

A Newfoundland Diaspora?

Moving through Ethnicity and Whiteness

In her narrative *Memoirs from Away: A New Found Land Girlhood*, published as part of Wilfrid Laurier University Press' Life Writing Series, Helen M. Buss/Margaret Clarke¹ recounts a trip back to the island of her birth, some four decades after she first left it. She describes exploring a now-deserted Newfoundland outpost and reading "its story in the language of the graveyard's headstones" (13):

These bleached-white testaments tell the history of so much of Newfoundland, the brave, tenuous communities of interconnected families, the generations of lives spent in these small worlds of the coves, their ultimate diaspora. It would not be surprising if we were to meet someone from Sudbury or Seattle or Singapore climbing up through the underbrush to see her ancestor's graves. (14)

In this moment of reflection, Buss/Clarke locates her own migration from Newfoundland within the history of Newfoundland as a whole; what she calls the "ultimate diaspora" of Newfoundlanders from these small outposts to St. John's, and the mainland beyond, is the almost teleological conclusion to a history of settlement and hardship. The imagined narrative of this one place becomes representative of Newfoundland as a whole and, for a moment, in the bleak atmosphere of the graveyard, it as though the entire island has emptied.

For over a century, Newfoundland has experienced a staggering amount of out-migration to other parts of North America, with the flow reaching new heights in the years leading up to and following the 1992 cod moratorium. Between 1971 and 1998 net out-migration amounted to twenty per cent of the province's population (Bella 1). This out-migration has become a significant

part of Newfoundland culture. In his review of Buss/Clarke's memoir, Malcolm MacLeod also refers to this massive outflux as a "diaspora," noting that a whole body of Newfoundland migrant literature describes experiences of "displacement, adjustment and nostalgia for a distant, past homeland" (98). Many writers and critics have used the term "diaspora" to describe Newfoundland out-migration and its accompanying literature (e.g. Dragland, O'Dea). But almost all have done so in passing. They do not address the full theoretical intricacies of the term as a word once reserved for the Jewish diaspora, which has taken on the loaded and emotional connotations of victimization, mass trauma, and the legacies of colonialism. Is this usage appropriate to describe the significant impact that out-migration has had on Newfoundland's individuals, communities, and culture? Or is it merely an example of what Khachig Tölölyan calls the "promiscuous" proliferation of the term "diaspora" in both popular and academic discourses, a proliferation that empties the term of its traditional meanings of "exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain" (8-9)? Clearly Newfoundland out-migration is both statistically and culturally significant. But can Newfoundland out-migration, as a predominantly white, economically motivated movement that occurs mainly within Canada, legitimately be considered "diasporic?"

In this paper, which is part of a larger project on the idea of a "Newfoundland diaspora," I first suggest that diaspora does usefully describe the phenomenon of Newfoundland out-migration, because of the connotations that diaspora traditionally carries, and because applying the term in this context necessitates a careful examination of the place of Newfoundland identities within the Canadian nation-state. Secondly, I interrogate the assumptions about the concept of diaspora that make this move so controversial, working through the complex and often contradictory relationship between diaspora and the slippery concept of ethnicity. Using Buss/Clarke's memoir as a case study, I suggest that Ien Ang's concept of "postmodern ethnicity" usefully articulates the strategic process of identification involved in the construction of a Newfoundland diaspora. Finally, I examine the connections between diaspora and race, asking whether Newfoundlanders' predominant "whiteness" ultimately disqualifies them from diasporic identification.

The Newfoundland Diaspora

The concept of diaspora has several connotations that helpfully illuminate the complexities of Newfoundland out-migration. As Tölölyan reminds us, "diaspora" suggests painful and coercive displacement, a connotation that

demands a careful re-examination of the experience of labour and economic migrations. While privileged compared to the violent displacement of refugees, such movements can still involve trauma and lack of choice. The final report of the Newfoundland and Labrador Government's Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada, released in 2003, states that "with job losses in many parts of the province being so severe, and without sufficient growth in employment opportunities elsewhere in the provincial economy, people have been forced to choose between unemployment and out-migration" (35). When faced with the inability to support oneself or one's family, unemployment versus out-migration is not much of a choice at all. Newfoundlanders who make the *decision* to leave may not feel as though they had a *choice*. Not all migrants are placed in this extreme position. But together they reflect a culture of out-migration wherein leaving becomes almost inevitable for people of all classes, ages, and regions of Newfoundland. This pervasive pressure to leave is often experienced as a painful rupture from home and identity, and this loss is reflected in much Newfoundland literature.

