

**Broadcasting a Performance of Caring:  
Social Justice and Migrant Narratives on the CBC's *Canada Reads***

by  
Keely Cronin

A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English (Literary Studies)

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2021

© Keely Cronin 2021

## **Examining Committee Membership**

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner	Dr. Danielle Fuller Professor
Supervisor(s)	Dr. Winfried Siemerling Professor Dr. Veronica Austen Associate Professor
Internal Members	Dr. Heather Smyth Associate Professor Dr. Aimée Morrison Associate Professor
Internal-external Member	Dr. Kristina Llewellyn Professor

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.  
I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

My dissertation argues that migrant narratives are used to facilitate a Canadian performance of caring on the popular broadcast television and radio program *Canada Reads*. The program brings together popular culture and Canadian literature to form a reading community that models affective reading practices and solicits reader responses to social justice themes in Canadian literature. The ideal of the ‘caring’ Canadian nation implies that it is accepting of diversity, welcoming to refugees and migrants, and inclusive of a wide variety of languages and cultural traditions. As I argue in this dissertation, however, this ideal is professed but often not substantiated in Canadian culture. This is evident in the ways in which migration and social justice are discussed on *Canada Reads*. I analyze how the ideals of Canadian nationhood, multiculturalism, and the ‘good migrant’ are constructed and disseminated in Canadian culture and media. Focusing on panelist Samantha Bee’s 2014 defense of Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* and panelist Cameron Bailey’s 2015 defense of Kim Thúy’s *Ru*, I assert that the migrant narratives on *Canada Reads* are often not fully or honestly represented. Instead, these texts are used to maintain the Canadian performance of caring and uphold the illusion of successful multiculturalism.

## Acknowledgements

First, thank you to my co-supervisors, Dr. Winfried Siemerling and Dr. Veronica Austen. Your incredible support and belief in me have been essential to my completion of this dissertation. Thank you for always encouraging me to keep going!

Thank you as well to my committee members, Dr. Aimée Morrison and Dr. Heather Smyth, for the insightful and encouraging feedback that has certainly strengthened my work here.

Thank you to Dr. Danielle Fuller, for her own exceptional scholarship and for her willingness to act as my external examiner and provide excellent feedback. Thanks as well to my internal-external Dr. Kristina Llewellyn, for her feedback, encouragement, and her acknowledgement of the care work I undertook as I completed this dissertation. The kindness and encouragement shown to me by two practical strangers during my defense was a surprise and a delight.

Endless thanks to the administrative staff in UW's English Department for the support in navigating the processes and paperwork to make this possible, particularly Tina Davidson.

Tremendous thanks to my PhD partners in crime: Phil Miletic, Chris Lawrence, and Elise Vist, for all the writing/gossip sessions and late-night dance parties. I really couldn't have done this without you!

For the companionship and cuddles as I wrote and re-wrote this dissertation, thanks to my beloved canine research assistant, Finn.

Enormous thanks to my parents, Ron and Terry, and my sister Jamie, for their endless and unwavering support. Your faith in me is beyond anything I could imagine and I'm so thankful to have a family who so generously shares their love.

Thea, Allie, Sarah, Kaley, Chanda, AV, Steph, Jenna - my dearest friends who have given me love, time, and much-needed distraction along the way! I'm lucky to have you all in my life.

To Adam: when we decided together, over a bottle of wine in Florence, that I would undertake this PhD, I could not have imagined what a journey it would be for us. You have encouraged me, paid my bills, listened to me chatter endlessly about books, held me when I cried, believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, made me laugh every single day, and loved me unconditionally. I am so grateful for you. This is *almost* as much your accomplishment as it is mine.

And finally, to Ephram: your little existence was exactly the motivation I needed to finish this thing. After all, I needed to show you "the joyful feeling that comes with finishing well what you start."

## Table of Contents

Author's Declaration .....	iii
Abstract .....	iiiv
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Introduction: .....	1
Chapter 1: <i>Canada Reads</i> in Context.....	26
Chapter 2: Facilitating a Performance of Caring .....	69
Chapter 3: Competing Criticisms in Rawi Hage's <i>Cockroach</i> and <i>Canada Reads</i> .....	104
Chapter 4: Kim Thúy's <i>Ru</i> , <i>Canada Reads</i> , and the Ideal of the 'Good Migrant' .....	153
Conclusion .....	203
Works Cited .....	210
Appendix .....	235





## Introduction

As he introduced the 2014 season of *Canada Reads*, then-host Jian Ghomeshi declared, “We’re looking for the winning book to inspire social change, to inspire Canadians ... to stand up and take action ... It’s not just a battle of the books; you might say it’s a battle for a better Canada” (2014 Episode 1). Stephen Lewis, a *Canada Reads* panelist in 2014, celebrated the program as particularly ‘Canadian,’ asking, “What other country rallies around books? What other country has a network like the CBC doing something this important with people who are so deeply invested and caring about literature? ... It’s not just charming – it’s profound” (2014 Episode 3). These quotations reveal what I call a Canadian “performance of caring,” in which the nation is constructed as being deeply invested in equality, compassion, social justice, and cultural production. My argument in this dissertation is that *Canada Reads*, its social justice themes, and the texts it selects for discussion encourage panelists and audience members to read about, reflect upon, and discuss social justice issues that will shore up ideals about Canadianness, specifically that the nation and its inhabitants are diverse, compassionate, accepting of difference, and welcoming to migrants. However, as I demonstrate in my close readings of the 2014 and 2015 panel discussions of two texts, *Cockroach* and *Ru*, the lived realities of migrants in Canada are often a stark contrast to this idealized vision of the nation.

### **Situating *Canada Reads***

*Canada Reads* has become a literary institution in Canada, in part because it is organized and aired by Canada’s public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The program started in 2002 with the aims of discussing Canadian literature and

identity in a format that is broadcast nation-wide. It first aired on CBC Radio and, in 2004, also became available on CBC-TV and at [cbcbooks.ca](http://cbcbooks.ca). *Canada Reads* has been broadcast on CBC-TV intermittently, but video live-streams have been available on [cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca) since 2010. As of the time of this writing in 2020, the program has run successfully for 19 years. Each year, *Canada Reads* producers create a shortlist of Canadian literature, with five celebrity panelists each choosing a book from this list to champion throughout a week-long, live debate. There is also a *Canada Reads* host who facilitates the conversation, asking questions about the texts and maintaining order in the discussions. One book is voted off at the end of each debate and the last surviving text is declared both the winner and a book that all of Canada ‘should’ read. A French-language version of *Canada Reads*, called *Le Combat des Livres*, aired on Première Chaîne from 2004 – 2015, following a similar format and promoting only French-language Canadian literature to a primarily Québécois audience. *Le Combat des Livres* was revived in 2018. For the purposes of focusing my argument, however, this dissertation focuses specifically on the English-language version of *Canada Reads*. For both the French and English versions of the program, producers were inspired to create a national book competition as a result of the popularity of the “One Book One Community” programs that invited citizens of an entire town or city to read and discuss one book. *Canada Reads* producers decided that “it would be cool to get a whole country to read together” and to attempt a similar project on a national scale (“About”). As this took place in the early days of reality television, producers also chose to “make it interesting” by discussing and promoting books “very publicly, in an on-air debate” (“About”). Producers of the program have acknowledged that *Canada Reads*’ format is inspired in part by the popular reality television

program *Survivor* in that one book is ‘voted off’ at the end of each episode. As I will further discuss in Chapter 1, this mixing of genres and media firmly places *Canada Reads* within middlebrow popular culture, intended to appeal to the widest possible audience as a means of disseminating particular ideas about what it means to be “Canadian.”

The first 9 seasons of *Canada Reads* – 2002 to 2010 – were simply a “battle of the books” focused on determining the ‘best’ book of the five contenders. However, when producers decided to focus the 2011 competition on the “most essential” Canadian novels, they initiated the convention of having a theme for each season. Since then, producers have established clear themes around which each annual debate will centre: the 2012 theme was “Canadian non-fiction,” while the theme for 2013 was “Turf Wars,” which showcased a novel from each of Canada’s major regions (British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario, Québec, the Atlantic Provinces). The focus of the 2014 season was “One Novel to Change our Nation;” in 2015 the panel sought “A Book to Break Barriers“ while 2016’s theme was “Starting Over.” The 2017 and 2018 seasons debated “The Book Canadians Need Now” and “One Book to Open Your Eyes” respectively. The 2019 season had a theme of “One Book to Move You,” and 2020 was a search for “One Book to Bring Canada into Focus.” In light of these themes, the panel discussions have become increasingly focused on social justice issues, addressing climate change, immigration, racism, rights for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and issues affecting Indigenous communities to name a few. Prior to this, there had certainly been political inclinations on *Canada Reads*, but the inclusion of social justice themes in 2011 formalizes the program’s prerogative to examine relevant social and political issues in Canada.

With this shift, *Canada Reads* becomes not just about which book Canadians should read, but which book they should read *now*. Producers provide panelists and audience members with an opportunity to challenge long-held assumptions about what characterizes Canadian identity and who gets to claim it – and then ask how we might continuously redefine and reconstruct ‘Canadianness.’ This is evident in the 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads*, with their themes of “A Book to Change our Nation” and “One Book to Break Barriers” respectively. The 2014 season included *Intolerable: A Memoir of Extremes* by Kamal Al-Solaylee; *And The Birds Rained Down* by Jocelyne Saucier; *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* by Raziel Reid; Kim Thúy’s *Ru*; and *The Inconvenient Indian* by Thomas King. In 2015, the books at the table included Joseph Boyden’s *The Orenda*; *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood; Esi Edugyan’s *Half-Blood Blues*; Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach*; and *Annabel* by Kathleen Winter. In each of these seasons, one text addresses immigration and the experiences of immigrants and refugees: Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* in 2014 and Kim Thúy’s *Ru* in 2015. I have chosen to focus on these two texts as my case studies in Chapters 3 and 4, as they occasion similar conversations about migration, Canadian identity, and multiculturalism around the *Canada Reads* table. This is a particularly relevant issue in light of the global refugee crisis of the early twenty-first century: the ongoing civil war in Syria that caused the displacement of over 10 million Syrian people and made refugees of almost 4 million was at the forefront of Canadian and international media at the time these seasons aired. In the 2014 and 2015 seasons, panelists discuss the Syrian refugee crisis as an urgent and relevant issue, both globally and in light of the fact that Canada in particular would subsequently resettle “more than 25,000 Syrian refugees between

November 4, 2015 and February 29, 2016” (“#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures”). Panelist Samantha Bee mentions this fact in the 2014 season, reminding the audience of Canada’s commitment to resettle “Syrian refugees fleeing violence” (2014 Episode 4). The issue is even more prevalent in 2015, with panelists Cameron Bailey and Craig Kielburger frequently referring to the “millions of refugees” fleeing Syria and the “very urgent circumstances” facing the international community as a result (2015 Episode 3). Comments such as these signal the shift in the program’s 16-year history: the connections that the program makes between *Ru, Cockroach*, and the increasing number of Syrian refugees coming to Canada lend an urgency to the *Canada Reads* debates, as the program is no longer ‘just’ about books but about the human lives that depend on the nation living up to its reputation of acceptance and generosity towards migrants. As such, the texts on the table initiate discussion about Canada’s willingness to welcome the migrant subject and the nation’s attitudes and policies towards racism, immigration, and multiculturalism in Canada.

### **Social Justice Discourse in Themes on *Canada Reads***

In the 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads*, the introduction of social justice themes is central to debates about 'Canadianness,' as the themes make the national rhetoric on *Canada Reads* even more visible as the nexus around which texts are chosen and debates take place. The 2014 theme is “A Novel to Change Our Nation,” the phrasing of which accomplishes several things. On *Canada Reads*, the social justice themes suggest that there is an enormous affective power in books and reading: the theme of this season declares that the texts on the *Canada Reads* table have the ability to influence hearts and minds to the point that they could “change our nation.” It is important to note here that “change” is explicitly

identified as the goal of this season. As I argue in more detail in Chapter 1, this is a performance of caring on the part of *Canada Reads*: the program's identification of the need for change in Canada implies an awareness of social inequalities and discrimination, and panelists demonstrate an appropriate level of concern about these issues, which is very much in line with the identity that Canada has constructed for itself as a nation that cares about diversity, justice, and equality. However, this theme is not as social justice-focused as it might appear at first glance. Though the rhetoric in the phrase "A Novel to Change Our Nation" centres change and social justice, it also invokes "our nation." This begs the question: who is included in this 'our'? Many people – citizens, Indigenous peoples, migrants, people of colour, and refugees alike – might find this 'our' problematic given that 'our' nation is located on Indigenous land, some of which was taken via treaties that settlers predominantly failed to uphold and some of which remains unceded. This 'our' also assumes that everyone in Canada *feels* included in "our nation" in spite of racism and discriminatory actions and policies – and also that everyone *wants* to be included in this nation. Neither of these assumptions is true for many members of Indigenous and minority communities across the country. This is just one example of the tension that exists in the very structure and format of *Canada Reads*: the program's aim to generate national unity comes into conflict with its social justice theme, which in the case of "A Novel to Change Our Nation" serves predominantly to emphasize all the ways in which the nation is fragmented and the impossibility of achieving unity in such a nation-state.

The 2015 theme of "One Book to Break Barriers" is similarly rhetorically complex, with its suggestion of the power of reading, its gesture to other mass reading events, and its

invocation of certain visible and invisible “barriers” for some Canadians. Like “A Novel to Change our Nation,” this theme implies that there is power in reading: a book needs to make a powerful argument and evoke a lot of emotion if it is to successfully “break” a social barrier. Again like the 2014 theme, “One Book to Break Barriers” also invokes change: there are social barriers that need to be broken in Canada, and *Canada Reads* perform both awareness and caring in centering these barriers in the 2015 season. Though this phrasing does not explicitly invoke “our nation” as the 2014 theme does, it is nonetheless deployed nationalistically with the implication that “one book” might unite the nation. The phrase “one book” implies that a single text can affect change and also that the entire nation should rally around this chosen text in the spirit of social justice in Canada. “One book” will break barriers for an enormous, diverse, and widespread Canadian population, if one is to believe this *Canada Reads* rhetoric. The “one book” phrasing also makes an important connection with other mass reading events: since the late 1990s, various mass reading programs have been implemented in cities across North America and the United Kingdom. These appear under various names, including “One City, One Book,” “One Book, One City,” “One Book, One Community,” and other variations. Mass reading events such as these are organized by local libraries, secondary schools, and municipalities as a means of promoting reading, supporting local authors, and bringing together a community. Though the “one book” phrasing may not resonate with everyone, some of the *Canada Reads* audience will be familiar with it due to the popularity of these programs. This aligns *Canada Reads* with both the local and the national and even makes a connection with other mass reading events globally, further reinforcing the idea that reading can affect change and unite communities.

As I argue throughout this dissertation, however, there is enormous tension between seeking national unity through “one book” and the enormous structural and institutional barriers that need to be broken to achieve said unity – and this tension is evident on *Canada Reads*. Indeed, even the phrasing of “breaking barriers” makes it seem like these “barriers” are naturally-occurring, not that they have been constructed, historically and in the present, by the tools of oppression and white supremacy. As Alice Jardine writes, to “choose an attitude toward interpretations – and therefore toward language – ... is to choose a politics of reading, it is to choose an ethics of reading” (96-97). The social justice themes on *Canada Reads* determine the attitude that panelists, producers, and audience members will take towards the interpretation of the texts around the table. As I assert here, however, *Canada Reads* often fails to examine the political and social implications of these themes and the ethics that they impose upon the texts and discussions around the table.

## **Literature Review**

There remains a dearth of scholarly work on *Canada Reads*, though a handful of scholars have contributed significantly to the field throughout their careers. These have certainly influenced and inspired my own analysis of panel discussions and texts featured on *Canada Reads*. In Gillian Roberts’ work *Prizing Literature: The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture*, she compares *Canada Reads* to other national literary prizes that similarly attempt to “popularize ... literature upon which they confer cultural value” (35), reflecting on the ways in which literature is made to shore up national unity. Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo also write about *Canada Reads* as a nation-building project. The two have written extensively about *Canada Reads*, both independently and in collaboration.



Their 2013 text, *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*, has a chapter devoted to *Canada Reads* in which they posit that the program can be classified as a “mass reading event” or MRE, a manifestation of “contemporary cultures of leisure reading” (1). I use this formulation throughout my work here, particularly in Chapter 2, as it provides a framework through which *Canada Reads* can be understood as a blend between a book club, a game show, and reality television. Fuller and Sedo write that, “by attempting to appeal to different age demographics through different media,” including print, radio, the Internet, and television, *Canada Reads* “works to fulfill the [CBC’s] legislated mandates of facilitating national unity and promoting Canadian cultural products” (*Reading* 119). More recently, Paul Barrett and Sarah Roger have embarked on a SSHRC-funded, scholarly project that includes *Canada Reads* to discuss “the disjointed and unexpected ways in which Canadians talk about books” (Barrett and Roger). They hail *Canada Reads* as “the CBC’s second-most popular program (after *Hockey Night in Canada*)” and note that the 2018 competition “saw almost two million Canadians tune in; another 876,000 watched on TV, while 45,000 downloaded the podcasts” (Barrett and Roger). Barrett and Roger ask whether Canadians engage with *Canada Reads* “on its own terms or on theirs” and question “who is actually engaged in [the] public, online conversation about Canadian literature” that follows *Canada Reads* on various social media channels. They share their research through blog posts on [canadiansread.ca](http://canadiansread.ca). Through this project, Barrett and Roger argue that “any single narrative of Canadian literature, whether it be the celebratory voice of *Canada Reads* or the critique that has shaped it more recently, cannot account for the wide range of voices and perspectives” visible within the *Canada Reads* community online (Barrett and Roger). All of

the above work is central to my own understanding of *Canada Reads* as a mass reading event, particularly the comparisons to other mass reading events and analyses of the program's place in the hierarchy of Canadian cultural content.

Other CanLit scholars have also commented on *Canada Reads*, some of whom have expressed concerns about or disapproval of the program and its influence on Canadian culture and readers. They question the program's methods of selecting and discussing Canadian books, as well as the implications of framing a book program in national terms. Listening to the 2002 *Canada Reads* debates, critic Smaro Kamboureli deemed the celebrity discussions and the "process of elimination whimsical and arbitrary" ("The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy" 36). Similarly, scholar Laura Moss writes that her "concern" with *Canada Reads* is that it "celebrates the shortlisted novels without engaging critically with them"; she cites Frank Davey's arguments that such "'aesthetic/humanist and ... national' ideologies" can "divert readers, critics, and writers from the political dimensions of literature" (8). Such concerns about *Canada Reads* are certainly valid, and indeed, some of these are echoed in my own analysis of the program. However, Danielle Fuller reflects on this kind of academic concern about *Canada Reads* by relating an anecdote about the 2005 TransCanada Conference: when the topic of *Canada Reads* was raised, the group of academics present began to "giggle" ("Reading" 11). Fuller asks

What was so funny? ... Did the laughter indicate concern about a "watered-down" literary critique aired on radio by "unqualified" readers? How much professional anxiety about the impact of our role as teachers and thinkers in the world outside the

university campus prompted our laughter? Or, was this the laughter of dismissal and the rejection of a popular program format? (“Reading” 11)

Though some criticism of *Canada Reads* may certainly be accurate, Fuller here questions whether this attitude about the program might come from the “anxiety” that some academics or “professional” readers might feel “when Canadian literature is conveyed in so many popular cultural formations” (“Reading” 11). She argues that, “rather than laughing anxiously (or dismissively) about celebrities undertaking literary interpretation, scholars need to identify and critique the ideological work that is being performed in the name of reading Canadian literature” (31). As Fuller asserts, its methods and outcomes may sometimes be problematic, but *Canada Reads* does important ideological work in the public sphere to generate and spread ideas about reading, literature, and Canada. Other scholars have similarly recognized some cultural significance in *Canada Reads*, arguing that even if many disapprove of the program’s methods of discussing literature, the simple fact that it has garnered a wide Canadian audience means that it deserves some critical attention. Kathryn Grafton writes that, “in the rhetorical situation of the *Canada Reads* debate,” celebrity discussion of books is “far from ‘arbitrary’ or impulsive” (91). Instead, this is “motivated” book talk and, “if we approach all evaluative talk about literature as motivated, then we may move beyond a critical stance that some literary talk is more meaningful than others, a stance that can limit what we consider to be the proper concern of Canadian literary studies” (91). Even Laura Moss, with her valid concerns about *Canada Reads*, acknowledges that it is “imperative that we, those who work on and in Canadian literature, take this game seriously”

(7). These scholars recognize that *Canada Reads* has secured for itself a place of influence in the Canadian cultural sphere.

My work in this dissertation indeed takes *Canada Reads* “seriously,” as Moss suggests that scholars of Canadian literature should. As I note above, much of the scholarly work on *Canada Reads* takes one of two approaches to the program: some critics write about *Canada Reads* as a cultural phenomenon, nation-building project, and/or reading community, while others write about specific seasons of the program or certain texts as they are represented. These scholarly works include Anouk Lang’s discussion of the appearance of Boyden’s *Three Day Road* in 2006, Danielle Fuller and Julie Rak’s analysis of the 2012 season, and a recent article about *Canada Reads* 2019 by Orly Netzer. My work brings together these two approaches, addressing *Canada Reads* as a cultural phenomenon and also looking at specific seasons and the representation of certain texts. More specifically, I look at the evolution of *Canada Reads* brought about by the introduction of social justice themes, which draw attention to minoritized groups and inequity in Canada even as the national framework of the program maintains the possibility of national unity. I perform a detailed analysis of the performances of panelists and their discourse of social justice on the program, as well as close-readings of two novels in the 2013 and 2014 seasons of *Canada Reads*, to argue that the program uses migrant narratives to facilitate a performance of caring for panelists and audience members in which Canada and Canadians are constructed as caring about migrants, multiculturalism, and inclusivity. I situate my argument within a broader context of Canadian literary history, mass reading events, and nation-building to establish the cultural capital that the program has amassed throughout its duration. Through this lens of

'Canadianness,' I address the rhetoric of the panel discussions in which panelists frame their affective reading practices as compassionate and empathetic, then connect these reading practices to the larger national project. The close readings of the two novels I have chosen as case studies allow me to identify the tension between this performance of caring and the lived experiences of migrants as they are detailed in the *Canada Reads* texts, which describe racism, discrimination, and ignorance on the part of the nation that has 'accepted' these migrants.

My work here is situated, then, at an intersection between scholarly work on popular reading culture, work on affect and reading practices, and scholarship on Canadian literature, particularly those scholars who write about diaspora, race, and migration in CanLit. As a mass reading event and broadcast book club of sorts, *Canada Reads* is not the first of its kind; programs such as Oprah's Book Club in the US and Richard and Judy's Book Club in the UK set important precedents. Writers including Cecilia Konchar Farr, Jaime Harker, and James M. Collins all write about Oprah's Book Club as a cultural phenomenon that raised new questions about the role of literature in American culture, examining the ways in which the program privileged affective reading practices and encouraged reading in community with others. In their analyses of such reading communities, critics such as Tony Bennett and Anouk Lang make important observations about the consequences for readers of reading in a group, suggesting that, as Lang writes, "the interpretations that readers take from texts are contingent on the contexts in which their reading occurs, and what readers articulate about their reading therefore needs to be understood as embedded within a network of social and interpersonal relationships" (1). My work here contributes to this field of scholarship through

my analyses of panel discussions on *Canada Reads*; there are many examples in which the social and interpersonal relationships of the panelists influence the roundtable discussions. These reveal what we understand about some social and cultural dynamics: those between readers and protagonists; white readers and characters of colour; male readers and female characters, and many other similar dynamics. Some conversations on *Canada Reads* expose the gaps in understanding that are prevalent in Canadian culture as panelists try to navigate difference. Like some of those critics who discuss Oprah's Book Club in the context of American culture, I articulate the ways in which *Canada Reads* influences Canadian culture, book sales, and the reputations of certain Canadian authors, particularly given the program's explicit framing of texts as particularly Canadian.

As a result of my work about the role that *Canada Reads* plays in influencing Canadian culture, I also examine exactly *how* texts are made to work on behalf of the nation. On *Canada Reads*, this work is largely accomplished through affective reading practices, which raises questions about the possibilities and limitations of reading with emotion. Many critics have done important work in examining the influence of affect on readers, such as Sara Ahmed, Kathleen Woodward, Kimberley Chabot Davis, and Lauren Berlant. They write about the ability of texts to move readers to empathy as well as the limitations of this kind of empathizing, asserting that these emotions "may sometimes be rooted in a power differential between subject and object" (Davis 8). I specifically address the ways in which reading in a group and with a specific goal – in this case, nation-building – privileges affective reading practices. I assert here that affective reading practices on *Canada Reads* are framed not only as an activity that will unify readers, but also as particularly 'Canadian' in their ability to

evoke emotions such as compassion and empathy, which are portrayed on the program as characteristically ‘Canadian.’

Finally, this work also contributes to scholarship on narratives about migration, diaspora, and race in Canada by analyzing two particular Canadian migrant texts and the ways that they are made to shore up the nation on *Canada Reads*. Scholars such as Eleanor Ty, Larissa Lai, and Vinh Nguyen have done work on texts by Asian-Canadian authors and the ways in which they articulate unique experiences of hybridity and diaspora. Black Canadian scholars have also done important work in this area, including Dionne Brand, M. Nourbese Philip, and George Elliott Clarke among others, all of whom have commented on the ways that Black-authored texts are interpreted in a Canadian context by critics and readers alike. As George Elliott Clarke writes, writers such as Brand, Philip, and poet Claire Harris, along with many other Canadian writers of colour, are often reduced to “the status of sociologists,” or their work is emptied “of aesthetic pursuits” in an effort to speak against “racism, sexism, imperialism, classism, and homophobia” (254). I comment here on this phenomenon in the context of *Canada Reads*, asserting that texts by authors of colour are used to represent certain social justice issues, which are often emphasized over the aesthetic qualities of the texts on the program. My writing here comments not just on migrant narratives themselves and the ways in which they pose questions about identity and belonging, but also on how these texts are *used* on *Canada Reads* to reinforce certain ideas about the Canadian nation. Below, I provide a brief summary of each chapter with additional details as to how these arguments and case studies construct my argument about the performance of caring.

## **Defining Canada: Chapter 1**

Given that *Canada Reads* is a national reading formation, Chapter 1 of this dissertation looks at how Canada and 'Canadianness' are culturally and socially constructed, using theories around the concepts of nation, multiculturalism, and nation-building in Canada. This includes the works of Gillian Roberts, Will Kymlicka, Himani Bannerji, and Rinaldo Walcott, among others. This scholarship helps me to establish how the concept of nation is constructed and to argue that, in Canada, this construct includes very specific ideas about multiculturalism, diversity, and tolerance. As Arnold Itwaru indicates, the nation's goal is to achieve "unity in diversity and multiculturalism" (Itwaru 12): Canada is, according to a constructed mythos, accepting, multicultural, and peaceful, demonstrating these values in its welcoming of immigrants and refugees and its global peacekeeping missions. The CBC is one venue through which these ideas about Canada are disseminated amongst its population, and as such, I use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatus, and Gillian Roberts' definition of "national habitus" to understand how multiculturalism has been constructed as the predominant characteristic of Canadianness, and how this idea has been imposed upon and sticks to both Canadian and migrant subjects. As I demonstrate in more detail in Chapter 1, the scholarship of critics such as M. Nourbese Philip and Rinaldo Walcott asserts that multiculturalism is a flawed framework through which Canada attempts to manage its diversity, which is central to my analyses of the panel discussions and texts in the 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads*. I also discuss race and racism in Canada, which are visible in the texts I analyze in my case studies, but which are significantly less prominent in discussions of these texts. As such, I



often refer to Daniel Coleman's concept of "white civility" as a means of understanding the unique and problematic ways in which Canadians avoid discussing race. Ultimately, Chapter 1 argues that, though *Canada Reads* portrays Canadian literature as a celebration of multiculturalism and shared nationhood, the texts featured on the program more often reveal the failures of and fissures in these Canadian ideals.

In Chapter 1, my use of terms such as 'Canadian,' 'Canadianness,' and "performance of caring" take on specific meanings. In the context of *Canada Reads*, the terms 'Canadian' and 'Canadianness' refer to a certain set of characteristics, though this is never overtly established on the program. Throughout Chapter 1, I argue that to be 'Canadian' is widely understood as being welcoming, tolerant of cultural difference, empathetic, and appreciative of multiculturalism. Of course, this is a fantasy of the nation; as I address in my case studies in Chapters 3 and 4, racialized migrants and Canadians often experience 'Canadianness' as the very opposite of these characteristics. The fantasy of some inherent Canadian goodness is what I have defined as the "performance of caring," behaviours in which both the nation and its inhabitants publicly perform empathetic, compassionate, and welcoming behaviours towards migrants and newcomers to Canada. This can be found in the rhetoric of multiculturalism, statements by Canadian governments and politicians of appreciation for Canada's diversity or regret for the nation's past mistreatments of Black and Indigenous subjects and people of colour, and the many liminal and subliminal messages that convince Canadians of their goodness in comparison to other nations. As I argue throughout this dissertation, however, these sentiments of caring and regret on the part of the nation are often more performative than authentic. Politicians, average Canadians, and panelists on *Canada*

*Reads* alike eagerly perform the role of peacekeeper and welcome refugees and migrants fleeing violence and poverty. They publically articulate desires to improve the nation's treatment of racialized migrants, but stop short of changing policies or national institutions to facilitate equity and eradicate racism and discrimination.

Of course, race is also a factor in how the terms 'Canadian' and 'Candianness' are interpreted on *Canada Reads*. If, as I have indicated above, the term 'Canadian' suggests that one will be welcoming and receiving of migrants, it falsely suggests that many Canadians are the white settler subjects who allow refugees and migrants entry into 'their' nation. This brings to mind the common micro-aggression experienced by Black Canadians, migrants, and people of colour: when asked, "where are you from?" they respond "Canada," and are subsequently met with "No, but where are you *really* from?"; the assertion that an individual who is not white cannot *really* be Canadian is clear. This example elucidates the assumption that whiteness is equated with Canadianness; everyone else must be an immigrant. I address how this is apparent on *Canada Reads* in Chapter 1, where I argue that whiteness is "implicitly constructed as ... authentic[ally] and *real[ly]* Canadian" (Mackey 89) on *Canada Reads* even though the program often performs diversity in its choices of texts, panelists, and featured authors.

## **The Performance of Caring: Chapter 2**

To understand the ways in which *Canada Reads* participates in the construction of an idealized version of the nation, I call upon the work of Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. They discuss popular reading formations like *Canada Reads* and the kinds of discussions, analyses, and cultural events that emerge from these. Their writing about

*Canada Reads* and other “mass reading events,” along with other scholarship around popular reading, book clubs, and middlebrow cultural content such as the works of Janice Radway and Cecilia Konchar Farr, allow me to argue that programs such as *Canada Reads* can influence audiences by modeling particular reading practices and promoting them as avenues for social justice. In the case of the 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads*, panelists model affective reading practices, and their emotional reactions to the texts around the table are both popular and effective. In Chapter 2, I analyze how panelists on *Canada Reads* utilize such reading practices; my use of affect theory in this section supports my assertion that affective reading practices are central to the social justice themes on *Canada Reads*. With these themes, panelists and producers suggest that affect and emotions experienced through reading – particularly empathy, compassion, and even frustration – can influence one’s actions and outlook, thereby enabling the kinds of “change” that the nation purportedly requires.

### ***Cockroach* and *Ru*: Two Case Studies in Chapters 3 & 4**

Two of the texts that producers chose for the 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads* provide an opportunity to expose how the program co-opts migrants narratives and misrepresents them to fit neatly into its chosen themes. These are Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* in 2014 and Kim Thúy’s *Ru* in 2015, defended by Samantha Bee and Cameron Bailey respectively. The concept of the ‘good migrant’ is a prevalent theme in discussions of both texts. This idea suggests that the migrant subject must demonstrate only those behaviours and attitudes that align with those deemed acceptable by the nation; they must perform the role of the ‘good migrant.’ I will briefly address each part of this phrase – ‘good’ and ‘migrant.’ The

term ‘migrant’ is Bailey’s particular word choice in the 2015 competition. Though the subject of *Ru* is a refugee, Cameron Bailey speaks most often about ‘migrants,’ bringing refugees and immigrants into one category so as to address their experiences together. This language is prevalent particularly in the first episode of the 2015 season, wherein he uses the word ‘migrant’ 4 times in just his 60-second introduction of the novel. As the program progresses, Bailey and other panelists often speak about ‘immigrants,’ whether they are discussing *Ru*, Bailey himself, or the Syrian refugees often raised as contemporary examples of newcomers to Canada. In these instances, it is clear, however, that the term ‘immigrant’ is being used as Bailey often uses ‘migrant,’ as a catch-all term meant to include refugees as well. In Chapter 3, I will address the problems with this rhetorical move, but for now, let me simply point out that it aligns with the *Canada Reads* prerogative to make texts representative of social justice issues. Themes such as motherhood and family values are present in *Ru*, but on *Canada Reads* it is ‘the’ book about immigration around the debate table, and as a result, all refugees and immigrants are placed in one catch-all category for the convenience of discussion amongst panelists.

My use of the term ‘good’ in the phrase ‘good migrant’ is informed by various critics who have examined the need for migrants and people of colour to perform a specific ‘good’ identity that will facilitate their acceptance by the dominant culture. Scholar Yen Le Espiritu examines the discourse of the ‘good refugee’ deployed in America in the years after the Vietnam War, in which “Vietnamese refugees become most visible and intelligible to Americans as successful, assimilated, and anti-communist newcomers to the American ‘melting pot’” (xv.) Espiritu argues that the refugee must perform the role of “grateful

beneficiary of U.S.-style freedom,” affirming the validity of the U.S involvement in the Vietnam War and the nation’s acceptance of refugees from the region (xv). Expectations such as these are “the biggest burden on people of colour”: “society deems [them] bad immigrants – job-stealers, benefit-scroungers, girlfriend-thieves, refugees – until [they] cross over in their consciousness, through popular culture, winning races, baking good cakes, being conscientious doctors, to become good immigrants” (Shukla n.p). In a collection of essays titled *The Good Immigrant*, Musa Okwonga writes, “the very moment immigrants [are] seen as contributing anything less than wholesomely to the national effort, they [are] viewed with contempt” (233). The stakes are high, then, for migrants, but also for the nation itself. When refugees and immigrants fulfill the expectations of the 'good migrant,' they not only attempt to gain the nation’s acceptance, but also contribute to Canada’s positive international reputation. The circularity of this is apparent: migrants must demonstrate their ‘good’-ness to prove that they deserve the Canadian generosity which they have been offered, while the Canadian nation proves *its* ‘good’-ness through a performance of caring as it accepts these very migrants. Canada’s openness to ‘good migrants’ is not simply an act of compassion, then, but an “effective *and* affective instrument that advances national interests and security” and bolsters the “Canadian imaginary of a caring nation” (Harting and Kamboureli 661). While the nation reinforces its international reputation on the backs of ‘good migrants,’ these migrants perpetually bear the burden of being ‘good’ enough to secure their acceptance within the Canadian nation. I use the phrase ‘good migrant’ throughout Chapters 3 and 4 to address the many ways in which this rhetoric is deployed against, about, and by the

protagonists of *Ru* and *Cockroach* as they navigate their hybrid identities as migrants to Canada.

In their respective seasons of *Canada Reads*, then, both *Cockroach* and *Ru* are understood as occasions to debate and discuss migrant experiences in Canada, as well as issues of race, discrimination, and Canada's role in the contemporary global refugee crisis. Within the contexts of "A Book to Change our Nation" and "One Book to Break Barriers," and in alignment with *Canada Reads*' goals to influence hearts and minds around social justice, these texts are meant to illuminate how Canada and Canadians can improve their policies and attitudes towards refugees and immigrants. However, though the two texts raise similar issues on *Canada Reads*, the strategies for defending these novels are very different. Chapter 3 analyzes Samantha Bee's 2014 defense of Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* and its intersections with that season's theme, "One Novel to Change our Nation." I argue that *Cockroach* exposes the racism and institutional barriers to success that migrants experience in spite of the nation's rhetoric that all are welcome. *Cockroach* is quite critical of Canada and portrays the nation and Canadians as racist and inhospitable to refugees and immigrants. This is contrary to both Canada's international reputation and the way in which the nation is constructed on *Canada Reads*. As such, it is not particularly well-received on the program, with several panelists arguing that such a bleak, cynical portrayal of migrant life should not be depicted as representative of 'the immigrant experience' in Canada. In spite of these feelings, however, the book is not voted off early in the competition and in fact finishes as runner-up for the 2014 season. Some panelists indicate that this is because *Cockroach* is such a complex text and they therefore "have a lot to say" and need more time to discuss it (2014

Episode 2). Others suggest that the novel's champion, Samantha Bee, does an excellent job defending the book and influencing their opinions of it. Host Ghomeshi makes this observation in Episode 3: he speaks specifically to Bee when he notes that the panelists have "been shaped by the debates" and her strong arguments for *Cockroach* (2014 Episode 3). Indeed, Bee argues passionately against the tendencies of her fellow panelists to generalize about immigrants and impose unrealistic expectations upon newcomers to Canada. She challenges the limitations of the 'good migrant' narrative and asserts the importance of paying attention to the nuances of various immigrant stories, particularly those that do not conform to the ideal. However, Bee does not adequately examine her own privilege or difference in relation to the protagonist of *Cockroach*, though she feels deep sympathy for his situation. Instead, she models for the audience the stereotype of the 'good' Canadian: one who performs sympathy for migrant subjects but does not always demonstrate a willingness to examine and critique the structural racism and discrimination that make them sympathetic.

In Chapter 4, I turn to Cameron Bailey's defense of *Ru*, defended on the 2015 season of *Canada Reads*, which had the theme of "One Book to Break Barriers." I discuss Bailey's representation of the novel on *Canada Reads* and the ways in which it both aligns with and contradicts the portrait of the nation that Thúy herself constructs in the novel. In many ways, *Ru* shores up the notion of Canada as a caring and accepting nation through its portrayal of the Nguyen family's warm welcome in Granby, Québec. The novel conveys a sentimental, sometimes nostalgic experience of coming to Canada from a violent, unstable Vietnam, relaying the family's various sacrifices and struggles to make this journey and a new life in

Canada possible. Bailey presents *Ru* as an example of how Canadians should welcome future refugees to Canada, often making connections between Canada's acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s and the contemporary Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. As an immigrant to Canada himself, Bailey aligns himself with the novel's protagonist An Tinh, asserting his own hybrid identity and discussing the ways in which he, An Tinh, and many other migrants are expected to conform to the ideal of the 'good migrant': one who is hardworking, grateful, and well-integrated into Canadian society. In so doing, Bailey provides the embodied presence of an immigrant on *Canada Reads*. He is a visible example of the "good," successful migrant. However, in so eagerly aligning himself with An Tinh, Bailey also ignores the differences between their two distinct experiences and sometimes implies that all immigrants are alike. Bailey and the rest of the *Canada Reads* panel also ignore the scenes in the novel that criticize Canada and Canadians, neglecting to address the instances in which An Tinh experiences racism and discrimination. Bailey and *Ru* find significant online support and ultimately win the competition in spite – or perhaps because – of the fact that his defense omits some important moments in the novel that speak to the flaws and complexities of multiculturalism in Canada. Chapter 3 addresses both possibilities to argue that Bailey provides a perspective on migration that challenges common Canadian ideas about belonging and migration *just* enough to make Canadians feel uncomfortable.

In providing close-readings of passages from *Cockroach* and *Ru*, as well as the defenses of both novels, I demonstrate the ways in which migrant narratives are used on *Canada Reads* to facilitate a Canadian performance of caring. This performance supports the idea that Canada and Canadians care enough about multiculturalism and migration to debate



migrant narratives on national television. However, the texts used on *Canada Reads* to facilitate this performance of caring are often not fully or honestly represented; though the program performs inclusivity in its book selections, the social justice themes force these texts to represent entire communities as though they are homogenous, which results in the misrepresentation of much of their content. Ultimately, scenes in which Canada and Canadians are exposed as racist, ignorant, and discriminatory are generally ignored in favour of those in which the nation's preferred self-image as the benevolent recipient of migrants is reflected and celebrated. This misrepresentation serves the purpose of maintaining the illusion of successful multiculturalism in Canada.

## Chapter 1

### ***Canada Reads* in Context**

*Canada Reads* takes the nation as its organizing principle and discusses national values and identity throughout its debates; this is not surprising given Canada's long history of exploring these things through literary culture. This chapter examines the concept of 'nation' and how the Canadian nation in particular has been constructed through multicultural rhetoric and Canadian literature, as well as the fractures and fissures that are present in this constructed nation as a result of white supremacy and structural racism. *Canada Reads* assumes a definition for many of these concepts, without ever questioning: what is the nation? What are the characteristics of the Canadian nation? What is 'Candianness'? Rather than taking ideas of nation and Canadian identity at face value, as many hosts and panelists do on the program itself, I find it necessary to examine these questions to determine how they serve the goals of *Canada Reads*. As Canadian scholar Gabriele Helms writes, once we "recognize that our notions of Canada, to borrow from Michel Foucault, 'do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized,' we can begin to de-essentialize Canada and make challenges possible" (Helms 4). As such, in this chapter I identify and analyze those forces that construct and enforce these "rules" and "justifications" for Canadian culture. I will address the role of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in creating and disseminating ideas about Canada and Canadian literature, both historically and more recently, looking specifically at *Canada Reads* and its attempts to appeal to a broad, diverse Canadian audience by situating itself as middlebrow

cultural content. To do so, *Canada Reads* often emphasizes accessibility over aesthetics in literature, while also utilizing a game show format in which one book is voted off each week and celebrity panelists who are presented as average, reading Canadians rather than “professional readers.” These strategies are used to appeal to a wide and diverse Canadian audience, portraying Canadian literature as a celebration of shared nationhood and shoring up popular notions of ‘Canadianness’ that include multiculturalism, compassion, and tolerance for diversity.

