* (2004): 4 Jan. 2005
<http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm>
[10] Peter Caws, "Identity: Cultural, Transcultural, and Multicultural" in: *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*
David Theo Goldberg ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1997), 372.

Canadian Multiculturalism Act replaced Trudeau's statement of 1971 in 1988, which altogether with the introduction of legislation gave foundations for the creation of Department of Multiculturalism. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that it has been just another institution created by the dominant culture in order to deal with "otherness".

Needless to say, not all the Canadians supported Trudeau's policy. Some feared that multiculturalism would favour the English-speaking Canada, others believed that this kind of policy would simply divide Canadians, although it encouraged some understanding between cultures. Evelyn Kallen claimed that it

> was a technique of domination designed to entrench the power of the ruling Anglo elite when its superordinate, national position was threatened by (…) the growing numerical and economic strength and increasing cultural vitality of immigrant ethnic collectivities (…).[11]

Even the visible minorities who searched in multiculturalism help in eliminating the discrimination could notice the disadvantages of it. Let us, by way of example, turn to Neil Bissoondath's argument that epitomizes the critique of Trudeau's policy:

> At the heart of Bissoondath's complaint is the contention that multiculturalism policy produces folkloric stereotypes of people and cultures and creates social division leading "an already divided country down the path to further divisiveness".[12]

Criticism coming from Himani Bannerji is also worth mentioning. Bannerji claims that instead of solving problems, introducing changes within the society or even bringing to an end racist capitalism, the government gave the people just another term, i.e. multiculturalism.[13] Another argument against it is that:

> This ideological Englishness/Whiteness is central to the programme of multiculturalism. It provides content of Canadian culture, the point of departure for "multiculture".[14]

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[11] Roy Miki, "Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing" in: *Broken Entries. Race Subjectivity Writing. Essays* (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1998), 106.
[12] Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "For Export: Multiculturalism and Globalization" in: *Profiles of Canada (Third Edition)* Kenneth G. Pyrke, Walter C. Soderlund eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2003), 260.
[13] Reference to Himani Bannerji, "On the dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of Canada" in: *Literary Pluralities* Christl Verduyn ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998), 126.
[14] Himani Bannerji , 141.

More specifically, multiculturalism suggests that there is a core and there are peripheries, the dominant culture around which inferior ones are concentrated. In other words, it is based on inequality as having a certain norm surrounded by "others".

Recently Trudeau's ideas have come in for a great deal of criticism also from the officials. In 1993 a new ministry – Canadian Heritage replaced the Department of Multiculturalism. By way of analogy, the notion of multiculturalism was substituted by citizenship, which was to be an opposite term as well as new unifying symbol for Canadians. On the basis of above facts it is possible to assume that construction of further identities imposed on people is to some degree attributable to Trudeau's programme.

It may be presumed that multiculturalism is a by-product of an inflow of people to Canada. This brings us to the next point, namely immigration. Canada as the county of immigrants has been and still is dominated by the issues of assimilation of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Every single Canadian is to a certain extent an immigrant. Regardless the reasons which have brought people to Canada, the fact that all of them contribute significantly to building the country scarcely needs emphasizing. All immigrants have laid the foundations of Canada, but the special attention in this essay will be devoted to people of Japanese origin for the sake of further discussion of Roy Kiyooka's book.

Owing to the fact that British Columbia faces the Pacific Ocean, it has attracted many people from Asia as well as Japan. Japanese immigrants began arriving in Canada in considerable numbers circa 1900. If the building of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway led to an increase in the influx of settlers, the Great Depression of the 1930s stopped almost all immigration. In addition, even the already established newcomers were not welcome in Canada any more. But the worst was yet to come. The ordeal of Japanese people began after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. Not only were Canadian citizens of Japanese ancestry

removed from their homes and had their properties confiscated but also they were separated

from their families and sent to camps in the interior where they remained until the end of war.