The title of Buss/Clarke's *Memoirs from Away* immediately identifies the disjuncture between the two poles of diaspora, that of the Newfoundland homeland, which the author left with her family at the age of fourteen, and the current location "away." She recognizes that she "cannot return to my homeland. After four decades of living on the Prairies I am from 'away' and therefore cannot come home" (9-10). She explains that "in Newfoundland 'away' is the word they use to explain the crass, the ignorant or the merely mysterious acts inevitable to the condition of being foreign to a place" (10); drawn out of the perceived threats of Canadian assimilation, the label "Come From Away" prevents her from a homecoming. For Paul Gilroy, Cho, and others, this inability to return easily is a defining aspect of diaspora (Gilroy 124; Cho "Turn" 19).

Despite this rupture from the homeland, a strong connection to home or the idea of home is also key to most definitions of diaspora (Safran). For James Clifford, this connection "must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (310). As sociologists Leslie Bella, Harry Hiller, and Tara Franz have found in their studies of Newfoundland out-migration, migrants often maintain connections to Newfoundland and Newfoundland culture by preserving ties with people back home, by maintaining a strong desire to return, by consuming Newfoundland products, and by establishing diasporic communities

abroad. For Buss/Clarke, the connection to home is maintained through more personal and intangible means in her drive to revisit her memories and identity in her writing. But even her most sentimental recollections are always tinged with loss.

William Safran identifies feeling “partly alienated and insulated” from the new “host society” as one common characteristic of diaspora (83). Although Newfoundland is a part of Canada, many migrants to the mainland both feel different from other Canadians and find themselves the brunt of “Newfie” jokes and stereotypes (Bella xiv). While Buss/Clarke has spent most of her life away from Newfoundland, she remarks on the first page of her memoir that in her own country she “often find[s] [her]self uncomfortable” (1). While she considers this discomfort with her own identity a quintessential part of being Canadian (2), there is a suggestion that it is her Newfoundland origins that, in part, make her identity feel fraudulent and isolating. Later, she reflects briefly on her experiences in school as a young diasporic Newfoundlander: “we were way ahead of the prairie kids, but lost out in the end because they laughed at our Newfoundland accents and we felt inferior” (126). She does not dwell on this moment of prejudice as an audible minority, but it effectively evokes the alienation that members of diasporas feel in the new host society, the feeling that they are not “fully accepted” (Safran 83).

“Diaspora” has a complex and often contradictory relationship to nation. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin argue, diasporas challenge the notion that the modern territorial nation-state is the “unchanging ground of identity” (31). But at the same time, Ien Ang persuasively argues that “the transnationalism of diaspora is actually proto-nationalist in its outlook, because no matter how global its reach, its imaginary orbit is demarcated ultimately by the closure effected by the category of the diasporic identity itself” (“Together” 144). As a concept that constantly problematizes nationally drawn boundaries and identities, diaspora is particularly useful to articulating Newfoundland’s vexed relationship to the idea of nation. While the current migration of Newfoundlanders occurs primarily within Canada, this movement often highlights the uneasy fit between the province and the state. Prior to Confederation in 1949, Newfoundland was a dominion with a distinct history, and many see Confederation as the loss of the Newfoundland nation. Confederation was won with a mere fifty-two per cent of voter support, and has been the subject of ongoing conspiracy theories. Today, the same economic struggles that have propelled out-migration lead many Newfoundlanders to feel discriminated against, economically exploited, even “colonized” by

Canada, which is blamed for the destruction of the fish stocks and resented for continuing battles over oil revenues. Newfoundlanders, then, do not always easily assimilate into new homes in Ontario or Alberta, even though they are moving within the nation of their citizenship. In works by David French, Wayne Johnston and others, the individual alienation that the expatriate feels in mainland Canada mirrors the larger alienation of the province within the Canadian state. Both French's 1988 play *1949* and Johnston's 1999 memoir *Baltimore's Mansion* depict the Confederation moment through the eyes of displaced Newfoundlanders, emphasizing the loss that these characters feel as Newfoundlanders doubly divided from their nation.