### **Examining the Concept of ‘Nation’**

Though Canadian efforts towards nation-building have been varied and fierce, the nation itself is ultimately a construct, or what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.” Anderson states that the nation is “imagined because even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). As such, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail ... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Anderson indicates the difference between the “actual” realities of those who participate in the imagined community and the way in which these participants “conceive” it. Many other critics similarly acknowledge that the concept of nation is a construct, such as Paul Gilroy, who indicates that nations are created “through elaborate cultural, ideological, and political processes which culminate in [the citizen’s] feeling of connectedness to other national subjects and in the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect, or caste” (*Small Acts* 49). Gilroy emphasizes here the political and ideological discourses that work to create and

sustain the construct of nation. Though this might be perceived as a given among scholars considering recent postcolonial and global trends, I find it imperative to acknowledge the constructed quality of the nation as its naturalization is one of the many legacies of imperialism, necessary to legitimize the control of one nation by another. As several critics have pointed out, it is this very constructedness that makes the nation unstable. Scholar Homi Bhabha has written extensively on the problems with nationalist representations, indicating that they are “highly unstable and fragile constructions which cannot even produce the unity they promise” (*The Location of Culture* 117). Bhabha writes that the unity of the nation is fragile because it is both “pedagogic” and “performative” (117). The pedagogic nation claims a singular origin and a linear history, a “continuist, accumulative temporality” (145), that allows it to assert authority over its population and put forth a singular historical narrative. However, he also asserts that a nationalist discourse is “performative” in that the icons and symbols that help fix its “norms and limits” (145) must continually be rehearsed by the population: the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must repeatedly be turned into the signs of a coherent national culture” (145). As a result of this “conceptual ambivalence” (146), Bhabha contends that the nation is constantly divided:

We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It/Self* alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense locations of cultural difference. (148)

In other words, in spite of the nation's many attempts to assert itself and its history as fixed entities, its reliance on its own heterogeneous population to reinforce these attempts exposes its fragmentation.

Though it may be constructed and fragmented, the nation endures. Many scholars have acknowledged the persistence of the nation as an institution, a concept, and a political entity with which they must grapple, though it may be “archaic, pointless, and ideologically suspect to define and defend national characteristics” (Szeman 32). As I will discuss later in this chapter, Canadian history and nation-building are closely tied to Canadian literature, with many Canadian texts documenting historical events such as the building of the Canadian National Railroad, life in early Canada, and Confederation. However, rather than assuming that the historical, the literary, and the national will reinforce and affirm one another, as nation-building cultural efforts in Canada have historically attempted to do, one must instead explore the ways in which they can challenge and wrestle with one another. Though Szeman asserts that “the connection between literature and nation can be limiting,” he states that “it can also be productive” (31). Similarly, Brydon argues that the Canadian nation-state has a rich and distinctive history that “has shaped our culture and our values, [and] is one of those institutions that should be neither dismissed nor underestimated” (3). Such an assertion indicates the need to consider the influence that the nation-state has had on perceptions of Canadian history, literature, politics, and identity. Donna Palmateer Pennee also identifies significant potential in yielding to the persistence of the nation-state as an institution, but while “doing the national differently” (83). She asserts that literary studies “organized under the rubric of the national create space to ask civic questions of state policies and inherited

notions of nationalism” (81). Rather than simply accepting the tropes and values that have been characterized as 'Canadian,' one can instead use the framework of the nation-state to examine and question the ways in which citizenship, belonging, and identity function within the Canadian nation. Szeman, Pennee, and Brydon all emphasize the importance of engaging in a critical practice that reorients itself to challenge “inherited notions” about the nation-state and ask new questions of “the ways in which the nation is embedded in the global rather than stressing its distinctiveness” (Brydon 10).

These critics also identify the practical realities and lives that rely on the nation-state, in spite of the fact that it is a contested and problematic construct. Szeman suggests that alternatives to the nation-state such as internationalism or cosmopolitanism have a “tendency to eliminate political struggle . . . and, perhaps unintentionally, to legitimate mass media and cultural imperialism by tacit acceptance of it” (33). Scholar Todd Gordon similarly identifies the complex relationship between the state and the challenges of individual citizens, saying “[t]he state does not exist independently of struggle or human agency; and nor is struggle, in turn, autonomous from the state” (qtd. in Derksen 48). In fact, human struggle and the nation-state are inextricably caught up in one another, and in some cases, the state may be the cause of human struggle, such as in instances where policy may discriminate against citizens of a certain race or sex. There are certainly groups whose rights and liberties are *not* protected by the state in some situations; the political debate surrounding the religious rights of Sikh men or Muslim women to wear head-coverings in certain professions, for example, exemplifies a case in which the religious freedoms of Christian religions are defended by the state while those belonging to other religious groups are decidedly not. However, there are

also circumstances in which the state is the only available apparatus through which citizens can navigate the struggle; as Brydon suggests, “most people still need the protections provided by the state” (14). In their discussion of transnational and hemispheric perspectives in Thomas King’s work, for example, Davidson, Andrews and Walton indicate that transnational or global approaches “may be both useful *and* problematic for Indigenous individuals and groups, whose original occupancy of nation-state lands and alternative notions of nation remain either marginalized or unacknowledged altogether” (600). They identify Indigenous land claims as an example of a situation in which the struggle has been occasioned by the state, but the state is also the only means through which the struggle can be negotiated. A move to a hemispheric model that “subordinates the idea of a nation to hemispheric geopolitical affiliations at a time when many aboriginals are attempting to make land claims and assert their sovereignty is to discount the need, however contradictory, for stable notions of the nation-state, which would allow such negotiations to take place” (Davidson et. al. 600-1). As they point out, though some Indigenous people may not self-identify as Canadian or acknowledge settler-imposed borders upon their land, there is a “simultaneous need for and undermining of nation-state structures“ (601) that recognizes both the constructed nature of nations and border as well as the necessity of these very structures.

This dissertation addresses the ways in which these tensions regarding the concept of nation arise in both the texts included on *Canada Reads* and the discussions around the *Canada Reads* table. The program might be intended to “create space to ask civic questions of state policies and inherited notions of nationalism” (Pennee 81), but as I argue throughout

this work, it often falls short. The 2014 and 2015 seasons of *Canada Reads* seek to shore up the nation while also participating in social justice discourse that critiques the policies and power structures that sustain the nation, resulting in contradictory messages about Canada and Canadians.

### **The Matter of Multiculturalism: Managing Diversity in Canada**

One of the central – and most often challenged – tenets of Canada’s ethos as a nation-state is multiculturalism, implemented in the early 1970s as the nation’s approach to managing its heterogeneous population. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau first declared Canada’s adoption of the policy in 1971, and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was officially incorporated into the Canadian Constitution by the Mulroney government in 1988. The policy is an attempt by the state to acknowledge diversity across the nation and was to be implemented within the already-established bilingual framework in Canada, as defined in the Official Languages Act of 1969. According to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, any ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences among Canadians “need no longer be a disruptor of the national project” (Dobson, *Transnational* 73). Instead, the celebration of difference is figured as “a part of Canadian nationalism” (73), as the Act asserts that the diverse lived experiences of Canadian residents need not impede the pursuit of national unity. Of course, this formulation suggests that ethnic and racial diversity was previously understood as a disruption to the unified white Canadian nation – and this remains true in Canada in spite of decades of multicultural policy. As Kymlicka argues, “issues of accommodating diversity have been central to Canada’s history” and policies and approaches to diversity politics are constantly shifting to accommodate Canada’s heterogeneity (“Ethnic, Linguistic” 39). He



identifies the introduction of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act as a significant shift in attitudes and policies towards cultural and ethnic difference, “one that anticipates that many immigrants will visibly and proudly express their ethnic identities and that accepts an obligation on the part of public institutions . . . to accommodate these ethnic identities” (“Ethnocultural” 44). Kymlicka points out that federal efforts to strengthen Indigenous rights and treaties also took place at this time, after widespread disapproval of Trudeau’s 1969 White Paper; similarly, the federal government also took measures to improve education and occupational opportunities for francophones and to “achieve real linguistic equality within the federal government” (50). These policies attempt to frame diversity in Canada not as a problem, but instead as a central characteristic of ‘Canadianness.’ As Brydon observes, “official Canadian discourse remains obsessed with social cohesion and integration” (12); this discourse suggests that the state’s dedication to multiculturalism is a fundamental aspect of contemporary Canadian identity.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act benefits the state, reinforcing Canada’s “proudly multicultural profile in the international community” (Bannerji) as well as the economic benefits of “new and ongoing migrations that are so central to Canada’s capitalist economic health” (Walcott 20). Ultimately, the policy increased the state’s national and international power, for as Nandita Sharma points out, by “embracing non-whites who held citizenship through their birth in Canada, or who had been admitted as permanent residents and therefore had legal access to citizenship, multiculturalism expanded the numbers of those who believed the Canadian state ruled on their behalf” (“Canadian Multiculturalism” 97). Similarly, Himani Bannerji identifies the ideological implications of multiculturalism in Canada,

asserting that it “may be seen as less a gift of the state of ‘Canada’ to the ‘others’ of this society, than as a central pillar in its own ideological state apparatus” (Bannerji). Sneja Gunew takes this assertion even further: multiculturalism is not at all a “gift” to the “others” of Canadian society, but instead a means of controlling the Canadian population, as the policy is “intimately bound up . . . with practices and discourses which manage (often in the sense of police and control) ‘diversity’” (15). A state-sanctioned multicultural policy, then, is the state’s attempt to assert and maintain power over its diverse citizenry.

The state and its international reputation may benefit from the implementation of multiculturalism but, as many critics point out, in practice these policies encourage simplistic, impoverished notions of culture and further entrench white privilege. Multiculturalism does not allow for acknowledgement or celebration of the ways in which cultures and peoples have influenced one another throughout history, and instead promotes an understanding of “racial and ethnic identities as fixed, historical, discrete categories” (Smyth 276). As a result of multiculturalism’s insistence on understanding ethnic and racialized cultures as fixed entities, and on clearly delineating between these entities, culture in Canada has been reduced to folklore, exotic trinkets, and annual multicultural festivals – commodification disguised as celebration. In emphasizing difference, multiculturalism disavows the reality of a shared Canadian space, as well as the various interactions, histories, and encounters that shape relationships between its citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. Karina Vernon, among others, points out that multiculturalism does not acknowledge Indigenous populations whatsoever, ignoring the violent history of colonization in Canada and its devastating impact on Indigenous populations, and failing to “make visible the contact

zones between First Nations and the diasporic peoples who have territorialized in Aboriginal nations on Turtle Island” (85). In seeking to rally the nation around difference, multiculturalism has in fact undermined much potential for unity in Canada by isolating and trivializing ethnic and Indigenous communities rather than celebrating their interactions with the rest of the nation.

In addition, Canada’s multicultural policy has historically allowed the nation to see itself as superior to the more assimilationist policies of the US. Daniel Coleman calls this notion “white civility,” the idea that Canadians are more sophisticated, intelligent, accepting, and polite than their southern neighbours. “White civility” is a “long-term trance” that engages its members in “the repetition of a mantra that affirms membership and meaning, a mantra that asserts that Canadian are more civilized than others on all levels” (25). In particular, this trance convinces Canadians that they “are more civilized than Americans *always*” (25, emphasis in original), reinforcing the nation-state’s construction of Canadian identity in opposition to American identity. Uncritical acceptance of liberal multiculturalism has contributed to the idea that “race” is an American “problem,” not a Canadian one (Coleman and Goellnicht 9) – an idea that ultimately upholds white supremacy in Canada. It is important to acknowledge the role of the nation-state in maintaining the trance of “white civility” that “allows us to imagine ourselves as a community” (25) in spite of the divisions and discriminations that persist despite policies of multiculturalism and acceptance. This concept of “white civility” demonstrates the ways in which the national habitus not only constructs Canadian identity, but also interpellates its citizenry with this identity. Canada’s diversity policies are one such site of interpellation, as they are “centrally concerned with

constructing liberal-democratic citizens in a multi-ethnic state” (Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys* 64). This allows the Canadian nation-state to acknowledge that its relationships with ethnic and cultural minorities have “historically been defined by a range of illiberal” policies and actions as it tries to restrict the behaviours of members of these minorities (64). The constant renegotiation of diversity policies is seen as an attempt to “transform the catalogue of uncivil relationships into relations of liberal-democratic citizenship, both in terms of the vertical relationship between the members of minorities and the state, and the horizontal relationships among the members of different groups” (64). The acknowledgement of Canada’s past wrongdoings and the state’s constant attempts to renegotiate its relationships with minority groups against which it has previously discriminated are central to the definition of 'Canadianness,' in that they allow white Canadians to maintain the vital delusion that they are a compassionate, accepting, diverse population without actually requiring individual citizens to *do* something.

This is an example of what I call the “performance of caring”: the nation and its citizens publicly acknowledge past wrongdoings and articulate a desire to improve policies and institutions for the benefit of racialized migrants and Canadians, but in many cases these assertions are more performative than sincere. In his discussion of multiculturalism, Kymlicka refers frequently to the “constructing,” “filtering,” and “framing” of diversity on the part of the nation, drawing attention to the “language of human rights, civil liberties, and democratic accountability” (64) used to reinforce ideals about acceptance and belonging in the Canadian nation-state. These constant renegotiations and the careful use of language are the trick of the “trance” of white civility; they reinforce the state’s projections of Canadian

identity as accepting and diverse and allow Canadians to congratulate themselves for their willingness to come to terms with difference, though in reality racism and discrimination are no less common in Canada than in the US.

In fact, contemporary Canadian multicultural policy is “in no way a challenge to the national myth of Canada as a white nation-space or a raceless state” (Walcott, “Disgraceful” 26). Rather than discouraging racism and discrimination, “the discourse of multiculturalism sidesteps non-white persons’ ongoing experience of racism” (Sharma, “Canadian Multiculturalism” 85), demanding “racial separation but organiz[ing] this through the supposedly tolerant view that each different culture or ethnic group is best valued when left on its own” (96). In “celebrating the tolerance of white Canadians for these so-called different people who, until recently had been legal targets for discrimination, a new kind of racist understanding of Canada has been cemented” (96). Sharma asserts that multiculturalism has “done little to dislodge the centrality of whiteness” in Canada and has instead “insulated whiteness further by representing it as just another culture amongst many, instead of as an emblem of power and a form of dominance over Others” (96). This allows white Canadians to be complacent about racism in Canada and to shrug off incidents of racially motivated violence or discrimination as anomalies.

Similarly, Coleman and Goellnicht indicate that the rebranding of Canada as a multicultural mosaic has contributed to perceptions of the nation as “raceless,” but only by those who are never on the receiving end of racism. They assert that liberal multiculturalism has succeeded in “silencing concerns and issues focused on “race” (8) by promulgating the view that Canada is a multicultural state, accepting of cultural, ethnic, and racial difference

and therefore immune to racism or racial controversy. In reality, however, the policy of “multiculturalism in a bilingual frame” is problematic from the outset because it places “non-French and non-English Canadians, including First Nations, in a different class from that of the two “founding nations” and has thus been seen by many as an attempt to discipline and manage racialized minorities in a peculiarly polite and understated Canadian fashion” (Coleman and Goellnicht 8). Multiculturalism does not acknowledge the “colonialist and racist policies and practices in the formation of the Canadian state,” and downplays the “seriousness of racism” in Canada (9). In addition, as Eva Mackey points out, multiculturalism in Canada might celebrate “the hyphenated cultures – French-Canadian, Native-Canadian, and ‘multicultural-Canadian,’” but this formulation “implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture and that other cultures become ‘multicultural’ in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture” (2). In other words, while the nation is celebrated and upheld as multicultural and accepting, whiteness remains central and systemic problems and institutionalized racism are therefore ignored though they have significant consequences for the lived realities of racial and ethnic minorities.

### **Canadian Literary History, Nation-Building, and the National Habitus**

As I have argued, Canada’s multicultural policies and rhetoric are the nation’s attempts to unite its own heterogeneous population, which includes Indigenous peoples, white settlers, second- and third-generation Canadians of colour, Black Canadians, and recent racialized immigrants and refugees. The Canadian identity constructed and promoted by government and media is multicultural, diverse, and accepting of difference, and *Canada Reads* has certainly been instrumental in promoting this ideal version of ‘Candianness’ as a

CBC program. As Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka asserts, it is “civic education and political socialization” that “develop and sustain a broader political culture of human rights and civil rights liberalism” in Canada (*Multicultural Odysseys* 161). Mass media and literature have historically been sites of cultural identity production in Canada, creating what Stuart Hall calls “narratives of nationhood” (Hall, “The West and the Rest” 293). These narratives represent “the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation [and] lend significance and importance to our humdrum existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will outlive us” (293). Canadian writers and critics such as Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, and Frank Davey have historically debated the merits of understanding Canada’s national identity through literature. Frye argues that the national context for literature is an always-unfinished construct, constantly revised by a nation-state that seeks to understand Canadian identity and bring about national unity. Though he acknowledges that Canadian cultural production is often the product of its “wider North American” context, he also states that “Canadian literature, whatever its merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to, and it tells us things about the environment that nothing else will tell us” (Frye 341). Here, Frye asserts that reading, discussing, and analyzing literature can provide insight into the Canadian imagination and the environment in which it is cultivated. Even as he writes in 1965, he expresses awe at the ways in which technology makes the world ever more global, but indicates that he cannot help but feel that “there does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum, and that writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or

not,” suggesting the influence of a national construct even in a world that is constantly shaped by globalization (372). Though the predecessors and influences of Canadian writers certainly include American and British works, as well as texts that have been written in diasporic contexts, Frye suggests here that all of these converge in a continuum of influence that is in some way uniquely Canadian.

I align the “imaginative continuum” of which Frye speaks with Gillian Roberts’ concept of the “national habitus,” derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Roberts asserts that the national habitus encourages a “disposition *towards* the nation and its cultural products on the basis of nationality” (21, emphasis in original). She asserts that the alignment of nation-building efforts with cultural production in Canada promotes the production and consumption of Canadian cultural products *because* they are Canadian. Roberts goes on to say that, although

no ‘single unified national habitus’ operates in practice in Canada, national celebration of Canadian cultural products projects a unified habitus on the basis of shared nationhood ... a national habitus uses the nation as its currency, emphasizing the value of national cultural products precisely because of their nationality, and attempting to forge a national taste - a taste for the nation and its culture. (14)

The imagination and promotion of a national habitus orients Canadians towards consuming and appreciating Canadian works of art and literature. In doing so, the national habitus asserts that a particular set of dispositions is central to Canadian identity and character, and that there is something inherently Canadian that makes Canada’s cultural products worth consuming.



In Canada, the establishment and maintenance of a national habitus has often been supported by the state through arts funding and programming, such as the establishment of the Governor General's Awards in 1936, the Massey Commission in 1949, the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957, and various literary prizes. The Massey Commission was particularly significant in that it made possible the establishment of many subsequent literary prizes. The Commission not only encouraged the promotion of Canadian arts, broadcasting, and literature, but also expressed anxieties about the influence of American and wider North American contexts. The aim of the Massey Commission was to establish clear regulations in the Canadian broadcasting market, an aim that led to a broader purview in which the commissioners made recommendations about university funding and support for arts and culture in Canada. The strong convictions of the commissioners regarding the importance of supporting a unique Canadian culture are evident throughout the report, which states that it is "concerned with nothing less than the spiritual foundations of our national life" ("The Royal Commission" 271). Such a statement reveals the belief that the Commissioners' "enterprise deserved the support of all patriotic citizens because culture was what bound Canadians together and distinguished them from other nationalities" (Litt 4). However, the Commissioners were also concerned with Canada's international reputation, expressing concerns about "international trade" and attracting "tourists and desirable immigrants" ("The Royal Commission" 254). As Druick asserts, the Commission "bore the contradictory impulses of creativity and institution, art and technology, culture and commerce" (164). Amidst these tensions, the commissioners advocated for increased support of Canadian artists and writers, stating that it was "necessary to find some way to help Canadian writers to

become an integral part of their environment and, at the same time, to give them a sense of their importance in this environment” (“The Royal Commission” 227). This statement indicates an awareness of the ideological work that must be done in order to establish a national habitus that will create a taste for national cultural products and sustain the constructed value in Canadian cultural production.

Like the Massey Commission, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has historically supported and promoted Canadian arts and literature for the purposes of educating, informing, and connecting Canadians. Though the CBC is a crown corporation that acts autonomously and with its own economic best interests in mind, Roberts suggests that the state is nonetheless indirectly involved in the CBC’s efforts to create a national habitus “through the CBC’s government funding” (35). As Kamboureli asserts, “there is a tight relationship - structural, ideological, and material, between cultural production and the representation of the nation” in Canada (“The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy” 39). Literature is an important part of the process through which the nation-state creates and disseminates ideas about national identity; in Canada, the CBC and other state-supported efforts such as literary prizes are central to those efforts. Many of the goals of *Canada Reads* align with the recommendations of the Massey Commission, as the program encourages its viewers and listeners to encounter texts that are specifically Canadian, and to discuss their merits *as Canadian texts* in terms of what they can contribute to Canadian culture or reveal about Canadian life. Indeed, the CBC’s mandate to “enlighten, reflect, and connect Canadians” (qtd. in Fuller “Listening” 15) mirrors the Massey Commission nicely in that

both aim to increase Canadian appreciation for the literary arts - to “enlighten” Canadians to the fact that Canadian literature is an “integral part” of their environment.

Literary prizes are similarly important to the efforts of promoting Canadian literature and upholding the national habitus. Roberts writes that prizes are one way in which the value of Canadian cultural production is asserted and institutions with cultural authority consecrate literary texts. She indicates that literary prizes such as the Scotiabank Giller Prize, the Governor General’s Literary Awards, and the title as Winner of *Canada Reads* operate at “the intersection of national and literary interests” (3). She asserts that these prizes endorse a “literary and national citizenship based on a responsibility *to* and *for* a commitment to Canadianness” (4 emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup> However, Roberts identifies some significant differences between *Canada Reads* and other Canadian literary prizes. First, *Canada Reads* is “the most overt” in its aims to “create a taste for Canadian cultural products” (35) through the construction of a unified national habitus that promotes a particular vision of Canadian values and culture. Another difference that Roberts points out is that, in her opinion, *Canada Reads* is “not as ‘high on prestige’ as other prizes” because it relies predominantly on national and economic capital (38). This is due in part to comparisons to other prizes such as

---

<sup>1</sup> The Governor General’s Award includes seven categories and has been co-sponsored by the Bank of [Montréal](#) since 1988, though “this additional financial backing has not been reflected through a change of name” (Roberts 22). Winners of each category are awarded \$25,000, with an additional \$3,000 to each publisher for promotional purposes (Governor General’s Literary Awards). The Giller Prize was established in 1994 and was privately funded by Jack Rabinovitch until 2005, when it partnered with Scotiabank and changed its name to the Scotiabank Giller Prize. While the prize was privately funded, it awarded its winner \$25,000; when Scotiabank started to contribute, the amount was increased to \$50,000. The amount has since increased to \$70,000 in 2008 and again in 2014 to \$140,000 (“Prize History”). As Roberts notes, these two prizes are often compared, and the Giller has “attempted to distinguish itself from the Governor General’s in terms of philosophy and mandate, priding itself in taking into consideration no factors other than ‘excellence - in writing, judging, and promotion’ and rejecting ‘some of the contortions other prizes go through to ensure every kind of regional, gender, and ethnic balance’” (28).

the Giller which “focus[es] on ‘excellence’” (29) in Canadian fiction with a judging panel that is composed of “the very best writers and critics in Canada, based not on any criterion other than proved expertise through past writing” (J. Simpson A18 qtd. in Roberts 28). In comparison, the celebrity panelists on *Canada Reads* are encouraged to consider factors such as pleasure, accessibility, and social issues as they vote against the contenders. Ultimately, however, these various prizes share a central aim: to celebrate Canadian literary production specifically as a product of Canada and as a means of generating national pride.

### **The Cultural Capital of the CBC**

*Canada Reads*' ability to produce feelings of national unity depends largely on the program's popularity and viewership. Kymlicka asserts that national broadcasting is often an attempt to create solidarity across the nation; he contends that institutions like the CBC are intended to “ensure that all citizens, wherever they live, would have certain identical experiences and expectations of national citizenship, and that these would be the source of feelings of solidarity, trust, democratic responsibility, and community of fate” (*Multicultural Odysseys* 72). This is a challenging task given the geographic and demographic diversity in Canada; in the case of the CBC, the matters of national reach and popularity are combined with concerns about audience share and private broadcasting competitors. However, the CBC “is designed to serve its audience as citizens rather than as consumers; it sees its viewers and listeners as a public, a *demos*, rather than a market” (Rowland 8). Indeed, this is reflected in the most recent iteration of the CBC's Mission and Vision. In 2019, the crown corporation released the following:

Our Mission: “CBC/Radio-Canada expresses Canadian culture and enriches the lives of all Canadians through a wide range of content that informs, enlightens, and entertains”

Our Vision: “CBC/Radio-Canada will be the public space at the heart of our conversations and experiences as Canadians” (CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2017-18)

Particularly noteworthy here are the references to “all Canadians” and “public space,” which rhetorically situate the CBC as neutral, accessible, and widely appealing. This language emphasizes that the CBC is central to – or “at the heart of” – conversations about relevant topics as well as entertaining to Canadians from a wide variety of locations and backgrounds. As Paul Attallah writes, “the Broadcasting Act (1991) sets out a broadly ideological role for the CBC: to contribute to the strengthening of the social, political, and economic fabric of the country and to the creation of a ‘shared consciousness’” (193). Of course, “the point of view from which the consciousness should be produced is a bone of contention” (193). As Attallah’s assertion suggests, the CBC is not, in fact, ideologically neutral; its mandate to “educate and inform” Canadians is a colonial impulse, intended to create the ‘good migrants’ and ideal citizens that will uphold the national project. The CBC’s mission is not just to “enrich” the lives of “all Canadians,” but also to do so with the specific goal of reinforcing a national project in which Canada is understood as multicultural, diverse, and welcoming of migrants.

The CBC’s status in Canada depends on economic and cultural capital – both of which have varied enormously depending on funding, programming, and audience share

throughout its 80-year history. The crown corporation's funding has been alternately granted and cut by various governments depending on its perceived ideologies, and its market share of viewers and listeners is often low. The CBC reports on its performance, future plans, and financial situation in an annual report, which is available on the CBC website. The corporation uses the term "Media Lines" to include all "various platforms and revenue" that stream across services, including television, radio, and podcasts (CBC/Radio-Canada 2018-2019 Annual Report). The report includes measurements of the network's performance against its operating targets and is divided into Radio-Canada (French-language programming) and CBC (English-language programming). This is measured in terms of audience share, which identifies the number of household televisions or radios tuned to a certain station at a certain time. The numbers differentiate "all day" audience share from "prime time" audience share," with "prime time" referring to the hours of 8-11pm, when the largest audience is expected. According to the English-language 2018-19 report, CBC Radio One and CBC Music had 12.8% of the all-day audience share in 2017-18 with a combined monthly average national reach of 12.2 million. In television, CBC's prime-time audience share was 7.6% in 2017-18, with a 1.4% all-day audience share – significantly lower than its private competitors. In "Our Performance – Strategy 2020," the network sets out goals in terms of audience reach and perceived relevance. Their goal is for 75% of Canadians "to consider one or more of [their] services to be very important"; however, in the 2017-18 survey, they fell short of this goal, with only 57.1% of Canadians agreeing to this statement (CBC/Radio-Canada 2018-2019 Annual Report). These numbers reflect the longstanding struggles of the CBC in comparison to its private media competitors.

In spite of such numbers, however, some research does indicate that the CBC maintains some cultural capital in Canada. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; . . . and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which . . . confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is assumed to guarantee. (“The Forms of Capital” 242)

I assert that the cultural capital enjoyed by the CBC produces “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (242) in Canadians that result in deeply held beliefs about the company’s obligation to provide quality Canadian programming and promote national identity.

According to independent polls, Canadians see the corporation as the “mass media most responsible for taking a leading role in building strong Canadian identity” (Pike 35 qtd. in Fuller & Sedo “A Reading Spectacle” 17). One of the ways in which the CBC has established this reputation, particularly in relation to book culture, is through its various book programming, which has contributed significantly to this process of creating and promoting Canadian cultural content.

Fuller and Sedo indicate that the CBC’s “efforts as an active agent in the field of Canadian literature have earned it a high place on the cultural authority hierarchy with many contemporary Canadian listeners-readers” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 98), identifying the highbrow associations of the CBC as an institution of cultural authority. As Bourdieu states, authorities such as academics, museums, and institutions “consecrate a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person” (qtd. in Collins 33). For listeners and viewers, the

institutionalized authority of the CBC and its historical involvement in the consecration and promotion of Canadian literature results in specific cultural expectations about CBC programming. Fuller and Sedo indicate that this “audience for the CBC is one that could be considered “higher class”; they are listeners with the “time, education, networks and money to read [and are] . . . the latest in a long line of avid readers to appreciate book programming” in Canada (92). As a result, they expect the CBC to “consecrate” certain kinds of cultural production, in particular those that will both espouse Canadian values and serve the overall CBC mandate to “educate and inform” its audience.

*Canada Reads* is not the first or only book-related programming on the CBC intended to contribute to the national habitus, but one of many broadcasts about writing and literature. The CBC radio show *Writers and Company*, for example, is hosted by Eleanor Wachtel and has been running since 1990. Wachtel is well-respected in the Canadian literary establishment, and the program has won various awards for excellence in radio programming. On the program, Wachtel interviews both Canadian and international writers, discusses literary and political themes, and provides reading lists and recommendations. Similarly, *The Next Chapter* with Shelagh Rogers is also hosted on CBC Radio One and features interviews and “book talk” with writers, often focusing on the stories of average Canadians and the social and cultural issues of their daily lives. As a result of these long-running, award-winning book programs, the CBC has established a reputation for providing “book talk” to appeal to Canadian listeners. Therefore, many Canadian readers regard the CBC’s book broadcasting as a “trustworthy, if not perfect, cultural authority” (Fuller “Listening” 30) from which to take book suggestions. These programs often promote smaller



presses, poetry, short story collections, and lesser-known authors in addition to more popular texts and writers, aligning themselves with an audience that is likely more educated, open to various genres, and adventurous in its tastes.

As a result of this history of Canadian book programming, some CBC listeners expect that *Canada Reads* will be consistent with the CBC's highbrow reputation. However, *Canada Reads* appeals more often to a broader, more middlebrow audience when compared to its fellow CBC book programs. This hierarchy of high, middle, and lowbrow cultural content intersects with class and race, orienting certain readers towards certain books and book programming. In her work *A Feeling for Books*, Janice Radway examines a clearly delineated cultural hierarchy of highbrow and lowbrow cultural production, which when applied to literature conceives of the book as "singular treasure or utilitarian tool," either "true art" or an instrument to fulfill practical requirements of education or pleasure (152). However, she indicates that popular reading phenomena such as the Book-of-the-Month-Club, founded in 1926, created a space no longer dominated "by [these] two clearly demarcated poles": rather, they introduced a "new cultural constellation" called the middlebrow (152). Radway asserts that the middlebrow was formed not by "the introduction of wholly new cultural material distinct from its neighbors at either end of the cultural hierarchy," but rather "by processes of literary and cultural mixings whereby forms and values associated with one form of cultural production were wed to forms and values usually associated with another" (152). Radway here identifies the "scandal of the middlebrow," which allows the formerly impenetrable boundary between low and high cultural content to become permeable, and indicates that this change is scandalous because it identifies culture

as a “form of capital - symbolic capital to be sure - but capital nonetheless” (152). The development of the middlebrow brings the sacred, universal, and transcendent qualities of art into contact with the profanity of economics, by which art is supposed to remain untouched.

### ***Canada Reads*, Book Sales, and Economic Capital**

*Canada Reads* has significant economic influence and is therefore firmly situated in the middlebrow: the program generates increased book sales and income for the authors whose books are selected to compete. An organization called BookNet Canada tracks book sales across the country to study and improve Canada’s book industry, and provides data that supports this correlation between *Canada Reads* and nation-wide book sales. The organization uses a tool called BNC SalesData to “capture about 75 per cent of all trade book sales in Canada,” and the data associated with *Canada Reads* selections is telling (“The ‘*Canada Reads* Effect’”). According to BookNet, year-over-year sales data indicates a “consistent sales trend for *Canada Reads* titles from 2006-2014, with relatively stable market share among winners” (“The *Canada Reads* Effect”). This research acknowledges that this data is certainly influenced by “additional literary award nominations and success of previous novels,” but nonetheless notes that “all *Canada Reads* contenders experience steady sales prior to the debates and spike during debate week,” with the winner ultimately seeing “a significant increase in unit sales and on-order quantities” (“The *Canada Reads* Effect”). More recent research from BookNet that looks at sales of *Canada Reads* winners from 2011-2017 reveals that “sales for the past seven winning titles increased by an average of 434% in the week following the competition” (“Literary Awards: *Canada Reads*”). These numbers

indicate that *Canada Reads* is successful, then, in at least one of its aims: to encourage Canadians to spend their loonies on Canadian content.

The economic success of the books featured on *Canada Reads* is a reminder that the program and its promotion of “CanCon” (Canadian content) is an industry, not just an exercise in nation-building. Though some critics of *Canada Reads* have expressed discomfort with this convergence of culture and consumerism, the hosts, panelists, and producers of *Canada Reads* are proud of “the *Canada Reads* effect.” Fuller and Sedo assert that, if one asks “what cultural work does *Canada Reads* perform – and for whom?” the “straightforward answer is simply this: the program sells books” (“A Reading Spectacle” 27). However, the second half of this question – “for whom?” – is significantly more complex. Just as race and class impact the concepts of high and middlebrow cultural content, the authors who benefit from *Canada Reads* are an elite few. Because of the intersections between global publishing structures and *Canada Reads*’ nation-building aims, the program tends to “favour a handful of highly commodified texts and writers” (Fuller and Sedo, *Reading* 7). This is precisely the concern of many critics: Moss, for example, writes that the “game has had far greater economic, social, and cultural impact than anyone could have imagined at its inception” (6) and suggests that average Canadian readers may not be thinking critically about the implications of bestowing bestseller status on certain texts, or adequately considering questions of canon or literary value. As “popular literary culture,” however, programs such as *Canada Reads* are more concerned with “the convergence of literary and consumer experiences” (Collins 33) than with examining the critical significance of consecrating certain texts and supporting certain publishing houses and authors.

In the case of *Canada Reads*, the literary, consumer, and national experiences seem to collide as the program so clearly promotes the 'Candianness' of its chosen texts and authors as something to be consumed along with their literary merit. In this way, producers acknowledge the financial realities of Canadian writers and publishers in a market that is saturated by American content. They promote “the consumption of Canadianness alongside the idea that Canadian culture can profitably trade in the currencies of both symbolic and economic capital” (Roberts 21). On the program itself, hosts and panelists embrace this relationship between art, culture, and economics and assert that the “*Canada Reads* effect ... [is] clearly a significant boon to authors” (2014 Episode 2). As a host in 2015, Wab Kinew states that “winning *Canada Reads* can change the lives of authors” and reminds listeners that, after winning the competition in 2014, *The Orenda* “shot to the top of bestseller lists and stayed there for months” (2015 Episode 2). In fact, the entire shortlist typically sees a renewed interest, sometimes experiencing a “second life on the bestseller list due to attention” on *Canada Reads* (2015 Episode 1). In openly embracing this ability to have real-world economic impact, *Canada Reads* distances itself from the highbrow ideal of “art for art’s sake” and instead takes pride in its ability to promote and sell Canadian content and a certain brand of 'Candianness' throughout its sphere of influence.

### **Highbrow Expectations and Middlebrow Realities on *Canada Reads***

As I mentioned earlier, the middlebrow brings art and economics together and in the case of *Canada Reads*, this is an economically successful endeavor. However, some CBC listeners, book critics, and academics have expressed their disappointment in the corporation’s attempts to appeal to a more middlebrow audience with *Canada Reads*. This is

apparent particularly after 2010, when the program starts to crowd-source book suggestions and further incorporate the opinions of its viewers and listeners. For example, book critic and blogger Steven Beattie argues that the change in 2010, which allowed the Canadian public to vote on *Canada Reads* selections, would disappoint the highbrow expectations of CBC listeners by limiting book “selections to popular literature and bestsellers” (“*Canada Reads* loses the plot: Updated”). Beattie’s blog post received over twenty responses, with commenter Laura Roberts complaining about the fact that books were voted off because they were “too challenging for the average Canadians” and Beattie himself asserting the importance of including canonical texts that are “part of a literary tradition that stretches back to Confederation and beyond” (“*Canada Reads* loses the plot: Updated”). Such comments articulate the expectation that the CBC will uphold its established reputation as an advocate for academic reading practices and more “literary” texts that are perhaps less well-known but would likely appeal to the CBC’s higher-brow audience. The emphasis on challenging texts and the Canadian literary canon reveals traditionally highbrow associations with reading, and the expressions of disappointment in the producers’ decisions to make these changes to *Canada Reads* stems from the highbrow expectations these readers have of the CBC. However, these readers do not acknowledge that the traditional Canadian literary canon is exclusionary and tends to include writers and texts from the dominant culture. The changes to the program after 2010 and the subsequent focus on social justice issues are intended to move away from upholding the traditional canon to instead tell stories that have always existed in Canada but which have historically been marginalized.

Though not well-received by some *Canada Reads* fans, the gradual changes to the program starting in 2010 were almost certainly influenced by concerns about audience share amidst budget cuts and competition from private broadcasters. In 2012, Stephen Harper's Conservative government cut \$115 million over 3 years from the crown corporation (Fillmore). These cuts to funding converge with existing concerns about an aging audience and a smaller audience share in comparison to private broadcasters, making it ever more important that the CBC make its programming relevant to its public - a wide, diverse audience of Canadians. According to Bourdieu, the middlebrow is a "product of the system of large-scale production, because these works are entirely defined by their public" ("The Market of Symbolic Goods" 28). The public of *Canada Reads*, however, is varied and ill-defined, particularly when one compares the *actual* audience of the CBC with the *intended* audience of *Canada Reads*. If, as I have indicated, the assumed CBC audience is composed of older, liberal, educated individuals, and the audience that *Canada Reads* hopes to attract is younger and more diverse, then the "public" that should define the middlebrow content of *Canada Reads* is perhaps too heterogeneous to please. Such an observation is supported by Fuller and Sedo's assertion that there is a "tension that runs through the program" because the "CBC's traditional role as a promoter of highbrow Canadian literature and the sounds of the *Canada Reads* broadcasts are at odds with one another" (*Reading Beyond the Book* 100). In fact, the hosts and celebrity panelists are not oblivious to this tension, at times showing awareness of the fact that the format and content of the program might not please the network's typical audience. For example, in 2015, host Wab Kinew comments on the early voting-off of Thomas King's *An Inconvenient Indian* and states, "You can see the monocles

popping off our CBC audience. People hissing and shouting “Shame!” like this was the House of Commons” (2015 Episode 3). Here Kinew pokes fun at the perceived CBC audience, as his references to “monocles” and “the House of Commons” supports the popular idea that “our CBC audience” is predominantly older, educated, and part of the dominant culture in Canada. He not only challenges the expectations of the CBC’s “typical” audience here, but also teases this audience about those very expectations. Kinew’s joke is based on the assumption that an educated, liberal audience is painfully aware of its obligation to appear sensitive to issues regarding racialized and First Nations populations, as a side effect of a multicultural society that espouses tolerance and cultural sensitivity.

As the aforementioned examples of backlash to changes on *Canada Reads* indicate, classifications of cultural content are determined by the dominant culture, which will be resistant to change when it is challenged. Discourses of power are inevitably produced and reproduced through persisting hierarchies of race, class, and gender. As a result, discussions of high and middlebrow cultures and their audiences often assume white, middle-class viewers or readers, and privilege the cultural productions of white, male, educated writers. Radway herself notes this in her analysis of the Book-of-the-Month-Club when she states that the editors making selections for the club consistently presumed a “white, first world, relatively privileged reader” (315). Then, upon reflecting on her survey of the Book-of-the-Month-Club selections, she comes to realize that the title selections are “deeply involved in an ongoing project of reconstructing whiteness in the face of a threat posed by peoples who could no longer be ignored or fully controlled by the apparatuses of colonial administration and domination” (315). Radway also notes that these texts shore up the notion that the ideal

white reader should also be “responsibly concerned” about racialized groups by including characters who were often “cast in the position of noble unfortunates” (315, 336). The assumed white middle class reader was expected, then, to see them as “needy, disadvantaged people requiring the greater expertise and responsible compassion of their educated, more knowledgeable, and still always white brothers” (336). Therefore, though the advent of the middlebrow may challenge centuries-old distinctions between high and low cultural content, it also works to consecrate cultural content that is specifically intended for a projected, imagined audience that is historically white, educated, and middle class.