The Canadian Citizenship act (enacted on 27th of June 1946) was the principal factor behind

the post war rise in immigration (1947-1961). Canadian attitudes towards newcomers slowly

began to change:

> No one culture contains all the real values of life and (…) every group in our Canadian population
> has something worthwhile to contribute.[15]

Since the early 1970s approximately 40 per cent of Canadians are of Asian origin.[16] One may

notice that Japanese-Canadians as "visible minorities" have permanently entered Canadian

society. Being a marginalized group, Canadian writers of Japanese origin *nolens volens*

participate in deconstructing Canadianness. Immigrants having a hyphenated or hybrid

identity are themselves a decentralizing factor.

The beginnings of deconstructing Canadian identity can be traced back to the 1950s

when poets emerging from various ethnic groups have devoted a great deal of effort to re-read

as well as re-write history and previously established images of Canadianness. Both

postmodern and postcolonial discourses question the dominant narratives and the idea of a

fixed centre.

> The key to postmodernism is its "questioning of any notion of coherent, stable, autonomous
> identity (be it individual or national)" – and what could be more Canadian than that?[17]

Indeed, through celebration of regionalism in the 1960s and the 1970s, calling attention to

immigrants, re-visioning the old notions, criticizing multiculturalism and making attempts at

seeing history from the viewpoint of marginalized groups (since the 1980s) Canadians have

called into question almost everything rejecting at the same time American and British models

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[15] *Cultural Democracy 1949* based on C.R. MacLeod, *Citizenship Training: A Handbook for Canadian Schools*
(Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1949): 4 Jan 2005 <http://www.canadianhistory.ca/iv/1914-
1945/attitudes/index.html>

[16] Presented history of Japanese-Canadians is based on the Internet resources: 4 Jan. 2005 *Immigrant Voice*
<http://www.canadianhistory.ca/iv/1914-1945/index.html>, *Forging Our Legacy: Canadian Citizenship and
Immigration 1900-1977* <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/legacy/index.html> , *About Canada:
Multiculturalism in Canada*
<http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian_studies/english/about/multi/index.htm#table>

[17] Karim H. Karim

of culture as well as the Imperial perspective. The canon as well as conservative writing techniques have been challenged by minority writers. But again, if the immigrants had not been allowed to maintain their old culture (which is nowadays referred to as heritage) and if the government had not introduced the multicultural policy, the emergence of writers who sustained their ethnic identities would not have been possible. These poets and novelists remarkably influenced Canadian literature for the simple reason that instead of becoming assimilated with the dominant discourse they challenged the canon.

The postcolonial discourse is similar to the postmodern one in respect of assuming that the representations are always misrepresentations and examining the unstable notions and identities. However, it is valid to speculate that postcolonialism is "closer" to Canada, because

> (…) postmodernism and poststructuralism direct their critique at the unified humanist subject, while postcolonialism seeks to undermine the imperialist subject.[18]

Nostalgia for the distant homeland, exploration of otherness, renegotiation of Canada and Canadianness, dealing with various problems within a hostile environment, praising the opportunities offered by Canada and complex issue of hybrid identity count among the most common themes of postcolonial discourse. This can be illustrated by Roy Kiyooka's *Mothertalk. Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka.*

The book presents the story of "Mary" Kiyoshi Kiyooka who as a daughter of a samurai has accepted a marriage arranged by her father and in 1917 has joined her immigrant husband "Harry" Shigekiyo Kiyooka ("Papa") in Canada. Although Mary was quite enthusiastic about the new adventure in her life, the hardships connected with the Depression era and the Second World War did not omit her. Mary and Harry belong to the Issei, the first generation of immigrants ("the survivors") who have come to Canada.