Buss/Clarke begins her narrative with the memory of Confederation, an event that, in contrast to Johnston and French's characters, her family supported, but that also becomes distilled into a key moment in her construction of self. She describes standing as a little girl on the eve of Confederation beneath the maple trees in her backyard (the symbolism of the maple is noted), ritualistically declaring "I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian" (2), as though the performance will close the gap between the words and the personal experience of identity. From the second page, then, we are made aware of the contingency of, and invention of, Buss/Clarke's Canadianness. While she is Canadian by citizenship, she is not Canadian by birth. This moment of "coming to Canada" (1) introduces the narrative; she uses rhetoric of immigration to forecast her later physical immigration to the mainland and the "awayness" that qualifies her voice.

Newfoundland, then, is not just a province of Canada but, in poet and novelist Michael Crummey's words, a "lost nation" and a place with a unique cultural history that maintains a powerful hold on the formation of identity. The concept of diaspora invites us to consider how Newfoundland identity is constructed, both within and in opposition to the Canadian state. Clearly, Newfoundland identity is not dependent merely upon place of residence, but is rather a more complex affiliation involving nationalism, genealogical kinship, cultural heritage, collective memory, and feelings of marginalization in relationship to other Canadian identities.

Are Newfoundlanders "Ethnic?"

Frequently, diaspora connotes "ethnic" identification. In her influential 2000 book, *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, Smaro Kamboureli does not in fact differentiate between "diaspora" and "ethnicity" as concepts. As she writes in her preface, "although they are different,

their genealogies overlap, and I have decided to work with their intersections rather than to offer definitions that could at best be provisional” (viii). While many diaspora theorists have proposed definitions of diaspora that are not dependent upon ethnic identification, in Canadian contexts the terms are often inextricable. If Newfoundland out-migration can helpfully be considered a “diaspora,” are Newfoundlanders “ethnic?” How is Newfoundlandness defined and demarcated if not by place of residence?

Applying the term “ethnic” to Newfoundlanders does create some discomfort amongst both academics and Newfoundlanders. Such a claim to ethnicity threatens to confuse the history of colonization. For some, it suggests homogeneity and ethnic absolutism, erasing the presence of Aboriginal peoples and recent immigrants, as well as the long conflicts between classes, religions, and rural and urban dwellers. It could be interpreted as the appropriation of ethnic identity in order to increase the cultural capital of members of a perceived dominant white majority. As James Overton warns, the idea of a Newfoundland ethnicity has been largely invented and commodified by a growing tourism industry (49). It thus often allows what Kamboureli calls the “performative manifestations of heritage” (106)—the exotic cod-tongue-eating, kitchen-partying performance of “Newfoundlandness”—to stand in for actual experiences of identity.

Despite these dangers, for those who study Newfoundland out-migration, “ethnicity” has been a helpful concept for articulating Newfoundlanders’ community formations and sense of difference in the hostland. Bella argues that

Newfoundlanders “away” in Canada are a distinct ethnic group. Many Newfoundlanders can trace their roots in Newfoundland further back than most mainland Canadians. Newfoundland has its own dictionary. The Newfoundlanders participating in this study belong to a “true ethnic group,” associating together because they view themselves as alike in important ways, such as common ancestry, experience and culture. However, Newfoundlanders are invisible in Canadian literature on ethnicity and multiculturalism. (vi)

While the criteria that Bella uses to define ethnicity here may be contestable, clearly Newfoundland ethnicity is, for her, a helpful and important claim to make to further her understanding of the experience of out-migration. Similarly, Hiller and Franz, in their study of online “diaspora” communities, claim that

The intense loyalty which Newfoundlanders feel to their homeland has produced a nascent or emergent ethnicity that is rooted in distinctive speech patterns and word meanings, vibrant myths and folklore about the past, a strong sense of

history and a pervasive group consciousness . . . All of this has occurred in the context of economic underdevelopment and dependency and frustrations over political and economic control. (736)

For Hiller and Franz, Newfoundland ethnicity is demarcated not only in diaspora, but also at home, in Newfoundland's relationship to the rest of Canada. Ethnicity, then, is a way of articulating Newfoundlanders' sense of difference. In her study of the large Newfoundland expatriate community in Cambridge, Ontario, Karen Dearlove quotes Dick Stoyles, known as the "mayor of Newfoundlanders in Cambridge." "Some people think Newfoundlanders aren't an ethnic group. But we are," Stoyles argues. "We have our own language, our own food, our own music" (qtd. in Dearlove 10).