As Radway’s analysis indicates, the white reader has historically been the assumed book club reader/participant. Fuller and Sedo make a similar observation about *Canada Reads* when they state, “if the content of ‘Canada Reads’ is to be examined, then the ‘national’ community being hailed appears to consist largely of white, literate individuals with a university education” (“A Reading Spectacle” 23). They note that the “majority of the 15 books featured between 2002-2006 were written by Canadians who fit that description, as did most of the panelists” (23). This is indeed true: in four of the first five seasons of *Canada Reads*, 4 of 5 panelists are white and of the twenty-five authors represented in the five seasons, eighteen are white. Fuller and Sedo’s research looks only at seasons 2002-2006, but an extended look at the numbers reveals similar trends. I gathered some statistics for the later seasons of *Canada Reads*, which I share below; details of how I calculated these numbers appear in Appendix 1. In the 2007 competition, the panel was entirely white and only one of the five texts was written by a person of colour (*The Song of Kahunsha* by Indo-Canadian author Anosh Irani). After this point, there are several seasons in which four of five authors



are white, with one Black, Indigenous, or person of colour making up the fifth: 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2013. Between 2002 and 2015, 72.8% of the authors represented on *Canada Reads* were white and 67.1% of panelists who defended these texts were white. These numbers suggest that, while the CBC might appear to be diversifying its content for a wider audience base in more recent seasons, the program remains centred on whiteness, but this is simply less visible both in terms of books and panelists. While there is no data on the demographic makeup of the *Canada Reads* audience available, I concur with Fuller and Sedo: it is reasonable to assume that the audience of Canada Reads has historically been largely white, given that it is a program wherein predominantly white panelists discuss texts primarily written by white people. It is important to note, however, that in *Canada Reads*' more recent history, this long standing trend seems to be shifting. The numbers from the last five seasons of the program, 2015-2019, demonstrate increased diversity as compared to the sparse representation one sees in the earlier seasons. White panelists are less common in these seasons: the 2015 season has the highest number of white panelists (3), while the other four seasons have only one or two. Overall, white panelists make up 40% of the panels over these five years, significantly less than the 67% between 2002-2015. White-authored texts are also on the decline around the *Canada Reads* table in these years, with only 28% of the texts represented written by white authors compared to 72.8% between 2002-2015.

Fuller and Sedo assert that white content on *Canada Reads* is intended for a largely white audience, but it does not necessarily follow that more diverse content is intended for a more diverse audience, as the program's content continues to uphold whiteness as it has throughout its eighteen-year history. Whiteness is still understood and communicated as

normative on the program, but this is more rhetorical than visible after 2013. Mackey asserts that whiteness “sustains its dominance by refusing categorization as other than just ‘normal’ and ‘human’” (22). She writes,

the power of whiteness is embodied precisely in the way that it becomes normative, ... defined not by any particular characteristics, but by its difference from (and often its ability to tolerate) other marked Canadian identities such as multicultural-Canadian, Native-Canadian, or French-Canadian. The state of being unmarked (and therefore ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’) is both constitutive of, and an effect of, structural advantage and power, and the cultural authority that that power brings. (21)

Whiteness relies on being understood as unmarked, the default identity when one uses the term ‘Canadian.’ Indeed, when panelists on *Canada Reads* talk about texts, the subject position from which they often speak – the “we” – is the presumed white, Anglo-Canadian perspective, which centres whiteness and marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and people of colour by default. As Eva Mackey notes, in Canada, “*Canadian-Canadians*” are white: they are “unmarked, unhyphenated, and hence normative” citizens who are thus “implicitly constructed as the authentic and *real* Canadian people, while all others are hyphenated and implicitly marked as *cultural*” (Mackey 89). The social justice rhetoric on *Canada Reads* seeks to “break barriers” between “normal” Canadians – assumed to be white, cisgendered, heterosexual, neurotypical and able-bodied– and those who have been marginalized. The texts chosen for these seasons feature protagonists who are Indigenous, (racialized) migrants, and members of the LGBTQ community, which rhetorically situates them as the kinds of people with whom “normal” Canadians need to better empathize.

This is particularly interesting when panelists who are not white talk about texts on Canada Reads, as they speak as part of the Canadian “we” even when they themselves are Indigenous, racialized, or migrants to Canada. However, one need not be white to be hailed as white. According to Althusser, the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) hails individuals, thereby interpellating them with particular identities. Interpellation is the subtle process through which the individual internalizes the values of their culture. The values that one encounters are pervasive and seem natural, which is why many do not question white supremacy: the centering of whiteness is presented as “normal” and is therefore internalized as such in Western society, even by those who are disenfranchised by this reality. As Althusser indicates, “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (115) but this is not often recognized as ideological. However, “what seems to take place outside ideology ... in reality takes place inside ideology” (118) and reinforces the hegemony of the dominant class by replicating its dominance. As such, even those who are not white can be hailed as white: Indigenous, Black, and panelists of colour on Canada Reads are hailed as white in that they are expected to uphold whiteness as a part of an ISA, the CBC. The panelists are speaking as Canadians, whether they are white, Black, Indigenous or people of colour. The racialized panelists on Canada Reads certainly speak from their own subject positions as Black, Indigenous, or people of colour and introduce important perspectives to the program. However, they are on the program as *Canadians*, and when one is hailed as a citizen or a Canadian, they are asked to adopt a certain subject-position that is conducive to the maintenance of the social order. In Canada, that social order centres whiteness. Thus, the diversifying of texts, authors, and panelists is not a straightforward sign

of progress on *Canada Reads* or in the mainstream Canadian media, but the fulfillment of an obligation to appear to be more diverse and considerate of minority groups in Canada, all the while maintaining the centrality of whiteness.

### **Celebrities, Reality Television, and “Book Talk” on *Canada Reads***

Indeed, *Canada Reads* does not pretend to be highbrow, but instead aims to at least *appear* to appeal to a more diverse, middlebrow Canadian audience. This is evident in the program’s reality television game show format. In a *Globe and Mail* article, producer Talin Vartanian comments that the program is intentionally trying to be “more populist”: she states that “the fact that it’s not a highbrow debate, that we’re not getting into intricacies of literary style or plot developments ... attracts a different kind of listener” (qtd. in Caldwell). Sedo indicates that according to the results of her focus group survey conducted in 2006, the CBC may be “perceived as the keeper of Canadian high culture,” but “this role does not neatly support [the] popular game-type programming” implemented by the producers of *Canada Reads* (“Richard and Judy’s Book Club and *Canada Reads*” 201). Unlike reading, which is traditionally considered a pastime for cultivated and educated individuals, television — game shows and reality television in particular — is perceived to appeal to a lower-class, less educated audience, explaining the apparent disjuncture in the different mediums that *Canada Reads* seeks to bring together. In fact, the middlebrow status of the program is frequently asserted throughout the broadcasts, as promotional materials, celebrity panelists, and hosts refer to the program as “a game show” (2015 Episode 4) and a playful “battle of the books” (2014 Episode 1). This format, and the less formal “book talk” that it promotes, aligns with the goals of *Canada Reads* producers to attract a “new and younger” (Fuller & Sedo “A

Reading Spectacle” 21). In cultivating a reality-television feel to the program, *Canada Reads* also encourages a healthy sense of competition between judges that sometimes results in interpersonal drama and heated discussion, using the “celebrity debate format of the radio program . . . as part of a bid to shed its culturally elitist reputation” (Sedo, “Reading Communities” 193). In addition, a book is voted off at the end of each broadcast in a style that echoes *Survivor*, with music and dialogue creating suspense during this process. These reality-television inspired features adapt the traditional format of other CBC book programming, but by the time *Canada Reads* premiered in 2006, they were familiar to television audiences and therefore were a strategy on the part of *Canada Reads* producers to garner a wide Canadian audience.

Like the game show attributes of *Canada Reads*, the inclusion of celebrity panelists as judges on the show adapts the format of CBC book programming. While other CBC book programs solicit discussion from authors, poets, and critics, *Canada Reads* foregrounds the fact that its panelists are *not* professional readers and instead aligns them with the “average” Canadian reader. This alignment ignores the fact that these celebrities are not average *Canadians*; rather, *Canada Reads* seeks to benefit from their celebrity, capitalizing on the name recognition and symbolic capital that they bring to the program. When panelists are introduced on *Canada Reads*, their reputations always precede them as Canadian celebrities. The panelists for 2014 and 2015, the seasons with which this dissertation primarily concerns itself, included politicians, actresses, musicians, activists, and an Olympian, and each of these brought to the competition a respectable degree of name-recognition or familiarity among Canadians. According to Bourdieu, this is symbolic capital, defined as “the *recognition*,

institutionalized or not,” that public figures receive from a group (*Language and Symbolic Power* 72). John B. Thompson interprets Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital by stating that to “achieve visibility through the media is to gain a kind of presence or recognition in the public space, which can help to call attention to one’s situation or to advance one’s cause” (11). In this instance, *Canada Reads* and its promotion of national cultural production is the cause to which the celebrity panelists call attention. The program depends on this recognition to attract a younger audience and to assert that the CBC can produce programming that is not exclusively appealing to its assumed older, white, educated audience. The name-recognition, television appearances, charity affiliations, and radio play enjoyed by celebrity panelists produce symbolic capital that would not likely be available to a panel of academics and book critics. Fuller indicates that this “choice of “non-professional” readers was deliberate, and so was the engagement with celebrity culture” (14), allowing *Canada Reads* to attract viewers familiar with the names and affiliations of the panelists. As such, participants might initially approach *Canada Reads* because a favourite celebrity is defending a book, not because they are frequent CBC viewers who are interested in “book talk.” Producers hope, then, to attract new viewers with celebrity panelists and then to keep them interested by foregrounding the accessibility of the literature on the program. Fans will not perceive *Canada Reads* as too highbrow for their own tastes because their favourite celebrities are not “professional readers” or literary experts, but average readers like themselves.

Indeed, the fact that panelists are average readers is constantly reasserted throughout the *Canada Reads* broadcasts. In the effort to make themselves relatable to a Canadian audience, celebrity panelists often explicitly assert their status as “ordinary” readers within

the first episode of each season. Many of them express their love of reading, their emotional responses to the texts, and even go so far as suggest that they lack the expertise to analyze the texts at hand in any formal way whatsoever. For example, on the first episode of the 2014 season, Donovan Bailey states “I’m way out of my element here,” while Jian Ghomeshi refers to panelist Samantha Bee’s suggestion that she was “considering going back to college to prepare for this” (2014 Episode 1). Similarly, Stephen Lewis emphasizes that though he holds “37 honorary degrees,” he does not actually have “a real degree” and does not “read as a rule” (2014 Episode 1). Similarly, when Wab Kinew introduces panelists on the 2015 season, he also asserts that their expertise is primarily in areas other than literature, though they may be able to speak about books. He states, for example, that Cameron Bailey “knows how to pick top-notch films as the artistic director of the Toronto International Film Festival,” and that Elaine Lui is “known for her sharp commentary about celebrities” (2015 Episode 3). Lui herself articulates uncertainties about her judging abilities later in the debates, stating that she is not certain that she has the “artistic sophistication” to appreciate some of the more literary texts (2015 Episode 3). Another panelist, Martha Wainwright, suggests that *Canada Reads* “is not really a competition, a literary competition, because [she] wouldn’t be on that panel” (2015 Episode 4), similarly indicating her lack of expertise in literature. While some of these panelists are indeed artists themselves and are therefore engaged in the arts in Canada, such as Wainwright, Lui, and Cameron Bailey, others have had very little professional or educational experience in the arts, as one might say about Donovan Bailey or Stephen Lewis. In announcing the careers and accomplishments of panelists at the beginning of each episode, Kinew subtly reminds viewers that, though

panelists may be able to engage in reasonably intelligent conversation about books, they are not “professional” readers. In this way, the panelists and producers reassert that what celebrities contribute to the show is based fundamentally on their symbolic capital: they may be recognizable Canadian figures, but when it comes to literary expertise they are just like the middlebrow Canadian audience to which they are intended to appeal. As Sedo indicates, the judges on *Canada Reads* act as a “sort of ‘trusted other,’ much like a friend or family member who has proven to provide satisfactory book recommendations” (“Richard and Judy’s” 200). The program capitalizes on the fact that, while celebrity panelists will not know most *Canada Reads* viewers in person, the public nature of their careers, achievements, and previous endorsements has made them familiar and therefore more trustworthy than an unfamiliar face. I would argue, however, that to fulfill this role for both the long-time CBC listener and the newcomer, celebrity judges must strike exactly the right balance between appearing to be “average” in their tastes, responses, and recommendations, and also asserting the cultural capital that will allow them to provide insight on literary texts.

### **Walking a Fine Line: Celebrity Panelists and Literary Language**

Though the CBC attempts to widen its reach with *Canada Reads*, the program also endeavors to meet the expectations of its ‘typical’ audience regarding the kind of ‘book talk’ fitting for CBC book programming. In Fuller and Sedo’s study of *Canada Reads* participants, they discover that readers are sometimes skeptical of the program, and that this skepticism is “bound up in cultural expectations about CBC Radio, their desire to learn about Canadian culture and literature, and doubts about the authority of the panelists” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 98). If readers are uncertain about the panelists’ abilities to generate discussions worthy



of the CBC as “non-professional readers,” then panelists must prove themselves and establish their authority throughout the course of the program. After all, public engagement with Canadian literature is not the singular aim of *Canada Reads*. Rather, the books discussed on *Canada Reads* are promoted as “tool[s] for learning” that will ultimately honor the “historical culture of the CBC ‘to inform and educate’ its audience” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 105). Indeed, a closer look at some of the language and reading practices modeled on *Canada Reads* reveals that producers remain conscious of its goal to educate its audience. Panelists often employ literary language and terminology in their discussions of the texts, and also sometimes utilize the “literary name-drop” as a way of establishing their expertise. Therefore, though they do not “reproduce the rhetorical strategies of scholarly written discourse in their broadcast conversations, they employ elements of academic literary discourse in order to demonstrate their own cultural capital and ability to judge literary texts” (“Listening” 32n4). It seems, then, that each season includes at least one panelist who can bring some more formal literary analysis to the panel. For example, in his 2014 season as a panelist, Wab Kinew casually mentions that he is a “fan of the great existentialist writers of the past like Franz Kafka,” and also indicates that he understands allusions made in *Cockroach* to works by Albert Camus and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (2014 Episode 1). Later in this same season, he references the works of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said in a discussion about decolonization and *The Orenda*. Here, Kinew not only indicates his familiarity with literary greats and well-known critics, but also chooses the term “allusions” in his discussion of how he understands *Cockroach*, suggesting a familiarity with the terminology of literary analysis. Similarly, panelists often express the importance of the literary and aesthetic values

of the texts in making their decisions. In 2014, Kinew asserts that one can consider the value of books “in terms of their literary value, and then . . . in terms of answering the challenge to change Canada” (2014 Episode 2). He states that his decision to vote off *The Year of the Flood*, for example, was based “purely on aesthetic grounds” (2014 Episode 1). In justifying this decision, Kinew argues for the importance of choosing a text that not only speaks to contemporary social issues, but also reaches particular aesthetic standards.

There is a similar situation in the 2015 competition. Two texts on the program, Jocelyne Saucier’s *And the Birds Rained Down* and Kim Thúy’s *Ru* are identified as the “literary novels” of the competition, a quality that is often spoken of as a strength when compared to the other texts. Martha Wainwright praises both novels for the “rich” quality of the writing and indicates that their authors are “writer[s] of substance” (2015 Episode 2; 2015 Episode 3). Similarly, Cameron Bailey indicates that Saucier and Thúy are writing in a particular “tradition” in choosing to write “literary book[s],” and articulates his appreciation for the subtler ways in which they explore social issues (2015 Episode 2). However, one must also note that these “literary” novels are often found to be challenging by panelists: the fragmented form of *Ru* is identified as particularly difficult at times, and in 2014 *Cockroach* is similarly criticized for presenting its narrative from a fragmented point of view. When the subtleties or difficulties of these texts are contested, their champions often align them with canonical literature in their defense. Wainwright compares *And the Birds Rained Down* and *Ru* to “great literature” that is “brilliant” regardless of the challenges it might pose to average readers (2015 Episode 2). Kinew defends *Cockroach* by reminding listeners that it is an homage to Kafka’s *Metamorphoses*, and praises Hage’s “talent for putting words on a page

and creating beautiful passages” (2014 Episode 1). By self-identifying as readers who can appreciate the literary form of these texts, rather than simply finding them useful for their abilities to speak to social issues, Wainwright, Kinew, and Cameron Bailey assert a higher level of cultural capital that allows them to appreciate the aesthetic characteristics of these texts. As Fuller writes, “given that each year at least one panelist has taken literature at an undergraduate and/or graduate level, the employment of interpretive and evaluative models for considering literature that are common within the academy is not in the least surprising” (16). As I mentioned earlier, these are some of the panelists who might be considering ‘artistic’ on *Canada Reads*, whose own careers and educational backgrounds are in the arts. Even if “the [*Canada Reads*] producers try to highlight the playful, competitive nature of the debates” (Roberts 193), these panelists make it clear that they value the more formal characteristics of the texts on the table such as style, form, imagery, and literary devices. Given that both Kinew and Cameron Bailey win their respective seasons, it appears that bringing some measure of literary discourse to one’s defense is a successful strategy around the *Canada Reads* table.

### **In Conclusion**

All of the aforementioned features of *Canada Reads* – its middlebrow cultural content, adaptation of reality television features, and inclusion of celebrity panelists – are strategies to appeal to the widest possible Canadian audience. Though this is certainly a bid for a larger audience share, it is also a result of the fact that *Canada Reads* and the CBC in general are responsible for disseminating ideas about Canadian nation identity to Canadians from coast to coast. This chapter has addressed the ways in which *Canada Reads* participates

in a tradition of nation-building through Canadian literature. The Canadian nation is often constructed as multicultural, diverse, and tolerant, and federal programs and funding such as the Massey Commission have historically supported Canadian literature as a venue through which these ideals can be shared. As a Canadian institution, the CBC has significant cultural capital and is trusted to assert the value of Canadian cultural content and to disseminate specific ideas about Canadian identity. Aligning itself with this effort, *Canada Reads* situates itself as middlebrow Canadian cultural content and takes on the CBC's goal to "inform, enlighten, and educate" Canadians. In centering the nation as its organizing principle and asserting that literature can bring Canadians together, the program participates in "state-sponsored national boosterism" (Brydon) that is intended to generate national unity and bolster the nation, though the cracks in this desired national unity are evident if one looks closely. As M. Nourbese Philip writes, "multiculturalism, as we know it, has no answers for the problems of racism, or white supremacy – unless it is combined with a clearly articulated policy of anti-racism, directed at rooting out the effects of racist and white supremacist thinking" (185). Rather than directly addressing racism and white supremacy, Canadian governments, individuals, and institutions such as the CBC more often act as though multiculturalism is indeed the solution to these problems; a similar rhetoric is reflected in *Canada Reads*' assertions that Canadian literature and the acts of reading and discussing texts together can unite a nation.

## Chapter 2

### **Facilitating a Performance of Caring: Mass Reading Event Format and Affecting Reading Practices on *Canada Reads***

As I indicated in Chapter 1, multiculturalism is asserted as a central tenet of Canadian identity, one that is shored up by Canadian institutions and cultural content alike. *Canada Reads* participates in this tradition by seeking to unite Canadians through literature and disseminating specific ideas about Canadian cultural identity. One of the ways in which the program seeks to do so is through the social justice themes adopted on the program starting in 2013; these are presented as avenues for increased compassion and empathy amongst a diverse Canadian population. I argue here that these themes assert that social justice might succeed where multiculturalism has failed in Canada, to negotiate the “tense locations of cultural difference” (Bhabha 148) through stories and their ability to generate empathy. As such, the texts for the 2014 and 2015 seasons are chosen because they can ostensibly represent social justice issues that will unite the *Canada Reads* audience through story. In this chapter, I build upon the work of Fuller and Sedo to situate *Canada Reads* as a “mass reading event” or MRE, a new cultural formation for shared reading that has emerged in the twenty-first century as a manifestation of a “contemporary culture of leisure reading” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 1). This shared reading formation facilitates *Canada Reads*’ goal of unifying its audience around a specified set of books, panelists, and social justice issues. It also allows *Canada Reads* panelists to model specific reading practices to a wide audience, demonstrating emotional engagement with the texts and encouraging readers to access empathy and compassion when reading. In this way, *Canada Reads* asserts that affective

reading practices can influence action and behaviour, urging social change through the 2014 and 2015 seasons. It is important to note the ways in which this assertion influences the content of *Canada Reads*. Though the program's reality-television inspired format might suggest spontaneity with its live broadcasts and roundtable discussions, the content of each episode of *Canada Reads* is scripted and curated at least to some extent, tailored to fit within the social justice themes that are imposed upon the books and discussions of each season. This chapter examines the particular affective power of these social justice themes on *Canada Reads* for those who experience affect by reading about others facing injustice. I argue that the affective reading practices modelled on the program are intended to generate empathy and compassion, which ultimately facilitate a performance of caring for the program's audience. These affective responses shore up the idea that Canadians care enough to debate books, multiculturalism, and diversity, even when the program and its participants fail to meaningfully engage with structural barriers for minoritized groups.

### **Affective Reading Practices**

Given that affective responses are central to *Canada Reads*' aim to generate compassion and bring about change, I will take a moment here to define the phrase 'affective reading practices' and include some scholarly work around the concept of affect. The very idea that social justice themes on *Canada Reads* might be able to "change our nation" or "break barriers" relies on affective reading practices, by which I mean reading to evoke emotions that can influence behaviour or actions. The importance of action for *Canada Reads* is implied in the social justice themes of "one book to change our nation" and "one book to break barriers." The connection between emotion and action has been thoroughly

examined by scholars in the field of affect theory, which was established in the early 1960s by psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Affect has been explored across disciplines such as gender studies and philosophy, and by scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Lawrence Grossberg, and Sara Ahmed, all of whom have posited various understandings and definitions of the term. Particularly relevant to my discussion is the relationship between affect, emotion, and one's bodily experiences and actions. In studies of affect, writers such as Zizi Papacharissi point out the distinction between affect and emotion, noting that emotion is "subsumed within affect, and perhaps the most intense part of affect ... [but] affect itself extends beyond feeling as a general way of sense-making" (*Affective Publics* 15). Seigworth and Gregg assert that affect is "the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" (1). These visceral forces are always emergent: "conveying all fathomable potential, [affect] represents imagined and actual possibilities" (*Affective Publics* 13). Affect, then, includes emotions as well as other impressions, distinctions, and potential for the ways in which one affects and is affected by one's environment. Therefore, there is a strong link between affect and the concrete, lived experiences of individuals. Deleuze and Guattari state that affect refers to "the ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xiv). Emotions do not simply exist, then, but have outcomes and consequences; as Ahmed argues, one must "consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, between the

individual and the collective” (“Affective Economies” 119). She emphasizes “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near” (“Happy Objects” 30). Therefore, the forces of affect are influenced in part by one’s environment, by the socially determined “moral distinctions of worth” by which one is surrounded, and by the ways in which one is or is not oriented towards those factors (31). As Grossberg posits, everyday life “is not simply material relationships; it is a structure of feeling” within which affect is located (313). This statement underscores the *process* of affect, wherein one’s emotions and actions are gradually and constantly shaped by one’s surroundings. The subject will sometimes be conscious of the effects of their emotions, while remaining unconscious of many of the influences of affect. The social justice themes on *Canada Reads* encourage readers to become aware not only of how the affect of a text has influenced their emotions, but also to consider how this might result in action and create changes. If, as Papacharissi argues, affect “drive(s) us towards *movement*” (13, emphasis mine), then affect is indeed necessary to urge readers to act on the social issues raised on *Canada Reads*.

### ***Canada Reads* as a Mass Reading Event**

Central to *Canada Reads*’ aim to affect change and influence Canadians is its format as a Mass Reading Event (MRE), which affords the program a wide and diverse audience and allows it to model the affective reading practices that might “change our nation.” Fuller and Sedo describe MREs as large-scale reading events that bring together print, broadcast, and digital media to encourage the “sharing of books in public spaces” (3). These events explore the ways in which shared reading can be a transformative experience for individuals and a



“way of building community and improving cross-cultural understanding” throughout a group (3). The organizers and supporters of mass reading events demonstrate an “unquestioned acceptance . . . of the idea that reading and sharing books is a worthwhile pursuit” (19). Therefore, these events seek to reify the cultural value and legitimacy of books and reading. MREs often take these basic values about literature and reading and combine them with the look and sounds of reality television or radio/television talk shows, making reading a social pursuit rather than a solitary one and privileging forms of literary interpretation that are generated and discussed by the group. Media scholar Jim Collins argues that “the most striking change in this new cartography of literary taste making is where the expertise is now located and readily accessible” (81). He asserts that, rather than some ‘expert’ determining the value of a particular text, literary authority is situated within the reading public. Mass reading events often encourage participants to voice their own reactions and opinions in public forums and online; this takes “book talk far beyond the realm of books” (82). In their survey of three different mass reading events – *Richard and Judy’s Book Club* (in the UK), *Oprah’s Book Club*, and *Canada Reads* – Fuller and Sedo assert that the “aesthetic construction of [these] programs” enables producers to “reconfigure the meaning of reading as a solitary pursuit conducted in private into an interactive and social process that could benefit from the audiovisual aspects of television” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 61). These programs and their presences across various forms of media, from television and radio to websites, blogs, and Twitter, have allowed reading to “shed its popular image as a serious, solitary, and academic pursuit” (14) and instead become an activity that is more widely and readily accessible. As Fuller and Sedo point out, popular book programming has

united reading culture with popular culture “in terms of its cross-media presence and in terms of the reading practices advocated” by readers and the cultural authorities who create and lead these groups in their reading experiences (*Reading Beyond the Book* 14). Collins argues that MRES demonstrate that “reading is decidedly not the free-floating, solitary pleasure that it is too often imagined to be, but instead a historically specific activity requiring certain rituals and protocols that bestow it with particular values in different contexts” (88). This is especially true in that mass reading events often frame the reading of a particular text in a certain way, privileging certain interpretive practices, discussing the text in specific contexts, and allowing participants access to the thoughts and reactions of fellow readers in ways that will inevitably influence their own opinions about the text at hand.

In the case of *Canada Reads*, the structure of the MRE shapes the aims and outcomes of the program in two ways: first, the MRE format makes *Canada Reads* accessible to a wider audience, as MREs are typically available across a wide range of media and encourage audience interaction. In addition, the reading practices commonly modelled in MREs – including on *Canada Reads* – encourage affective engagement with texts, taking into consideration subjective experiences with books and stories in addition to the formal merits of a text. These two factors combine to create an “affective public,” which Zizi Papacharissi defines in *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* as “networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment” (125). She interprets these formations as “publics that have been transformed by networked technology to suggest both space for the interaction of people, technology, and practices, and the imagined collective that evolves out of this interaction” (125-6).

Papacharissi also notes that the affective public is a “sentiment-driven modalit[y] of civic engagement” which “may invite a politics of sympathy and frequently empathy, [but that it] should not be construed as being devoid of rational thought or reason” (134). This blend of sentiment and reason is central to *Canada Reads*’ goal to “change our nation” through social justice themes and intelligent, civic-minded “book talk.”

### **Multiple Forms of Media and Audience Engagement**

The MRE format of *Canada Reads* allows the program to provide its audience with various means of engagement with its content, including the live broadcasts on CBC television and CBC radio, the @cbcbooks Twitter feed, and the videos, interviews, and resources on the CBC Books website. *Canada Reads* has been broadcast on CBC Radio throughout its twelve-year tenure, with audio recordings more recently becoming available digitally as podcast episodes. *Canada Reads* is similar to other programming on CBC Radio in that it engages with current events and Canadian culture from a variety of perspectives. The program has been successful on radio because its drama “is conveyed chiefly through debate, while the context for the chosen titles is provided by panelists’ verbal presentations and audio clips of the selected authors making comments on their crafts” (Fuller “A Reading Spectacle” 12). Though *Canada Reads* consists primarily of a group of people sitting around a table talking, producers use various tactics to ensure that the program remains engaging for its audience. One such tactic is the inclusion of dramatic readings from each text, as well as short plot summaries with accompanying music called “book trailers.” These features create additional means through which listeners can connect with the literary style and narrative of each text, adding additional layers of sound to engage their imaginations.

While these features make for good radio or podcast content, *Canada Reads* producers must also make this “book talk” engaging for a television audience, as the program was introduced to CBC Television in 2004. To do so, they often capitalize on the appeal of a “live” event much like reality television, emphasizing that “there are no predetermined outcomes” in terms of how the debates will transpire or which book will win (2015 Episode 3). This means that viewers witness the unedited reactions of panelists to particularly intense debates or controversial votes – including facial expressions, body language, and sometimes even tears. In addition, the inclusion of a live studio audience adds similar drama, as the radio and television audiences can hear impromptu applause and sometimes even audible gasps as the debates take place. The television audience will also see some audience reaction as the cameras pan the faces of fans who attend the filming of the live broadcast. In addition, television viewers similarly benefit from *Canada Reads*’ use of props; panelists often hold objects as they speak about their chosen texts, gesturing with a book in hand, for example. These props remind *Canada Reads* audiences that the social justice issues at hand are represented not only in the texts being discussed, but are also visible and relevant in other media and in reality. Of course, these visuals need to be translated for radio or podcast listeners, but hosts navigate these moments with verbal cues that describe for a listening audience any important visual, such as Cameron holding his passport. Admittedly, in these moments the listening audience will have a different affective experience, as the verbal description of the image is decidedly different than a visual experience. However, though radio and podcast audiences might not be able to access this visual information in the moment, videos of *Canada Reads* episodes are available on the CBC books website as they

air, extending the experience of the program beyond the broadcast and allowing listeners to access any video or visual they may have missed. In one instance, panelist Craig Kielburger refers to a recent issue of *Maclean's* magazine, and in fact has a copy of the magazine with him, which he holds up for the televisual audience to see. This issue portrays an Indigenous woman on its cover, with a headline that reads “Canada has a bigger race problem than America. And it’s ugliest in Winnipeg” (*Maclean's* 22 Jan 2015). This gesture makes a strong connection between Kielburger’s text, *The Inconvenient Indian*, and current events in Canada in 2015, allowing Kielburger to express what he understands as an objective “right thing” to do in his defense of *The Inconvenient Indian*. In another instance, Cameron Bailey uses not a magazine cover, but his own Canadian passport in his defense of *Ru* to demonstrate the importance of this hard-won item and what it symbolizes to him as an immigrant to Canada. The presentation of his personal passport is very consistent with Cameron Bailey’s deeply personal strategy in defending *Ru*. These props are powerful visual tools in the defenses of both panelists. In these instances, the face of Rosanna Deerchild on the cover of *Maclean's* or the image of Cameron Bailey holding his passport, with visible tears in his eyes, bring the struggles and triumphs of real people into focus and prevent the debates about Canada’s values of acceptance and diversity from being merely theoretical or symbolic.

The use of objects on *Canada Reads* – *Maclean's* magazine and a Canadian passport, in these instances – is effective not just in that they provide visual variety, but because of the “symbolic functions” of these particular objects (Candlin and Guins 1). As Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins assert, “our day-to-day, spiritual, emotional, sexual, social, cultural, and

political lives are conducted in relation to objects and thoroughly mediated by them” (2). The appearance of these particularly Canadian objects exerts a symbolic weight that will trigger certain emotions or associations for the *Canada Reads* viewer: the sight of *Maclean’s* magazine, one of the most recognisable and popular publications in the nation, will likely evoke a sense of familiarity, regardless of that individual’s background or whether he or she is a frequent reader of the magazine. The Canadian passport has even more symbolic weight as an object with “social meaning... used to assert status or power, circulate value, demarcate our habitat and habits, and enforce the law” (Candlin and Guins 1). In holding up his passport, Cameron Bailey capitalizes on the power of the object to “connect and disconnect us from friends, colleagues, or strangers” (1), asserting his status as a Canadian as well as his connection to every viewer who holds or desires a Canadian passport and the nation to which they all (hope to) claim citizenship. When *Canada Reads* panelists use the visual medium afforded by television and online video to display a recognisable magazine or a passport, they reinforce ideals of 'Candianness' and unite the audience by calling on the symbolic weight of these objects. In this way, *Canada Reads* capitalizes on the cross-media functions of the MRE format to reach and appeal to a wide range of viewers.

### ***Canada Reads* and Curated Content**

Evident in the use of props, book trailers, and prepared opening statements is the fact that *Canada Reads* is a scripted, curated program, though it might also encourage spontaneous roundtable discussions amongst its panelists. Many on-air reactions and emotional responses on *Canada Reads* are unrehearsed and uninhibited, but panelists come to the roundtable discussions in the first place with props, notes, and prepared introductions

that will assist them in defending their chosen texts. Even *Canada Reads*' incorporation of audience contributions is curated, particularly in how the program showcases social media responses to the debates. The program explicitly encourages the audience to respond to the broadcasts on Twitter and then incorporates some of these responses into the official *Canada Reads* narrative. From the beginning of the 2014 season, host Jian Ghomeshi reminds the audience to "join the conversation using the hashtag #CanadaReads2014" (2014 Episode 1); 2015 host Wab Kinew also encourages them to "follow @cbcbooks [and] use the hashtag #CanadaReads" (2015 Episode 4). In this way, the program solicits audience reactions to the books and discussions on *Canada Reads*, but only those responses that align with the program's nation-building aims are incorporated into the program proper. In the final episode of the 2014 season, for example, Ghomeshi reads tweets about each panelist aloud, with the text appearing across the bottom of the screen for viewers to read themselves. The 2015 season similarly incorporates audience content from Twitter, featuring "A Round-up of Our Favourite Tweets" about *Canada Reads* on the CBC Books website. However, Ghomeshi openly states in 2014 that, though producers "wanted to share some of what our audience has been saying," they have included "only the lovely stuff, which has been, mostly, 90% of what it is" on the program (2014 Episode 4). As I will address below, there are plenty of critical tweets about *Canada Reads* that are decidedly not "lovely," but Ghomeshi reveals here the level to which the content on the program is curated by the producers to portray positive reflection of *Canada Reads* and thereby its nation-building aims.

Another factor that influences the scripted quality of *Canada Reads* is the introduction of social justice themes. While previous seasons, from 2002-2010, did not have

themes and were simply focused on appreciating Canadian literature, these more specific social justice themes dictate the lens through which texts are viewed and allow the panelists to frame their arguments to fit with the theme. In these seasons, each text is representative of a minority group or perspective and panelists defend their texts accordingly. For example, in 2014, there are books that represent each of the following social justice issues: climate change, Canada's relationship with Indigenous and First Nations peoples, racial inequality, immigration/immigrant experience, and gender equality. With regard to topics such as Indigenous peoples and racialized groups, the themes imply an expectation that one text will represent an entire, diverse community. This is in itself problematic, as there is no acknowledgement on *Canada Reads* that these communities are not homogenous. The speeches and arguments that panelists prepare generally focus on how well their respective stories represent or 'fit' within the denoted theme, while other important aspects of their narratives are neglected. *Cockroach*, for example, is not popular with *Canada Reads* panelists; this is because it is a negative example of the migrant subject integrating into Canadian culture and they do not want to believe that this could be representative of all migrants. However, when the example at hand is a positive one, as in the case of *Ru*, the panel is eager to believe that the text speaks for the whole community, because it tells a story that Canada and Canadians want to hear, as it reflects their delusions of multicultural success. I will discuss these examples at length in Chapters 3 and 4, but for now, let me simply suggest that the imposition of specific social justice issues upon the texts often results in a lack of understanding of the complexities and intersectionalities of the characters and issues portrayed in these texts. Like the use of props and the showcasing of certain tweets from



audience members, the social justice themes on *Canada Reads* are evidence that the program is a scripted *performance* that upholds a particular ideal of 'Canadianness.' This curated content allows the program to reflect to Canadians a version of themselves that many will be happy to see: an audience that cares enough to be self-reflexive and to explore alternative perspectives and marginalized voices through literature, performing the role of the open-minded, socially-conscious, liberal Canadian.

### **United We Understand: Affective Reading Practices on *Canada Reads***

I have asserted so far that *Canada Reads* uses its format as a mass reading event to reach a wide audience through multiple forms of media, including radio, television, and social media. This reach is important given that the program's aim is to generate national unity amongst a widespread and diverse Canadian population. In addition, the program's MRE format allows it to encourage its audience to not only read Canadian literature, but to read it in a particular way by modelling certain reading practices. In her study of reading groups like *Canada Reads*, Cecilia Konchar Farr and Jaime Harker point out that in these reading formations, "the meaning of texts . . . is defined not by the words themselves but by the community of readers who construct the text" (4-5). There are typically leaders of these reading communities, such as Oprah or the celebrity panelists on *Canada Reads*, who perform "the all-important selection process, and then relay that information in conversational speech" (Collins 85). As I mentioned in Chapter 1, however, these leaders are not "professional readers" but simply provide the audience with cues and strategies for reading and discussion within the MRE. They model a variety of interpretive practices that include emotion and personal experience as they discuss the texts. This implies that there is

not one ‘correct’ way to understand the texts at hand and suggests that emotion is a valid and valuable interpretive tool for a reader. This model offers common readers “a form of popular connoisseurship, a taste for books that is decidedly informed, and just as decidedly accessible to all” (85). Rather than foregrounding scholarly expertise, then, MREs operate on a belief in “the value of everyday literary criticism, an assertion of the value of critical discussion on books by persons who may have no formal skills or knowledge of literature” (Penfield Lewis 237). In this context, one does not need to have any particular education or training, but simply an interest in reading and a desire to share the experience of reading with others. Discussion is privileged in this forum and participants are encouraged to express their views and emotions, engaging one another as they interpret the text collectively. Farr argues that this practice “connects talking and reading in a way that makes reading more accessible for [the] less experienced reader” (41), as literary terminology or analysis is not required. Rather, readers can foreground their emotional responses to the texts and share any personal experiences that might allow them to relate to the characters or plot.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asserted that *Canada Reads* models specific affective reading practices to its widespread Canadian audience and therefore creates an “affective public,” a networked formation that enables a “sentiment-driven modalit[y] of civic engagement” (Papacharissi 134). This very much aligns with the ultimate goals of *Canada Reads*: in framing the book competition in terms of the nation-state and the social justice issues relevant therein, the program is inherently concerned with civic engagement and attempts to inspire such engagement through the “sentiment-driven modality” of affective reading practices (134). Papacharissi notes that affect is “the intensity with which

we experience both reason and emotion. Structures of feeling invite affective attunement with *thought as feeling and feeling as thought*, thus not prioritizing one over the other but striving towards a meaningful balance between the two” (134 emphasis in original). This balance between thought and feeling significantly informs the strategies and arguments of the panelists on *Canada Reads* as they demonstrate the ways in which emotion can inform their defenses and arguments in favour of their chosen texts. Panelists often share their emotional reactions to the texts and implore readers to access empathy and compassion in understanding the narrative at hand. The ability of a book to evoke an emotional reaction is treated as an asset; indeed, it is one of the criteria that panelists are asked to debate and assess for the *Canada Reads* audience. Hosts ask questions such as “which of these remaining books is the most successful at getting readers to understand ... what it’s like to be marginalized, to be an outsider in some capacity?” (2014 Episode 3). In response to this question, many panelists share their *own* affective responses to the texts, often becoming visibly emotional as they discuss their chosen texts. For example, when Samantha Bee defends Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* in 2014, she becomes tearful on several occasions as she articulates her feelings of compassion for the novel’s narrator. Though she apologizes for “manipulating [the audience] with [her] tears,” she gets choked up in almost every episode (2014 Episode 1). It is clear that her personal experiences and the affective forces that accompany them influence how Bee approaches *Cockroach*. Her willingness to share these feelings models for the audience a kind of reading that is simultaneously experiential, emotional, and intellectual. Similarly, at the end of the 2015 competition, when Lainey Lui and Cameron Bailey make their final pleas for *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* and

*Ru* respectively, both panelists demonstrate significant emotion, eyes welling up with tears and voices charged with feeling. These are treated as strong, effective defenses; after Lui and Bailey speak on behalf of their books, Kinew sincerely states, “Passionate, emotional pleas from both of you ... tugged at my heartstrings there” (2015 Episode 4). These reactions to the *Canada Reads* texts are not brushed off as irrelevant because they are too full of feeling; rather, they are considered an important part of the affective experience of reading and an effective strategy in gaining the support of both audience members and other panelists to determine the winner of *Canada Reads*.