As Daphne Marlatt notices in the "Introduction", *Mothertalk* cannot be treated as a documentary. It rather presents different history visions of individual members of Kiyooka

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[18] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker, 222.

family. Nevertheless, two major accounts may be distinguished in the book. Above all there is the experience of Mary, who has been interviewed for ". The in-depth interview was not only held in Japanese but also made by a translator as Roy Kiyooka felt the inadequacy of speaking his mother's language. Once the translation was made, Roy freely arranged Mary's stories linking them by themes rather than by chronology. These two life-stories are blended into one and constitute the main "plot" of the book. But what is more, at the end of *Mothertalk* in the first appendix one may find "Papa's version" which provide us with the view of history from again another angle. It is hard to escape the obvious conclusion that just by presenting the multiplicity of truths, Kiyooka's book inscribes itself in both the postmodern and the postcolonial discourse.

Unquestionably, immigrant perspective challenges the constructed models of Canadianness and its characteristics. Firstly, although Mary admits that "geography has a lot to do with who we are"[19], the only thing that really matters is the "landscape-of-the-heart'.[20] This kind of landscape cannot be located in any geographical site, but is carried within people and is strongly connected with the nostalgia for the far away homeland. Mary, during her life, travelled several times to Japan and insisted on her children doing the same. The roots played the remarkable role in her life.

> I want my children to keep going back. How else will they know there's a landscape etched on their hearts which got sown in a bamboo grove?[21]

Secondly, *Mothertalk* raises an issue of finding a place within an existing culture. He emphasis is on the difficult matter of yearning for the assimilation with the "host" country and being simultaneously closely linked with one's ethnic culture. More to the point, while living *via media*, in-between two cultures one cannot escape the label of having hybrid identity. Roy Kiyooka makes us aware of it in 'Burning Leaves" – a poem attached to the book:

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[19] Roy Kiyooka, *Mothertalk. Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka* Daphne Marlatt ed. (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers Limited, 1997), 27.
[20] Roy Kiyooka, 160.
[21] Roy Kiyooka, 160.

> I am sitting here (…)
> still, a part of me is over there (…)[22]

This state of belonging to two cultures may be also described as having double consciousness. Some of the critics claim that the notions of 'here" and "there" reflect the pluralism of the society and thus lie at the centre of Canadianness meeting the demands of postcolonial identity. However, the emerging notion of hybridity may have a positive tinge and be understood as the liberation from one particular culture. One may slip between cultures having fluid rather than unfinished identity.

Both, the importance of being a part of Canadian society and the need for acceptance are marked by one of Mary's memories, namely her husband's death:

> (…) the minister told everyone that Papa, like so many Asian immigrants, had a harsh life but for all that he was among the fortunate ones for having had seven children who've all become exemplary Canadians. (…) He worked hard all his life to be a good Canadian.[23]

Recording the problems of relocation and living within the environment which has been both physically and socially inhospitable is the third major theme in *Mothertalk*. After arriving in Canada, Mary confessed that their life was not easy, but she could have also seen the bright sides of it.

> Work was scarce, wages scant but we were young and agile. We got by in the Englishman's world. Imagine a samurai's daughter learning how to live with a hard-drinking man in a world that didn't speak Japanese.[24]

Furthermore, by devoting a considerable amount of space in the interview, she makes us aware that drinking and prostitution have been a common feature of day-to-day existence. Nevertheless, the Kiyooka family led a peaceful life at that time. The situation changed dramatically during the Second World War. Only after did the immigrants start to feel Canadians (not to mention that most of them had Canadian citizenship and passports) the newspapers began to call them "Japs".

> We Issei families (…) get fingerprinted and registered as 'Enemy Aliens" just like all the Japanese-Canadians on the West Coast. Like them we were deprived of both freedom and

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[22] Roy Kiyooka, 35.
[23] Roy Kiyooka, 124.
[24] Roy Kiyooka, 63.

> livelihood. Twenty-five years after coming to Canada and becoming citizens we were stripped of everything. Boy it's been a bitter pill to swallow.[25]

Yet the fact remains that not everyone began to avoid the Japanese-Canadians. There were still people who knew that Kiyooka family had nothing to do with Japan bombing Pearl Harbor and who did not take Japanese-Canadians for Japanese.