At this point, then, it is necessary to consider exactly what is meant by the term "ethnicity." "Ethnicity" has been used almost synonymously with "minority" or "race," suggesting experiences of prejudice and marginalization. But elsewhere, "ethnicity" has been regarded as a term co-opted by the discourse of multiculturalism in order to circumvent issues of race; it has been associated with delineations of whiteness and, therefore, privilege. As Sneja Gunew notes, "'ethnicity' as a defining category was initially employed as a differential term to avoid 'race' and its implications of a discredited 'scientific' racism. Ethnicity was more easily attached to the European migrations which proliferated around the two world wars" (16). In still other contexts, "ethnicity" is meant to reference neither privilege nor marginalization, but rather the cultural heritages to which everyone may lay claim, so that English is just as much an ethnicity as, say, Chinese. Kamboureli argues that under the Multiculturalism Act (1988), "treated as a sign of equality, ethnicity loses its differential role. Instead, it becomes a condition of commonality: what 'all Canadians' have in common is ethnic difference" (100). This false image of ethnicity as equality "dehistoricizes the social and political conditions that have discriminated against many Canadians" (101), and hides the fact that a white majority still dominates the country.

I want to locate my analysis of the Newfoundland diaspora at the juncture of these conflicting meanings of ethnicity. By straddling these contested and contradictory connotations of marginality, privilege, *and* equality, I am able to reference the prejudice and feeling of difference that many Newfoundlanders experience in relationship to the rest of Canada, and their desire to articulate their feeling of difference within the dominant discourse of Canadian multiculturalism, while simultaneously acknowledging the ethical difficulties with marking a settler culture and province of Canada as

“ethnic.” What I am moving towards, then, is a strategic ethnicity, marking a *process* of identification, in Stuart Hall’s terms, rather than a biological or cultural certainty (“Diaspora” 392). What I have in mind is Ang’s concept of a “postmodern ethnicity”:

This postmodern ethnicity can no longer be experienced as naturally based upon tradition and ancestry. Rather, it is experienced as a provisional and partial “identity” which must be constantly (re)invented and (re)negotiated. In this context, diasporic identifications with a specific ethnicity (such as “Chineseness”) can best be seen as forms of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1987: 205): “strategic” in the sense of using the signifier “Chinese” for the purpose of contesting and disrupting hegemonic majoritarian definitions of “where you’re at”; and “essentialist” in a way which enables diasporic subjects, not to “return home”, but, in the words of Stuart Hall, to “insist that others recognise that what they have to say comes out of particular histories and cultures and that *everyone* speaks from positions within the global distribution of power.” (36)

I strategically invoke postmodern ethnicity, then, as a means of theorizing the Newfoundland diaspora and its complex relationship to the rest of Canada as a particular position of power.

While the phrase “postmodern ethnicity” is Ang’s, in her important 1988 work *Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon argues that the postmodern takes a unique shape in Canada, citing the country’s ethnic diversity as an “ex-centric” impulse that leads naturally to a postmodern aesthetic (3-4). Kamboureli critiques Hutcheon’s privileging of “ex-centricity” for appropriating marginalized identities into a new master narrative of postmodernity itself, erasing ongoing conditions of violence and grievance (168). I agree with Kamboureli’s concerns, but Kamboureli’s recourse, to reserve “ethnicity” for groups who feel marginalized by a dominant white majority, is also problematic. As Margery Fee writes, while “Anglo-Canadians are seen as without ethnicity, as possessed of a ‘Canadian’ ethnicity, ‘ethnic minorities’ are limited to ‘ethnic writing,’ [which] is instantly devalued as both less than national and therefore, less than literature” (270). As Fee sees it, “the assumption of ethnicity may indeed be deployed to add to the privilege of the already-privileged, but it also has the potential to lead to an understanding of how that privilege has been ideologically constructed” (272). The universal application of ethnicity is crucial to acknowledging, rather than erasing, the differences between ethnicities in terms of hierarchies of power. Ang’s linkage of ethnicity with the postmodern, with its connotations of historiographic metafiction, fragmentation, invention, and fluid or hybrid identities, becomes a useful discourse within which to think Newfoundland identity and diaspora.