### **Breaking Barriers and Affecting Change**

This emphasis on emotional responses is effective on *Canada Reads*, but if a text is going to “change our nation” or “break barriers,” it must necessarily inspire action as well as emotion. This idea is at the heart of the *Canada Reads* competition, wherein panelists debate the purpose of literature, with some arguing for the “notion of literary texts doing work, expressing and shaping the social contexts that produced them,” while the others promote a more traditional critical perspective “that sees [novels] as attempts to achieve a timeless, universal ideal of truth and formal coherence” (Tompkins qtd. in Farr 62). On *Canada Reads*, the notion of texts “doing work” is central to the program’s social justice themes: the books in these seasons are ostensibly calls-to-action regarding issues such as environmental controversies, Indigenous rights, racism, immigration policies, LGBTQ rights, and mental illness. However, the question of whether books can *actually* move readers to action is frequently debated around the *Canada Reads* table - and in literary criticism - though it is the axis around which the very concept of these social justice seasons revolve.

The transformative potential of a book depends, according to Farr and Harker, on the level of emotional connection the reader feels to the text. They state that readers “value novels they can take personally, that can speak to, challenge, or transform their lives, novels that entertain them with lively stories or call them into political or social awareness, even action” (2). However, they do not address the significant difference between awareness and action here, a differentiation that various other critics make. Scholar Suzanne Keen asserts that “scant evidence exists for active connections among novel reading, experiences of narrative empathy, and altruistic action” and concludes “books don’t make change by themselves” (xiv). Lauren Berlant is similarly skeptical that reading could be responsible for producing radical changes in an individual’s behaviour. She argues that presenting one narrative as representative of a larger issue is problematic in that, when “a multitude is symbolized by an individual case, how can we keep from being overwhelmed by the necessary scale that an ethical response would take?” (*Compassion* 7). In other words, readers will become so overwhelmed by the enormity of an injustice that they will become completely paralyzed and unable to act. Berlant also warns that, since “the ideology of true feeling cannot admit the non-universality of pain, its cases become all jumbled together and the ethical imperative toward social transformation is replaced by a civic minded but passive ideal of empathy” (“Poor Eliza” 641). She suggests here that the act of simply *feeling* compassion or empathy may become an end in itself, rather than leading one to take action to address or correct the larger problem. Ahmed shares a perspective that is perhaps more optimistic. She writes that, though it is indeed impossible to fully understand or feel the pain of another, this does not mean that “the pain is simply theirs, or that it has nothing to do

with” anyone else (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 30). She suggests an alternative: “that an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel” (30). This is the main assertion of these seasons of *Canada Reads* in which social justice is at the centre of the competition: the program implores its audience to be “open to being affected by” the experiences and emotions of others as a means of fostering understanding and compassion for Canadians whose experiences differ drastically from their own (30).

Reading practices informed by affect in such a way can be socially and politically productive; as Ahmed points out, “[f]eminist and queer scholars have shown us that emotions ‘matter’ for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surfaces of bodies as well as worlds” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12). Emotion certainly “matters” on *Canada Reads* as well; thanks to the social justice themes, the emotional stories shared on the program are closely connected to the political realities of racism and discrimination in Canada. The program implicitly asserts that reading matters not only personally, but also politically as “an act of learning about Canadian culture ... [and] an emotionally-engaged act of questioning that culture, one’s knowledge about it, and one’s connection to it” (Fuller and Sedo “A Reading Spectacle” 15). It is the *process* of reading, discussion, and reflection that has the potential to create change, then. In her writing on feelings of empathy in fiction readers, Suzanne Keen asserts that widely read texts can “give readers something to talk about and can contribute to the formation of those little ad hoc communities of fellow-feeling that arise” when readers come together to discuss a text (xv). One must note Keen’s wording when she states, “books don’t make change by themselves”: she does not assert that books do

not make change *whatsoever*, but that they do not “make change *by themselves*” (xiv, emphasis added). She emphasizes “the importance of discussion, directed introspection, and leadership through questioning and providing examples” in these instances, all of which rely on relationship-building between readers (xiv). The cultivation of connections between readers in a reading community facilitates questioning, recommendations for further reading, and open sharing for all members of the group. A space in which active discussion about books is encouraged will not often result in unanimous agreement about the text or issues at hand, but will instead elicit a “disjunctive tension between readers’ experiences and the assertions of the fictive world” (Keen 147). It is this tension that will produce the discussion and introspection necessary to shift the views or opinions of an individual, which may in turn result in a shift in their behaviour. This is what the MRE accomplishes, then, in the case of *Canada Reads*: reading becomes “an act that ... may be ideologically unsettling for the reader and, therefore ultimately, for the way that Canada is imagined by readers” (“A Reading Spectacle” 16). In encouraging readers to relate to texts emotionally, and to share their responses with the rest of the reading audience, *Canada Reads* asserts that this practice of being “affected by that which one cannot know or feel” (Ahmed 30) is valuable in that it can push one to take action against forms of oppression to which an individual might not be vulnerable, but to which they have been exposed through the reading practices in which they participate.

### **“Join the conversation”: *Canada Reads* & Twitter Participation**

One of the places in which the affective responses of participants to *Canada Reads* are made visible is on Twitter. I mentioned above that *Canada Reads* incorporates some

tweets about the program into its live broadcasts, quoting its audience to suggest that the program and its themes are well-received and that Canadians are eagerly participating in the *Canada Reads* conversation. Indeed, many people do participate in the *Canada Reads* discussions on Twitter, with thousands of tweets using #CanadaReads. This is, in part, because *Canada Reads* actively encourages its audience to engage with the program and its panelists in this way: hosts suggest that audience members “join the conversation on Twitter” using #CanadaReads (2014 Episode 1). All of the panelists – whose followings span wide and diverse populations thanks to their various careers and interests – tweet about *Canada Reads*, often praising the competition and encouraging their followers to keep up with the debates. Throughout the broadcasts, there are several mentions of the fact that panelists and hosts alike receive “hundreds and hundreds” of tweets about their books (2015 Episode 3). Host Wab Kinew even points out that certain phrases used on the show are “tweetable moment[s],” and praises Cameron Bailey in particular for speaking in “Twitter catchphrases” – making it even easier for viewers to quote him in their own tweets about *Canada Reads* (2015 Episode 1, Episode 3). In addition, in the question-and-answer periods following the live broadcasts, panelists take questions from Twitter, selected by producers and read aloud by the host.<sup>2</sup> This incorporation of Twitter into the *Canada Reads* broadcast is a form of engagement that allows the audience to do more than watch and listen; they can contribute to *Canada Reads* conversations online and connect with others participating in the event.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Questions and Answer periods are opportunities for the *Canada Reads* panellists to engage with the live studio audience as well as the program’s Twitter following, so questions are solicited from both of these audiences. Producers choose 3 or 4 questions from audience members, the host reads them aloud, and the panellist(s) to whom the question was directed will respond. The Q&A is not part of the broadcast on CBC television, but is included in the episodes that stream on cbcbook.ca.



Twitter is another venue through which *Canada Reads* users can participate in the MRE, making reading a social activity and facilitating connections between participants.

Connections between *Canada Reads* audience members are made possible when they use the hashtag, which connects participants not as a result of close physical proximity or pre-existing social groups, but through their expressions of mutual interest in *Canada Reads*. Users can tweet into #CanadaReads and/or any of the related hashtags, such as #CanadaReads2014, #CanadaReads2015, #CanLit, and #DiverseCanLit, to connect with the *Canada Reads* audience. Social media scholar Nathan Rambukkana points out that the hashtag is “an utterance that is at the same time an action” (5) in that it is “both text and metatext, tag and subject matter” (3). The inclusion of a hashtag in a tweet is therefore a performative act that “brings the hashtag into being at the very moment that it is first articulated and – as the tweet is instantly disseminated to all of the sender’s followers – . . . announces its existence” (23). It is this “flexibility for forming new hashtag communities as and when they are needed, without restriction, which arguably provides the foundation for Twitter’s recognition as an important tool for the discussion of current events” (Bruns and Burgess 23). As Bruns and Burgess point out here, Twitter’s flexibility in allowing its users to create and join hashtag communities makes engagement in live events and relevant social issues easy and immediate. This allows Twitter to function as a space in which users can encounter and engage with one another in new ways; so, while the fact that they are participating in discourse is not new, and the political topics with which they engage are not new, the hashtag functions as a new “pathway to an open and non-predefined set of communicative encounters and architectures” (Rambukkana 4). In the case of *Canada Reads*,

users can choose to follow #CanadaReads, which makes available to them every tweet using that hashtag, or contribute to the #CanadaReads community directly by tweeting into it, responding to the tweets of others and/or expressing their own views and sharing relevant resources. This online engagement strengthens the MRE, as the audience is not just connecting with the texts, panelists, debates, or official *Canada Reads* materials, but also with other audience members who might provide additional content, suggestions for further reading, or alternative perspectives on the issues raised in the debates.

The *Canada Reads* audience is all reading the same text and participating in discussion; though they do not know one another offline, their interactions and shared experiences online can create a form of intimacy that is just as potent and important as that which might be cultivated in person. Lang asserts that a reading community can be both “virtual and face-to-face, ranging from an intimate knot of people who know one another well to a vast crowd of anonymous and invisible strangers who are brought together partly or primarily by their shared focus on a text” (*From Codex to Hypertext* 13). This takes place when the most active online participants not only read and retweet tweets using the hashtag, but also respond to one another through publicly visible @replies and added commentary in retweets. For example, when frequent #CanadaReads contributor @leonicka starts a conversation on Twitter about the 2015 season of *Canada Reads*, she and fellow participant @booktrovert engage in quite a long conversation about the theme of “breaking barriers.” @leonicka initially asks “How do you define “barrier” and do you think all the books fit? #DiverseCanLit” (21 Mar 2015 7:09am), to which @booktrovert responds that Craig Kielburger had a good interpretation of the term “barrier,” opening up about “his own

internal barrier, thinking all immigrant stories were hard, sad stories” (21 Mar 2015 7:18 am). @leonicka replies “That was a great moment!” and then shares her own view of Kielburger’s statements (21 Mar 2015 7:21am). In total, there are eight tweets exchanged between these two users on this topic and one other user is also mentioned in the thread. For avid followers of #CanadaReads such as @leonicka and @booktrovert, #CanadaReads becomes a space in which they can connect with one another to follow up on their impressions about the 2015 debates; the conversation does not end with the panelists but extends through the hashtag to allow users to contribute to an expanded discussion. The hashtag allows these users to communicate with “a community of interest around a hashtag topic without needing to go through the process of establishing a mutual follower/followee relationship” (Bruns and Burgess 15), because what matters within #CanadaReads is not any pre-existing relationship between participants, but a mutual interest in discussing a common text: *Canada Reads*.

Though *Canada Reads* has incorporated some of the #CanadaReads content into its broadcast, most of the conversation within #CanadaReads takes place among users and outside of the CBC-approved sphere. In the aforementioned quotation from Ghomeshi, he states that feedback from listeners and viewers on Twitter has been selected to include “only the lovely stuff” (2014 Episode 4), while tweets that call for “smarter judges” (@Lateandlost 17 Mar 2015, 7:58 pm) or criticize the competitive format are excluded from this narrative. However, because the CBC has no control over what participants contribute to #CanadaReads on Twitter, it is an open space in which participants are free to express whatever reaction or opinion they please, even those that do not align with the program’s

rhetoric. An enormous number of participants tweet their impressions of the texts, debates, panelists, and even the structure of *Canada Reads* using #CanadaReads, creating a space in which dissenting views and more nuanced discussions can be shared. Therefore, rather than directing tweets @cbcbooks or at any of the panelists, most users instead direct their questions and observations to their fellow audience members. These #CanadaReads tweets are directed at an audience that may not be physically, geographically, or even temporally co-present with their authors, but with which the authors nonetheless find support, fellowship, and an interest in debating and sharing that coincides with their own investments in *Canada Reads*. This behaviour suggests that many participants are not concerned with being ‘heard’ by the CBC, *Canada Reads*, or the panelists, but by the rest of the #CanadaReads audience.

The affective public of #CanadaReads brings the affective responses of its participants into the public sphere, allowing them to share their experiences and reactions to facilitate a rigorous and nuanced online debate. Papacharissi asserts that the very architecture of Twitter “thrives on, invites, and rewards *sharing*,” and if it is the “act of information sharing that presences actors, then this can be read as an act of agency” (126). This idea of agency reminds us that, within #CanadaReads, reading is neither private nor public, but “a social process” (Fuller and Sedo *Reading Beyond the Book* 27). Rather than only *Canada Reads* panelists sharing their reactions and opinions about the texts on air, #CanadaReads provides an opportunity for the program’s audience to contribute as well, as Twitter “present[s] a stage that people can claim to render a personal thought public” (Papacharissi *Affective Publics* 114). This creates space wherein participants can interact with one another to shore up or challenge the rhetoric of national unity and concern for social justice issues

portrayed on the program outside of the official discourse of *Canada Reads*. While the broadcasted *Canada Reads* content often promotes a feel-good view of Canadian tolerance and identity, many tweets problematize this and provide critical reflections on this national identity, particularly in the context of race, multiculturalism, and diversity in Canada. As Farr asserts, reading in a group is “about challenging and reconstructing (sometimes deconstructing) culture and values in the midst of momentous change” rather than reinforcing dominant discourses and conventions (91). Reading in a social space such as the *Canada Reads* community provides opportunities for these challenges to the hegemony through discussion and debate, and “while reading still engages the solitary self in reflection and self-examination . . . it is also about encountering diversity and making connections, even, put simply, starting conversations” (91). Many tweets demonstrate that the “Canada imagined by listener-readers of ‘Canada Reads’ . . . does not, therefore, necessarily reproduce the ideological and structural models” of the program (“A Reading Spectacle” 23). Users can explore the various content associated with the hashtag and allow these additional perspectives and resources to further influence their thoughts about the texts and social justice issues raised on the program proper. When varying opinions about the texts are shared through #CanadaReads, different interpretive strategies are spread through the community, ensuring that the views of the panelists are not the only ones to which users have access.

**“It’s [not] going to happen one on one”: Individual Responsibility for Social Justice**

Though *Canada Reads* situates reading as potentially emotionally unsettling and encourages participants to share their affective responses, including on Twitter, I would argue that the program’s emphasis on individual change motivated by compassion is

inadequate. There is too little reflection on structural barriers and systemic discrimination in Canada, or how the systems through which we all move predispose us to racism and xenophobia. The program and panelists place the onus on individual Canadians to create change for migrants and those who are racialized, stating “it’s going to happen one on one” and “in the smallest spaces ... a gesture or a meal” (2014 Episode 4). Of course, I would not argue that this is untrue or that there is no value in these individual acts of care and compassion. However, at no time on the program is it acknowledged that individual actions are not the only causes of racism, discrimination, or marginalization. The centuries-old systems that marginalize and disenfranchise racialized migrants and Canadians are made invisible on *Canada Reads* in the program’s insistence on changing individual hearts and minds. Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Farr’s statement that reading in a group is “about challenging and reconstructing (sometimes deconstructing) culture and values in the midst of momentous change” (91) – but in the case of *Canada Reads*, the national framework from which the texts are approached prevents this kind of engagement on the program proper. Panelists and producers encourage critical thinking, engagement with the issues, and occasionally even action, but stop short of criticizing the national institutions, structural barriers, or political parties (to which the CBC is beholden) in a meaningful way. Therefore, *Canada Reads*’ attempts at social justice fall short without any reflection on the ideological influences of the state or the structural barriers to equality in Canadian culture and institutions, ultimately upholding rather than dismantling the dominant power structures within the nation-state.

### **The Implied White Canadian Reader**

I asked at the beginning of this chapter whether the social justice themes on *Canada Reads* have a particular affective power, and for whom? The above analysis of the rhetoric on *Canada Reads* regarding affect, action, and reading practices suggests that the program hopes to influence Canadians who read about those facing injustice – and I have argued that this focus on changing the “hearts and minds” of Canadians is central to the social justice themes on the program. As I asserted in Chapter 1, “Canadians” in this context means “white Canadians,” as they are “implicitly constructed as the authentic and *real* Canadian people” (Mackey, 89). This is apparent in much of the language around the “one novel to change our nation” and “breaking barriers themes.” For example, when panelists are asked in 2014 which book is “the most successful at getting readers” to understand “what it’s like to be marginalized,” two of the three remaining books on the table are about those who are racially and culturally marginalized – and *not* white (2014 Episode 3). This suggests, then, that “readers” are white, non-immigrants to Canada. Similarly, in 2015, Cameron Bailey was asked, “how urgent is it for us to understand the immigrant experience?” (2015 Episode 3). Though a migrant subject could certainly be interested in understanding immigrant experiences, I would suggest that this question implies that “us” readers are most often white, non-immigrants; these are the subjects to whom *Canada Reads* appeals when it asks readers to employ more empathy and understanding for those whose lives and identities differ from their own. Such a question leaves no room for intersectional identities, as it suggests that one could not possibly be both a Canadian citizen *and* an immigrant, though, ironically, Cameron Bailey himself is both. The rhetoric here is not that migrants or those who are minoritized need to be ‘more Canadian’ or better fit into Canadian society, but that white people need to

be more empathetic towards those who are different and accept them. Social justice themes on *Canada Reads* assert that social inequality in Canada can be changed and “barriers” can be broken for those who are marginalized if ‘we’ read ‘their’ stories, understand their values and perspectives, and approach them with empathy. There is certainly some pushback to this assertion, which I will discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 with specific examples in discussions of *Ru* and *Cockroach*. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is enough to note that *Canada Reads* implies and assumes a white, privileged reader, and that the social justice themes on the program are intended to incite empathy and action in these readers.

#### **“Let’s Get Real”: Motivating Real Change on *Canada Reads***

I have noted thus far that *Canada Reads* models affective reading practices that are intended to encourage empathy and action amongst its implied white audience. Whether or not this move from emotion to action is possible can be debated, as I have indicated above, but I must also question what the outcome of this might be if *Canada Reads* is successful in its aims. In other words, if a reader is indeed moved to compassion as a result of the texts and discussions on *Canada Reads*, what happens next? I agree with Ahmed that reading can indeed evoke strong emotions such as compassion and empathy that might move a reader to social action; I have experienced this myself. However, I am sceptical as to whether or not this is productive in the case of *Canada Reads* in the way that the program hopes. My criticism is that the entire project is in service of national unity, which is problematic for two reasons. First, I would argue that, while the program makes some connections between emotion and action, these are few and far between, with only some panelists truly encouraging their audience to move beyond feeling. In the 2014 season, host Jian Ghomeshi



states, “We’ve talked a lot about inspiring social change this week, about the words. We haven’t talked necessarily about turning that inspiration into action. So let’s get real, if we can“ (2014 Episode 3). In 2015, host Wab Kinew similarly emphasizes the importance of taking immediate action on the issues at the table, asking questions such as “How urgent is it for us to understand the immigrant experience?” (2015 Episode 3). Of the ten panelists across the two seasons, however, only one truly encourages readers to “get real”: Craig Kielburger. In 2015, Kielburger states that *Canada Reads* is “such a rarified opportunity to put the most important issues in front of Canada right now” (2015 Episode 1). There is, without a doubt, some delusion of grandeur here, as the issues raised on *Canada Reads* are put in front of only the *Canada Reads* audience, not the nation as a whole as Kielburger suggests. However, he seems to fervently believe in the possibility that books can create change. He asserts that *An Inconvenient Indian* has the power to reshape how Canadians understand minoritized identities “in such a fundamental way, in such a powerful way that it stands on its own and it just reshapes our country” (2015 Episode 1). The “breaking barriers” theme looks for a text that “illuminate[s] issues, challenge[s] stereotypes, [and] change[s] perspectives” but Kielburger asks, “to what end?” (2015 Episode 1). He suggests that the theme needs to “push us” towards “tangible actions” in the form of “talking to politicians, writing letters...online petitions, actual petitions, volunteering, dollars raised, hours logged” (2015 Episode 1). When *The Inconvenient Indian* is voted off in 2015, Kielburger notes that fans of the book were very vocal online and expressed disappointment that such an important text was eliminated. He urges these fans to “take [their] passion” about the book and “get angry and raise [their] voice[s] ... about missing and murdered Aboriginal women, about 2,000 dollars

less per student in federally-funded on-reserve schools” (2014 Episode 3). He directly connects these feelings of anger to a change in behaviour, suggesting that the audience “talk to [their] Members of Parliament ... [and] keep this book alive in the public discourse” (2014 Episode 3). Here, Kielburger asserts that reading the books on *Canada Reads*, engaging in debates, and even perhaps changing one’s mind about the issues presented on the program are inadequate responses: rather, one must take action by volunteering, donating to relevant causes, and articulating one’s views to politicians and others who might influence policies. He draws a direct connection between reading and social or political action, particularly in the context of a mass reading event wherein one is exposed to new perspectives on the relevant issues.

Kielburger is an anomaly on *Canada Reads*, however, as the only panelist from the 2014 and 2015 seasons who encourages this kind of action. Most other panelists express skepticism that a book can actually create social change, such as Stephen Lewis, who states, “I don’t believe, really in my heart, that any of these books will fundamentally change Canada” (2015 Episode 4). Panelists sometimes seem annoyed with the social justice themes, arguing that they limit the scope of the roundtable discussion and shift focus away from the aesthetics of the texts. For example, Martha Wainwright expresses frustration with the constant iteration of the “One Book to Break Barriers” theme on the 2015 show and what she perceives as a neglect of the literature itself. She states, “[I]et’s break down the barrier of the theme and start talking about the books and their merit” (2015 Episode 2). Wainwright’s comment responds to the fact that the social issues represented by the texts often dominate conversations in the *Canada Reads* debates, rather than the literary mastery that allows the

texts to speak to these issues. Similarly, Cameron Bailey asserts, “our books are not just arguments. There’s so much more to *Ru* than any talking points could ever say. There’s its form, there’s its beauty” (2015 Episode 3). Indeed, throughout the 2015 season, the merits of *Ru* in particular are fiercely debated because it is a text that addresses social issues more subtly thanks to its fragmented, poetic form. Cameron Bailey states that the novel is effective because it “tries to make art, make poetry, make something beautiful out of a painful experience” (2015 Episode 2). He advocates for a consideration of the aesthetics of the text here, rather than simply how the book speaks to immigration. These panelists make an important point: the texts themselves are works of art, and therefore considerations of their literary merit should not be considered irrelevant or distracting, but instead articulated alongside a call to action in the service of social justice.

Such a perspective is challenged by other panelists on the program, however, such as Lainey Lui, who expresses doubt about the effectiveness of a poetic text such as *Ru*. She indicates that she does not “think that pleasure is supposed to be a part of [a] conversation” about the potential for a book to affect social change (2015 Episode 3). In addition, Lui questions whether an average reader among the *Canada Reads* audience will be able to appreciate the form and beauty of *Ru*, stating that “if all of Canada is to read a book, then all of Canada has to be able to access it” (2015 Episode 3). In his role as host and moderator of the 2015 competition, Kinew states, “it’s interesting to hear the debate morphing back and forth between the literary merits of each title, and then to the content, the substance, you know the actual sociological phenomena that these books could touch on” (2015 Episode 2). Here, Kinew clearly indicates that, in his mind, the literary merits of a text are independent of

its ability to speak to a social phenomenon. Jian Ghomeshi articulates a similar sentiment in 2014 when he states, “We want the winning novel to inspire, but we also want it to be a great book. So if we set aside the notion of social issues for a moment, which of these books tells the best story?” (2014 Episode 1). This is an unproductive question, however, because in this context, each book cannot be divorced from the theme. Its very presence on *Canada Reads* is about representing a social justice issue and therefore the main criteria for determining whether it is “the best story” is whether it might be “One Book to Break Barriers” or “A Novel to Change our Nation.” As a result of this pitting of aesthetics and social action against one another, panelists spend more time debating whether social change is possible as a result of reading than they do encouraging their audience to take action on the social issues raised in the texts.

### **The Performance of Caring**

This leads to my second observation about *Canada Reads*, which is that the very acts of reading, discussing, and reflecting on inequality and injustice in Canada facilitate the Canadian performance of caring and shore up the idealized image of the compassionate, tolerant Canadian. Though some of the texts and arguments on *Canada Reads* resist and challenge the nation-building prerogatives of the program, they are also embedded within a national narrative that asserts that Canadians are, by definition, invested in improving the relationship between the state and minoritized groups in Canada. Like the renegotiation of multiculturalism policies and the state’s acknowledgement that it has often historically failed minoritized groups, *Canada Reads* and its social justice themes are another attempt to “transform [this] catalogue of uncivil relationships” (Kymlicka *Multicultural Odysseys* 64),

this time in the nation's cultural rather than political sphere.<sup>3</sup> Given that diversity policies play a central role in "Canada's collective life and collective identity" ("Ethnic, Linguistic" 313), the CBC's reinforcement of the idea that 'Candianness' means caring about renegotiating these relationships is ultimately an act of nation-building. The acts of challenging multicultural policies and performing empathy for immigrants, Indigenous communities, and other minoritized groups are exactly what is expected of the 'good' Canadian citizen, who is constructed as one who cares about equality and diversity. Therefore, though *Canada Reads* seems to expose the "dark side" of the nation by addressing issues of racism and discrimination in Canada, this is in fact an act of nation building in its utter 'Canadianness.' This self-congratulatory rhetoric is apparent on the program when hosts ask panelists to "reflect on" the "pride that [they] take in Canada ... [doing] a program ... based on discussing books" (2014 Episode 3). Panelist Stephen Lewis states that *Canada Reads* "is unique in the constellation of literature in modern times" (2014 Episode 3). He situates *Canada Reads* as a reflection of Canada, stating, "I was in Pittsburgh last weekend, and no one would believe me when I told them about Canada Reads. They were completely

---

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as public statements of apology to minoritized groups that have been discriminated against by the state. This includes Stephen Harper's official Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools in June 2008 and Brian Mulroney's Statement of Apology, televised on *The National*, to Japanese survivors of internment camps and their families. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed asks "How does national shame work to acknowledge past wrongdoings, whilst absolving individuals of guilt?" (101). She observes that "shame becomes not only a mode of recognition of injustices committed against others, but also a form of nation building," allowing us to "'to assert our identity as a nation.' Recognition works to restore the nation ... by 'coming to terms with' its own past in the expression of 'bad feeling.' But in allowing us to feel bad, does shame allow the nation to feel better?" (102)

taken aback! Most of them didn't even know what a book was!" (2014 Episode 3). This statement is met with laughter from the audience, and Lewis' comments here are one of many instances in which *Canada Reads* and Canadians are praised for caring about both books and diversity enough to debate and discuss them in the public sphere. I reflected in Chapter 1 on the ways in which Canada is constructed in opposition to the United States of America as more cultured, diverse, accepting and kind; as one can see here, *Canada Reads* bolsters this Canadian ideal. *Canada Reads* producers surely have good intentions in framing discussions around social justice, but it is important to recognize that this is also an opportunity to reassert Canada's reputation as accepting of difference and diversity on television, radio, and Twitter.

This chapter has described how the MRE format of *Canada Reads* allows the program to model affective reading practices to its audience. Producers encourage panelists to share their affective experiences of reading the texts on the *Canada Reads* table, using television, radio, and social media to reach a wide Canadian audience. As I have indicated, these affective reading practices are central to *Canada Reads*' goals to foster empathy and compassion amongst Canadians as a means of negotiating cultural difference. This is done in the name of social justice: the themes of "One Novel to Change our Nation" and "One Book to Break Barriers" suggest that, though Canada might be more diverse and accepting than some other nations, many still face inequality and discrimination. Though it is never explicitly stated, the implied *Canada Reads* audience is white and privileged – and the program beseeches this audience to have more compassion for those who are "marginalized, who are outsiders in some capacity" (2014 Episode 3). The program operates on the

assumption that reading can be a transformative experience for its audience, generating empathy and inspiration, and ideally “turning that inspiration into action” (2014 Episode 4). As I have argued here, however, few panelists on the program meaningfully encourage audience members to take action, and those who do emphasize individual action without reflecting whatsoever on the structural and systemic barriers that oppress racialized and marginalized subjects. *Canada Reads* might congratulate itself for its noble goal - “to find a book that could change the hearts, minds and lives of readers across the nation, with the ultimate goal of inspiring social change” (“Canada Reads crowns”) – and Canadians who participate in the program might similarly congratulate themselves for caring enough to read about those who are marginalized. As I have pointed out, however, this performance of caring upholds the ideal of Canadianness that serves to bolster the nation. Ultimately, *Canada Reads* operates within the CBC, which is beholden to government for its funding. Canadian governments – whatever their particular politics – are concerned with maintaining their power and would not dismantle the systems that keep them in power, even if those systems uphold racism, white supremacy, and other forms of inequity. The quest for compassion, empathy, and unity is presented on *Canada Reads* as neutral, but it is not – it serves a nation that benefits from unequal power relations between the dominant class and those who are minoritized.

## Chapter 3

### Competing Criticisms in Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*

“The melancholic migrant is the one who is not only attached to difference, but who insists on speaking about racism, where such speech is heard as labouring over sore points. The duty of the migrant is to let go of the pain of racism by letting go of racism as a way of understanding that pain. The melancholic migrant’s fixation with injury is read not only as an obstacle to his or her own happiness, but also to the happiness of the generation to come, and to national happiness” (Ahmed, “Happy Objects” 48)

-----

In the 2014 season of *Canada Reads*, comedian Samantha Bee chooses to defend Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach*, a novel that critiques Canada’s reception and treatment of migrants. Given that the theme of this season is “a novel to change our nation,” this is a bold but apt choice for Bee; both the novel that she is defending and her own methods of defense are quite critical of multiculturalism and the stereotype of the ‘good migrant.’ Hage’s novel presents a protagonist who is the very antithesis of the ‘good migrant’ as a means of exposing the naïveté of Canadians about the structural racism that many migrants face, whether they are ‘good’ or not. He dismantles the ideals of multiculturalism and Canadianness, portraying Canadians as unkind, patronizing, and deeply implicated in global violence in spite of their reputation as international peacekeepers. Bee similarly denounces the concept of the ‘good migrant’ in her defense of *Cockroach*, arguing that it dehumanizes those upon whom it is thrust and renders those migrants who do not conform to the ideal invisible in Canadian society. She chides her fellow panelists for making broad generalizations about migrants and



argues for the value of reading experiences that evoke discomfort and bring readers to examine their biases. Bee demonstrates that she cares deeply about migrants and the ways in which they are treated as they adapt to life in Canada, performing the role of the ‘good’ Canadian who cares about diversity, equality, and human rights.

This chapter is a case study: I examine how the social justice theme of “One Novel to Change our Nation” influences the discussion of *Cockroach* and the methods by which Samantha Bee defends it. I consider here the reception of *Cockroach* by the *Canada Reads* panel as well as the ways in which Bee’s effective defense of the text results in new perspectives on the novel amongst her fellow panelists. I argue that Bee uses two strategies in her defense. First, she both advocates for and models compassion towards migrants on an individual scale, emphasizing that small, personal acts can make change in Canada. In addition, she argues that *all* migrants are deserving of such compassion, applying an ethics of universal personhood to even those migrants who do not conform to the ideal of the ‘good migrant.’ However, Bee often also simplifies the issues portrayed in *Cockroach* and ignores several passages in which Hage levels his most forceful criticisms. Therefore, I ask: How do the arguments made by Hage and Bee compare as they urge Canadians to examine their attitudes towards migrants? In what ways is Bee’s defense shaped and influenced by the structure of *Canada Reads*? How is her defense complicated by her own privilege and whiteness? How does Bee criticize Canada and Canadians while still maintaining hope and optimism for the nation’s treatment of migrants? Can increased empathy and an ethics of universal personhood adequately challenge the ideal of the ‘good migrant,’ as Bee suggests they can? To this end, I perform a detailed reading of passages from *Cockroach* and from the

2014 panel debates to assert that, though Bee's defense is effective within the structure of *Canada Reads*, her simplified representation of *Cockroach* ultimately maintains Canada's reputation and self-image as compassionate towards migrants, in spite of the fact that the novel itself argues the exact opposite.

### ***Cockroach on Canada Reads***

The inclusion of Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach* in the 2014 season of *Canada Reads* is one of the novel's many accolades within the Canadian literary establishment. It is included because of its ability to speak to the theme of the season, which was "A Novel to Change our Nation." The other texts chosen included Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda*, defended by rapper and journalist Wab Kinew; *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood, defended by politician, diplomat, and AIDS activist Stephen Lewis; Esi Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues*, defended by Olympic runner Donovan Bailey; and *Annabel* by Kathleen Winter, defended by actress Sarah Gadon. Jian Ghomeshi moderated the competition, having done so since 2008, and the debates took place March 3-6, 2014. Prior to being featured on *Canada Reads*, *Cockroach* was nominated for various other literary awards in its year of publication (2008), including the Governor General's Literary Award, the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize. It did not win any of these, but was awarded the Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction from the Québec Writers' Federation ("Cockroach" <https://houseofanansi.com/products/cockroach>). *Cockroach* and Hage were already recognized in the Canadian literary establishment by the time they were included on *Canada Reads*, though *Cockroach* certainly experienced a renaissance in popularity thanks to the program.

*Cockroach* also did well in the 2014 season of *Canada Reads*; it was the runner-up in the competition, losing out only to *The Orenda* in the final vote. This is particularly impressive given the fact that many panelists and audience members found the text difficult and struggled to relate to its unsympathetic narrator, a fact that is widely discussed in the debates. I would suggest that the success of *Cockroach* on *Canada Reads* can be attributed to two factors: the strength of Samantha Bee's defense of the text, and the novel's clear, if complex, relation to the theme of the 2014 season – "One Novel to Change our Nation." Bee is praised for her effective defense of the text; as host Ghomeshi notes, many members of the *Canada Reads* audience celebrate "just how much heart and intellectual rigor she's been putting into her book" (2014 Episode 4). In addition, Bee's arguments for *Cockroach* often identify the ways in which the text clearly speaks to the theme of this season. The "One Novel to Change our Nation" theme calls into question how Canada can confront its challenges and work towards equality, and *Cockroach* is included on the premise that it provides a critical perspective on immigrant experiences in Canada. Bee hopes that the novel's complex, non-conforming narrator will provoke Canadians to examine their biases and reflect on how they view refugees and immigrants. She indicates that she chose the book because of its potential to spark "meaningful conversations about the state of immigration" and argues that, though the novel's protagonist is decidedly not the 'good migrant,' he nonetheless deserves the compassion of Canadians (2014 Episode 4). The relationship between *Cockroach* and the theme of this season is complicated and requires both reflection and discussion; as such, it seems that panelists are motivated to keep the book on the table simply because they "have a lot to say about *Cockroach*" (2014 Episode 2). Though the

complexity of the novel and its relationship to the theme might be challenging for the *Canada Reads* panel, these factors are ultimately advantageous for Bee's defense, as they require a lot of time to discuss *Cockroach* and therefore keep the book in the competition until the final episode.

### **Samantha Bee Defends *Cockroach***

Samantha Bee firmly believes that *Cockroach* could be a book to “change our nation,” but defending the text against the many criticisms of her fellow panelists is a tall order. The following sections analyze the various objections that Stephen Lewis, Sarah Gadon, Wab Kinew, and Donovan Bailey have to *Cockroach*, followed by a thorough discussion of the frameworks that Bee uses to rebut their arguments. Throughout the 2014 season, Bee asserts that *Cockroach* inspires compassion for migrants because it “challenges us to think about the people who are living on the margins” (2014 Episode 1). The novel's narrator is decidedly not the ‘good migrant’: he is unemployed, mentally unwell, and ungrateful for his life in Canada. As such, he is often “ignored” and feels “invisible” because he is not readily accepted or approved of by many Canadians and other migrants (92, 66). For Bee, however, this is the point: she argues that migrant subjects deserve compassion and acceptance no matter how well they satisfy the ideal. She constructs this argument from the very beginning of her defense, when she shares a “personal story” in Episode 1:

I used to work in a restaurant ... [with] numerous people working down the line ... dishwashers, busboys ... probably 25 or 30 people. And when I got the job, they were like ‘That’s Seva.’ And they just sort of introduced them as a group, as ‘the Sevas.’ Okay? Their names were not all Seva, but they just all

went by the same name ... For me, the main character of *Cockroach* is that person, who is working so ... I'm going to cry when I talk about it but these people are *real*. They're three-dimensional people. They have families. They come from a place. And nobody even calls them by their name. (2014 Episode 1)

With this anecdote, Bee shares her personal experience of interacting with migrant subjects who, like the narrator of *Cockroach*, are rendered nameless and invisible; their individual identities, struggles, and stories are erased by those who see them only as 'migrants.' She connects this story to the similar tendency she sees amongst her fellow panelists to lump migrants together when they speak of 'the immigrant experience.' She argues against this tendency to generalize, asserting that there is no one immigrant experience but an "infinite number of different experiences" (2015 Episode 3). Bee points out that the expectation that migrants will be grateful, hard-working, and assimilate easily to Canadian life is dangerously homogenizing of a very diverse group. This is in fact a point that Hage makes himself in an essay titled "On the Weight of Separation and the Lightness of the Non-Belonging" where he writes, "transformation is bound to affect every immigrant and exile ... [and] can encompass a range of states, from happiness and well-being to depression, culture shock, longing, anger, resistance, acceptance, and, in extreme cases, madness" (229). He asserts that Western expectations of migrant narratives require that the immigrant subject cannot be portrayed as "evil" or complex, but that if writers "create characters who do only good, who are all oppressed, who were the victims of something and then come here and are saved, [they are] not presenting them as humans" (Hage qtd. in Richler). With these arguments, both Hage and

Bee make the point that the ideal of the ‘good migrant’ denies migrants the opportunity or ability to be understood as complex, flawed, struggling human subjects who have endured significant culture shock and trauma in the process of migration.

Though the narrator of *Cockroach* is certainly not a ‘good migrant’ subject, Bee asserts that his story is nonetheless an important one. Her goal in defending the novel is to draw attention to migrant experiences that specifically do *not* conform to the ideal: she outright “reject[s] the idea ... that immigrants should exist here in a twenty-four hour bubble of gratitude and not have the ability to express themselves” (2014 Episode 3), arguing that stories like *Cockroach* should be just as visible as the stories of those migrants who have been deemed more ‘successful’ by the nation-state. She states, “what’s true in the novel and true in life is that these people are not seen ... They are literally in the background. They are cleaning the office towers after you go home for the day. They are invisible” (2014 Episode 2). With her reference to “cleaning office towers,” Bee implies that these migrant subjects are often not only racialized but also marked by class. The “racial and class categories” into which they fall become “defining characteristics, effectively eliding or effacing [their] individual identities” (Beneventi 276). The individual human being becomes ‘the immigrant,’ the ‘migrant worker,’ or the ‘working class,’ bearing a label that transforms him into a “particular other” and makes him comprehensible to the nation (Itwaru 14). Bee indicates that these labels mask the individual identities of migrant subjects such as the narrator of *Cockroach*. This is not to say that beneath the mask of the tax-evading, thieving, mentally ill protagonist there is a generous, grateful, hardworking migrant. Bee’s argument is that there does not need to be. She asserts that he should be treated with basic respect and kindness

regardless of his personal qualities or the state of his mental health, and that he should not be held to any particular standard simply because he is a migrant to Canada.

Bee pushes back against the panel's generalizations about migrants and urges her fellow panelists to understand the varying circumstances into which people migrate. She states, "not all immigrants arrive [in Canada] and feel the warmth of a robust, socially mobile community": many of them are "traumatized ... beyond the point of accepting help" or struggling with "depression and insufficient mental health care" (2014 Episode 4). It is important to note here that Bee does not attribute the struggles of migrants exclusively to their traumatic or violent pasts. She also places some of the onus on Canada to provide sufficient "mental health care" and assist migrants in finding and building "community" so as to ease their transition to life in Canada (2014 Episode 4). This is central to Bee's defense of *Cockroach* on *Canada Reads*: she argues that the fact that the novel's narrator is "living in despair" to the point that he attempted suicide is surely a reflection not only on his personal character, but also on the society in which he is living (2014 Episode 1). Bee makes a connection here to the wider political context in which the 2014 season of *Canada Reads* takes place. She reminds the audience that "Canada will be resettling 13,00 Syrian refugees fleeing violence over the next two years" and implies that the nation bears some responsibility for the well-being of these migrants long after their arrival (2014 Episode 1). Bee asserts that *Cockroach* provides insight into "an ongoing issue" that will need to be continuously addressed as the nation resettle migrants from Syria and other areas (2014 Episode 4). It is a "novel to change our nation" not only because it challenges Canadian readers to empathize with an unsympathetic narrator, but also because it asks them to

consider how a lack of services and support has further contributed to the decline in his mental health. This is the singular instance in the 2014 season in which Bee connects the narrator's struggles to structural barriers. She argues that the nation's benevolence cannot extend only to the point at which migrants have been welcomed into Canada: it must also support those migrants throughout the long process of resettlement.