It appears that despite all the suffering Mary could have always found something positive in her experience. But one should not overlook the fact that she has been retelling the story when she has been in her 90s. As a result it is an account of a mature person who has had enough strength not to be overwhelmed by bitterness and misfortunes, although it has taken her a long time to realize the happy moments of her life:

> I've known embittered Issei who only saw their lives through the hardships they endured. And I've known others who simply trusted that their small deeds might shine in the everyday world. It's taken me a long lifetime to see things straight.[26]

Apart from this, *Mothertalk* touches upon the issue of the second and third generation of Japanese immigrants (Nisei and Sansei). Growing up in Canada, the children of Issei could assimilate with greater ease than their parents.

> And isn't it funny that all the guys are wearing their Maple Leaf sweaters? My, how Canadian can an immigrant family get![27]

Moreover, they also do not return to their past so often or do not feel the close ties with the homeland. The factor behind it is that they are Canadian-born and want to become a part of the society within which they live. Mary was anxious about the future – she did not want her children to forget where they came from. Not only did she insist on preserving the heritage but also she hoped that even though the vast majority of children went to public schools, learnt French or English and were taught English history, they would retain ties to family, ethnic group and above all the culture of their parents and grandparents. Difficult as it might

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[25] Roy Kiyooka, 137.
[26] Roy Kiyooka 63.
[27] Roy Kiyooka, 100.

be, Mary succeeded in installing love for the native culture in their children and grandchildren. *Mothertalk* is the unquestionable evidence for it.

Last but not least, the very structure of the book challenges the official discourse, too. Postcolonial writing encourages making the boundaries vague and mixing the genres. Not to mention postmodernism whose main characteristic is "a *bricolage* of forms and genres".[28] Roy Kiyooka stepped aside from the conservative writing techniques. His book, as bathed in two aforementioned discourses, consists of a collection of poems, letters, family photographs as well as the different accounts of the same history. Re-telling the past and nostalgia for the homeland are particularly illustrated by the act of looking through the old family album.

Another remarkable issue is the concept of language and textuality "through which silenced history of Japanese-Canadians is imagined"[29] as Roy Miki has argued. Firstly, as it was mentioned before, the book was translated into English from Japanese because Mary "[has] never learnt to read and write English".[30] Mary's children by contrast with her, have not mastered Japanese, they just know "the bare necessities"[31] as a result of the immense desire "to rid [themselves] of the immigrant status".[32] Barbara Godard, following Roland Barthes, emphasizes that language is not inherited. It can be learnt as well as forgotten and in a country like Canada the choice of language results in serious consequences. Minority writers may enter the language of power i.e. English or decide on disrupting it by writing bilingually or, as Roy Kiyooka has done, translating the structures of the vernacular into English. For instance, by adopting Japanese grammar constructions to English it is possible to shape in a way one's own culture. In this case one is tempted to suggest that language is inseparably connected with the cultural identity.

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[28] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker, 203.
[29] Roy Miki, 114.
[30] Roy Kiyooka, 151.
[31] Roy Kiyooka, 151.
[32] Roy Kiyooka, 151.

> She and she alone reminds me of my Japanese self by talking to me in the very language she taught me (…)[33]

Nowadays, in comparison with naming (as one of the language functions) which is considered to be a stage of construction, unnaming is linked with questioning the established notions. And that is the task of the contemporary ethnic writers, as Robert Kroetsch suggests:

> At one time I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name.[34]

However, Donna Bennett argues that naming as well as unnaming can be seen as complementary notions that do not oppose each other. It can be recognized in Mary and Papa's avoidance of using their real names and calling themselves the new ones. Moreover, this act emphasises their wish to assimilate with the host culture.

> He never called me Kiyo and I never called him Shigekiyo. (…) I guess all of us are the products of naming we could never make up."[35]

From the above data one may conclude that *Mothertalk* by focusing on postcolonial condition of belonging to two cultures within the same country, breaking the boundaries of traditional writing techniques as well as presenting various versions of the same past (which are all valid at the same time) inscribes itself in the current of challenging different models of Canadianness. Moreover, the critique of multiculturalism and the idea of mosaic as the concepts which multiply boundaries between the ethnic groups rather than dismantle them may be also observed.