Buss/Clarke's Diasporic Double Consciousness

Buss/Clarke's two names are emblematic of a fragmented postmodern identity. While she signs off her foreword with the statement that a "desire for the self that is joined to all the others and the otherness that makes me who I am, leads me to sign myself . . . Helen Buss / Margaret Clarke" (xiii), the effect of the slash is not one of fusion, but rather places emphasis on the fissure. The origins of her names—the maiden name of her childhood versus the married name of her adopted western home—also identifies the slash between them as the rupture of diaspora.

Diaspora enables both identities to exist simultaneously, divided by space as well as the passage of time, so that Buss/Clarke imagines that returning to Newfoundland space as one point in "the territory of [her] life," (6) will also enable a return to a past identity. As Susanna Egan argues, "autobiographers of diaspora privilege space over time in order to retain all their possibilities. Space, as realized in these narratives, enables plural identities to coexist simultaneously despite their being contra-dictory [sic]" (158). For Buss/Clarke, once those spatial distances are collapsed, her careful demarcations of identity are threatened. She writes "the idea of walking in my old neighbourhood has, over the years, become mysteriously fearful. The memory of feeling like a ghost when I went there in my twenties, my refusal to set down my foot there when I had come a few years ago, had built a kind of anti-nostalgia in me: the dread that some carefully shaped identity would disintegrate by the very act of touching the ground" (15). Her identity as a Newfoundlander, (re)constructed from "away," depends upon that spatial distance, that diasporic location.

For Buss/Clarke, the condition of diaspora makes her at home nowhere. She feels "unreal" in Newfoundland, like "a woman haunted by unmade stories" (5). She can only lay claim, then, to a *postmodern* version of Newfoundland ethnicity, which allows her multiple identities to coexist. As Buss writes in her 2002 study of women's memoirs, *Repossessing the World*, "[m]emoir's acts of survival are restoration, reformation, and reinvention. Through making the old alive in the new, we can perform acts of repossessing the self and the world" (34). Instead of being "haunted" by her precarious identity and lack of stories, Buss/Clarke finds that a postmodern "reinvention" or reconstruction of a "New Found" identity and history is an important way of repossessing her homeland. She is therefore able to claim a sort of Newfoundland ethnicity and a diasporic connection to homeland without committing to origins as the only or main source of identity.

Buss/Clarke locates her own constructed and self-reflexive Newfoundlandness within the context of Canadian multiculturalism. At the end of the memoir, she visits the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. She notes that the European settlement of Newfoundland is absent from the display:

I was beginning to feel the loneliness of my Canadian identity again. My ancestors—unlike the First Nations peoples, unlike the Basque fishermen, unlike the Acadians, unlike the Québécois, my ancestors—with their fish flakes and their cabbages—were not part of the origins this national museum chronicles. (152)

While Buss/Clarke's Canadian identity includes her Newfoundland history, it is a "lonely" identity; the official Canadian histories described by the national museum exclude her origins. Newfoundland does not enter into the museum's "story of Canada" until Confederation. The phrase "my people" immediately references Buss/Clarke's own ancestors, but it also asserts that Newfoundlanders as a group form an identity equal in importance to the Acadians or the Québécois. Buss imagines an alternative set-up for the museum, in which a plethora of diverse voices are collected in multimedia memoirs, and fantasizes about her niece, who is also named "Margaret Clarke," attending:

I think she should be able to take up all the threads of her history and pattern them as she wants with the history of many others in the museum. And as she does so, she should be learning a way to make an identity that does not portray women's lives as merely a backdrop to the histories of men. She should be given many possibilities of identity so she can make her own story. (153)

In this moment, Buss/Clarke privileges her memoir as having the potential to locate Newfoundland heritage within the larger narratives of Canadian history and multiculturalism. As she theorizes in *Repossessing the World*, "The memoir is increasingly used to interrogate the private individual's relationship to a history and/or a culture from which she finds her experience of her self and her life excluded" (3). Buss thus privileges memoirs as giving voice to marginalized or "excluded" subjects, and equates her marginalization as a woman with other forms of exclusion, such as the marginality of her home province. But her references to "seaming together" an identity out of many "possibilities" is a decidedly postmodern vision of how Canadian identity might be both performed and represented.