### **Panelist Pushback: Divergent Perspectives on *Cockroach***

Though Bee's arguments for *Cockroach* are thorough, every other panelist around the *Canada Reads* table has significant objections to the novel's ability to meet the requirements of the "One Novel to Change our Nation" theme. Many of them continue to express very specific expectations of a migrant narrative in spite of Bee's argument against this tendency. Because *Cockroach* does not present the 'good migrant' narrative, several panelists argue that it is not representative of migrants to Canada and therefore not a good choice as "one novel to change our nation." Panelist Stephen Lewis asserts that he found the book so "unsettling" that he would not want to declare, "this is the immigrant experience and we need to change it" (2014 Episode 1). He states that the novel "just did not resonate with [him] in any way as the immigrant experience" or as a text that would "invite people to social change" (2014 Episode 3, 1). As a means of validating this opinion, Lewis draws on his personal experience, having served as a Deputy Director of UNICEF, Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations, and Chair of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides care for women and children affected by AIDS across 15 countries in Africa. He implies that these experiences interacting with migrants provide him with insight into these issues. He states: "To me the issue is whether or not this is a genuine reflection of the



immigrant experience. I don't want to be intensely personal but I've spent 50 years of my life dealing with marginalized groups and a lot of immigrants ... [and] I do not believe that [*Cockroach*] champions the experience of the immigration" (2014 Episode 4). For Lewis, *Cockroach* portrays a discomfiting, unfamiliar version of migrant life in Canada, and he therefore argues throughout the season that it is not a text to which immigrants and other Canadians alike will respond positively in the search for a book to "change our nation." This perspective betrays Lewis' discomfort with migrants whose narratives do not fit neatly within the stereotype of the 'good migrant.'

Like Lewis, panelist Wab Kinew also finds that the experiences of *Cockroach*'s protagonist are not representative of migrant experiences and asserts that the text will not compel readers to create change. Kinew draws from his experience volunteering "in the immigrant and refugee community in Manitoba," where he hears about "getting credentials recognized," "security for children," "childcare ... [and] education" (2014 Episode 1). He asserts that he "didn't see those themes coming out very strongly in *Cockroach*" and is therefore reluctant to hold the text up as "representative" of the issues faced by immigrant communities (2014 Episode 1). However, if one has read the book, they will know this to be untrue, particularly Kinew's assertion that the theme of getting credentials recognized is absent in the novel. Though the narrator himself does not have any credentials to be recognized – he was a thief in Lebanon just as he is in Canada – there are several other characters who detail their struggles to find suitable employment and get their credentials recognized upon coming to Canada. For example, the narrator's friend Majeed was once "a journalist" but now he is a "taxi driver" (*Cockroach* 146). He thought this would be

“temporary until he learned French and found a job as a journalist or a teacher” (191), but he has since given up in his pursuit of these aspirations, saying, “I do not bother anymore. Now I am a taxi driver. That is what I am” (146). Similarly, the narrator’s neighbour is an older Russian woman who works as a caretaker for an elderly woman. She informs the narrator that she has “a master’s degree in anthropology from the best university in Russia” and demonstrates her knowledge of history and colonialism throughout their conversation (41). In her current job, however, her expertise and qualifications are clearly going to waste aside from the fact that they allow her to take advantage of her client by selling the artefacts collected by the elderly woman’s husband. I would assert that, far from being absent in *Cockroach*, recognition of credentials is one of the narrator’s chief criticisms of Canada’s treatment of immigrants. He often makes jokes and sarcastic comments about the lack of opportunity for migrants in Montréal; when he himself gets a job as a busboy in a restaurant, he sarcastically remarks, “Another immigrant landing a career!” (107). *Cockroach* portrays multiple characters struggling to gain recognition for their education and credentials upon arriving in Canada, so for Kinew to suggest that this is *not* a central theme of *Cockroach* is a clear misrepresentation of the novel. Rather than recognizing and discussing these characters in the debates, Kinew instead focuses on the characteristics of the protagonist that exclude him from the ‘good migrant’ narrative and uses this limited perspective to argue that the text cannot achieve *Canada Reads*’ goal of changing the nation.

Several *Canada Reads* panelists most vigorously object to the lack of gratitude demonstrated by the narrator of *Cockroach*; they draw from their personal experiences to argue that, unlike the novel’s protagonist, migrants are generally deeply grateful for their

lives in Canada – an expected characteristic of the ideal ‘good migrant.’ However, in these arguments, the panelists completely disregard the impact of racism in determining the success of most migrants as well as their attitudes about being in Canada. Sarah Gadon, a blonde, white female panelist states “both of my grandparents, two sets of grandparents, they were both immigrants to Canada, and they didn’t hate Canada when they came here. They loved Canada, they believed in Canada, and they wanted to be in Canada” (2014 Episode 2). She suggests that her “Italian grandparents ... [who] came to Canada after World War II ... struggled really hard, but they loved being here. They believed in Canada” (2014 Episode 2). These are the ideal migrants: hard-working taxpayers who are grateful for the opportunities they have found in Canada. Gadon implies that migrants such as her grandparents have the ‘right’ attitude about being in Canada, while the narrator “doesn’t even want to be in Canada” (2014 Episode 2). She suggests that this difference in attitude is why “a lot of people are saying ‘I don’t identify with [the narrator’s] experience’” (2014 Episode 2). However, at no point does Gadon acknowledge that attitude is not the only difference between her white, immigrant grandparents and the brown-skinned, Arabic-speaking, Middle Eastern immigrant protagonist: she completely disregards the influence that racism has on migrants of colour, particularly in post-9/11 North America. Stephen Lewis similarly disregards race in comparing the narrator to migrants with whom he has interacted. He states, “I’ve spent 50 years of my life dealing with marginalized groups and a lot of immigrants, from Russian dentists seeking accreditation to Somalians [*sic*] seeking education ... I do not believe that [*Cockroach*] champions the experience of the immigrant” (2014 Episode 3). While he may have experience working with immigrants and refugees from various

backgrounds, Lewis also fails to recognize that, though a Russian dentist will certainly struggle upon immigrating to Canada, the experience will be very different than that of a Somali migrant, who will undoubtedly experience racism in addition to seeking education, learning English, and getting credentials recognized – which will again be different than that of the Middle-Eastern narrator of *Cockroach*. The argument that any ‘good migrant’ should simply be grateful for Canada’s acceptance erases the reality that some of these migrant subjects will experience racism and discrimination that will influence their experiences of Canada, just as the narrator’s identity as a Middle Eastern male in a post-9/11 North America certainly influences how the nation perceives him and therefore how he perceives the nation.

These panelists approach the novel in perhaps the best way they know how: if they cannot relate to the experience themselves, they consider the migrants with whom they have interacted to compare these experiences. However, it is important to note here that these are both white readers. I indicated in Chapter 2 that, on *Canada Reads*, the reading subject is often presumed to be the white Canadian, and these readers are encouraged to take up affective reading practices as a means of understanding and relating to the ‘others’ with whom the program’s social justice themes concern themselves – racialized migrants, members of LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous peoples. As the white panelists on *Canada Reads* demonstrate, their subject positions as white readers mean that they come to the table with certain predispositions towards racialized migrants, as in the case of Lewis’ and Gadon’s responses to *Cockroach*. These examples demonstrate that the empathy with which readers are encouraged to read is contingent upon the migrant’s performance of the ‘good migrant’ narrative. In the case of *Cockroach*, Gadon and Lewis seem to suggest that the

narrator does not deserve empathy because of his criminal, cynical, and ungrateful behaviours. These behaviours do not align with their expectations of or personal experiences with 'good migrants' and they do not acknowledge that their experiences might be limited or influenced by their own whiteness. Neither Gadon nor Lewis seek to empathize with migrant subjects who have not been so fortunate as to adapt quickly and easily to life in Canada due to factors such as racism and mental illness; instead, they continue to homogenize 'migrants' and shore up the ideal of the 'good migrant.'

Another panelist, Donovan Bailey, similarly questions the validity of *Cockroach* as a narrative that accurately portrays life in Canada for migrants. He states that the novel is “not ... a true depiction of the real immigrant experience here [in Canada]” and calls on his own experience as an immigrant to make a value judgement (2014 Episode 2). As a migrant himself, Bailey is the only individual on the panel whose experience might parallel that of *Cockroach*'s narrator in that regard. However, rather than identifying or empathizing with the narrator, Bailey instead disavows *Cockroach* and declares that it is not a “true depiction” (2014 Episode 2). Instead, he relies on the stereotype of the 'good migrant': he states, “all immigrants ... most immigrants are here working fifteen jobs to ensure that Canada's giving them freedom, that their kids can go to university and become first generation Canadians and do well” (2014 Episode 2). In so distancing himself from the novel, he further cements his own status as a 'good migrant,' one whose hard work has done Canada proud; after all, he is a Canadian Olympic Gold Medalist, a businessman, and a member of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame. Of course, there is no guarantee that Donovan Bailey will identify with *Cockroach* simply because he is also a migrant; he is not obligated to represent or embody the migrant

subject on *Canada Reads* simply because he is the only migrant around the table. However, the fact that Bailey's experience of migration is drastically different from that of the narrator is a missed opportunity in the panel discussions – it demonstrates the very point that Samantha Bee has tried to make to her fellow panelists about the diversity of migrant lives, but the panel does not take up this opportunity to further discuss the various experiences of migration that are represented around the *Canada Reads* table.

As I have demonstrated, all of the panelists have measured the narrator of *Cockroach* against their expectations of the 'good migrant' and subsequently rejected the text as representative of migrants to Canada. As I will argue about *Ru* in Chapter 4, panelists on *Canada Reads* have very specific expectations of migrant narratives. It is interesting to note that, where *Ru* is deemed inauthentic because An Tinh's migration "came so easily" (2015 Episode 1), *Cockroach* is perceived as inauthentic because the narrator's migration is *too difficult*. Stephen Lewis finds the narrator's mental health problems "unsettling," while Sarah Gadon objects to the fact that the narrator "doesn't even want to be in Canada" because it challenges her assumption that migrants are only ever thankful for their lives in their new home (2014 Episode 2). All of the panelists argue that *Cockroach* cannot be "a novel to change our nation" because it does not portray a "genuine" migrant experience – or at least not one that fulfills their expectations of what that must look like. It is important to note here that, as panelists on *Canada Reads* and voices on the CBC, they themselves are representatives of Canada as a host to migrant subjects. Itwaru asserts that the imposition of certain expectations upon the immigrant subject is typical of the host nation; he writes in *The*

*Invention of Canada* that Canadians attach a specific identity to the label 'immigrant' and that their expectations of those to whom this label is affixed are inescapable. He observes:

The stranger in the name and label 'immigrant' is already invented as 'immigrant,' a distinctiveness which is also anonymous, upon arrival. This person is no longer only the bearer of another history, but has now become a particular *other*, the bearer of a label, invented by the 'host.' This person has become the 'immigrant' – this term of depersonalization which will brand her and him for the rest of their lives. (13-14, emphasis in original)

Itwaru notes here that the immigrant becomes a “particular *other*” upon arriving in Canada, though the identity to which he or she must conform is not self-determined but constructed by the host. The expectations that come with the label of “immigrant” – that they will be hard-working, grateful, and adapt to Canadian norms – must be fulfilled, or else the hospitality of the host will be revoked. I will expand on this argument in Chapter 4, but for now let me note that the state’s expectations of the migrant subject are made clear in its immigration and refugee procedures from the very beginning, and these requirements stick long after the migrant subject has landed in Canada. There are limits and conditions, then, to Canada’s “hospitality” towards refugees and immigrants: they are welcome so long as they comply with the expectations of the host nation. As Gillian Roberts notes, “this wavering of hospitality underpins the idea of the host culture and its power to accept or reject” those who seek its hospitality based on whether or not they “conform to the dominant host culture” (9). The unruly narrator of *Cockroach* refuses to conform or adapt to Canadian cultural norms: he does not pay taxes, participates in criminal activity, and fails to demonstrate gratitude

towards his host nation. Therefore, the *Canada Reads* panel declares that his story is not a genuine reflection of migration to Canada and not an appropriate text to “change our nation.”

### **The Case for Compassion: Bee’s Defense of *Cockroach***

Given all of these objections to *Cockroach*, the fact that the book is the runner-up in the 2014 competition is surprising, but Samantha Bee’s defense of the text is even more thorough than the arguments of her competitors. Her first defensive strategy is to implore the *Canada Reads* audience to understand the novel as a case for the importance of empathy and compassion in individual interactions between Canadians and new migrants. Second, she invokes an ethics of universal personhood to assert that even those individuals who are difficult or ungrateful deserve this kind of compassion. Throughout her defense, Bee acknowledges that many readers will find the narrator of *Cockroach* to be overwhelmingly difficult and unsympathetic. She states that she “completely understand[s]” when her fellow panelists express their concerns with the book and its difficult narrator (2014 Episode 3). However, she asserts that these are “exactly the people for whom this book is intended. I think this book is supposed to put you in an uncomfortable place” (2014 Episode 3). Bee connects these feelings of discomfort with the potential to create change, asserting that exposure to stories such as *Cockroach*, with its unruly narrator who defies all expectations of the ‘good migrant’ subject, will bring about “meaningful discussion[s] about immigration ... about change” but only if Canadians can “listen” to and understand narratives that provoke discomfort and frustration (2014 Episode 3). These kinds of “meaningful discussions” are purportedly the aim of addressing social justice issues on *Canada Reads*: the program “frames the reading of CanLit as an act that stimulates pleasure, emotion, knowledge



acquisition, and self-reflection” (“A Reading Spectacle for the Nation” 16). However, this is not to say that all of the emotions experienced or knowledge acquired will be easy for readers to process and accept. Novels such as *Cockroach* “give voice to those previously silenced and resituate those cast as outsiders, thereby exposing the myth of an innocent nation and challenging its hegemonic centre” (Helms 3). Of course, this hegemonic centre works to the benefit of most Canadians by privileging white, Canadian-born, heterosexual, cis-gender, able-bodied, upper/middle-class individuals – and as I indicated in Chapter 2, this is *Canada Reads*’ assumed audience. According to Bee, these are the very readers for whom *Cockroach* is included. She asks: “how do you get people to care about a problem they don’t even acknowledge exists?” (2014 Episode 2). For Bee, the first step is the visibility of narratives such as *Cockroach*; she hopes this will breed empathy, which will in turn inspire action.

In her arguments here, Bee makes a connection between the feelings of discomfort that might be evoked for readers of *Cockroach* and their actions towards migrants to Canada. In Chapter 2, I explored the connections between action and emotion and cited Sara Ahmed’s assertion that “emotions ‘matter’ for politics” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 12). I argued that this statement is central to the aims of these seasons of *Canada Reads* in which social justice is foregrounded – and Bee’s defense of *Cockroach* is a good example of this. She contends that Canadian readers need to be willing to engage in real, concrete ways with migrant subjects, arguing that “change can just happen ... on a one to one level” (2014 Episode 4). She asserts that feeling empathy without taking action is inadequate or, as critic Kathleen Woodward might say, “the feeling of self-satisfaction that we wish to do the right thing and hence are virtuous” is not enough (7). As such, Bee encourages readers to take

even small steps to demonstrate empathy. She states, “to give people a meaningful sense of belonging sometimes can happen in the smallest way, like in a gesture or a meal ... change ripples out from individuals and it amplifies from there” (2014 Episode 4). Bee asserts that those who participate in these kinds of interactions will find that their perspectives are changed, whether they are the more or less privileged party. For Bee, the “imperative toward social transformation” must not be replaced by a “civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy” (Berlant “Poor Eliza” 641). Rather, the “ethical demand” of empathy is that one “must act about that which [she] cannot know”; she must be “moved,” as Ahmed suggests, not just emotionally but physically by “what does not belong” to her (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 31). This reinforces the rhetoric of *Canada Reads* that individual attitudes are responsible for social change, which deflects from the structural and institutional barriers that migrants face in Canada. However, this emphasis on individual action resulting from emotion aligns with *Canada Reads*’ impetus to “change our nation”; the program’s goal is to shore up the idea that Canadians not only care, but also *act* to welcome refugees, support immigrants, and keep the peace internationally. Bee makes the connection between emotion and action explicit in her defense of *Cockroach* and encourages her audience to explore their discomfort with the text as a means of understanding their biases, generating empathy, and inspiring compassion even for those who might not be ‘good migrants.’

In her arguments against generalizations about ‘good migrants,’ Samantha Bee finds a rather unlikely ally: Jian Ghomeshi, the host of this season. Though he is technically not allowed “to debate during the show” (2014 Episode 2), Ghomeshi often expresses his support for *Cockroach* during the off-camera Q&A sessions (available to the live audience as well as

the live-stream viewers). Even in the debates themselves, he sometimes comments on the misrepresentation of the novel that he sees from other panelists. In Episode 4, he points out that the panel discussion of *Cockroach* has misrepresented what it is actually about and expresses a concern that audience members who might not have already read the novel will be dissuaded from reading it. He states

I think we do a disservice to *Cockroach* and to those who haven't read the book out there who might get a misguided sense of what this book is about and what it's like by only talking about the lead character in this book. If you want to talk about the immigrant experience, there's the professor, the restaurant owner, the taxi driver, the young daughter, the Iranian daughter ... these are very vivid characters that speak to the immigrant experience beyond just the lead character. (2014 Episode 4)

Ghomeshi makes this point to demonstrate that, contrary to some panelists' arguments against the novel, it does in fact portray a broad spectrum of immigrant experiences beyond simply that of the protagonist. In responding to *Cockroach*, the *Canada Reads* panel focuses almost exclusively on the narrator – the 'bad' migrant – and essentially renders all other migrant experiences in the text invisible. It seems that, in this final episode of the season, Ghomeshi feels compelled to challenge this tendency, even if he is not technically supposed to contribute to the debates.

Ghomeshi comes to the defense of Bee and *Cockroach* again during the Q&A and commentary after the Episode 2 broadcast. He says, "since we're off camera here, I find the argument that *Cockroach* doesn't represent the immigrant experience is baffling" (2014

Episode 2). He goes on to state, “I wouldn’t identify myself necessarily directly with this character who’s a thief . . . and living in despair. But there’s a lot about that first generation immigrant experience that I do identify with . . . so to kind of toss it off as not being representative is strange to me” (2014 Episode 2). As a first-generation Canadian and the son of Iranian migrants, Ghomeshi works against the homogenizing rhetoric about ‘the’ migrant experience in the debates; he faces the predominantly white panel and states quite clearly that he *does* “identify with” the story and even with its difficult, unsympathetic narrator (2014 Episode 2). He implies that, compared to the rest of the panel, he might have more authority to judge the legitimacy of *Cockroach*’s narrative as a result of his own ethnicity and background. What is interesting here is that, while Donovan Bailey, who *is* a migrant to Canada, does not express any identification with the narrator of *Cockroach*, Ghomeshi does identify with the protagonist even though he is *not* a migrant. Rather, he identifies on the basis of being a first-generation Canadian who has witnessed the struggles of his parents through the process of their migration and assimilation in Canada. However, because he is not a panelist and these comments do not take place within the debates proper, he does not have an opportunity to expand on exactly how or why he identifies with the narrator of *Cockroach*, but his insistence on inserting these kinds of comments anyway suggests that he feels a need to correct what he sees as a misrepresentation of the novel.

Bee’s second strategy in defending *Cockroach* and combatting assumptions about the ‘good migrant’ is her ethics of universal personhood; she asserts that a migrant such as the novel’s narrator is deserving of compassion even if he is mentally ill, given to criminality, and reliant on the state. She objects to the tendencies of her fellow panelists to generalize

about immigrant narratives and their desire for a narrative that will reflect ‘all immigrants’ and allow its readers to ‘relate’ to the story. *Cockroach* provides neither of these things but, as Bee indicates, it should not be required to do so. She constantly argues against the “notion that the immigrant experience is only allowed to be one thing,” asserting that the lives of immigrants in Canada can be “complex, and isolating, and negative” (2014 Episode 3). She also contests her fellow panelists’ assertions that migrants must express only gratitude for their lives in Canada, asking, “How can you have a meaningful discussion about immigration ... when there’s a large voice of people who are like ‘haven’t we done enough for you? Shouldn’t you be more grateful? Shouldn’t you be happier that you have this and this and this?’” (2014 Episode 3). This is, again, similar to Hage’s own views: he argues that the experiences of migrants can be “volatile, and this volatility can lead to aimlessness and a perpetual sense of loss and non-belonging” (“On the Lightness” 229). Bee contends that these kinds of experiences must be acknowledged and respected along with those migrant narratives that better align with expectations of the ‘good migrant.’ She asserts that when her fellow panelists “lump people together, when [they] deny that some people can have angry, conflicting experiences – that is totally dehumanizing” (2014 Episode 3). Bee implores Gadon, Bailey, Kinew, and Lewis to re-evaluate their reading practices and understand *Cockroach*’s flawed narrator as human – and therefore equally deserving of respect and compassion - in spite of his refusal to act the part of the ‘good migrant.’

Bee approaches *Cockroach* with an ethics of universal personhood: as sociologist David Scott FitzGerald explains, this perspective asserts that people should relate to one another on the basis of universal personhood – the “quality of being a human being” – rather

than territorial-based personhood or the “quality of membership in a particular place-based community” (FitzGerald 127). In such a framework, the nationality, race, or origin of the subject must not determine how they are understood or treated. This emphasis on personhood is the crux of Bee’s argument: she states, “these people are *real*” and deserve “kindness” and a “meaningful sense of belonging,” whether or not they are ‘good migrants’ (2014 Episode 1, 4). She argues that even difficult migrant subjects such as the narrator of *Cockroach* deserve the panelists’ respect and compassion, and to be granted basic human rights regardless of any particular loyalty to the nation or qualities of ‘Canadianness.’ Rather, Bee argues that stories like *Cockroach* allow their readers to see the “utter uniqueness of particular individual migrant experiences ... [which] elicits humanity” and brings about the realization that “few actual individual lives fully conform to the master narratives” that the nation has constructed about migrants (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994 qtd. in FitzGerald132). As FitzGerald points out, such a perspective focuses more on the global or transnational than the local and “undermine[s] the notion that nation-states are “containers” for distinct national cultures” (132). This transnational framework might work in tandem with the ideal of universal personhood that Bee so passionately espouses, as both suggest that the migrant subject should not be evaluated for how well they embody any constructed notion of ‘Canadianness.’ As I indicated in my discussion of nation and ‘Candianness’ in Chapter 1, however, the nation-state is a stubborn construct. The negative responses and lack of support for Bee from other panelists suggest that, though this ethics of universal personhood might be an ideal to strive for, it imagines a postnational moment that has not yet arrived in Canada. After all, the structure of *Canada Reads* and its rhetoric of changing ‘*our*’ nation relies

heavily on the construct of the nation: it is the very reason everyone is gathered around the table to debate these texts. Thus, though Bee's appeal to an ethics of universal personhood might be noble, it is perhaps a bit too idealistic even within the social justice context of 'changing our nation.'

Though it might be unrealistic in some ways, Bee's emotional defense of *Cockroach* and her appeals to universal personhood are popular amongst many of the *Canada Reads* audience, as one can see in the responses within #CanadaReads on Twitter. I mentioned in Chapter 2 that the MRE format of *Canada Reads* allows its audience to engage with the program and its content in various ways, including on social media. I argued that Twitter allows for the formation of "affective publics" in which affective responses to the texts are brought into the public sphere. There is a significant amount of support for *Cockroach* and Samantha Bee within the affective public of #CanadaReads, with many audience members tweeting their own emotional responses, both to the text itself and to Bee's defense of it. For example, @taraemurphy tweets, "Emotional accessibility is important to me as a reader & [Bee] brought that" (@taraemurphy 3 Mar 2014). @JoanWyatt states "@iamsambee is mighty for championing the least accessible book with such gusto & respect" (@JoanWyatt 5 March 2014). @MicheleEHarris similarly appreciates that Bee "brought such humanity to her defense of *Cockroach* on #CanadaReads2014. Bravo!" (MicheleAHarris 6 Mar 2014). Bee's arguments for increased compassion for *all* migrant subjects also resonate with many of the *Canada Reads* audience within #CanadaReads. User @wudasie praises Bee for championing the "diversity of immigrant experience" (@wudasie 5 Mar 2014), while @CeeVanArt appreciates that Bee expresses compassion for "\*all\* of [her] fellow citizens" (@CeeVanArt

3 Mar 2014). Like Bee, participant @leonicka takes issue with the panel's tendency to generalize about immigrants: she contests the idea that "immigrants are a uniform block with 1 experience" and that they "can't be individuals" (@leonicka 6 Mar 2014). In another tweet, she expresses frustration with the *Canada Reads* format that situates each text as representative of only one issue, stating, "immigrants can't have mental health issues? Oh. And a book has to be only about one thing? Oh. #CanadaReads2014" (@leonicka 6 Mar 2014). These users echo Bee's assertions that migrant experiences can often be complex, diverse, and intersectional – but that these complexities do not disqualify them from deserving compassion and respect. In fact, a survey of tweets within #CanadaReads suggests that Bee's arguments have been quite effective in influencing the views of some audience members. @NatticusMaximus writes, "I previously wanted *Cockroach* to be eliminated first but @iamsambee made me rethink that. Well played, Bee. #CanadaReads2014 (@NatticusMaximus 3 Mar 2014), while @selinayoung says "@iamsambee before hearing your defense of *Cockroach* I hated the book. You opened my eyes. Thank you. #CanadaReads2014 (@selinayoung 6 Mar 2014). These responses demonstrate a shift in perspective facilitated by Bee's arguments: the users imply that they did not relate to *Cockroach* or see it as a book with the potential to "change our nation" prior to hearing Bee's defense. As such, Bee is praised on Twitter for demonstrating that "literature can [sic] shift views and move people" (@CharltteWolters 6 Mar 2014). Participants celebrate the fact that her arguments influence her fellow panelists even though she was "battling uphill all the way" (@TGHKXL 5 Mar 2014). These audience members observed that, though *Cockroach*



was not initially well-received by other panelists or some readers, Bee's arguments for universal personhood and compassion towards migrants are both effective and influential.

### **Honest Hage: *Cockroach's* Criticisms of Canada**

I have argued thus far that Bee's defense of *Cockroach* is in some ways aligned with Hage's own view that the ideal of the 'good migrant' is reductive and damaging. However, it is important to note that Hage's arguments about Canada throughout *Cockroach* are much more complex and far-reaching than even Bee would have the *Canada Reads* audience believe. The novel works to expose the fallacy that Canada and Canadians are accepting, compassionate, global peacekeepers. Hage does this in three ways: first, using the narrator's therapist Genevieve, he asserts that many Canadians exoticize and patronize migrant subjects. The relationship between Genevieve and the narrator demonstrates the naïveté and wilful ignorance of some Canadian subjects in their understanding of migrants. Second, Hage writes many scenes in which Canadians are decidedly un-'Canadian': they are rude, cold, and racist in their attitudes towards the narrator and do not offer him the warmth or welcome of "le nouveau monde français" promised when he immigrated to Canada (*Cockroach* 27). Finally, Hage comments on Canada's complicity in conflicts in the Middle East, exposing an arms deal between a Montréal businessman and an Iranian politician known to torture dissidents. Hage charges Canadians with racism, wilful ignorance, and profiting from global violence – all realities that are a little too 'real' for the *Canada Reads* panel and therefore go unacknowledged throughout the 2014 debates. The focus in the panel discussions is on the migrant subject, rather than the Canadians with whom he comes into contact; the panel will

critique the protagonist of *Cockroach* but will not reflect on the behaviour and attitudes of the Canadian subjects who are also portrayed in the novel.

Central to Hage's criticism of Canada is his development of the relationship between the narrator and his therapist, Genevieve. Through their therapy sessions, Hage explores the differences in perspective between a privileged, white, French-Canadian subject and the racialized, lower class, migrant narrator. Rather than allowing the mainstream Western reader to feel that they have "made authentic and experiential contact with the marginalized other," *Cockroach* refuses and "deliberately sabotages" the "voice of cross-cultural understanding" through the narrator's interactions with Genevieve (Libin 73), challenging the reader to reconsider their own understanding of the novel's subject. While the scenes between the narrator and Genevieve are relayed from the narrator's point of view, which is certainly unreliable given his mental illness and general bias against Canadians, they nonetheless bring to light problematic attitudes amongst Canadians. Genevieve and the narrator enter their therapy sessions with markedly different goals for their work together: he reveals that some of his basic needs are not being met and seeks her guidance, while she focuses on his past life in Lebanon and exoticizes his experiences of violence and war. Genevieve exclusively asks questions about her patient's past: his childhood, his family relationships, his career as a thief under the mentorship of the criminal Abou-Roro, and the tragic murder of the narrator's sister by her abusive husband. The narrator feels that she stubbornly maintains this focus even when he suggests that the more immediate cause of his distress is the instability of his present situation in Canada. When he mentions "food shortages" and suggests that he is unable to meet even his basic needs, Genevieve ignores him and continues to focus on his

early life, saying “[f]or now I am interested in your past” (*Cockroach* 49). In doing so, she locates the source of his pain and trauma in Lebanon, far from her Canadian home, though in reality his life in Canada is no better than it was in Lebanon: he is living in poverty and continues his criminal activity, while also experiencing racism, isolation, and alienation that exacerbate his mental health issues.

Genevieve’s approach to the narrator here works to maintain the gap of inequality between herself and her patient. She is in a position to *do* something to help the narrator improve his unstable situation; she could use her role and privilege to connect him to community resources that might address his food insecurity and some of his other challenges. Instead, however, she refuses to acknowledge his concerns about the material conditions of his present situation and thereby reinforces the gap between her patient’s standard of living and her own, ensuring that the materialities of their lives remain drastically different. Sharma writes that the construction of the migrant subject is “intimately connected to the establishment and reproductions of unequal materialities, so that those who are categorized as “different” (from Canadians) *do* become truly differentiated in relation to resources and power” (“On Being *Not* Canadian” 431). This construction “gives social meaning, and not a small modicum of plausibility, to notions that actual differences exist” (431). Genevieve does not address the narrator’s indications that he is living in squalor and sometimes even going hungry, nor does she refer him to any additional resources that could address these basic needs and help him elevate his status. Rather, she focuses exclusively on his past in Lebanon, thereby denying him access to the resources and power that might help him change his situation and bring his standard of living closer to her own. This allows Genevieve to

continue “thinking like the state,” a framework in which “we see others and ourselves as either ‘foreigners’ or ‘citizens’” and thereby reinforce difference (Sharma, “Canadian Nationalism” 9). The narrator suggests that he is exploited in this relationship with Genevieve; he feels that she perceives him as the “exotic, dangerous foreigner” (*Cockroach* 199) and is therefore reluctant to concern herself with his quotidian needs or the struggles he faces in Canada that would destroy that illusion.

Genevieve’s insistence on focusing on the narrator’s past is motivated by a desire for progress in his therapy, which, she often reminds him, is being funded by the Canadian government. In one session, she asks him, “Do you want to tell me more about your childhood today?” and then, before he can answer, adds, “If we do not move forward, we do not improve. I might have to recommend that you go back to the institution. Frankly, you do not give me much choice with silence. I have a responsibility towards the taxpayers ... people who actually pay taxes. Some of us do” (60). Here, Genevieve invokes the ‘Canadian taxpayer’ who is funding the narrator’s rehabilitation; this is ostensibly a means of motivating the narrator to participate willingly in therapy, but I would argue that she is really just making him feel guilty about the fact that he is dependent on welfare and government resources. In addition, when she adds “some of us do” to her comment about paying taxes, she reinforces the difference between herself, the upstanding taxpayer, and the narrator: he is not included in her “us.” Genevieve suggests that the narrator should feel indebted to the nation – not only for accepting him as a refugee in the first place, but also for providing him with a meagre existence via his monthly welfare cheque and his weekly therapy sessions. In a later scene, when the narrator shares with Genevieve that he has a job in a restaurant, she

responds that this will allow him to “reintegrate into society,” while he is more concerned with this fact that working in a kitchen means that he “would have food to eat” (76). Genevieve’s mentions of ‘taxpayers’ and ‘society’ are similar to the comments made by panelist Sarah Gadon on *Canada Reads*, to which I referred earlier in this chapter. She compares the narrator of *Cockroach* to her migrant grandparents who, unlike the narrator, “believed in Canada. They believed in paying taxes” (2014 Episode 2). This statement reveals the expectation that migrants will both be grateful for the ways in which the nation supports them and will also eventually contribute to this system of social support themselves by paying taxes to the Canadian government. Gadon’s disdain for the narrator is evident here; he is neither contributing to Canadian society nor does he demonstrate gratitude for the ways in which this society supports him and she therefore feels that *Cockroach* is not a book for Canadians to “rally behind” (2014 Episode 4). However, Gadon does not take into consideration the broader context of the narrator’s migration here. As critic Syrine Hout points out, the narrator does not arrive in Canada with any of the privileges that enable other migrants to succeed. While others have “the necessary finances, education, family connections, chaperoning parents, and/or dual nationality at their disposal,” the narrator has none of these advantages (160). Nonetheless, his “stay in Montréal has been long enough for him to acquire rights but also duties and obligations” – none of which he is capable of or even interested in fulfilling (160). As I argued earlier in this chapter, there are conditions to Canada’s hospitality towards migrants: the ‘good migrant’ must exhibit ‘progress’ in both his therapy and his development towards becoming a hardworking, tax-paying contributor to

Canadian society, regardless of the various structures that work to prevent him from easily accessing either privilege or wealth.

Though the categories of ‘Canadian’ and ‘not-Canadian’ that divide Genevieve and the narrator are rhetorically constructed, the enormous differences in their experiences are all too real. The narrator perceives Genevieve as “naïve and innocent” (50) and he often has to correct her assumptions or clarify his statements to accurately describe the violent environment in which he grew up. For example, he reveals that his father was abusive, and also that his brother-in-law, Tony, violently abused and eventually murdered his sister, for which the narrator himself still feels enormous guilt. However, when Genevieve asks questions about these relationships, she does not seem to understand that this instance of domestic violence takes place in a larger social context of violence – the Lebanese Civil War. She asks, “[w]as there violence in the family?” to which the narrator responds, “[v]iolence was everywhere” (168). Genevieve responds “Right. Well, I’m not interested in the war for now” (168); she completely ignores the broader political and cultural context in spite of the narrator’s clear assertion that the violence within his home was related to the war. From her position of privilege, Genevieve is also critical of the narrator’s criminal background and violent means of survival. When she points out that his career as a thief was accomplished “by means of force,” he argues, “it’s not wrong if there are no options” (98). He then observes, “pacifism is a luxury ... you have to be well off to be a pacifist. Rich or secure like you” (98). Genevieve protests this statement, but the narrator perseveres, pointing out that she cannot possibly understand a context in which violence is sometimes the only option “to get things, accomplish things, defend things” (98). Later, she asks if the narrator “kept a gun”

in the house and, when he responds, “Yes,” she asks if he had a “license for it” (169). The narrator laughs at this question and the other naïve questions that Genevieve asks, constantly having to remind her, “things are different there” (78). For the narrator, questions such as these are the result of her Canadian privilege and relative wealth; he observes that she is “[g]entle, educated, naïve, ... sheltered by glaciers and prairies, thick forests, oceans and dancing seals” (104). In this comment, the narrator parallels the terms “educated” and “naïve” as they apply to Genevieve; he suggests that she is book-smart but ‘street-stupid,’ blissfully unaware of the privilege that has insulated her from many harsh realities.

In Hage’s critique of Canada, Genevieve is not just Genevieve but representative of any “mainstream Canadian reader” who might be tempted to similarly judge the narrator’s actions (Libin 77). Though Hage confronts his audience with the “false and patronizing identities they construct for the reader of diasporic texts as well as for the diasporic subject” (73), Genevieve’s name goes unmentioned through four rounds of *Canada Reads* debates and her problematic relationship with the narrator is completely omitted from all discussions of the novel. Samantha Bee declares that *Cockroach* is intended to put its readers “in an uncomfortable place” (2014 Episode 3), but she and the rest of the panel never discuss the discomfort that might be occasioned by a reader’s realization that they have made the same assumptions about the narrator as Genevieve. I would suggest that these scenes between Genevieve and the narrator have significant potential to elicit reflection amongst readers as to their tendencies to either exoticize or vilify racialized migrant subjects – to *actually* affect a change in attitudes amongst many Canadians that moves beyond mere empathy and examines structural racism and biases against people of colour and those with mental illness. These

reflections might be a little too uncomfortable for the *Canada Reads* panel and its audience, and they are therefore avoided entirely on the program. This is another example of the panel's tendency to focus on the migrant subject rather than the text's portrayals of Canadians; they critique the protagonist but will not look inward at the nation and its citizens, which in turn reinforces a binary in which 'us' denotes 'Canadians' and 'them' denotes racialized, marginalized 'others.'

### **“Go back where you came from”: Canadians as un-‘Canadian’**

I argued in Chapter 1 that Canada is understood – both internationally and self-reflexively – as a nation that is multicultural, diverse, and accepting of difference. The idea that Canadians care about justice and human rights, and act compassionately towards those who struggle, is also central to the ideal of 'Canadianness.' In *Cockroach*, Hage interrogates these the various superficial ways in which his narrator does not satisfy the qualifications of 'Canadianness' as well as the ways in which the narrator is punished by his fellow Canadians for his failure to live up to the ideal. However, Hage also exposes Canadians themselves as un-‘Canadian’ in that their treatment of the narrator is devoid of compassion or kindness. The narrator often behaves in ways that are not criminal or offensive, but simply un-‘Canadian’: he struggles to adapt to the cold Montréal winter and expresses his distaste for hockey, for example. However, the reactions of his fellow Montréalers to these behaviours are often extreme. When the narrator complains about the “chronic snow” of the Canadian winter or “curse[s] the plane that brought [him] to this harsh terrain” (17), he notices that any Canadian who overhears him will “answer ... with tight lips and a cold tone and tell you to go back where you came from if you do not like it here” (193). This is particularly ironic given that it



is stereotypically ‘Canadian’ to complain about cold weather while also being proud of one’s ability to withstand the harsh climate. Canadians are allowed to complain about the cold, but the narrator is not. His struggle to adapt to Canada’s weather is reasonable given the warm, Middle Eastern climate from which he came, but his difficulties are met with contempt rather than compassion. In the narrator’s experience, any rejection of the cold is un-Canadian and the nation’s hospitality is evidently contingent upon his ability to adapt to its climate. If an immigrant such as the narrator complains about this central aspect of Canadian identity, he will be treated rudely by those he encounters - if he is acknowledged at all. More often than not, the narrator finds himself ignored by others and further isolated by the cold weather. He notices that those whom he meets in the street are characterized by “silenced ears, plugged with wool and headbands” and “hiding faces, pursed lips, austere hands” (9). There is no friendliness to be found in the streets of Montréal, “not even a nod in this cold place, not even a timid wave, not a smile from below red, sniffing, blowing noses” (9). The kindness and hospitality for which Canadians are supposedly internationally renowned is not extended to migrants such as the narrator; instead, his hosts are rude and uninterested in offering him any compassion or connection that might help him adapt to life – or winter – in Canada.

The narrator experiences not only discourtesy at the hands of Canadians, but also racism and outright violence. When he expressed his distaste for hockey in a sports bar, the man next to him “shoved [him] down from his bar stool ... [the narrator] fell on the floor and [his] drink spilled” on him (304). The reaction to this statement is clearly excessive, but this violent incident communicates a clear message to the narrator: if he does not adapt to Canada and readily accept its norms, he is unwelcome. However, when he does attempt to adapt and

contribute to Canadian life – by seeking a respectable job – he is faced with flat-out racism. While working as a busboy in a French restaurant, the narrator approaches his boss to ask if he might be promoted to a waiter; the head waiter responds by saying that the narrator is “*un peu trop cuit pour ça*” – a little too ‘well done’ for that (30). This is unabashed racism that directly affects the narrator’s material conditions in Canada: his skin tone apparently disqualifies him from access to an opportunity that would allow him to improve his circumstances and rely less on the state. It is important to recognize here that this incident takes place not just in Canada, but specifically in Québec. As Hout points out, even an immigrant who speaks French well, “as the protagonist does,” is “not allowed to improve [his] status” through gainful employment in Québec because his “skin colour is not sufficiently white” (167). The narrator perceives this kind of treatment as another attempt by the Québécois to protect their white Francophone heritage. He notes that the “Québécois, with their extremely low birth rate, think they can increase their own breed by attracting the Parisians, or at least balance the number of their own kind against the brownies and darkies coming from every old French colony, on the run from dictators and crumbling cities” (*Cockroach* 28). He is painfully aware, then, of the irony of his situation; his ability to speak French – thanks to the French colonization of Lebanon - makes him a more tenable candidate to migrate to Québec, but after his arrival, he is perceived as a threat to the white, Francophone tradition upon which the province was established. As such, “he is treated poorly by the Québécoise with whom he comes into contact, either fetishized for his “middle-eastern exoticism” (Beneventi 75) or discriminated against for failing to adequately exhibit Canadian preferences and behaviours. It is clear, then, that the narrator of *Cockroach*

experiences racism and discrimination at the hands of both individual Canadians and Canadian institutions. He finds the people he meets in Montréal to be uncaring, unkind, racist, and lacking compassion - the very antithesis of those characteristics that supposedly define Canadianness. These behaviours suggest that Canadians do not, in fact, care about the lived experiences of migrant subjects, particularly if they do not conform to the ideal of the 'good migrant.'