There can be no denying that cultural pluralism is the reality of Canada. Attempts are made to unite Canadians under a common citizenship which will be free from discrimination and racial prejudice. In the light of presented arguments, multiculturalism as such does not appear to be the best solution. It is argued that multiculturalism may be valid only when it is broaden by "polyvalent theoretical and analytical models"[36], tolerance, accepting one another

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[33] Roy Kiyooka, 184.
[34] Donna Bennett, 171.
[35] Roy Kiyooka, 30.
[36] Karim H. Karim

and openness to the new. Ian Angus claims that "multiculturalism as an ideal is really bout giving everyone (…) the right to be different (…) within a pluri-cultural unilingual framework".[37] Another critic suggests that Canada should be considered as a kaleidoscope where the fragments are constantly interacting and influencing the placement of one another. Roy Miki adds to it by saying that "the terminology and frames applied" should be "open-ended and flexible enough to adjust to exclusions and blind spots when these become visible".[38] To take the argument further, "human beings are better served by cultural exchanges than by cultural assimilation or separation"[39] i.e. exchanging differences is more preferable than melting into one. Through these cultural dissimilarities the meaning emerges and the identity of both ethnic and dominant groups develops, is constructed by multicultural dialogue. In Stuart Hall's words:

> (…) meaning cannot be fixed and one group can never be completely in charge of meaning. (…) thus it has been argued that you cannot know what it meant to be "British" in the 19th century until you know what the British thought of Jamaica, their prize colony in the Caribbean, or Ireland, and more disconcertingly, what the Jamaicans or the Irish thought of them (…)[40]

From the above observations it also follows that Canadians make efforts to reconstruct the old models of Canadianness, that is to say they try to create an all-inclusive image. The minority groups in order to be involved in this process of reconstruction have to participate in the social and cultural mainstream. The future shape of Canadian identity and the whole society depend on the citizens who make commitments to unify themselves while still appreciating their ancestral cultures. As the identity is not inherent but constructed, all the Canadians should have the right to shape it and by no means have it imposed on them. But again, it is the privileged group that decide how certain things are perceived. The dominant culture experiences a certain crisis and needs the Other to redefine as well as reconstruct itself.

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[37] Yasmeen Abu-Laban, 262.
[38] Roy Miki, 123.
[39] Stephane Dion *Unity in Diversity, the Canadian Way* (1999): 4 Jan. 2005 <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/aia/default.asp?Language=E&Page=pressroom&Sub=speeches&Doc=19990610_e.htm>
[40] Krzysztof Knauer, "Difference Does Matter: Identity, Memory and Multicultural Imagination" in: *Britishness and Cultural Studies. Continuity and Change in Narrating the Nation* Krzysztof Knauer, Simon Murray eds. (Katowice: "Śląsk" Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2000), 91.

Taking a longer view, however, one cannot forget that although May in Canada is the month of Asian Heritage, Cultural Profiles Project assists the newcomers to adapt quickly to life in the new conditions and writers of Japanese ancestry are starting to receive a considerable attention, it is the socio-political elite who presently control dominant discourse that makes room for minority voices.[41] In addition, the multicultural tolerance, which underlines present debates may appear as "the practice of accepting and positioning the Other in the dominant's sphere of influence according to their value (for the dominant)".[42] When viewed from this perspective, the position of the marginalized groups may not change so much and the dominant culture will preserve its ruling position.

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[41] Reference to Karim H. Karim
[42] Ghassan Hage as quoted by Guy Beauregard, *The Emergence of "Asian Canadian Literature": Can Lit's Obscene Supplement?* Guest Lecture at the University of Calgary: 4 Jan. 2005
<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/engl392/492a/articles/beauregard.html>