For Sara Ahmed, the feeling of being at home is like inhabiting a "second skin," and thus the ruptures of migration are often felt as physical discomforts. Diaspora entails a split between home as place of origin, and home as "the sensory world of everyday experience" (90). Buss/Clarke's inability to

place her foot on the ground in her childhood neighbourhood emphasizes the irreconcilable rupture that diaspora has caused between the homeland and the physical body. This rupture becomes a driving force behind her writing. Reflecting on an earlier trip to Newfoundland, she writes that she “felt like a ghost haunting a former life. I remember not liking that feeling. It was the beginning, I think, of being overly conscious of my disconnectedness from my own lived life, the uneasy way you have to feel in order to be driven to words, driven by desire for those small moments when, writing, you live inside your own experience, your own body” (4). The moment of writing becomes a moment of reconnection between her body and her homeland, a resolution of the multiple and “unreal” identities that occupy her. But these moments of reunion with the body are fragmented, experienced as temporary sensory memories rather than a coherent narrative where home and body coexist in perfect union.

Often, such feelings of diasporic homelessness are attributed to the alienation of the racially marked body. But how do migrants who are racialized as “white” understand their own experiences of homelessness? It *could* be argued that Newfoundlanders like Buss/Clarke, who describes being laughed at for her accent, are victims of racism despite their prevailing visual “whiteness.” Bella tentatively makes this move, pointing out the negative impact of “Newfie” jokes and stereotypes, which sometimes results in migrants not being able to find work or being denied credit (xiv). Bella also cites many Newfoundlanders’ deliberate attempts to lose their accents as possible “internalised racism” (xv). Clearly these examples constitute prejudice and discrimination, but are they “racism?” Is the postmodern ethnicity that I have laid out merely a euphemism for racialization? And if not, how do “white” identities fit within the phenomenon of diaspora?

Postmodern Ethnicity and the “White Diaspora”

Newfoundland is characterized by an overwhelming whiteness and Anglo-Celtic heritage; a mere 3,800 people in the province, less than 0.8 per cent of the population, considered themselves “visible minorities” in the 2001 census.² I do not want to suggest by any means that Newfoundland identity is exclusively or definitively white, but the movement’s demographic makeup raises some important questions.

When “White Diaspora” as a category is considered it is usually as a form of colonial expansion, such as Gillian Whitlock’s definition of “white diasporas” as the “distinctive and highly organized programmes of migration

which were a feature of nineteenth-century Anglo imperialism” (91),³ or Catherine Jurca’s “ironic” usage of the phrase to highlight white American suburbia’s self-representation as victims. These usages, regardless of their intended ironies or awareness of privilege, for me, problematically obscure diaspora’s connotations of uneven power relationships with the new “host” society. Canadian historian Donald Harman Akenson carefully works through the etymology and theoretical development of the term “diaspora,” yet he also abandons many of the useful definitions that have developed in recent decades in order to locate the colonial settlement of English-speaking Canada within a wider British ethnic and cultural nexus. This usage seems to form the opposite of the precise and “textured” view of history that he advocates (395), by suggesting that the migrations of every group to Canada can be considered in parallel terms. If the category of diaspora were so capacious, why not simply call it “dispersal?” At what point does the term become meaningless? Akenson cites the Armenian diaspora as an example proving that the term can apply to “white” groups, but by considering “diaspora” merely as a label to be applied rather than as, in Cho’s useful terms, a “condition of subjectivity” (11), he quickly slides down a slippery slope to the conclusion that any movement, including the colonial invasion of Canada, can and should be considered diasporic. The “whiteness” of the Armenian diaspora cannot be easily compared to the “whiteness” of British imperialism.