For the narrator, these experiences are all the more devastating because they contradict the promise of migration to Canada. He is disappointed to find that the happy images portrayed on posters on the "walls of immigration offices" and the rhetoric of Canada as 'saving' the migrant subject from violence and war are false (27). Sara Ahmed explains in *The Promise of Happiness* that the expectation of happiness "gives us a specific image of the future"; for the narrator, migration to Canada had been constructed as a promise, or as Ahmed would say, "'the where' from which we expect" happiness (29). However, this expectation of happiness in Canada "provides the emotional setting for disappointment" (29): rather than feeling welcome and cared for, he is treated rudely and met with racist attitudes. In these scenes, Hage "refuses to concur with the majority that multiculturalism is inherently good and cheerful" (Marchi 50); instead, his story exposes the "ineradicable traces of violence and racism that still persist in our presumably happy democrac[y]" (50). In a season of *Canada Reads* for which the theme is "A Novel to Change our Nation," one might expect that the issues of institutional and structural racism would be addressed and explored in the spirit of Canadian self-improvement. Instead, these scenes go unacknowledged on *Canada Reads*: the panel never discusses the narrator's experiences of racism and violence, though

these are the very scenes that might have the potential to ‘change our nation’ in that they occasion the discomfort and affective responses that might evoke action. Samantha Bee might advocate for individuals to demonstrate more compassion towards migrant subjects, particularly when they do not conform to the ideal of the ‘good migrant,’ but she ultimately fails to address the structural racism upheld by the nation and its inhabitants.

### **Keeping up Appearances: Ignoring Canada’s Complicity in Global Conflict**

Unlike Samantha Bee, Hage himself is unafraid to level criticism at the nation in *Cockroach*. In addition to portraying Canadians as racist and rude, he also exposes the nation itself as deeply complicit in global violence, clearly contradicting Canada’s international reputation as peacekeeper. In the novel, the narrator learns about Canada’s involvement in an arms deal with Iran through his work at a Persian restaurant. A frequent customer, Mr. Shaheed, conducts a business meeting at the restaurant with a man who, from the narrator’s perspective, is stereotypically Canadian: he is white, well-mannered, interested in art and music, and even appreciative of the cold weather. It is eventually revealed that this man and Mr. Shaheed are making arrangements for a “local weapons manufacturer” to supply “lighter weapons” to Iran (281). Curious about their interactions, the narrator steals the man’s briefcase and delivers it to Majeed, who confirms that it contains “information about weapons. Canada is selling weapon parts to Iran” (281). Majeed identifies Mr. Shaheed’s bodyguard as Canadian and indicates that the “Canadian government assigned him protection. They want to make sure he stays well and that the deal goes through” (281). This is not simply a matter of private business between an arms dealer and the Iranian government, then: the state itself is involved in facilitating the deal. Even the narrator, who

has thus far been extremely critical of Canada and its image, expresses disbelief at Canada's involvement in violence against the Iranian people. He begins to dispute Majeed's claim, saying, "But Canada ..." when Majeed interrupts him and exclaims, "Of course, Canada! ... One of the largest military-industrial complexes in North America is right here in [Montréal]. What do you think? That the West prospers on manufacturing cars, computers, and Ski-Doos?" (281). The narrator is shocked and appalled at the revelation that the nation is profiting from wars in the Middle East, which suggests that he has been influenced by the ubiquitous ideas about Canada's values even when his personal experience contradicts these. To this point, he has assumed that his experiences of discrimination and exoticization at the hands of Canadians are a local phenomenon: they are specific to Montréal and to the context in which he is living. This revelation makes clear, however, that the things he finds deplorable about Montréalers – their tendency to exoticize foreigners and general disregard for brown-skinned people like himself – are true on a much broader national scale. Though the narrator often complains about Canada and Canadians, his shock at Majeed's proclamation suggests that the narrator still harbours some attachment to the fantasy of Canada as a place of peace and prosperity. This reveals the extent to which the "myths of ... nationhood are ubiquitous, and have a certain kind of authority" (Mackey 37); even a subject such as the narrator, who is eager to find fault with the adoptive nation that has so disappointed him, is still influenced by pervasive rhetoric that paints Canada as the peacekeeper. In reality, however, the nation is willing to profit from violence in the Middle East in order to maintain Canadian economic welfare and stability.

Violence in the Middle East has had a significant impact on the lives of several characters in *Cockroach*, and when the narrator learns of the arms deal between Canada and Iran he begins to “understand that Canada cannot simply be equated with peace; the local and the global blur, as Canada benefits economically from Iran, while the latter relies on Canada to sustain its regime” (Lapierre 564). The novel makes it clear that this regime is violent and violates human rights and, in exposing Canada’s complicity in this, asserts that Canada is not the peacekeeping nation it purports to be. Two of the narrator’s friends, Majeed and Shohreh, both emigrated from Iran and have experienced violence and torture at the hands of the regime. When they discover Canada’s complicity in this violence, these characters criticize the nation’s hypocritical participation in the global economy of war. Majeed observes, “we come to these countries for refuge and to find better lives, but it is these countries that made us leave our homes in the first place” (*Cockroach* 223). When the narrator asks him to clarify, he states

They want only dictators. It is easier for them to deal with dictators than to have democracy in the countries we come from. I fought for democracy. I was tortured for democracy, by both the Shah and the mullahs, on two separate occasions. Both regimes are the same ... Do you think if the mullahs go away there will be democracy in my country? No! They will put back somebody else who is a dictator. Maybe not a religious one, but it will be the same. (223-224)

Majeed understands this issue as it affects both his personal life and the international politics between the West and the Middle East. He has had to leave his home, abandon his career aspirations, and live in near-poverty in a foreign country – and Canada is complicit in all of

this though its reputation was bolstered as a result of its willingness to accept him as an immigrant in the first place. This is part of a larger, global strategy to maintain Canada's image as the welcoming refuge for those fleeing violence, though the nation simultaneously facilitates the violence that causes subjects such as Majeed and Shohreh to flee. For Shohreh, it is even more personal: she reveals that Mr. Shaheed was her "jailer in Iran" (246). This man, who is now doing business in Canada and is protected by Canadian bodyguards, previously "raped [Shohreh] many times" and "tortured ... and humiliated" her (246, 274). The Canadian government is therefore associated with a violent man, an oppressive regime, and an ongoing war in Iran. Of course, these qualities are the very opposite of the international image that Canada maintains.

In *Cockroach*, Hage exposes this international image as a fallacy: he calls into question the idea of "Canada as a benign and tolerant country, "a peaceable kingdom," a country without a history of oppression, violence, or discrimination" (Helms 3). Yet again, however, this dismantling of Canada's reputation goes unacknowledged on *Canada Reads*, though the purpose of the season is to examine Canada's shortcomings and "change our nation." The panel does not discuss Canada's complicity in wars in the Middle East or the ways in which these conflicts generate the migrant crises from which Canada benefits by opening its borders to migrants and thereby reinforcing its international image. Stephen Lewis briefly mentions that Shohreh is the victim of "sexual violence" (2014 Episode 4), but the fact that Canada has colluded with her torturer is never mentioned. This is unsurprising, however, for as Dawson points out, Canadians staunchly "preserve an idea of our own civility by holding tight to the idea of an unimplicated Canada [that] ... stands in the wings of

the world's stage, exerting a tempering influence on the more aggressive major players" (69). Even when presented with a text that provides ample opportunity to examine how Canada is implicated in global violence, the panelists turn a blind eye. The discussion about *Cockroach* could be an occasion for the panelists to "resist the narrative erasures that are fundamental to the fantasy of the neutral Canadian" (Dawson 69), but they instead choose to ignore the scenes in which the nation is exposed as decidedly "un-Canadian." This demonstrates a dedication to the "long-term trance" of "white civility" that I discussed in Chapter 1. Though Bee is willing to criticize the attitudes of individual Canadians, she does not venture into territory that might dismantle Canada's central ideal of liberal multiculturalism, as this would deconstruct the idea that race is not a Canadian "problem" (Coleman and Goellnicht 9). As such, she and the rest of the *Canada Reads* panel uphold the idea of "white civility" that "allows us to imagine ourselves as a community" (25) that is united in spite of its differences.

### **The Ethics of Emotion: Complicating Samantha Bee's Defense**

Samantha Bee's neglect of scenes in *Cockroach* that expose racism and discrimination in Canada is not the only problematic aspect of her defense on *Canada Reads*. The ethics of the relationship between a reader and a novel's subject are often ignored on the program and Bee herself frequently fails to examine her positionality in relation to the narrator of *Cockroach*. I write in Chapter 1 that panelists such as Bee speak from the subject position of the presumed white, Anglo-Canadian reader, which centres whiteness and marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and people of colour by default. It is problematic that this is never acknowledged or examined on *Canada Reads*; white subjectivity is treated as neutral



and therefore commenting on it is understood to be unnecessary. In the case of Bee's defense of *Cockroach*, the white reader – Bee herself – openly shares her emotional response to the novel, blurring the lines between compassion, pity, and paternalism without ever addressing it. I indicated earlier that, in some ways, Bee's defense of *Cockroach* aligns with Hage's own perspective in that both argue against generalizations and stereotypes of migrant subjects. However, in that same interview with Richler, Hage also objects to narratives that present migrants as "somebody to pity" (Hage qtd. in Richler 2006). Nussbaum writes of the complexity of pity, saying

Pity does indeed involve empathetic identification as one component ... But even then, in the temporary act of identification, one is always aware of one's own *separateness* from the sufferer – it is for *another*, and not oneself, that one feels; and one is aware both of the bad lot of the sufferer and of the fact that it is, right now, not one's own. (35)

Bee does not seem to recognize this "separateness" between the reader and the narrator; instead, she belabours the importance of empathy, stating, "to just walk a mile in these characters' shoes is such a valuable exercise and so important" (2014 Episode 4). In her attempt to make the text feel relevant to all readers, she says, "in some ways when you talk about all these issues it can really feel like 'us' and 'them' but it isn't 'us' and 'them' – it's all of us" (2014 Episode 4). One must ask, however, whether it is possible for a white, middle-class reader such as herself to truly understand the narrator's experiences and emotions – and it does not appear that Bee ever asks that question. As she defends *Cockroach* against other panelists who suggest that the narrative is not the "typical

immigrant experience,” she cries, “how would you know?!” (2014 Episode 2). The question is, though: how would Bee herself know? She approaches *Cockroach* from her position of privilege as a white, Canadian woman – and a successful comedian with some degree of fame – and her own lived experience is drastically different than that of a mentally ill, Middle Eastern immigrant living in poverty. Considering such differences is part of the ethics of a reading practice: in responding to suffering, “we must take care to take our own difference into account, to understand it” (Woodward 68). As Kathleen Woodward notes, the colonial trauma and experience of diaspora belonging to a migrant subject “cannot be understood fully or assumed by a white middle-class reader” (71). This is the very point that Hage makes through the character of Genevieve in the novel; by exposing the enormous gap between her perspective and that of the narrator, he invalidates “the all-too seductive liberal ideology that the enlightened bourgeoisie are not only capable of empathizing with the marginalized other but are equally capable of curing him of his trauma” (Libin 77). Bee might care deeply about the narrator’s story and want to use her position of privilege to change Canadian attitudes, but several of her comments suggest that she has failed to examine her own positionality in relation to the narrator and the migrant population about which she speaks.

Bee’s failure to declare and examine her whiteness and privilege in relation to the narrator of *Cockroach* reveal that *Canada Reads* unfortunately reproduces many of the racist, paternalistic tendencies of its book club predecessors. In Chapter 1, I asserted that book clubs and reading groups have always been concerned with the ethics of reading, with the Book-of-the-Month Club suggesting that the ideal reader should be “responsibly concerned” about the

“noble savage” in need of the white reader’s compassion (Radway 315). This kind of reading practice is colonial and paternalistic, and while *Canada Reads* has certainly improved upon the tendencies of its book-club predecessors, there are still moments in the 2014 season in which the lines between pity and compassion, paternalism and social justice are blurred. For example, in Episode 1 of the season, Bee asks, “if we go through life not wanting to read about people who are difficult, who aren’t poetic figures of nobility, how can we possibly begin to change things for them?” (2014 Episode 1). This statement surely comes from a place of compassion, but some of the condescending rhetoric of colonization sneaks its way into Bee’s commentary. She reinforces the ‘us and them’ rhetoric that she will later condemn and strips the migrant subject of any agency when she asserts that ‘we’ need to change things ‘for them.’ Though her intentions may be good, Bee’s commentary here demonstrates just how pervasive colonialist thinking can be. She is certainly trying to relate to the novel ethically, advocating for compassion and empathy, but in so doing, her compassion sometimes sounds more like paternalistic pity. In addition, the fact that Bee herself is white and also that the assumed ‘we’ on *Canada Reads* includes other white readers, such a statement echoes the Book-of-the-Month club rhetoric in which white readers are expected to be “responsibly concerned” about racialized others. The irony here is that, as Mark Libin points out, *Cockroach* is very much characterized by its exploration of the “fundamental question of postcolonial ethics,” asking how readers might relate, “ethically and productively, to the diasporic subject, to the new immigrant, to the refugee” (72). He writes that postcolonial literature such as *Cockroach* can act as a “vehicle for enacting cross-cultural ethics and the betterment of the world” (71). This is the very mission of *Canada Reads* and if

Bee were able to speak about Genevieve, address the complex relationship between reader and text, and examine the nuances of pity and compassion, she might generate a discussion with the potential to “change our nation.”

Though I have pointed out these problems with Bee’s defense, I also think it important to assert that her approach here is not problematic because it is affect-driven; rather, she needs to take a more intersectional approach in her affective reading practice. In Chapter 2, I noted Zizi Papacharissi’s assertion that “sentiment-driven” engagement in affective publics as we see on *Canada Reads* must not be understood as “devoid of rational thought or reason” (134). There are long-held gendered associations with the sentiment/cognition binary in which emotion and sentiment are understood as ‘feminine’ and therefore devalued. This also results in a de-valuing of care work and an ethics of caring but, as Marie Carrière argues in her book *Cautiously Hopeful*, affect and care can, in fact, be effective at counteracting the politics of belonging “that underlie the good but divisive intentions of multiculturalism” (59). She writes, “this process most often involve[s] an active, everyday care of others, love, and friendship. It emerges from the depths of the speaker’s intersectional awareness and recognition of others” (58). Fiona Mackay makes a similar assertion, stating that “the introduction of the idea of care into political debates would empower women and minority groups, because inequality would be rendered visible and subject to redress” (124). Both Carrière and Mackay quote Joan Tronto’s important work on care and politics, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, which states: “Care is a way of framing political issues that makes their impact, and concern with human lives, direct and immediate. Within the care framework, political issues can make sense and

connect to each other. Under these conditions, political involvement directly increases” (177). With this in mind, Bee’s approach to defending *Cockroach* does have potential to spark the change that she hopes it might; her assertion that readers should feel compassion towards and care for migrants, no matter how difficult they are to sympathize with, is powerful. But, as Carrière writes, “affect, care, and any form of feminist alliance ... must be intersectional, just as affect, care, and allyship are the marrow of intersectional experience and analysis” (15). Bee’s ethic of care is evident on *Canada Reads* in how she speaks about *Cockroach*; if she could also articulate an “intersectional awareness and recognition of others” (58), her affective reading practice would even more effectively connect her feelings about *Cockroach* to the social and political issues to which the text speaks.

### **In Conclusion**

I have argued here that *Cockroach* is a novel with enormous potential to fulfill the aims of the 2014 season of *Canada Reads*. In the context of “a novel to change our nation,” the text’s many criticisms of Canada provide opportunities to address the discrepancies between the ideal of ‘Candianness’ and the realities of racism and violence for migrants in Canada. Bee’s defense of *Cockroach* is effective in keeping the novel on the *Canada Reads* table as long as possible. She argues that even a flawed, ungrateful migrant subject such as the novel’s narrator deserves compassion and that a wide range of migrant experiences should be acknowledged as valid and valuable as the nation seeks self-improvement. Bee also relies on an ethics of universal personhood to generate empathy for the narrator of *Cockroach* in spite of the fact that he falls far short of the ‘good migrant.’ I would argue that Bee’s defense is a performance of caring: with her emotional responses to *Cockroach* and

passionate arguments against the ‘good migrant’ ideal, she embodies the Canadian citizen who cares deeply about human rights and the treatment of migrants in Canada, so much so that she openly weeps on national television. This performance of caring is powerful, as demonstrated by the fact that *Cockroach* is not voted off until the last episode of the 2014 season, though it was by no means a favourite throughout the debates. Bee’s strategy in defending *Cockroach* appeals to Canadians on a personal level. She implores her audience to offer compassion and understanding to unruly migrant subjects such as the narrator, arguing that their struggles are just as much ‘the’ migrant experience as those who uphold the ideal of the ‘good migrant.’ Bee focuses on personal and emotional responses to the text, asserting that an affective reading practice can indeed move readers towards empathy and subsequent action.

Bee’s defensive strategy relies on individual Canadians to be so moved by *Cockroach* and her defense of it that they begin to change their attitudes and assumptions about migrants. I argued in Chapters 1 and 2 that *Canada Reads* contributes to rhetoric that establishes Canada as a multicultural, humanitarian, liberal state. I cited Kymlicka’s assertion that central to Canada’s reputation are its constant attempts to “transform [its] catalogue of uncivil relationships into relations of liberal-democratic citizenship, both in terms of the vertical relationship between the members of minorities and the state and the horizontal relationships among the members of different groups” (*Multicultural Odysseys* 64). In Bee’s defense of *Cockroach*, as well as the overall panel discussion, the focus is exclusively on those “horizontal relationships among members of different groups” (64), placing the responsibility of “changing our nation” on individual Canadians. Bee argues that changing

attitudes will be enough to eliminate discrimination against racialized migrants. This emphasis on individual hearts and minds certainly proves effective, but as I have argued, this approach is at odds with the thrust of the novel itself. Unlike Bee, Hage directly confronts “the mainstream Canadian reader with the fallacies” of multiculturalism and Canadian national rhetoric (Libin 73). A careful close reading of *Cockroach* reveals a relatively thorough take-down of Canada: Hage holds nothing back in criticizing the nation’s hypocrisies and flaws. Through the narrator’s various interactions with Canadians, he indicates that many are naïve, racist, and unwelcoming towards migrants – the very antithesis of the ideal of ‘Canadianness.’ In the novel, the narrator is patronized by Genevieve, racially discriminated against, and subjected to thoughtless violence for expressing views that are not ‘Canadian’ enough. This treatment undoubtedly contributes to the narrator’s cynicism about Canadians and the lack of gratitude he demonstrates towards the nation, both of which are held against him on *Canada Reads*. Hage also exposes Canada’s international peace-keeping reputation as fraudulent: the narrator discovers the nation’s military-industrial complex and the ways in which Canada facilitates violence that displaces millions of people while simultaneously accepting these very people into its borders and bolstering its reputation as a welcoming safe haven. If thoroughly examined and discussed, these themes and scenes could certainly provoke a reader to reflect not only on their personal attitudes towards migrants, but also on the institutions, processes, and structures that uphold structural racism in Canada. However, the context of *Canada Reads* does not allow space for this kind of critique of the nation and its institutions; after all, the program is supposed to be a nation-building exercise. As such, Bee has been conditioned to avoid speaking the truth about structural racism in

Canada; this may or may not have been the explicit instructions of the *Canada Reads* producers, but it is evident in her defense nonetheless. She does not acknowledge her privilege or address the scenes of racism and violence in *Cockroach*, demonstrating an unwillingness to get political or involve the state in her criticisms. Her performance of caring about migrants successfully fulfills the requirements of the caring Canadian, but her reticence to criticize the nation ultimately works to shore up the idea that simply caring – without addressing any structural barriers and fighting for real change – is enough.



#### Chapter 4 Kim Thúy's *Ru*, *Canada Reads*, and the Ideal of the 'Good Migrant'

"It is a familiar thought that the bureaucratic categories of identity must come up short before the vagaries of actual people's lives. But it is equally important to bear in mind that a politics of identity can be counted on to transform the identities on whose behalf it ostensibly labors.

Between the politics of recognition and the politics of compulsion, there is no bright line"

(Appiah 163)

---

In the 2015 season of *Canada Reads*, panelist Cameron Bailey and the protagonist of Kim Thúy's *Ru* come together – the 'real' embodied immigrant and the fictional refugee subject. Both the novel itself and Bailey's discussions of it on the program speak to experiences of multiculturalism, hybridity, and living up to the ideal of the 'good migrant.' In Chapter 1, I wrote that *Canada Reads* participates in constructing and upholding specific ideas about what it means to be Canadian, specifically that Canada and Canadians are purportedly defined by multiculturalism and acceptance of diversity. In Chapter 2, I argued that the program uses MRE format and social justice themes to model affective reading practices and appeal to a broad Canadian audience. This is all in service of promoting those ideas about Canadianness; the program facilitates what I have called the "performance of caring" in which Canadians demonstrate that they care about equality and practice empathy and compassion in their interactions with and understandings of those who are different. Like Chapter 3, this chapter provides a case study that examines how the social justice theme of "breaking barriers" shapes the 2015 discussion of Kim Thúy's *Ru*, placing the text within a framework in which maintaining Canada's self-image as multicultural and accepting of

migrants is paramount. I argue that Bailey's understanding of the 'good migrant' narrative – the specific parameters within which migrants must live, work, and tell their stories – help him to win the 2015 season. However, I also point out that there are several important aspects of Thúy's story that are ignored and avoided in the service of promoting national unity. As I will demonstrate, the panel discussions about *Ru* are an excellent example of the rhetoric on *Canada Reads* in which panelists assert that individual hearts and minds must change, while structural barriers to migrants and systemic racism go largely unacknowledged.

*Ru* tells the story of An Tinh Nguyen, a young girl who comes to Canada as a refugee from Vietnam in the 1970s and is overwhelmed by the environmental and cultural differences she finds upon her arrival. *Canada Reads* fits *Ru* within its framework of "One Book to Break Barriers," as Bailey invokes the generosity and acceptance of past generations of Canadians during the Vietnam War to inspire these same values in contemporary Canadians contemplating their own role in the global refugee crisis of 2015. Focusing on passages of *Ru* in which the Nguyen family is warmly welcomed into Canada, as well as the family's performance of the 'good migrant' role, *Canada Reads* seeks to generate positive, empathetic responses to the novel in order to shore up the multicultural rhetoric the program promotes. I consider here how the novel's champion, Cameron Bailey, draws strong parallels between his own experience as a Black immigrant and that of An Tinh, the novel's protagonist, who is a refugee to Canada. More specifically, I ask: how does Bailey use his embodied presence as a Black, male immigrant to align himself with *Ru*'s protagonist, a female, Vietnamese refugee? How does he blur the definitions of 'immigrant' and 'refugee' in his effort to "break barriers"? In what ways does Bailey misrepresent the content of *Ru* in

order to bolster Canada's understanding of itself as accepting of migrants and successfully multicultural? How does the political context of Canadian politics in 2015 influence this reception? To this end, I perform a detailed reading of certain passages from *Ru*, alongside a reading of *Canada Reads*' construction of the novel and Bailey's defense of it, to argue that *Canada Reads* co-opts Thúy's narrative in order to prop up a national ideal of multiculturalism and acceptance that the novel itself often contests.

### ***Ru on Canada Reads***

As I have mentioned, Kim Thúy's *Ru* was a selection for *Canada Reads* 2015, chosen by panelist Cameron Bailey, who is the Artistic Director of the Toronto International Film Festival. The 2015 theme was "One Book to Break Barriers" and *Ru* ultimately won this season of *Canada Reads*. On the program, Bailey indicates that he chose *Ru* for its portrayal of Canada from the perspective of a Vietnamese refugee, hoping that the text would influence Canadians to "open [their] doors ... [and] open [their] hearts" to migrants (2015 Episode 3). This season of *Canada Reads* also included *Intolerable: A Memoir of Extremes* by Kamal Al-Solaylee, defended by actress Kristin Kreuk; *And The Birds Rained Down* by Jocelyne Saucier, defended by singer-songwriter Martha Wainwright; *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* by Raziel Reid, defended by television personality Elaine Lui; and *The Inconvenient Indian* by Thomas King, defended by human rights activist Craig Kielburger. The season was hosted by Wab Kinew and took place March 16-19, 2015. Two of the texts in this season were translations: both *Ru* and *And The Birds Rained Down* were originally written in French and translated into English, a fact that was acknowledged during the *Canada Reads* debates in Episode 1, though panelists and hosts discussed it only briefly.

Even before its publication in English, *Ru* won the 2010 Governor General's Award for French language fiction, and the original French edition was also selected for *Le Combat des Livres* 2014, the French equivalent of *Canada Reads*.<sup>4</sup> *Ru* was translated into English in 2012 by translator Sheila Fischman; this translation was nominated for a Governor General's award for French to English Translation in that year. In addition to winning *Canada Reads*, the English edition of *Ru* was nominated for the Scotiabank Giller Prize in 2012 and the 2013 Amazon.ca First Novel Award. Between its French publication in 2009 and its *Canada Reads* win in 2015, both the French and English editions of *Ru* received praise for the poetic nature of their prose and the subtlety of Thúy's observations about cultural difference and historical events. The positive reception of Fischman's English translation of *Ru* further garnered recognition for Thúy across Canada, signalling the acceptance of Thúy and *Ru* into the English-Canadian Literary establishment.

I argue that *Ru* is successful, both on *Canada Reads* and within the larger Canadian literary establishment, because of its predominantly positive depiction of Canada. I asserted in Chapter 1 that *Canada Reads* is a nation-building project in which the social justice themes demand that its audience examine their identity as a nation that cares about diversity and human rights. In many ways, *Ru* portrays a Canada that lives up to the ideal: An Tinh is eagerly welcomed into the nation, receives a good education, and embarks upon a successful career as a result. Though the novel is certainly also critical at times of Canada and Canadians, Bailey idealizes the Canada of the 1970's in his defense of *Ru*, focusing on the

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ru* was eliminated on Day 3 of *Le Combat des Livres* in 2014; the two finalists for this season were a translation of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and *La belle bête* by Marie-Claire Blais, a much-beloved Québécoise author.

positive scenes in the text in which Canadians are portrayed as welcoming tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees. He establishes this as an ideal to which contemporary Canadians should aspire in their attitudes towards the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015. Bailey also establishes himself as the embodied migrant subject on *Canada Reads*, closely aligning himself with An Tinh and sharing his own experiences, both positive and negative, of migrating to Canada and adapting to Canadian life and culture. Bailey's defense of *Ru* is successful because it represents the text in a manner that reaffirms the vision that many Canadians have of themselves - as a nation that is diverse, accepting, and eager to improve – and because Bailey himself provides an embodied example of the 'good migrant' who has been welcomed and successfully integrated into Canadian culture.

#### **“a place of delights, an idyllic land”: Canada's Warm Embrace**

In *Ru*, the 'good migrant' narrative begins with An Tinh's arrival in Canada; the narrator depicts a warm Canadian welcome and immediately expresses gratitude for the services, education, and acceptance provided by the nation. When the Nguyen family arrives in Granby, Québec, they are met by friendly families who provide them with food, clothing, and kindness, all necessary comforts in an otherwise foreign and overwhelming situation. An Tinh recalls her feelings of uncertainty upon arriving in Canada and the individuals who helped her in this transition. She reveals that her first experience of Canada left her feeling “naked” in a snowy “landscape so white, so virginal” that it dazzled her (Thúy 8). All of her senses were overwhelmed in this new environment; she was “surprised by all the unfamiliar sounds” and found herself “unable to talk or listen” (9). This language – An Tinh's “naked” arrival in Canada where she finds herself “unable to talk or listen” – positions this moment as

a rebirth for An Tinh. She is like a baby, completely vulnerable and unable to understand her surroundings or advocate for herself. The francophone Québécois families who welcome the Nguyens gently interpret these unknown sights and sounds for An Tinh and her family. She recalls the “shapely” Marie-France leading the refugees “like a mother duck” (9), and a schoolteacher named Jeanne, whom she calls a “good fairy with a T-shirt and pink tights and a flower in her hair” (57). These early influences in An Tinh’s experience of Canada renewed her sense of agency and her ability to “experience the present, in the present” (8). The sense of security provided by Marie-France allowed the refugee children to “be children again,” and her melodious voice was “more than enough” to comfort An Tinh in this new environment (9). Similarly, Jeanne nurtured her “nine Vietnamese students at the Sainte-Famille elementary school” with attention, kindness, and music, eventually teaching the heretofore-silent An Tinh “how to free [her] voice from the folds of [her] body so it could reach [her] lips” (57). These women, along with many other residents of Granby, demonstrated “generosity” towards the Nguyen family as they adapted to life in Canada (21). For those Canadians who accept the identity the nation has constructed for itself – as one that eagerly accepts newcomers and improves their lives upon arrival – this depiction of a generous, accepting Canada is a welcome affirmation of that identity. And indeed, this shoring-up of Canada’s idealistic vision of itself and its role in the global refugee crisis is an important aspect of the ‘good migrant’ narrative, as An Tinh reflects to her Canadian readers the vision of themselves that they most want to see, distorted though it may be.

The criteria for acceptance in Canada are reflected in many migrant narratives, as several scholars have pointed out. Critic Vinh Nguyen asserts in his article “Refugee

Gratitude: Narrating Success and Intersubjectivity in Kim Thúy's *Ru*" that the novel's positive depiction of Canada's reception of refugees and An Tinh's expressions of gratitude for this reception affix the figure of "the refugee, like a piece of a puzzle, into the hegemonic mosaic of Canadian multiculturalism" (223). The text articulates "a belief in the benevolence and generosity of the Canadian nation for providing the opportunities and the conditions for the possibility of life and 'success'" (Nguyen 221). Jenny Heijun Wills similarly notes that *Ru* is "celebratory" specifically of "Québec as the land that welcomed An Tinh's family after their arduous journey" (77). In nicely aligning with Canadian ideals of multiculturalism, the text also reinforces *Canada Reads*' promotion of these same ideals. Postcolonial scholar Maude Lapierre paraphrases Schaeffer and Smith to argue that refugee narratives "have the power to legitimize state intervention" by generating empathy which "confirms that, while refugees may be victims, the western audience constitutes an empowered agent" for the humanitarian amelioration of suffering (561, 562). This is central to *Ru*'s success on *Canada Reads*: such descriptions of Canadians allow them to see themselves as "empowered agent[s]" in easing the suffering of those in need through the acceptance and welcoming of immigrants and refugees such as the Nguyen family (562). In other words, the refugee narrative generates good feelings amongst its Canadian audience because it allows them to feel as if they are *doing something* to alleviate suffering in the world, while also confirming the nation's multicultural international reputation. If multiculturalism is indeed perceived by many Canadians as the "most fundamental and proudly revered feature of Canadian 'identity'" then Canadians must perform this identity in a manner that demonstrates warmth

and inclusivity towards the migrant subject (Coleman 7).<sup>5</sup> *Ru* reflects this very image to the Canadians reading it and discussing it on *Canada Reads*. The book is therefore celebrated, on *Canada Reads* and more widely, because it extols the “goodness of liberal nationalism and multiculturalism” (Nguyen 221). The positive public reception and inclusion of the text on *Canada Reads* indicate that many Canadians are eager to view themselves and their nation as *Ru* presents them: warm, multicultural, and accepting of difference.

The Québécois families who receive An Tinh and her family adequately perform the role of welcoming, inclusive, and nurturing Canadians, upholding the ideal to which the nation strives. Important to the context of this Canadian welcome, however, is the fact that it takes place in Québec, a province in which the accommodation of diversity has historically been considered alongside a concern for the future of the Francophone Québec culture. For the Nguyens, this means that their welcome will be contingent on their embrace of French language and culture. In Chapter 1, I noted the centrality of multiculturalism in the formation of Canadian identity and the ways in which this has influenced Canadian literary production. However, as Siemerling notes, in Québec, “the evolution of cultural pluralism and of ethnicity followed a different logic” (120). While the rest of the nation was embracing Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s policies of multiculturalism, Québec rejected the concept in favour of interculturalism, defined by Québécois public scholar and public intellectual Gérard Bouchard as

---

<sup>5</sup> Coleman writes that this perception of multiculturalism is prevalent in “recent public opinion polls”; in his discussion of white civility, he notes that as a result of this common perception, it “comes as something of a shock, then, to White English Canadians” that the concept of multiculturalism has “come under fire from the very people it supposedly protects and includes in the civil sphere” (7).



a form of integrative pluralism ... based on a search for balance that attempts to find a middle ground between assimilation and segmentation and that, for this purpose, emphasizes integration, interactions, and promotion of a shared culture with respect for rights and diversity. (32)

Though not always termed ‘interculturalism’ and not officially adopted by the Québec government, the concept of interculturalism and the values it articulates have been debated and promoted in Québec since the 1960s and 70s. Such values were formalized in the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, released in 2008. The Commission explored the ideas of reasonable accommodation and interculturalism in the province and made recommendations for the accommodation of diversity; it was well-received amongst Québécois. Bouchard notes that, in the Commission, “a strong consensus emerged on three points: (a) the rejection of Canadian multiculturalism, (b) the rejection of assimilation, and (c) the importance of integration on the basis of the fundamental values of Québec society” (4). He writes that there is “no general solution” for managing diversity “that can be transferred from one society to another” (4); since the history and values of Québec differ from those of the rest of Canada, the province finds it necessary to establish for itself a unique solution to managing diversity, one in which Québécois culture and the French language will not be jeopardized. The Francophone majority within Québec is “a minority nation within Canada and a cultural minority on the continent” and therefore “Québec francophones have never been able to free themselves from legitimate concerns about their future whether with regard to their language, their fundamental values, their traditions, or their institutions” (Bouchard 11). Therefore, one of the central principles of interculturalism in Québec is “the promotion of French as the

main language of civic life and shared culture” (32); as official immigration documents in Québec assert, “to live in Québec is to live in French” (Ministère de l’Immigration et des Communautés Culturelles 2). For the Nguyen family in *Ru*, this linguistic protectionism is central to their acceptance in Granby; coming from Vietnam, a former French colony, they are already French-speaking and therefore will “not contribute to the potential decline of the French language” (Wills 78). An Tinh writes that her parents “already spoke French” (10) and encouraged her to “learn French as fast as possible” upon arriving in Granby (19), suggesting an understanding that their acceptance in Québec is contingent upon their ability to speak French. It is thanks in part to their ability and willingness to integrate easily into Québécois culture, then, that the Nguyens are so well-received in Granby.

### **Upholding the Canadian Ideal: Contemporary Context in Discussions of *Ru***

On *Canada Reads*, Bailey and some of the other panelists uphold the welcome bestowed upon An Tinh and her fellow Vietnamese refugees as a fundamentally Canadian ideal to which contemporary Canadians must continue to aspire. Bailey emphasizes that “Canada opened its arms” to An Tinh and establishes this as the exemplary Canadian response to a refugee crisis (2015 Episode 2). At the time of the competition and Bailey’s comments, the war in Syria and the debate around Canada’s continued acceptance of Syrian refugees were prevalent in the news at the time of the 2015 competition. Shortly after the competition, media attention in Canada increased significantly when a photo of the body of three-year old Alan Kurdi, who washed up on a beach in early September of 2015, made international headlines and brought enormous media attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. It was later revealed that Kurdi’s family was trying to reach Canada; Alan’s aunt, Tima Kurdi,

had applied to bring her brother Mohammed and his family to join her in Vancouver. This application, which was rejected by the Canadian government, was “intended to help pave the way” for her other brother Abdullah, Alan’s father (Chappell). When Tima’s application was rejected, Abdullah and his family “embarked on a desperate trip across the Mediterranean” (Chappell); their boat capsized and only Abdullah survived. This incident and the international media coverage it received brought about many heated discussions about immigration and the refugee crisis in the 2015 Canadian election.

All of this takes place shortly after Canada Reads 2015 (which filmed in March 2015), wherein Cameron Bailey makes a direct connection between the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s and the stance that Canada *should* take towards Syrian refugees in 2015. These discussions quickly become political as panelists not only connect *Ru* to a contemporary refugee crisis, but also call out federal immigration policies and even specific politicians for their positions on refugees and immigration. For example, Bailey states, “In the last few years, 200,000 people have been killed in the war in Syria. There are millions of refugees fleeing that country. A lot of them want to come here ... That’s Vietnam in the 1970’s. Why are we not seeing that as urgent right now?” (2015 Episode 4). Another panelist, Craig Kielburger, challenges federal policies towards refugees, stating that he is compelled to do so as a “self-respecting activist” (2015 Episode 4). He compares the fact that “50,000 [Vietnamese refugees] were welcomed in two years” during the 1970’s to the reality that Canada only “welcomed 1,300” Syrian refugees last year” (2015 Episode 3). Kielburger’s number here is accurate according to a 2015 article by CBC news with data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Schwartz.) He argues that this indicates a

prejudice against particular refugees and a need to “rewrite the story of Canada and our willingness to open our doors ... to more immigrants” (2015 Episode 3). The arguments of Bailey and Kielburger are interesting here in that they challenge the idea that Canadians are currently open-minded and welcoming towards migrants; their comments suggest that this is the *true* Canadian identity, but that contemporary Canadians have strayed from this ideal and must return to it in order to fulfill their Canadian commitments.

Cameron Bailey’s connections to contemporary politics become increasingly pointed as the program progresses, particularly when he incorporates a quotation from Conservative Member of Parliament Larry Miller into his defense in Episode 4. In March of 2015, Miller was quoted on a radio show saying, “I’m so tired of people trying to come here because they know it’s a good country and then wanting to change things” (qtd. in 2015 Episode 4). It just so happens that this interview with Miller took place the very week of *Canada Reads 2015*; Bailey repeats this quotation on the final episode of the season to indicate that the novel he is championing is timely and relevant in the current Canadian political context. His response to Miller is that “migrants *do* change things. The French and the English sure did” (2015 Episode 4). This rejoinder asserts that members of the white majority such as Larry Miller ought to be more aware of their own history of migration to Canada - and the colonial violence and devastation that white settler populations brought with them. By quoting a Member of Parliament, Bailey implies that representatives of the Canadian people are acting in opposition to the supposedly Canadian values of acceptance that they are expected to uphold. He asserts that “Canada’s future is as a migrant nation” and argues that Canadians who have never migrated themselves must learn to “open [their] doors to [new] migrants”

and “open [their] hearts to the people who are already here who have come from somewhere else” (2015 Episode 4). Bailey argues, “there are people who are in very urgent circumstances right now” (2015 Episode 3), indicating that the Syrian refugee crisis is not a fictionalized story like *Ru*, nor is it a matter of policy to be debated by xenophobic politicians such as Miller. Rather, there are lives at stake in this contemporary refugee crisis; Bailey indicates that Canadian attitudes towards this issue can be influenced for the better by narratives like *Ru* that elicit compassion for these subjects.

It is important to note here that, though Larry Miller is an MP and therefore part of the Canadian political system, he is understood on *Canada Reads* as an individual with problematic beliefs, rather than a representative of a problematic system. Bailey does not refer at all to immigration policies or the government’s stance on migration in 2015, but instead focuses on the fact that Miller’s conservatism and xenophobic attitude are common amongst other individual Canadians. He states: “Larry Miller said something important in that otherwise horrific quote: he said ‘I’m so tired.’ It’s fatigue, compassion fatigue. A lot of Canadians have grown tired of being nice to newcomers – that’s the barrier we’re trying to break” (2015 Episode 4). He argues that texts such as *Ru* will help break this “barrier,” reminding readers of “why migrants matter” and “invit[ing] compassion” in their attitudes towards newcomers to Canada (2015 Episode 4). Kielburger similarly identifies the need for individual Canadians to contribute to assistance for refugees coming to Canada. He states, “I don’t think many Canadians realize that when you look at the urgent humanitarian crisis going on with Syria, actually the majority of immigrants in this country - 60% - were welcomed by individuals” (2015 Episode 4). He specifies that these immigrants are “not-

government-sponsored,” but supported by Canadian individuals and families (2015 Episode 4). While Kielburger acknowledges here the generosity of these families who have sponsored immigrants, he also implies that more Canadian families need to be willing to do the same. Again, rather than examining or criticizing the fact that less than half of migrants to Canada are government-sponsored or suggesting that the state should be more open, Kielburger places the burden of welcoming migrants squarely on the shoulders of individual Canadians. Though he frames a lack of compassion as “a national crisis we need to address,” the burden of resolving this crisis does not fall on the nation. Rather, he suggests that it is individual Canadians who must determine “what kind of country we want to be” (2015 Episode 4) in their attitudes towards refugees and immigrants.

### **Imposing a Narrative on a Narrative: Expectations of Authenticity in *Ru***

Though many panelists respond well to *Ru*'s portrayal of Canada as welcoming and accepting, the text is also often hotly debated in the *Canada Reads* discussions because some panelists perceive An Tinh's experience of refugeeism as “too easy” (2015 Episode 3). The *Canada Reads* panel holds *Ru* up to a standard of authenticity, articulating various expectations of the migrant narrative. Scholar Graham Huggan observes similar expectations in his writing on ethnic autobiographies, stating that “ethnic authenticities” have “undeniably become valuable *commodities*” in successfully marketing “the work of writers who have come from ... ethnic backgrounds” (155). On *Canada Reads*, it is not so much Kim Thúy's identity as an ‘ethnic’ Canadian writer that comes into question, but rather the authenticity of her identity as a migrant. Craig Kielburger in particular struggles to see *Ru* as an authentic representation of the migrant narrative: he states that the barriers facing Thúy's protagonist

An Tinh simply “melted away” without the characteristic struggles and hardships that he expects of a migrant story (2015 Episode 1). Early in the competition, Kielburger asserts that *Ru* is “the least barrier-breaking” of the novels on the table, comparing it to other books “that have shared similar stories” (2015 Episode 1). He states, “I can see [An Tinh] being displaced, but I’m not sure of the barriers being broken. Partially because it just came so easily for her when she arrived in Canada, and perhaps that *is* part of the immigrant experience, absolutely, I just struggle with the reality that people gave English lessons and gave food” (2015 Episode 1). I would argue that this statement reveals Kielburger’s desire for what Huggan calls the “autobiographical trope of triumph-over-adversity” (161). This desire is unsurprising given the self-satisfaction that readers like Kielburger derive from this trope; in order for the Canadian reader to pat himself on the back for “saving” the migrant or refugee, the Third-World horrors from which the migrant comes must be drastic and dramatic. Because much of the focus in *Ru* is on the generosity the Nguyen family experienced upon arriving in Canada, Kielburger does not feel that they experienced enough adversity to satisfy his requirements for an authentic migrant narrative. This assertion is particularly troubling because, though *Ru* illustrates many instances of Canadian generosity, it also includes several incidents of trauma and racism that Kielburger, like the rest of the panel, completely ignores. For example, An Tinh’s fears in “the belly of the boat” that transports her from Vietnam to Malaysia – from “pirates” to “poisoning by biscuits soaked in motor oil” (3) - are certainly traumatic for her, and the detail with which she recalls this journey as an adult suggests that this trauma has had a permanent impact on her. As I will later address in more detail, she also shares several instances of racial discrimination

experienced in Canada, which Kielburger also ignores. Though, at one point, Kielburger himself admits that he may not be “the person to judge” the relevance or accuracy of an immigrant text such as *Ru* (2015 Episode 2), he nonetheless imposes judgment on the text, deeming its portrayal of trauma and struggle inauthentic.

Kielburger’s interpretation of *Ru* becomes even more complicated in Episode 3, as he changes his arguments about the novel entirely. He indicates that he “spent a lot of time thinking about [Cameron Bailey’s] argument” and realizes that he “brought a prejudice into reading the book” (2015 Episode 3). He admits that he “thought the immigrant story had to be difficult to be the immigrant story, and you had to see someone struggle” (2015 Episode 3). Kielburger shares his realization that a singular image of “the immigrant experience” can be extremely detrimental to Canadian attitudes about “the story of an immigrant” (2015 Episode 3). He indicates that “the book itself breaks a barrier in [his] life” (2015 Episode 3) and helped him to realize that his privilege prevented him from accepting and understanding that there are many possible immigrant narratives, and that the more subtle tone of *Ru* does not prevent it from being a valid and important example of the genre. Bailey and Kielburger then become clear allies in the competition, which is undoubtedly a boon to Bailey’s defense of *Ru*. At this point in the competition, Kielburger’s own selection, *The Inconvenient Indian*, has already been voted off and he therefore devotes his energy to supporting Bailey. Kielburger fiercely argues that *Ru* has the potential to “move Canadians” towards an increasing “sense of social justice” in their opinions of immigrants and refugees (2015 Episode 4). Kielburger in particular positions himself as somewhat of an expert on this topic due to his position as a social entrepreneur and his international experience with his charity,



Free the Children. By citing statistics and asserting his expertise as an activist, Kielburger lends some credence to Bailey's argument that the compassion evoked by *Ru* must not exist in a vacuum, but instead translate into more open-minded attitudes – and more open borders – for Syrian refugees in 2015. In addition, Bailey uses Kielburger's reflections on his bias to introduce a broader conversation about privilege, which becomes central to his defense of the novel. He states, "immigrants don't get to ... batter down any barriers" because writers such as Thúy need to simply write "the best, most beautiful book that [they] can" in order to be published and have their voices and stories heard at all (2015 Episode 3). In this instance, Bailey asserts that the subtle tone of *Ru* is a result of Thúy's history as an immigrant in Canada, in which she has had to conform to the role of the 'good migrant' and avoid harsh criticisms of the country that took her in. He challenges the other panelists' expectations of what a migrant narrative should be by suggesting that their assumptions about the tone of a text is influenced by their own privilege, reminding them that racialized subjects such as himself and Thúy do not benefit from the privilege that will automatically allow their voices and perspectives to be heard. Kielburger's own realization of this is an important moment on *Canada Reads* because it demonstrates the very purpose of the program: the process of reading, re-reading, and discussing a text shifted his perception, not only of *Ru* but also of migrant narratives more broadly.

The other three panelists on *Canada Reads* 2015 – Kristin Kreuk, Martha Wainwright, and Lainey Lui – have their own expectations of the 'immigrant narrative.' All three contest the novel's ability to break barriers not because of the story itself, but because of its fragmented structure, non-linear narrative, and poetic language. They object to the

“coldness” in *Ru*’s portrayal of trauma (2015 Episode 3), sparking debates about expectations of texts that communicate trauma. Early in the debates, host Wab Kinew takes a moment to explain the structure of the novel, stating “this book uses ... a very unconventional style of flipping between time and space, and they’re very short chapters, almost like little poems or snapshots from this journey from Vietnam to Québec” (2015 Episode 1). Kristin Kreuk indicates that this structure is challenging for her because it is “harder to connect deeply” with An Tinh’s character and articulates that she would prefer a “straight telling of a story” to this fragmented structure (2015 Episode 3). Lainey Lui similarly asserts that a reader might “miss what [the novel is] actually trying to say” as a result of its non-linearity (2015 Episode 3). In Episode 3, Martha Wainwright asserts that she does not feel that the narrator makes herself “vulnerable” enough in discussing her traumatic past, implying that An Tinh might be holding back details or emotions about her experiences (2015 Episode 3). Kreuk echoes this sentiment, saying that she found it hard to “get into” the novel when she started reading, and Lui similarly states that she does not make the “connection” between the narrator of *Ru* and the issue of immigration to which the book supposedly speaks (2015 Episode 3). These objections to the novel reveal a set of expectations in which the immigrant narrative must communicate trauma in an evocative and detailed manner.

I would suggest that these criticisms are an instance in which the fact that the panelists are not experts in literary analysis is obvious, as fragmented, non-linear formats are actually common amongst trauma narratives. Indeed, trauma theory often identifies “a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma” (Craps 2). Bailey makes this argument, connecting the fragmentation and

disjunction in *Ru* to memory and stating that Thúy's writing is "a very accurate reflection of how we all remember our own lives" (2015 Episode 4). He indicates that An Tinh's "horrific experiences" of migration and transition as a refugee are "mingled together because one thing leads to another" (2015 Episode 3). He suggests that the fragmented, poetic nature of *Ru* is in fact a strength of the text in that it accurately represents memory, particularly for subjects whose memories span continents and shifting ideas of identity. That poetic language needs to be defended as an artistic representation of trauma reveals the middlebrow nature of *Canada Reads*: "professional readers" would likely accept the fragmented form and poetic language of *Ru* as common amongst trauma narratives. Though he might not call himself a "professional reader," Cameron Bailey's undergraduate degree from the University of Western Ontario with a major in English Literature means that he would likely be more familiar with literary analysis than others. As such, the form of *Ru* is familiar thanks to his educational background, as well as the fact that it accurately represents his own experiences with fragmented memory as a migrant. Lui, Wainwright, and Kreuk, on the other hand, are less receptive and argue that *Ru*'s form makes the book inaccessible to some readers when the very purpose of *Canada Reads* is to appeal to a broad and diverse audience in order to "break barriers."

Bailey also defends the general lack of violent, bloody detail in *Ru*, countering the arguments of other panelists that An Tinh's experience of refugeeism was "too easy" and their implications that more graphic detail might have better facilitated connection with An Tinh's character. He compares the text to Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," a "beautiful song about lynching," and argues that *Ru* is a similar artistic attempt to create "beauty out of ...

horror” (2015 Episode 3). He asserts that Thúy “could’ve written just about [her trauma], she could have just put our heads into that muck, but instead she’s trying to find a story that has more hope, more beauty, more art to it” (2015 Episode 3). He indicates that the delicate writing style and the “detail in the book that is very beautifully wrought” allow Thúy to transform “her own experience into art in a really powerful way” (2015 Episode 2, Episode 4). Bailey suggests here that an absence of violence or gruesome details is not a sign that An Tinh’s experience was not traumatic, but rather that she is working to find hope and beauty in that trauma. This again demonstrates that *Ru* confounds some common expectations of an immigrant narrative: to defend his text, Bailey must push back against these expectations, challenging the *Canada Reads* audience to examine their biases and understand *Ru* as barrier-breaking even though it portrays traumatic experience through subtle story-telling and poetic language.

### **Drawing Parallels: Bailey’s Strategy on *Canada Reads***

Cameron Bailey’s belief that *Ru* can influence the attitudes of white Canadians towards racialized immigrants and refugees – while also resonating deeply with other migrants – is the crux of his strategy on *Canada Reads*. He asserts that *Ru* is a “book to break barriers” because, as a racialized migrant himself, he strongly identifies with An Tinh’s story. In Bailey’s defense of *Ru*, he argues that the book will “break barriers” because it will resonate with “anyone who’s migrated” – and he frequently reiterates that this is a significant portion of Canada’s diverse population (2015 Episode 2). In the first episode of the 2015 season, he states “there’s a whole new generation of migrants that’s changing the face of Canada ... [and] I’m one of those migrants” (2015 Episode 1). As the program progresses, he

also notes that he came to Canada “around the same time” as An Tinh and that reading the novel “brings ... back” his own experience of migration (2015 Episode 2). Bailey’s representation of *Ru* on *Canada Reads* is complex precisely because he simultaneously confirms and complicates the program’s metanarrative of inclusivity. His participation in the show, as a Black man and immigrant to Canada, shores up the idea that *Canada Reads* is inclusive in its selection of judges; his choice of text, written by a female Vietnamese refugee, reasserts the efforts of *Canada Reads* to be inclusive in the texts it selects as representative of Canadian literature. However, Bailey himself and his chosen novel are both sometimes critical of the Canadian institutions and individuals who have received them: Bailey sometimes questions and complicates Canada’s supposed inclusivity in his contributions to the dialogue on the program, and a close reading of several passages in *Ru* reveals that An Tinh has experienced racism and alienation at the hands of Canadians and Canadian institutions. In the following sections, I examine the points of Bailey’s identification with An Tinh and address his embodiment of the immigrant subject, the ways in which he elides differences between An Tinh’s experience and his own, and the strategies that appeal to the *Canada Reads* audience as Bailey champions *Ru* as a book to break barriers. Bailey constructs parallels for the *Canada Reads* audience between his own experiences and those of An Tinh based on two characteristics: the ‘good migrant’ narrative and the concept of hybridity that An Tinh explores throughout the text.

### **The Nguyen Family as ‘Good Migrants’**

The stories that An Tinh relates of her family’s early life in Canada fit within the ‘good migrant’ narrative, not only in their arrival but also in that the family demonstrates the

hard work and values that are expected of ‘good’ Canadian migrants. As Vinh Nguyen notes, the ‘good’ migrant is “constructed as a model minority, who is perceived as hardworking and resourceful and, through both innate and cultural qualities, is able to achieve educational, economic, and social success with no or very little assistance from the state” (221). In *Ru*, An Tinh reveals the many ways in which her family sacrifices pride to achieve ‘good migrant’ status. In Vietnam, they belonged to the upper class and An Tinh’s mother, the eldest daughter of a Vietnamese prefect, managed the family home in addition to spending her afternoons “doing her hair, applying her makeup, getting dressed to accompany [An Tinh’s] father to social events” (Thúy 13). In Canada, however, she goes to work “for the first time at the age of thirty-four, first as a cleaning lady, then in jobs at plants, factories, restaurants” (13). Meanwhile, her husband takes a similar demotion in status, going from “sitting in a limo en route to a strategic meeting” with a Vietnamese minister to “holding a mop on the steps of a hotel” (64). Both parents perform unskilled labour in Canada, demonstrating the hard work, humility, and resourcefulness required of them by the state as ‘good migrants.’ They have also adequately prepared their children for this life: An Tinh’s mother seemed to have some sense that their early life of privilege in Vietnam would not last, for though she dreamed “all the dreams she wanted” for her children, she also wisely prepared them for “the collapse” of this lifestyle by requiring them to work “on [their] knees like the servants” (13). An Tinh reflects that her mother “was right to do so, because very soon [they] no longer had a floor beneath [their] feet” (13). Her parents simultaneously prepared their children for two drastically different versions of the future: one in which they would be “musicians, scientists, politicians, athletes, artists, polyglots” in their comfortable life in Vietnam (13), and another

in which their privileged upbringing would crumble around them. Unfortunately, this latter version becomes a reality: when the Nguyen family was forced to leave behind their wealth and privilege for safety in Canada, the “History of Vietnam, written with a capital H, thwarted [her] mother’s plans ... flung the accents on [their] names across the Gulf of Siam ... stripped [their] names of their meaning” (2). An Tinh identifies this moment of exile as a loss of legacy, family history, and identity, but even amidst this enormous loss, her parents maintain hope for a “new history” (3) that will commence upon arriving in Canada and dedicate themselves to making this hope a reality. This “new history” will not be possible for the family, however, unless they demonstrate the hard work and gratitude required of the ‘good migrant.’

An Tinh’s parents provide her with various tools with which to navigate life in Canada, as noted by scholars such as Wills and Nguyen. After her arrival, she finds herself so unsure of what the future might hold, so baffled by this utterly unknown context, that she is unable to dream for herself: “I was . . . unable to talk or to listen, even though I was neither deaf nor mute. I now had no points of reference, no tools to allow me to dream, to project myself into the future, to be able to experience the present, in the present” (Thúy 8). This is what Vinh Nguyen identifies as a “condition of suspended self” in which “the ‘empty’ refugee comes into contact with the newness of Canada [upon] arrival” (57). He asserts that, for the refugee subject, the “expression of gratitude for a second chance at life and the narration of how that chance gets utilized need to be understood against a backdrop of an affective and material experience of absence and impossibility” (56-7). I would suggest, then, that the work An Tinh’s parents do to become ‘good refugees’ is to rectify this emptiness in

their children: everything they do after arriving in Canada is to re-equip An Tinh and her brothers with the tools they will need to find success in Canada. An Tinh states that, though her parents were “[u]nable to look ahead of themselves, they looked ahead of us, for us, their children” (10), and therefore “didn’t see the blackboards they scrubbed, the imperial rolls they delivered. They saw only what lay ahead. And so to make progress my brothers and I followed where their eyes led” (11). She realizes that, while her mother “certainly had dreams” for her, she also realized the importance of providing An Tinh with “tools so that [she] could put down roots, so that [she] could dream” for herself (20). Writing from the perspective of an adult, An Tinh reflects on these childhood experiences and conveys respect and admiration for the decisions her parents made during and after their migration. Many of these decisions did not make An Tinh’s childhood easier, such as her mother’s insistence that she learn English “for free” in a “military garrison of anglophone cadets” (19). An Tinh reveals that “it wasn’t free. [She] paid for it, dearly,” implying that she was bullied and perhaps somewhat even re-traumatized by her peers “play[ing] at war, without understanding” that An Tinh has just come from a war zone (19). In spite of this, however, she is grateful for her parents’ persistence in forcing her to adapt to life in Canada, even if it was painful for her at times. In this way, she is again the ‘good migrant,’ demonstrating respect for her hardworking refugee parents and even expressing gratitude for what she was made to endure in the name of assimilation. From her perspective as an adult, it was the persistence and personal sacrifice of her parents that enabled An Tinh to envision a future for herself beyond what she could have imagined upon arriving in Canada as a young child.



*Ru*'s portrayal of hardworking refugee subjects makes it a successful 'good migrant' narrative, which contributes to the novel's commercial success and its success on *Canada Reads*. While there are certainly scenes in *Ru* that might jeopardize the Nguyen family's status as 'good migrants' – such as the fact that every day after school, the Nguyen children wait “for the farmer's truck that would take [them] to work illegally in the fields” (19) – even this illegal activity demonstrates the work ethic and unwillingness to 'burden' society of the 'good migrant.' I would argue that, when Vinh Nguyen points out that the 'good migrant' must achieve “educational, economic, and social success” in their adoptive country (55), he implies that this will be success *as it is defined in Canada* – or in this case, specifically in Québec. The 'good refugee' must adopt and adapt to Canadian standards of success; therefore, learning both French and English, receiving a bilingual education, and contributing to the Canadian economy are requirements of the 'good refugee' – and An Tinh and her family satisfy all of these. An Tinh's mother even “started an English class” in the refugee camp in Malaysia (Thúy 17), setting her children up for success in Canada even before their arrival. Once in Granby, she sends them to an Anglophone military school, insisting that they “learn French ... [and] English, too” (19). These decisions have an enormous impact on the rest of An Tinh's life. Though her specific career path is unclear in the novel, An Tinh mentions that she some time spent “working as an interpreter for the New York police,” suggesting that her mother's insistence on learning languages has allowed her to establish a successful career and contribute to the North American economy. Vinh Nguyen suggests that the “in-text narration of success by minority and immigrant writers can play a crucial role in the mainstream success of such texts” because they “function as proof of the inclusive,

tolerant, and fundamentally non-racist constitution” of the Canadian nation (219). An Tinh’s story is a “public demonstration of success performed by [one] who [has] been rescued and/or allowed entry into Western democratic nation-states” (219), with her demonstrative gratitude and frequent iterations of personal and material success. *Ru* is positively received on *Canada Reads*, then, not only as an example of how Canadians should welcome refugees and immigrants, but also as a model of how the ‘good migrant’ should respond to that welcome – by learning the official languages, seeking education, and contributing to the national economy, eagerly fulfilling the specifically Canadian requirements for success.

Cameron Bailey emphasizes in particular the expectation that migrants to Canada will work – not just hard, but “harder” – than their Canadian-born peers, and that this demonstration of hard work is inherently tied to ‘Candianness’ for migrants (2015 Episode 3). The process of migration is difficult not just because one has left behind one’s family and culture, or because the conditions one is coming from are often characterized by war, poverty, or political instability – but also because of the never-ending process of proving oneself after arriving in Canada. Bailey asserts, “we grow up having to do better even to be seen as equal” (2015 Episode 3): for migrants like himself, social acceptance in Canada is “conditional upon [their] very best behaviour” (Okwonga 233). Bailey asserts that migrants “have to go out there and study harder, get to the top of the class, achieve more just so [they] can be seen as equal to people who were born here” (2015 Episode 3). These comments about migrants needing to “work harder” in order to “be seen as equal to” white, Canadian-born citizens suggest that he is aware that, as a migrant and a Black man, he is always being compared to white Canadians as a means of evaluating his contributions to the nation. As

sociologist David Scott FitzGerald observes, “whites are the touchstones against which all other groups’ “achievement” is measured, a practice that many observers have criticized for perpetuating the idea that only whites fully belong” (130). So, even migrants who become educated and achieve economic success - the pinnacle of having ‘made it’ in Western capitalist societies – cannot achieve ‘belonging,’ because as long as they can be identified as migrants (ie. they are not white or they speak English with an accent), there will always be the perception that they have been ‘allowed’ into Canada and therefore their successes are always a measurement of their worthiness of this admittance.

I want to point out that some of this rhetoric about the ‘good migrant’ originates in Canada’s immigration policies, which influence ideas about the belonging of migrants and Canadian-born citizens alike. Though “Canada is often viewed as the quintessential humanitarian state (especially as compared to the United States)” in terms of its attitudes towards immigration, the process of achieving eligibility for immigration in Canada is in fact quite stringent (Mountz 623). This is because of Canada’s points system, which was introduced in 1967 under Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. The aim of the points system was that immigration offices were no longer to discriminate on the basis of race; this resulted in an increased number of skilled migrants coming from Asia and Africa (“150 Years of Immigration in Canada”). Prior to the points system, Canada’s immigration policies were selective according to country of origin, particularly after amendments to the Immigration Act in 1906 and 1910. These were intended to “weed out undesirable immigrants,” including restrictive regulations on the admission of Chinese (head tax), East Indians (continuous-journey requirements), and Japanese (a voluntary-emigration quota)

drastically reduced the volume of Asian immigration. World Wars I and II reinforced these racist policies and demonstrated how easily the rights of immigrants could be circumscribed. (Kelley and Trebilcock<sup>15</sup>)

After WWI, there was a “virtual exclusion of all Asian immigrants to Canada in the 1920s and ... persistent discrimination” against Asians across Canada, while WWII saw the “forced relocation of close to the entire Canadian population of Japanese descent, the confiscation of their property, and the attempt to deport most to Japan” as well as the “exclusion of Jewish refugees [even] in the face of mass extermination” (17). Given this history, the call for a “racially non-discriminatory immigration policy tended to become more firmly entrenched and widely-held” throughout the 1960s and 1970s, which aligns historically with Canada’s adoption of multiculturalism in the 1970s.

This call for a fair immigration system led to the introduction of the points system wherein, as immigration and citizenship scholar David Abraham writes, Canadian applicants for immigration are “scored on points given for education, knowledge of English and/or French, work experience, youth, employment offers, proof of funds and friends, and adaptability” (290). However, the policy-makers who established Canada’s points system were not prepared for the global explosion of refugees in the 1980s. Many migrants “lacked the qualifications or family connections to be admitted ... by conventional methods” so they instead claimed refugee status (Knowles 221). Though the points system “is not applied to refugees” (223), these individuals are still “screened to ensure that they can adapt to the Canadian labour market and society” (224). The influx of refugees to Canada led to several new policies regarding the nation’s handling of refugees – many of which were quite

controversial – and this trend continued into the 1990s, as the ever-growing global population produced “huge numbers of new migrants who would attempt to improve their economic fortunes in developed countries like Canada” (234). This phenomenon has continued into the twenty-first century, with another global boom of refugees and migrants continuing to view Canada as a desirable final destination. Many migrants are still assessed using the points system, which may have “shed its openly racist bias and blatant favouritism towards certain nationalities” (Kelley and Trebilcock 15) but, as many critics have argued, is now more subtly racist and discriminatory in practice. Canadian immigration offices abroad remain in “traditional source countries” (Jakubowski 19), with several in Great Britain and the United States of America, but “only three in South America, five in the whole of Africa ... and India ... only has one” (Law Union of Ontario qtd. in Jakubowski 20). In addition to this limiting of opportunities for migrants from these areas, the points system also allows for personal bias to creep into assessments of applicants, as immigration officers must “use their discretion” to determine a migrant’s suitability to adapt to life in Canada, and can also “override the points system” entirely in “exceptional cases” (20). Even immigration law and policy, which are often positioned as neutral and objective, are in fact often racist, though not blatantly so; as Jakubowski points out, many policies and amendments have language that is “potentially discriminatory towards Blacks and people of colour” but, given the “explicit, anti-discrimination clause (Section 30(f)) of the *Immigration Act*, no legislator or politician ... will openly admit to having any knowledge of the discriminatory potential” (94). As Abraham writes, “why the Canadian system is often considered more liberal or fair [than the American system] is a bit of a mystery” (290), as the personal biases of immigration officers

and the limited accessibility of immigration information and processes provide ample opportunities for discrimination against applicants who would traditionally be considered less desirable by the state.

The points system influences both migrants and Canadian citizens alike in their ideas about belonging in Canada. In a place where one's eligibility for immigration is determined by a "points system which actively selects immigrants based on their potential to join the labour force and contribute to Canada's economy" (Bloemraad 3), it is reasonable to come to the conclusion that these factors will continue to be important long after one's arrival.

Canada's points system impresses upon those who apply for immigration the importance of education, financial status, and employment from the very beginning, so for migrants who make it into Canada, it makes sense that they have a strong sense of how they must perform once they are settled here. This factor also certainly influences the ideas that Canadian-born citizens hold about immigration. Sociologist Irene Bloemraad, who studies the relationships between immigration and political systems, cites a 2011 survey which indicates that overall, Canadians express "very high levels of support for the idea that migration is good for the Canadian economy" (3). She asserts, however, that this is not the result of some inherent love of multiculturalism. Rather, Canadians have positive attitudes towards migration because of the "economic orientation" of the points system as it "presumably alleviates worries about immigration being a drain on the welfare state" (Bloemraad 3). There is an expectation on the part of both the state and that of Canadians that, once they have been admitted, migrants will *deliver* on their potential to contribute to the Canadian economy.

The imperative of the ‘good migrant’ to demonstrate their worthiness of Canada’s acceptance is evident on *Canada Reads*. Cameron Bailey shares stories of his family’s hard work and struggles, praising the hard work of his parents to earn their Canadian citizenship and expressing gratitude towards both them and the nation for Canada’s acceptance of him. Bailey presents his passport and declares

This is my Canadian passport. If you’re born here, it’s pretty easy to get one of these. But ask someone who wasn’t born here what it took to get their Canadian passport. My mother and father fought, they worked their asses off, to get one of these, and *Ru* brought me back to that ... struggle – what it takes to become Canadian. (2015 Episode 4).

His use of the passport in this scene – a legal Canadian document – refers to the fact that migrants must navigate a long, complex bureaucratic process to obtain Canadian citizenship, in addition to their efforts to find work, adapt to life in Canada, and perhaps learn a new language. Bailey expresses his gratitude for the sacrifices his parents made to ensure his success – which is substantial, considering the fact that he is now in a position of authority in the Canadian cultural landscape as the Artistic Director of the Toronto International Film Festival, with enough local fame to be a panelist on *Canada Reads*. In fact, Bailey’s physical presence on the panel provides the program’s audience with a second, embodied example of the ‘good migrant’ who has been allowed entry into Canada: himself. His embodied presence on the program and defense of *Ru* is complex in that his very presence confirms *Canada Reads*’ metanarrative of inclusivity; as such, he reinforces the narrative in which “the immigrant’s success can be construed as the nation’s own success at multicultural collective-

building” (Nguyen 219). That Bailey has been included on the *Canada Reads* panel means that he has achieved success according to the values imposed by the Western capitalist society into which he immigrated. We know that he is educated – at one point, host Wab Kinew identifies Bailey as a “Western Alumni!” (*sic*) indicating that he has graduated from the University of Western Ontario (2015 Episode 4) – and that he has been successful in his career. He is even similar to An Tinh in that he, too, expresses enormous gratitude and respect for the hard work of his parents, further situating himself as the ‘good migrant’ who is grateful for the opportunities that have been provided to him. This rhetoric that circumscribes the behaviour of migrants, defining what ‘success’ must look like for the ‘good migrant,’ is so powerful that it influences not only first-generation migrants, but also their descendants, who are similarly scrutinized to assess whether they have ‘earned’ their place in Canada. For the *Canada Reads* audience, Bailey ticks all the boxes required of the successful migrant to Canada, reaffirming the process by which the nation accepts immigrants and confirming Canada’s liberal ideals of freedom, multiculturalism, and democracy.

Indeed, Bailey’s performance of the ‘good migrant’ ideal and his strategies in championing *Ru* on *Canada Reads* appear to be largely well-received by the program’s audience, judging from the responses of participants on Twitter within #CanadaReads and #TeamRu. In my survey of hundreds of tweets about *Canada Reads* 2015, only a few criticized either *Ru* or Bailey’s defense of it. A few users contest *Ru*’s sentimental portrayal of an accepting Canadian public and argue that neither the text nor the panel discussions of it adequately examine the dynamics of privilege, race, and discrimination at play in Canada. One critic writes, “Ru just won #CanadaReads. Sickly sweet and often overly sentimental,



it's a book we ultimately find disappointing" (@QuébecReads 19 Mar 2015). This tweet includes a link to a full review of *Ru*, which asserts that the novel is so saccharine that it "sticks to the page" and indicates that it is "exotic but not too foreign ... [a] safe choice" that does not challenge readers' ideas about Canadian culture (McCambridge). Likewise, #CanadaReads contributor Gabe Thirlwall asserts that *Ru* is "the easiest book for liberal white Canadians to read and feel comfortable" (@thepolicircus 19 Mar 2015). This tweet suggests that *Ru* fails to challenge ideas about race or immigration in Canada – and that this makes it exactly what Canada Reads is looking for. Carianne Leung, a frequent #CanadaReads contributor (and novelist herself), found Bailey's tendency to generalize about migrants problematic, tweeting, "there is no single story in the "immigrant story". #CanadaReads" (@kayee13 18 Mar 2015) – but many of her other tweets advocate for the novel's win and support Bailey's defense. I would argue that the more critical tweets are the exception: most *Canada Reads* participants on Twitter praise Bailey's defense.

In particular, the *Canada Reads* audience on Twitter expresses appreciation for Cameron Bailey's ability to make *Ru* relevant in a contemporary context, as well as his championing of the book's more subtle form. Many praise both Bailey and Kielburger for arguing for the relevance of refugee and immigration issues in 2015. For example, @SocMedGirlyyy writes, "How #Canadian that a book about the immigrant experience wins #CanadaReads!" (19 Mar 2015). Colinda Cloyne similarly states, "So happy that #Ru won #CanadaReads @CBCbooks It is a beautiful work with an important perspective on the Canadian experience" (@cclyne 19 Mar 2015). Both of these responses assert that there is something particularly *Canadian* about the inclusion of migrant narratives on *Canada Reads*,

revealing that these audience members understand multiculturalism and Canada's acceptance of migrants as central to national identity.

Several other participants express support for Cameron Bailey and *Ru* because they appreciated Bailey's advocacy for increased immigration to Canada and better treatment of migrants after their arrival. For example, @BlackCoffeePoet tweets, "@cbcbooks Great comparison between 1970s Vietnamese refugees and Syrian refugees of 2014/2015 by @cameron\_tiff on Day 3 of #CanadaReads" (19 Mar 2015), while Shan (@goodbooksandtea) writes, "I love the way @craigkielburger is able to connect books to the political landscape of Canada today. #CanadaReads" (18 Mar 2015). @Deen-Do tweets, "Much respect to @craigkielburger for bringing up #Syria refugee crisis and Canada not doing enough #CanadaReads" (18 Mar 2015). Another participant, Peggy Blair, states, "Interesting that #CanadaReads winning book is about immigration, at a time when Canadian politicians are telling immigrants to go home" (@peggy\_blair 19 Mar 2015). These responses suggest that the *Canada Reads* audience is eager for the program to address relevant social issues and also to connect them with the contemporary Conservative government's policies towards immigration and refugees. Bailey's defense of *Ru*'s form is also popular within #CanadaReads: Jennifer D writes, "Glad the idea of memory and recollections in form of *Ru* finally being mentioned! Loved that aspect of the book – how memory works! #CanadaReads" (@booktrovert 19 Mar 2015). @Rooster\_Monkey similarly states, "In terms of style and storytelling, #*Ru* is amazing. I love the micro-stories-with-a-novel format. #CanadaReads" (17 Mar 2015). Each of these audience members echo Bailey's assertion that

*Ru* is an appropriate text to “break barriers” in a contemporary Canada, wherein a global refugee crisis raises questions and reflections on Canada’s national identity.

Finally, Bailey’s strategy in defending *Ru* seems to resonate with many viewers, who are migrants themselves, which suggests that his strategy in explicitly appealing to these audience members is successful. Several members of the online *Canada Reads* community self-identify as immigrants or persons of colour in their tweets about the program and indicate that they feel included upon seeing faces and stories like their own represented in the debates. User Andrea Querido identifies herself as a first-generation Canadian when she responds to Bailey’s use of his Canadian passport, saying “@cameron\_tiff @cbcbooks As a daughter of immigrants – when you held up that passport... Wow! Can’t wait to delve into the beauty that is *Ru*” (@AndreaQ40 19 Mar 2015). Victor Ajani similarly identifies himself “as an immigrant,” stating that *Canada Reads* 2015 is his first experience of the program and has “strengthened [his] love for literature and Canada” (@farawaygooner 19 Mar. 2015). These viewers and listeners appreciate Bailey’s defense of *Ru* and its inclusion on *Canada Reads* because of its parallels with their own immigrant narratives or those of their families. Another *Canada Reads* respondent, @WordsofMystery, states, “As someone who is Viet, I LOVE that *Ru* won #CanadaReads! Hopefully we’ll see more books written on the lesser known immigrant experiences” (19 Mar 2015). Another user, J. Lam (@zengarden17) writes, “Incredible for me, as an Asian and child of immigrants, the diversity of the #CanadaReads panel” (16 Mar 2015). This response implies appreciation for the diversity represented in both the panel of books and in the panelists themselves. @zengarden17 declares their identity “as an Asian and child of immigrants,” suggesting a connection with *Ru*, while also admiring

the “diversity of the #CanadaReads panel,” which suggests that this user also identifies with Cameron Bailey across racial difference. These users clearly identify themselves as ‘like’ what they see on *Canada Reads*, identifying at times with Cameron Bailey as a migrant and at times with the protagonist in *Ru*. They are “Viet” or “Asian,” children of immigrants, or immigrants themselves – and *Canada Reads* occasions these assertions of identity on Twitter by initiating conversations about immigration and diversity as social justice issues. As I noted in Chapter 1, producers have made efforts to diversify the *Canada Reads* authors and panelists, particularly since 2013. The responses on Twitter to Cameron Bailey’s defense of *Ru* are evidence that the program’s audience is indeed diverse and that there is a market for stories that represent migrant experiences. For these participants, it is less important that Bailey is a Black immigrant from Barbados rather than an Asian refugee like An Tinh. Rather, they instead seem surprised and thrilled to see stories written and represented by members of migrant groups and racial minorities - stories like their own - on *Canada Reads* at all.

### **Complicating the Ideal: Migrants Negotiating Hybrid Identities**

Though Bailey certainly embodies the successful ‘good migrant’ on *Canada Reads*, he also attempts to complicate this ideal for the other panelists and the program’s audience by bringing attention to the racism experienced by many migrants and the difficulties of negotiating hybrid identity. Indeed, this is another way in which he aligns himself with An Tinh, as her narrative achieves these same goals. Throughout *Ru*, An Tinh is constantly negotiating her identity and reflecting on the fact that it is always in flux, including frequent anecdotes about her feelings of alienation and unbelonging. These stories of her struggles

challenge the idea that An Tinh's experience of migration was 'easy,' as readers such as Kielburger might suggest. Stuart Hall states that experiences of diaspora are defined,

not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. ("Diaspora and Cultural Identity," 401-2)

Such an evolution is evident throughout *Ru*, as the stories from various points in An Tinh's life demonstrate how she negotiates her hybrid identity. In stories from her childhood, she often reveals the feelings of alienation and misunderstanding that she experienced growing up in Granby. As she ages, however, she begins to find ways to understand and even appreciate her hybrid identity, though she is still often the victim of racism and discrimination.

Earlier in this chapter, I cited the various scenes in *Ru* in which a young An Tinh feels welcome in her new home in Canada. However, for each one of these instances of acceptance, there are myriad instances in which An Tinh instead feels alienated. Therefore, she must negotiate a complex web of often contradictory feelings and experiences as she grows up in Canada as a refugee and racialized subject. Throughout An Tinh's childhood in Québec, there were many moments in which she felt misunderstood and unsure of how to communicate her experiences to those around her, including her own family. For example, in the early days of their lives in Granby, the Nguyen children were invited for lunch at the homes of their various schoolmates, but they returned to school each day with "nearly empty

stomachs because [they] didn't know how to use a fork to eat rice that wasn't sticky. [They] didn't know how to tell [their hosts] that ... they really didn't have to go to every grocery store in search of every last box of Minute Rice" (Thúy 21). Though An Tinh blames this lack of communication on the fact that she and her siblings "could neither talk to nor understand" their hosts (21), it also reveals a lack of cultural understanding among the generous Québécois families receiving the Nguyens. There may have been "generosity and gratitude in every grain of rice left on [their] plates," but ultimately An Tinh is still going hungry (21). There is a disconnect between the intentions of Canadian citizens who are trying to practice acceptance and the lived experiences of those on the receiving end of that acceptance: though well-intentioned, the efforts of the families welcoming the Nguyens confirm An Tinh's feelings of unbelonging. In another instance, a local botanist takes the Nguyen children to a swamp where "cattails grew in the thousands, to show [them] the insects" (25). An Tinh notes that this botanist "didn't know that [they'd] rubbed shoulders with flies in the refugee camps for months" (25); he whispers to the children to listen to the droning of the flies, to "try to understand them" (25), but An Tinh reveals that she knew "the sound of flies by heart ... because for months [she] had to crouch down above a gigantic pit filled to the brim with excrement in the blazing sun of Malaysia" (26). For An Tinh, this educational outing recalls a traumatic experience in the refugee camp in which she lost a slipper in the pit of excrement and had to go "barefoot for days" in spite of the "hundreds of thousands" of maggots that transformed "the red clay soil into an undulating white carpet" (27). She does not communicate her reaction to the botanist, but internally marvels at how different their experiences have been. Scenes such as these indicate that the community of

Granby may have received the Nguyen family with generosity and kindness, but without a nuanced understanding of the trauma Vietnamese refugees experienced or the context from which they came. As such, An Tinh often feels alienated and misunderstood even amidst the generosity of her hosts.

As she ages, An Tinh continues to be confronted with questions of her identity and the ways in which she is perceived by others as belonging and/or not-belonging – much like Cameron Bailey, which he reveals on *Canada Reads*. As an adult, An Tinh lives at times in Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and Canada and shares various experiences of travelling globally and coming ‘home’ throughout *Ru*. Many of these anecdotes reveal how she attempts to negotiate a hybrid identity for herself. When she returns to Vietnam as an adult, for example, she shares an incident in a restaurant in Hanoi: “the waiter for [her] table didn’t understand why [she] was speaking Vietnamese with him. At first [she] thought he didn’t understand [her] southern accent. At the end of the meal, though, he explained ingenuously that [she] was too fat to be Vietnamese” (77). An Tinh realizes that this is not only a comment on her body, but “about the American dream that had made [her] more substantial, heavier, weightier” (77). Her experience of hybridity is very much about embodiment, then: in Canada, others might assume she is migrant because she is not white, while in Vietnam, her physical body also reveals that she is not Vietnamese. In this instance in the restaurant, An Tinh’s physical body betrays her and makes her feel alienated from both her ancestral home and her Canadian home. In another, later scene, however, it is her physical body that facilitates a connection with another migrant subject: she connects with a fellow Vietnamese refugee at a gas station in Canada simply because he “recognized [her] vaccination scar”

(132). An Tinh's identity as a migrant is marked on her body, which in this case allows for recognition between the two rather than alienation. She writes: "a single mark on the skin and [their] entire shared history was spread out between two gas pumps in a station by a highway exit" (132). In that moment, she understands their shared "ambivalence, [their] hybrid state: half this, half that, nothing at all and everything at once" and finds comfort in the fact that this stranger innately understands her history and hybrid identity as a refugee (132). This moment of unspoken understanding and communion is precisely what Cameron Bailey is appealing to in his defense of *Ru* on *Canada Reads* as he argues that all migrants will relate to An Tinh's longing for belonging and her reflections on hybrid identity.

Though there are these moments of "communion" with other migrants in An Tinh's life in Canada (132), she continues to feel the tension between her supposed acceptance into a multicultural Canada and the instances of alienation and discrimination that she experiences at the hands of both individual Canadians and national institutions. She recalls an incident with her Québec-based employer in which he "clipped an article from a Montréal paper reiterating that the "Québécois nation" was Caucasian, that [her] slanting eyes automatically placed [her] in a separate category" (79). Though Québec has "cradled [her] for thirty years" and provided her with the educational opportunities that have allowed her to find professional success, An Tinh finds herself ultimately rejected as an unsuitable citizen of the "Québécois nation" (79). This instance reveals racism on an individual level in her employer, but also suggests that such racial prejudice is systemic. The employer finds his own prejudice echoed in the media and institutions surrounding him and therefore sees no problem making comments about his employee's "slanting eyes" (79). An Tinh's experience demonstrates



that non-white francophone immigrants are ultimately excluded in spite of the province's official policies of interculturalism. As a result of Québec's ethnic nationalism, An Tinh is "denied Québécois subjectivity" though she has spent most of her life as a French-Canadian citizen (Wills 81). This feeling of un-belonging radiates outward from Québec through Canada as well, for though there may be differences between Québec's interculturalism and Canada's official national multicultural policy, it is no less true that whiteness remains a characteristic of the ideal Canadian citizen. whiteness "still occupies the positions of normalcy and privilege in Canada" (Coleman 7), regardless of province or policy. Though she speaks Québécois French and has lived in Québec for most of her life, An Tinh is visibly not-white and therefore vulnerable to racism and discrimination, alienating her from her adopted home in spite of her ongoing efforts towards belonging.

Cameron Bailey's discussions of hybridity are another strategy of defense *Canada Reads*. Bailey indicates that An Tinh's negotiations of hybrid identity resonate deeply for him and he uses this as a means of generating support for his book. He states in Episode 1 that *Ru* "captures ... every migrant's story" and remembers his own feelings of displacement, alienation, and uncertainty about his identity, existing "always in between" his former home in Barbados and his new home in Canada (2015 Episode 1). He suggests that these feelings are somewhat universal for most migrants, stating "no matter what your specific experience is, you go to a new place and you're ... just not where you're comfortable, you're not where you're familiar" (2015 Episode 2). The strategy that Bailey adopts in so clearly aligning himself with An Tinh and asserting that *Ru* will resonate with all migrants is similar to a trend that Eleanor Ty identifies in "Representing 'Other' Diasporas in Recent Global

Canadian Fiction.” She observes that several contemporary authors of CanLit have recently “written convincingly, perceptively, and knowledgeably about diasporic communities to which they do not belong” (99). Ty quotes Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, who assert that, often, “minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups” (qtd. in Ty 100). In aligning himself and his own journey of migration with that portrayed in *Ru*, Bailey’s representation of a diaspora different from his own situates him alongside other migrants and in opposition to the dominant culture. Ty suggests that this tendency for members of minority groups to speak about and represent the experiences of other diasporas is “linked to the turn to diaspora,” described by Lily Cho as signalling “a demand for finding a way to speak about the complexities of connections between communities, of the unredressed griefs and disarticulated longings from which collectivities emerge” (qtd. in Ty 100). Bailey asks viewers to look past the differences between his own experience and that of An Tinh, and to instead focus on what they have in common - their experiences of negotiating identity as racialized migrants in Canada - as a means of generating compassion and opening minds to all migrants and racialized subjects, regardless of their origin.