Cho convincingly maintains “that there is an important relationship between diaspora and race which must be attended to whenever diaspora is invoked” (personal communication). Given this relationship, an in-depth analysis of the ways in which diasporas and *whiteness* may clash or intersect needs to be done. On the one hand, the usages of writers like Akenson, Jurca and Whitlock raise troubling questions about how not only the word “diaspora” but the word “white” should be defined. On the other hand, as Lisa Grekul notes, many other diaspora scholars “implicitly collapse racialized [as not white] and diasporic identity” (xvii). In contrast to the unsettling idea of an “imperial diaspora,” then, traditional diasporas such as the Irish are often discussed in terms of their racialization, their tenuous and shifting relationship to whiteness (Ignatiev). Certainly many “white” ethnic groups have long histories of traumatic mass displacement. But is placement outside of whiteness necessary to consider them in diasporic terms? Where “whiteness” is usually a code for “privilege,” what tools do we have for understanding these movements that account for both their whiteness and their dislocation?

I want to linger on the definitions of “whiteness.” It is, as Gargi Bhattacharyya, John Gabriel, and Stephen Small argue, a shifting and self-contradictory concept, an “imaginary” rather than an ontological state (12). As Daniel Coleman argues, whiteness has been tied to a Canadian national project of “white civility,” which manages different identities through the learned performance of normative colonial manners and behaviours. While whiteness *suggests* the biological markers of skin tone, it is for most theorists a marker of privilege. It is therefore possible for a diaspora to “become white,” as Noel Ignatiev famously argues in his study of Irish immigrants to the US, or as Myrna Kostash describes as a Ukrainian Canadian who has been differently racialized within her lifetime.⁴ As David Roediger outlines, historically there has been a lot of anxiety about the racial identity of the Jewish diaspora as well, despite the group’s diversity. If whiteness is pure privilege, then we are forced to either consider marginalized “white ethnic” groups as being somehow outside of whiteness, or else, to simply include them in a homogeneous category of privilege. Himani Bannerji makes the latter move in an essay on Canadian multiculturalism. She writes: “In the presence of contrasting ‘others,’ whiteness as an ideological-political category has superseded and subsumed different cultural ethos among Europeans. If the Ukrainians now seek to be ethnics it is because the price to be paid is no longer there” (144). This kind of homogenizing of European identities as white privilege and supremacism undermines Bannerji’s otherwise important anti-racist intervention. Ironically, if part of the power of whiteness is its very invisibility or, as Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small put it, its “naturalization” as being not a race but a norm, then Bannerji’s move to homogenize whiteness merely reinforces this naturalization. I think we must both acknowledge the privileges of whiteness, and highlight the fact that whiteness is a shifting, arbitrary, and constructed category that does not always guarantee that privilege. We must acknowledge that white people are not *naturally* white, but rather also undergo a process of racialization, a process of attributing white racial characteristics to groups (Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small 1). By defining whiteness exclusively as a form of natural privilege we not only ignore real experiences of “white ethnic” subjugation, we also reinforce the ability of white people to appear, in Patricia Williams’ words, “un-raced” (qtd. in Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small 24).

Yet as Robyn Wiegman persuasively writes, in response to studies like Ignatiev’s and Roediger’s, history “rescues contemporary whiteness from the transcendent universalism that has been understood as its mode of

productive power by providing prewhite particularity, which gets reproduced as prewhite injury and minoritization” (137). Wiegman thus warns against the manoeuvres that Ignatiev and Roediger make as they seem “unable to generate a political project against racism articulated from the site of whiteness itself” (139). The project of making whiteness particular, then, must not simply make claims to marginality or victimization, a kind of “empathetic otherness” (Fee and Russell 188), but must acknowledge the privileges of whiteness even as it attempts to explode white universalism and invisibility.

It is crucial to carry this work of making white identities visible into the realm of diaspora studies. I argue that equating “diaspora” with “racial minority” in Canada serves to reinforce the notion of a homogeneous, dominant white majority, so that racialized “others” are always outsiders, always from elsewhere. This move threatens to refigure experiences of racism as a problem of integration, rather than of systemic, institutionalized racism. By beginning to disentangle race from diaspora we expose the fact that racism is endemic in Canada, and that marginalization does not hinge upon identification with an origin elsewhere. I therefore propose the “Newfoundland diaspora” as one means of resisting the ways in which the term can reinforce a false binary between an indigenized, universalized white monolith, and racialized others perpetually asked “where are you *really* from?” I hope to engage in a project of, in Wiegman’s terms, “not simply rendering whiteness particular but engaging with the ways that being particular will not divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power” (150).

Buss/Clarke’s contradictory relationship to identity illustrates how I want to deploy the concept of Newfoundland diaspora as a particular but sometimes powerful whiteness. Buss/Clarke reveals anxiety about her whiteness, suggesting that her feeling of homelessness in her own body may be derived in part from the disturbing connection between the whiteness of her skin and her homeland as a site of colonization. In a striking scene near the end of the memoir, she describes her childhood fantasy of living in mid nineteenth-century Newfoundland, and rescuing Shanawdithit, the last Beothuk, from domestic service before she dies of consumption. In this fantasy, “we live in a teepee of course and hunt in the winter and live off berries in the summer. . . . In my stories we never seem to make much effort to find her people or mine. We live outside of history” (134-35). Buss/Clarke admits that “nowadays I realize that this fantasy is merely an appropriation of someone else’s tragedy, honed into story to make me feel less shame” (135). But despite this self-consciousness, the moment nevertheless reinforces

stereotypes and a problematic power relationship between the white woman and the colonized Beothuk. By indigenizing herself into a constructed matriarchal tribe, Buss/Clarke denies Shanawdithit's history as a victim of colonial invasion, and appropriates her into a story that serves Buss/Clarke's own feminist agenda. Buss/Clarke's narrative, then, reveals anxiety and self-consciousness about her own whiteness, even as it reinforces the privileges of whiteness; she, and not Shanawdithit, is in a position in which she is able to re-imagine (and "repossess") the outcome of history. I argue that refiguring Newfoundland ethnicity as an identity that, like turn-of-the-twentieth-century Irish immigrants to America, is sometimes excluded from whiteness, dangerously obscures the privileges that Newfoundlanders and diasporic Newfoundlanders do enjoy as a predominantly white group.

Diaspora as a concept, then, must be able to accommodate both the pain and marginalization of the Newfoundland migrant in displacement, and the relative advantage of Newfoundlanders in relation to groups that do not benefit from the privileges and histories of whiteness. Buss/Clarke's memoir is emblematic of the contested positionings of postmodern ethnicity. She embodies both the marginalization of diasporic location and the privileges of whiteness, often occupying both positions simultaneously. Her diasporic condition, then, does not necessitate an essentialized identity racialized outside of whiteness, but rather enables the postmodern invention and multiplication of identities as she moves between various spatial and conceptual "homes."

Conclusion

I argue that we need an understanding of diaspora that can accommodate whiteness, taking into account the complexities of race and whiteness, the way in which the application of whiteness may shift over time, and the different definitions of whiteness as a state of privilege, a racial category, or an affiliation with imperial histories. My suggestion of a postmodern Newfoundland ethnicity is one means of playing with the shifting borders of diasporic definition, allowing me to think through Newfoundland out-migration alongside other Canadian diasporic identities, without falsely homogenizing their experiences. I think that the complexities and inherent contradictions of diaspora helpfully reflect the complexities and inherent contradictions of Newfoundland out-migration, and that with a careful, nuanced examination of the term, its application to Newfoundland can be helpful to both studies of Newfoundland literature and to diaspora studies in general.

NOTES

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- 1 As she informs us in the foreword, "Helen Buss," her first name and her married name, is the name she has given her "sensible side," which she uses in her academic writing. "Margaret Clarke," her middle name and her maiden name, is the name she gives her "inner child" (xii), and is the pen name she has used as a creative writer. In her memoir she finds these two separated identities coming together, hence the dual authorship of the book. These two identities are in constant dialogue throughout the memoir; I therefore refer to her as "Buss/Clarke" throughout this article in order to acknowledge this duality.
- 2 Statistics on visible minorities from the 2006 census have not yet been released.
- 3 Robin Cohen, in his 1997 study *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, traces the word's etymological origins to Greek imperialism, justifying a category of diaspora that he labels the "imperial diaspora." Yet the predominance of the Jewish diaspora, and the term's appropriation by postcolonial theory, has shifted it from its Greek imperial origins to a very different meaning, with hundreds of years of experiences of persecution, slavery, and indentured labour behind it. I don't think that this history can be easily erased.
- 4 Interestingly, FLQ leader Pierre Vallières removes the connotations of privilege from whiteness in his claim that the Québécois are the "white niggers of America." His usage of the racial term "nègres" further complicates the relationship between the seemingly biological markers of colour and the place of particular ethnic groups in Canadian society.

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