### **The Inevitable “However ...”: Complicating *Canada Reads*’ Discussions of *Ru***

Though Cameron Bailey’s strategies in defending *Ru* are ultimately successful – he sees enormous support from the *Canada Reads* audience and ultimately wins the competition – his wholesale identification with An Tinh is often problematic. *Ru* may uphold Canada’s reputation as accepting of migrants in some scenes, but I have also demonstrated how the text

complicates this with its depictions of the racism and discrimination that An Tinh experiences. Throughout Bailey's defense, however, these scenes are completely ignored and the moments in which he and the *Canada Reads* panel seriously examine An Tinh's unique experiences are brief and inadequate. Cameron Bailey responds to the racism and isolation communicated in *Ru*, but he does so indirectly and without acknowledging the nuances of this particular narrative. Instead, he often focuses more on his *own* experiences of alienation and racism, relating to the text on the basis of his racial difference as a Black man in Canada and sharing his personal experience of racism:

When I came to Canada as an eight year old, around the same time, actually, Canada also opened its arms, but there was racism as well. I was called 'blackie; I was called 'monkey' in the schoolyard; I was call 'nigger' sometimes. Um, and that was based on just how you look, on the face, and I think what we need to understand now, what *Ru* helps us do, is that there's so much more going on behind the face. (2015 Episode 2)

In relating this story, Bailey articulates the struggle of being discriminated against on the basis of race and of feeling at times like it would be "better ... to be white" (2015 Episode 3). However, Bailey shares this experience not in response to any discussion of An Tinh's experiences of racial discrimination, but to indicate that he identifies with her struggles to negotiate her hybrid identity. While Bailey's story is moving and does bring attention to the issue of racism in Canada, it is important to note that the incidents of racism in *Ru* itself are never actually discussed on *Canada Reads*, nor does Bailey acknowledge the ways in which race and gender intersect in An Tinh's experiences of discrimination. This is because An

Tinh's experiences of discrimination reflect structural racism and institutional barriers in Canada and, in order to win *Canada Reads*, Bailey must not draw attention to the ways in which *Ru* criticizes the Canadian nation.

As I have demonstrated above, An Tinh's reflections on hybrid identity and race are complex, providing poignant and important reflections from the unique perspective of a female, Vietnamese, refugee subject. However, the *Canada Reads* panel completely ignores these scenes, instead making generalizations about "the immigrant experience" as though there is only one. I would argue that this is a symptom of the venue: with its emphasis on "breaking barriers," political relevance, and universal relatability, *Canada Reads* necessitates generalizations. This is why Bailey aligns his own experience of migration with that of An Tinh and then makes these relevant in a contemporary context by also comparing them to the Syrian refugees seeking acceptance in Canada during the time of the 2015 *Canada Reads* broadcast. However, he does not acknowledge the various differences between his own subject position, that of An Tinh, and those of the refugees for which he is advocating in 2015. As Linda Martin Alcoff's article suggests, this is "The Problem of Speaking for Others": she asks, "is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or less privileged than me?" (3). Though Bailey and An Tinh have some things in common, they also occupy different subject positions in many ways and the intersectionality of An Tinh's identity is not taken into consideration in Bailey's defense. However, as Alcoff indicates, the "possibility of political effectivity" depends on the "question of speaking for others," for if one never speaks up on behalf of those less privileged, "coalition and collective action" are impossible (6). While "speaking for others" can be problematic, particularly for groups whose voices have

historically been silenced and whose histories have been erased, Alcoff also points out that “adopting the position that one should only speak for oneself” is problematic (4). She asks, “if I don’t speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege?” (4). In the context of social justice issues and *Canada Reads*, Bailey finds it necessary to speak out against oppression and to use his subject location as a migrant to do so. The “positionality or location of the speaker and the discursive context” are important, in this case (7): Bailey’s ability to generate support, visibility, and book sales for *Ru* is contingent on his ability to embody and generate compassion for the migrant subject. The “practices of speaking for others and speaking for myself” are close, Alcoff argues, and therefore, when one speaks for oneself, they “momentarily create” that self (5). Context is everything, then, and Bailey’s momentary creation of himself as a migrant subject like An Tinh is required to achieve his goal in the context of a “book to break barriers.” However, at no point during the *Canada Reads* debates does he remind his audience that his alignment with An Tinh as a migrant and racial minority does not ‘cancel out’ the differences between them.

In addition to these elisions of difference, Bailey’s defense also bolsters the idea that Canada ‘saves’ the refugee, with scant acknowledgement of the fact that subjects such as An Tinh will continue to be traumatized by racism long after their arrival. In failing to reference the myriad experiences of racism that An Tinh experiences in Québec, Bailey implies that her traumatic experiences predate her arrival in Canada. Though he references his own experiences of racism in Canada, his focus in defending *Ru* is on her traumatic experiences in

Vietnam. He reminds the audience that she had “really traumatic and awful experience[s], essentially watching children perform sex acts for money in Vietnam; horrible experiences as a refugee fleeing a country” (2015 Episode 3), actively placing her trauma both in the past and in southeast Asia. This calls to mind Genevieve, the therapist in *Cockroach*, who also situates the trauma and struggles of the migrant subject in the past and outside of Canada. Bailey portrays Canada as having saved An Tinh from these horrors: he emphasizes Canada’s “generosity of spirit” in welcoming the Nguyens and her successful integration into Canadian culture (2015 Episode 3).

Bailey creates a binary here: Vietnam is a place of violence, crime, and trauma, while Canada is a place of safety, comfort, and success for An Tinh. Interestingly enough, he does not refer back to his own experiences of racism in Canada, instead focusing on the positive aspects of An Tinh’s reception in Canada. As we have seen, however, An Tinh experiences several instances of racism and, as Stef Craps asserts, these can also be significantly traumatic. Craps writes that, though “overt racism has largely been replaced with more covert, subtle, ambiguous, and complex racist incidents operating at institutional and cultural levels,” traumatization can nonetheless “result insidiously from cumulative micro-aggressions” (26). An Tinh’s feelings of alienation suggest that she has indeed been negatively affected by the racism she has experienced in Canada, but this would not serve Bailey well in his quest to win *Canada Reads*. If he is using *Ru* to represent an ideal to which contemporary Canadians should aspire, he must construct the Canada of the 1970s that welcomed the Nguyen family as accepting and peaceful. This is particularly true considering that there are several other texts to be discussed on each episode of *Canada Reads*; there is

not a lot of time for Bailey to explore the book's complexity if he is to convince his fellow panelists and the audience of *Ru*'s value to Canadians. Therefore, rather than drawing attention to the scenes in which Canada is the one inflicting pain on the refugee subject and risking some panelists reacting poorly to this, he emphasizes the parts of the text that will "vilify ... those the west understands as 'barbarians'" (Lapierre 562), allowing Canadians to maintain their sense of triumph in 'rescuing' the refugee. Again we see that, in order to win *Canada Reads*, a text cannot fundamentally criticize Canada.

### **In Conclusion: Evaluating Cameron Bailey's Defense of *Ru***

In his defense of *Ru* on *Canada Reads*, Cameron Bailey establishes the novel as an example of Canadian ideals in action to the benefit of the migrant subject. He focuses on the scenes in *Ru* in which An Tinh is welcomed to Canada, experiences the generosity of the Canadians around her, and is successful as a result of the privileges she receives in her new home. Bailey indicates that An Tinh's positive experience of migration to Canada is largely due to the attitudes of the Canadians she encountered during this process; then, he asserts that contemporary Canadians must adopt these same attitudes of acceptance and generosity in relation to the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015. As I have asserted, the focus of Bailey's argument, and indeed of *Canada Reads* as a whole, is predominantly on changing individual attitudes towards migrants, rather than reflecting on the structural and institutional barriers that these communities face – which is particularly ironic in a season for which the theme is "breaking barriers." However, on a program which is organized around the concept of nation and which intends to unite Canadians across the country, this is an effective – and successful – strategic move. Also contributing to this success is Bailey's embodied representation of the

migrant subject: An Tinh exists in the abstract of the *Canada Reads* audience because she is a fictional character, though her story might parallel that of the novel's author in various ways. Therefore, Bailey performs the role of migrant-in-the-flesh, sharing many of his own experiences of racism, discrimination, and the struggles of negotiating hybrid identity, thereby grounding the migrant experience in reality for the *Canada Reads* audience. He draws many parallels between his own experiences and those of An Tinh, addressing the ways in which migrants must perform a certain level of 'goodness' in order to be accepted and successful in Canadian society. This act of identifying with An Tinh and situating migrants like themselves in opposition to the dominant culture is central to Bailey's argument that *Ru* will resonate with "anyone who's migrated" (2015 Episode 2); in grouping all migrants together, he not only seeks to appeal to the wide and diverse population of migrants to Canada, but also to evoke compassion towards this group from those who have not had this experience. In his effort to unite, however, Bailey is often problematically selective in his discussions of *Ru*: he neglects the scenes in the text in which An Tinh experiences racism in Canada and often fails to acknowledge important differences between his own experiences and those of An Tinh. In spite of these failings, Bailey's argument that *Ru* can be a barrier-breaking book is ultimately successful; though some panelists argue that the book is not an accurate depiction of migrant experience, Bailey slowly wins most of them over and *Ru* ultimately wins *Canada Reads* 2015.

I argued in Chapters 1 and 2 that *Canada Reads* contributes to rhetoric that establishes Canada as a multicultural, humanitarian, liberal state. I cited Kymlicka's assertion that central to Canada's reputation are its constant attempts to "transform [its] catalogue of



uncivil relationships into relations of liberal-democratic citizenship, both in terms of the vertical relationship between the members of minorities and the state and the horizontal relationships among the members of different groups” (*Multicultural Odysseys* 64). Cameron Bailey’s defense of *Ru* on *Canada Reads* 2015 is an excellent case study here: his references to contemporary politicians and migration policies advocate for a renegotiation of those “vertical relationships between members of minorities and the state,” while his appeals to Canadians at large to emulate their compatriots of the 1970s and welcome migrants with compassion and acceptance speak to those “horizontal relationships among the members of different groups” (64). The social justice theme of the 2015 competition, “One Book to Break Barriers,” provides an occasion for *Canada Reads* to demonstrate that it values inclusivity through its choice of panelist – the embodied presence of Cameron Bailey as a Black immigrant – as well as his choice of text – the Vietnamese refugee narrative with which many viewers and listeners can identify, as demonstrated by the positive responses on Twitter. Even Kim Thúy herself successfully performs the role of the ‘good migrant’ by creating a text that predominantly expresses gratitude and appreciation for Canada’s acceptance of refugees and migrants. Therefore, the novel and Bailey’s defense are met with overwhelming support in the #CanadaReads community. In this context, Bailey speaks openly about experiencing racism in Canada, allowing his fellow panelists and the #CanadaReads community alike to demonstrate their concern about this issue. In addition, he makes a clear connection between An Tinh’s story and the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 and demonstrates that he cares deeply about these issues, even if the methods by which he defends *Ru* are sometimes problematic. In so providing a venue in which these issues can be

discussed on national television, the CBC facilitates Bailey's performance of caring as he embodies the migrant subject and allows other panelists and the program's audience to understand and empathize with migrants to Canada.

## Conclusion

In the seasons of *Canada Reads* since 2014 and 2015, there have been many incidents of conflict and tension regarding multiculturalism, cultural identity, and race. These have often reflected the debates, discussions, and scandals taking place around these topics within Canadian literature and Canada as a whole. In the five years it has taken me to research and write this dissertation, there have been several incidents of outright racism, alleged fraudulent claims of minority identity, and support for abusers in CanLit, leading writer Alicia Elliot to call it a “raging dumpster fire” in a 2017 article (“CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire”). One of these incidents directly related to *Canada Reads*: the questioning of Canadian author Joseph Boyden’s supposed Indigenous heritage. When reporters raised questions about Boyden in 2017, readers and literary critics alike were forced to face the fact that an author who had become a darling of Indigenous representation in Canadian fiction might in fact be a fraud. Boyden’s exposure took place only three years after panelist Wab Kinew won *Canada Reads* while defending Boyden’s *The Orenda*, and this incident certainly cast a shadow on the program for many of its fans and critics. As questions about Boyden’s identity arose in the Canadian media, Kinew was asked on several occasions to share his thoughts on the topic, eventually stating, “I wish he behaved differently ... [but] there is room for everyone in our circle” (“There is room in our circle for Joseph Boyden”). Kinew maintained that Boyden’s “novels remain powerful” but implored readers to “also read authors who have lived a more Indigenous experience” (“There is room”). Kinew’s comments on the subject included an important reflection on Indigenous representation in Canadian literature – the fact that there is often little recognition of the differences between Indigenous nations and

communities in Canada. He stated that, even if Boyden were “Anishnaabe, he is not a member of the nations he wrote about, the Mushkegowuk, the Huron, the Haudenosaunee. Recognizing the distinctions will inform readers” (“There is room”). With this comment, Knew suggested that the tendency to perceive all Indigenous authors as simply ‘Indigenous’ is problematic when there are in fact hundreds of Indigenous nations and groups in Canada, all with very different traditions, languages, and histories. Boyden himself said in his apology, “I’ve become a go-to person” in the media and “that role should go to those with deeper roots – wiser and more experienced spokespeople and elders – who have that right and responsibility, and can better represent their community’s perspective” (“Statement by Joseph Boyden”). Still, Boyden remained unwilling to share the details of his involvement with and connections to the Indigenous nations that supposedly claimed him. I think it is clear that this incident points to a larger problem in Canadian literature and in Canada as a whole. As I have demonstrated with examples from *Canada Reads*, the tendency to make texts and authors representative of entire minorities, racialized groups, or communities results in impoverished interpretations of their writings and promotes tokenism. In the discussions of *Cockroach* and *Ru* on *Canada Reads*, panelists are eager to make sweeping statements as to whether the subjects of these texts do or do not fit into the prescribed definition of ‘migrant’ that has been determined by the nation for its own convenience. As I have demonstrated here, these discussions omit important components of the texts as a result, but when a single text is expected to represent a social justice issue, with no attention paid to the complexity of the texts or its critiques of the nation, this is an inevitable outcome.

In a 2018 incident on *Canada Reads*, panelists Jeanne Beker and Jully Black came into conflict and their on-air discussion became quite tense. In this case, Jeanne Beker, a white fashion reporter and TV personality, argued that Black Canadian recording artist Jully Black's selection, *The Marrow Thieves*, was "too dark" and did not encourage "healing" for Canada (2018 Episode 4). When Jully Black responded that Beker was unwilling to consider her own privilege or admit that it might influence her understanding of *The Marrow Thieves*, Beker exclaimed, "Why are you attacking me?" (2018 Episode 4). In this exchange, Beker demonstrated her inability to hear the truth from a Black woman about the realities of Indigenous Canadians without feeling "attacked"; she could not acknowledge that inequality in Canada is a result of colonialism and white supremacy. Black stated, "I'm not responsible for your feelings," clearly indicating that she would not absolve Beker's feelings of white guilt (2018 Episode 4). Beker's comments are reminiscent of many in the 2014 and 2015 seasons, but in this case, Black challenges the tendency towards unconvincing comments about individual change and responsibility and instead points to a need for structural change in Canada. Black's response to Beker's attempts to avoid responsibility are one example of how *Canada Reads* could engage more meaningfully with racism, xenophobia, and the legacies of colonialism, if only its producers and panelists were not so invested in maintaining a performance of caring that tends to stop short of working to dismantle structural barriers.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the nation's commitment to the performance of caring has deep roots in the idea that Canada as a nation is uniquely successful at carrying out multiculturalism. As I have indicated, however, there are myriad

fractures within this mythos, and the stories of many migrants demonstrate that racism, xenophobia, and discrimination are alive and well in Canada, though the nation's self-image and international reputation might imply otherwise. We have seen this with *Cockroach* and *Ru* on *Canada Reads*: the protagonist of *Cockroach* is painted as “not representative” of migrants as a result of his ungrateful attitude, portrayals of racism, and criticisms of the nation, and the parts of *Ru* that portray Canada as anything other than welcoming are ignored on *Canada Reads*, making it impossible to incite real, meaningful change. As a result of this commitment to the performance of caring, the winner of *Canada Reads* will not actually be the book that “we need” to read now; if the nation is not ready to *hear* stories that detail racism, or to interpret a text honestly even when it reflects badly on Canada, the chances that the program will ever find a book to “change our nation” are slim. This work, then, has raised questions about whether a platform for Canadian literature such as *Canada Reads* can move beyond virtue-signalling, past the performance of caring. Can real-world change emerge from the acts of reading and talking about books, particularly when it comes to issues of racism and discrimination in the context of the Canadian nation? How might a mass reading event such as *Canada Reads* encourage affective reading practices that not only evoke compassion, but also acknowledgement of difference? What would prompt white readers in particular to declare their privilege and reflect on how it informs their reading practices, especially in a context in which the nation is the framework for said reading practices?

I have written in this dissertation about reading with empathy, both the power of this emotion and its limitations, particularly in the context of social justice. Some critics, like Lauren Berlant, take the view that empathy always denotes privilege, because the suffering

subject is not oneself. She suggests that this can reproduce power relations and prevent white empathizers from taking useful action. I agree with Berlant that this is a possibility, but I think there are also other possibilities for readers. I appreciate the work of Kimberly Chabot Davis, who writes in the context of African American literature that that Black-authored texts can allow white readers to “look at their own whiteness from the outside in, to read themselves through Black viewpoints, and to gain a self-implicating understanding of systemic racism and white-skin privilege” (4). Chabot Davis makes the point that no one will decide to do anti-racism work without ever experiencing empathy. She situates empathy as an entry point, rather than an end goal: cross-racial empathy is not a destination, but an ongoing process, a never-ending struggle to cultivate a state of mind. She writes that “the sympathetic emotions may sometimes be rooted in a power differential between subject and object” but that “these consequences, however, are not implicit to the operation of sympathy, empathy, or compassion. Rather, they depend on the identities and ideologies that are culturally constructed and therefore subject to change” (8). Chabot Davis provides some space here for hope that reading might somehow make change. Some readers will access the text through empathy and recognize sameness, but they will also recognize *difference*: they will acknowledge their privilege in a way that someone like Samantha Bee does not on *Canada Reads*, provoking self-reflection and understanding of their own complicity in institutional racism.

This is where I see some potential for *Canada Reads* to have the impact it intends to with social justice issues. An affective reading practice must acknowledge that there are some things with which a reader will not be able to empathize, but that this is not the only

access point to understanding. Sara Ahmed talks about some pain “that cannot be shared through empathy” as a call not just for

an attentive hearing, but for a different kind of inhabitation. It is a call for action, and a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we have to live with and beside one another, and yet we are not as one (*Cultural Politics of Emotion*).

Ahmed argues for a different kind of unity here, one that would fundamentally challenge the goals of *Canada Reads*: if fostering unity is the point of the program, what might it mean for *Canada Reads* to assert that we are not as one - and that’s okay?

This brings me back to the performance of caring. Bee and Bailey both stop short of encouraging *Canada Reads* participants to consider their complicity in racism and colonial violence or to demand systemic change. Even when Bailey talks about his personal experiences of racism, he seems to suggest that more compassion for migrants on the part of white Canadians could solve this kind of problem. But empathy is an inadequate solution to many challenges faced by migrants because these are structural problems and empathy is an individual response. If *Canada Reads* could find a way to incorporate meaningful commentary on structural inequities and provide participants with suggested venues for subsequent action, the program would become more than just an opportunity for the nation to look good without having to do better.





## Works Cited

- Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "150 Years of Immigration in Canada." 17 May 2018, [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm).
- "Cockroach." *House of Anansi Press*, 8 Feb. 2019, [houseofanansi.com/products/%20cockroach](http://houseofanansi.com/products/%20cockroach).
- "About Canada Reads | CBC Books." *CBC*, 15 Mar. 2017, [www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/about-canada-reads-1.4025711](http://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/about-canada-reads-1.4025711).
- "About the Scotiabank Giller Prize." 17 Aug. 2018. [scotiabankgillerprize.ca/about/](http://scotiabankgillerprize.ca/about/)
- About Us*. 9 Aug. 2018, [fillingintheaps.ca/about/](http://fillingintheaps.ca/about/).
- Abraham, David. "Law and Migration: Many Constants, Few Changes." *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, edited by Caroline Bretell and James F. Hollifield, Routledge, 2015, pp. 289-317.
- Ahmed, Sara. "Affective Economies." *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 2\_79, 2004, pp. 117–39.
- . *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Second edition, Edinburgh UP, 2014, [public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1767554](http://public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1767554).
- . *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke UP, 2010, [public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1171775](http://public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1171775).

Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, no. 20, 1991, pp. 5-32,

doi:[10.2307/1354221](https://doi.org/10.2307/1354221).

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other*

*Essays*, NYU Press, 2001, pp. 121-176.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*,

Verso, 2006.

@AndreaQ40. "@cameron\_tiff @cbcbooks As a daughter of immigrants – when you held up that

passport... Wow! Can't wait to delve into the beauty that is Ru." *Twitter*, 19 March 2015,

8:46am.

Andrews, Jennifer and Priscilla L. Walton. "Rethinking Canadian and American Nationality:

Indigeneity and the 49th Parallel in Thomas King." *American Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 3,

2006, pp. 600–17.

Appiah, K. Anthony. "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social

Reproduction," *Multiculturalism*, edited by Amy Guttman, Princeton UP, 1994, pp. 162-163.

Attalah, Paul. "Public Broadcasting in Canada: Legitimation Crisis and Loss of Audience." *Gazette*

vol. 62, no. 3-4, 200, pp. 117-203.

Balser, Erin. "Let the Games Begin! Canada Reads' 10th Anniversary Will Explore the Past Decade in Canadian Fiction." 5 Oct. 2010, [cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca).

Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000, [www.deslibris.ca/ID/412525](http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/412525)

Barrett, Paul and Sarah Roger. "Institutions of Public Canadian Literary Culture." Institutional Work: Mediating CanLit Conference, 3 May 2019, Ottawa ON. Conference Paper.

Beattie, Steven. "Canada Reads Loses the Plot." *That Shakespearean Rag*, 7 Oct. 2010, <https://www.shakespeareanrag.com/?author=2>.

Beneventi, Domenic A. "Montreal Underground." *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études Canadiennes*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2012, pp. 263–86.

Bennett, Tony. "Texts in History: The Determinations of Readings and Their Texts." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1985, pp. 1-16

Berlant, Lauren Gail. *Compassion : The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. Routledge, 2014, [swb.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=3423752](http://swb.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=3423752).

---. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011, [public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1172993](http://public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1172993).

---. "Poor Eliza." *American Literature*, vol. 70, no. 3, 1998, pp. 635-668

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004.

[catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0421/2004018829.html](http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0421/2004018829.html).

*Bill N°60 : Charter Affirming the Values of State Secularism and Religious Neutrality and of*

*Equality between Women and Men, and Providing a Framework for Accommodation*

*Requests - National Assembly of Québec.* [www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-](http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-)

[parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-60-40-1](http://parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-60-40-1).

@BlackCoffeePoet. “@cbcbooks Great comparison between 1970s Vietnamese refugees and Syrian

refugees of 2014/2015 by @cameron\_tiff on Day 3 of #CanadaReads” *Twitter*, 19 March

2015, 11:48am.

Bloemraad, Irene. “Understanding ‘Canadian Exceptionalism’ in Immigration and Pluralism

Policy.” *Rethinking National Identity in the Age of Migration*, Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung,

2012, pp. 145-170.

@booktrovert. “Glad the idea of memory and recollections in form of Ru finally being mentioned!

Loved that aspect of the book – how memory works! #CanadaReads” *Twitter*, 19 March

2015, 7:24am.

---. "I thought Craig did, when he talked about his own internal barrier, thinking all immigrant stories were hard, sad stories." *Twitter*, 21 March 2015, 7:18 am.

---. "Would love to see panellists go even deeper on the "and now?" in next days. Perhaps online resources linked @cbcbooks @WabKinew #CanadaReads." *Twitter*, 16 March 2015, 5:39 pm.

Bouchard, Gérard. *Interculturalism: A View from Quebec*. Translated by Howard Scott. University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Routledge, 1984.

---. "The Forms of Capital." *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Timothy Kaposy and Imre Szeman, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 81–92.

---. "The Market of Symbolic Goods." *Poetics*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1985, pp. 13–44.

---. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity, 1991.

Boyden, Joseph. "Statement by Joseph Boyden." *NewsWire.ca*. 11 January

2017. [www.newswire.ca/news-releases/statement-by-joseph-boyden-610457835.html](http://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/statement-by-joseph-boyden-610457835.html)

Brettell, Caroline, and James Frank Hollifield. *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2015.

Bruns, Axel, and Jean Burgess. *The Use of Twitter Hashtags in the Formation of Ad Hoc Publics*.

Queensland University of Technology, 2016.

Brydon, Diana. "Metamorphoses of a Discipline: Rethinking Canadian Literature within

Institutional Contexts." *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, WLU

Press, 2007, pp. 1–16.

Caldwell, Rebecca. "The Great Canadian Book Brawl." *The Globe and Mail*. 19 Feb. 2005,

[www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/the-great-canadian-book-brawl/article18216492/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/the-great-canadian-book-brawl/article18216492/)

Candlin, Fiona, and Raiford Guins. *The Object Reader*. Routledge, 2009.

[catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0825/2008033873.html](http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0825/2008033873.html).

Carrière, Marie. *Cautiously Hopeful: Metafeminist Practices in Canada*. McGill-Queens University

Press, 2020.

"CBC/Radio-Canada Annual Report 2017-2018." [site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/site/annual-reports/2017-](http://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/site/annual-reports/2017-2018/about-us/who-we-are-en.html)

[2018/about-us/who-we-are-en.html](http://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/site/annual-reports/2017-2018/about-us/who-we-are-en.html)

@cclyne. "So happy that #Ru won #CanadaReads @CBCbooks It is a beautiful work with an

important perspective on the Canadian experience" *Twitter*, 19 March 2015, 8:02am.

@CeeVanArt “Wow. What a beautiful and moving cry from the heart for \*all\* of your fellow citizens, @iamsambee. Brava. #CanadaReads2014.” *Twitter*, 3 March 2014, 4:48pm.

Chappell, Bill. “Relatives Of Drowned Syrian Boy Will Move To Canada.” *NPR.Org*, 24 Sept. 2018, [www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/28/457697276/relatives-of-drowned-syrian-boy-will-move-to-canada](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/28/457697276/relatives-of-drowned-syrian-boy-will-move-to-canada).

@CharlTteWolters “If anyone still doesn’t believe that literature can (sic) shift views and move people just has to listen @iamsambee on #CanadaReads2014.” *Twitter*, 6 March 2014, 8:51am.

Cho, Lily. “The Turn To Diaspora.” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, 2017, pp. 11–30.

Clarke, George Elliott. “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism.” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études Canadiennes*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2000, pp. 161–89.

Coleman, D., and D. Goellnicht. “Introduction: ‘Race’ into the Twenty-First Century.” *Essays on Canadian Writing.*, no. 75, 2002, pp. 1–29.

Coleman, Daniel. *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2006, <http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/418830>.



Collins, Jim. *Bring on the Books for Everybody : How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*.

Duke UP, 2010.

Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing : Trauma out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Davis, Kimberly Chabot. *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading*. University of

Illinois Press, 2014.

Dawson, Carrie. "On Thinking Like a State and Reading (about) Refugees." *Journal of Canadian*

*Studies/Revue d'études Canadiennes*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 58–75.

@Deen-Do. "Much respect to @craigkielburger for bringing up #Syria refugee crisis and Canada

not doing enough #CanadaReads." *Twitter*, 18 March 2015, 7:56am.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University

of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Derksen, Jeff. "National Literatures in the Shadow of Neoliberalism." *Shifting the Ground of*

*Canadian Literary Studies*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Zacharias, WLU Press,

2012, pp. 37–63.

Dobson, Kit. "Neoliberalism and the Limits of the Human: Rawi Hage's Cockroach." *Textual*

*Practice*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, pp. 255–71.

---. *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization*. WLU Press, 2009,

<http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/433542>.

Druick, Zoë. "Remedy and Remediation: The Cultural Theory of the Massey Commission." *The*

*Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2–3, 2007, pp. 159–74.

Elliott, Alicia. "CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire." *OpenBook.ca*. 7 September, 2017. [open-](http://openbook.ca/Columnists/CanLit-is-a-Raging-Dumpster-Fire)

[book.ca/Columnists/CanLit-is-a-Raging-Dumpster-Fire](http://openbook.ca/Columnists/CanLit-is-a-Raging-Dumpster-Fire)

English, James F. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*.

Harvard UP, 2005.

"Episode 1." *Canada Reads 2014*. CBC, 3 Mar. 2014.

"Episode 1." *Canada Reads 2015*. CBC, 15 Mar. 2015.

"Episode 2." *Canada Reads 2014*. CBC, 4 Mar. 2014.

"Episode 2." *Canada Reads 2015*. CBC, 16 Mar. 2015.

"Episode 3." *Canada Reads 2014*. CBC, 5 Mar. 2014.

"Episode 3." *Canada Reads 2015*. CBC, 17 Mar. 2015.

"Episode 4." *Canada Reads 2014*. CBC, 6 Mar. 2014.

"Episode 4." *Canada Reads 2015*. CBC, 18 Mar. 2015.

“Episode 4.” *Canada Reads 2018*. CBC, 29 Mar. 2018.

Espiritu, Yen Le. “Thirty Years AfterWARds: The Endings That Are Not Over.” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2005, pp. xiii–xxiii.

@farawaygooner “@cbcbooks #CanadaReads has strengthened my love for literature and Canada.

As an immigrant its my 1<sup>st</sup> year of viewing it. Thanks a lot!” *Twitter*, 19 March 2015,

8:00am.

Farr, Cecilia Konchar. *Reading Oprah : How Oprah’s Book Club Changed the Way America Reads*.

State University of New York Press, 2005.

Farr, Cecilia Konchar, and Jaime Harker. *The Oprah Affect : Critical Essays on Oprah’s Book Club*.

State University of New York Press, 2008.

FitzGerald, David Scott. “The Sociology of International Migration.” *Migration Theory: Talking*

*Across Disciplines*, edited by Caroline Bretell and James F. Hollifield. Routledge, 2015, pp.

115-137.

Frye, Northrop. “Conclusion.” *Literary History of Canadian Literature in English, volume III*,

edited by Carl F. Klinck et al., University of Toronto Press, 1976, pp. 318-332.

Fuller, Danielle. "Listening to the Readers of 'Canada Reads.'" *Canadian Literature*, no. 193, 2007, pp. 11-34.

Fuller, Danielle, and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. "A Reading Spectacle for the Nation: The CBC and 'Canada Reads.'" *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-36.

---. *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. Routledge, 2013.

Fuller, Danielle and Julie Rak. "'True Stories,' Real Lives: *Canada Reads* 2012 and the Effects of Reading Memoir in Public." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2015, pp. 25-45.

Gilroy, Paul. *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. Serpent's Tail, 1993.

@goodbooksandtea. "I love the way @craigkielburger is able to connect books to the political landscape of Canada today. #CanadaReads" *Twitter*, 18 March 2015, 7:26am.

"Governor General's Literary Awards." 18 Aug. 2018. [ggbooks.ca/about](http://ggbooks.ca/about)

Grafton, Kathryn. "Situating the Public Social Actions of Blog Posts." *Genres in the Internet: Issues in the Theory of Genre*, edited by Janet Giltrow and Dieter Stein, John Benjamins, 2009, pp. 85-111.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. "An Inventory of Shimmers." *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke UP, 2010, pp. 1-28.

Grossberg, Lawrence. "Affect's Future: Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual." *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke UP, 2010, pp. 309–38.

Gunew, Sneja Marina. *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*. Routledge, 2004.

Hage, Rawi. *Cockroach*. Anansi, 2009.

---. "On the Weight of Separation and the Lightness of the Non-Belonging." *Finding the Words : Writers on Inspiration, Desire, War, Celebrity, Exile, and Breaking the Rules*, edited by Jared Bland, Emblem Editions, 2011, pp. 227-235.

Hall, Stuart. "Diaspora and Cultural Identity." *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-237.

---. "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power." *Formations of Modernity*, edited by S. Hall and B. Gieben, Polity Press, 1992, pp. 275-331.

- Härting, Heike and Smaro Kamboureli. "Introduction: Discourses of Security, Peacekeeping Narratives, and the Cultural Imagination in Canada." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 2, 2009, pp. 659–86.
- Helms, Gabriele. *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003, <http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/400021>.
- Henderson, Lynne N. "Legality and Empathy." *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 85, no. 7, 1987, pp. 1574-1653
- Hout, Syrine Chafic. *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction : Home Matters in the Diaspora*. Edinburgh UP, 2012, [universitypublishingonline.org/edinburgh/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780748643431](http://universitypublishingonline.org/edinburgh/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780748643431).
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Refugees and Citizenship Canada Immigration. "#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures." 2 Dec. 2015, [www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/welcome-syrian-refugees/key-figures.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/welcome-syrian-refugees/key-figures.html).
- McLean, Jesse. "Inside the Offshore Tax Scheme That Left Iconic Olympian Donovan Bailey Owing Nearly \$2.3 Million in Unpaid Taxes." *The Star*, 8 Feb. 2019,

[www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2018/06/11/inside-the-offshore-tax-scheme-that-left-iconic-olympian-donovan-bailey-owing-nearly-23-million-in-unpaid-taxes.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2018/06/11/inside-the-offshore-tax-scheme-that-left-iconic-olympian-donovan-bailey-owing-nearly-23-million-in-unpaid-taxes.html).

Itwaru, Arnold. *The Invention of Canada : Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*. TSAR, 1990.

Jakubowski, Lisa. *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism*. Fernwood Publishing, 1997.

Jancelewicz, Chris. "Jian Ghomeshi 'not guilty' verdict sends Twitter into a frenzy." *Global News*. 24 March 2016.

Jardine, Alice. "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva." *The Poetics of Gender*, edited by Nancy K. Miller, Columbia UP, 1986, pp. 96-116.

@JoanWyatt. "@iamsambee is mighty for championing the least accessible book with such gusto & respect." *Twitter*, @JoanWyatt 5 March 2014, 8:27pm.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "Preface." *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki, WLU Press, 2007, pp. vii-xvi.

---. "The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy." *Home-Work: Post-Colonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*, edited by Cynthia Conchita Sugars, University of Ottawa Press, 2004, pp. 35-56.

Kamboureli, Smaro, et al. *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012, [site.ebrary.com/id/10701735](http://site.ebrary.com/id/10701735).

@kayee13. "there is no single story in the "immigrant story". #canadareads" *Twitter*, 18 March 2015, 7:26am.

Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford UP, 2007.

Kelley, Ninette and Michael Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Kinew, Wab. "There is room in our circle for Joseph Boyden." *The Globe and Mail*. 3 January 2017. [theglobeandmail.com/opinion/there-is-room-in-our-circle-for-joseph-boyden/article](http://theglobeandmail.com/opinion/there-is-room-in-our-circle-for-joseph-boyden/article)

Klinck, Carl F., et al. *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. 2nd ed., University of Toronto Press, 1976.

Knowles, Valerie. *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2015*. Dundurn, 2016.



Kymlicka, Will. "Ethnic, Linguistic, and Multicultural Diversity of Canada." *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Politics*, edited by John C. and David E. Smith, Oxford UP, 2010.

---. "Ethnocultural Diversity in a Liberal State: Making Sense of the Canadian Model(S)."

*Belonging? Diversity, Recognition, and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, edited by Keith G.

Banting et al., Institute for Research on Public Policy/Institut De Recherche En Politiques

Publique, 2007, pp. 37–86.

---. *Multicultural Odysseys : Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford UP,

2007.

Lai, Larissa. *Slanting I: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s*. Wilfrid

Laurier UP, 2014.

Lang, Anouk. *From Codex to Hypertext : Reading at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*.

University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.

---. "'A book that all Canadians should be proud to read: *Canada Reads* and Joseph Boyden's

*Three Day Road*.'" *Canadian Literature*, no. 215, winter 2012, pp. 120-136.

Lapierre, Maude. "Refugees and Global Violence: Complicity in Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*." *Journal*

*of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 50, no. 5, 2014, pp. 559–70.

@Lateandlost. "You need smarter judges. Both best books gone with #canadareads." 17 March 2015, 9:40am.

@leonicka. "Because immigrants are a uniform block with 1 experience who can't be individuals? Oh. #CanadaReads2014" *Twitter*, 5 March 2014, 7:09pm.

---. "Because immigrants can't have mental health issues? Oh. And a book has to be only about one thing? Oh. #CanadaReads2014." *Twitter*, 5 March 2014, 7:10pm.

---. "How do you define "barrier" and do you think all the books fit? #DiverseCanLit." *Twitter*, 21 March 2015, 7:09am.

---. "I can't imagine having this theme and these books w/o diverse panellists. #diversecanlit #canadareads." *Twitter*, 21 March 2015, 7:30am.

---. "That was a great moment! Craig really gave himself room to listen and grow during the #canadareads debate. @DawsonOakes #DiverseCanLit" *Twitter*, 21 March 2015, 7:21am.

Libin, Mark. "Marking Territory: Rawi Hage's Novels and the Challenge to Postcolonial Ethics." *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2013, pp. 71–90.

Litt, Paul and William Dendy. *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*. University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Mackay, Fiona. *Love and Politics: Women Politicians and the Ethics of Care*. Continuum, 2001.

Mackey, Eva. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*.

University of Toronto Press, 2002.

*Macleans*, 22 Jan 2015. [www.macleans.ca](http://www.macleans.ca)

Marchi, Lisa. "From the Dark Territories of Pain and Exclusion to Bright Futures? Rawi Hage's Cockroach." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 223, 2014, pp. 50–66.

Massey, V., et al. *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, 1949-1951*. 1951.

Moss, Laura. "Editorial - Canada Reads." *Canadian Literature*., no. 182, 2004, p. 8.

Mountz, Allison. "Human Smuggling, the Transnational Imaginary, and Everyday Geographies of the Nation-State." *Antipode*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2003, pp. 622-644.

@NatticusMaximus. "I previously wanted Cockroach to be eliminated first but @iamsabee made me rethink that. Well played, Bee. #CanadaReads2014." *Twitter*, 3 March 2014, 9:01am.

Netzer, Orly Lael. "'A VR Empathy Machine': Testimony, Recognition, and Affect on *Canada Reads* 2019." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 242, 2020, pp. 58-79.

Nguyen, Vinh. "Refugee Gratitude: Narrating Success and Intersubjectivity in Kim Thúy's *Ru*."

*Canadian Literature*, vol. 2013, no. 219, 2013, pp. 17–36.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion." *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol.

13, no. 01, 1996, pp. 27-58.

Okwonga, Musa. "The Ungrateful Country." *The Good Immigrant*, Unbound, 2016, pp. 229-235.

Papacharissi, Zizi. *Affective Publics : Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*. Oxford UP, 2014.

@peggy\_blair. "Interesting that #CanadaReads winning book is about immigration, at a time when

Canadian politicians are telling immigrants to go home." *Twitter*, 19 March 2015, 8:58am.

Penfield Lewis, Kelly. "The Trouble with Happy Endings: Conflicting Narratives in Oprah's Book

Club." *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah's Book Club*, edited by Cecilia Konchar

Farr and Jaime Harker, State University of New York Press, 2008, pp. 211–30.

Pennee, Donna Palmateer. "Literary Citizenship: Culture (Unb)Bounded, Culture (Re)Distributed."

*Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*, pp. 75–86.

Philip, M. Nourbese. "Why Multiculturalism Can't End Racism." *Frontiers: Essays and Writings*

*on Racism and Culture*. Mercury, 1992, pp. 181-186.

Radway, Janice A. *A Feeling for Books : The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Rambukkana, Nathan. *Hashtag Publics : The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks*. Peter Lang, 2015.

Rehberg Sedo, DeNel. *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

---. "Richard and Judy's Book Club and 'Canada Reads': Readers, Books, and Cultural Programming in a Digital Area." *Information, Communication, and Society* vol. 11, no. 2, 2008, pp. 188-206.

Richler, Noah. "This Immigrant Is No Saint: Rawi Hage's Novel Shatters the Noble Newcomer Stereotype." *Mcleans*, 29 May 2006.

Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan, editors. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2nd ed, Blackwell Pub, 2004.

Roberts, Gillian. *Prizing Literature : The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture*. University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Roberts, Laura. "Comment." *Canada Reads Loses the Plot*, 9 Oct. 2010,

[www.stevenwbeattie.com/?p=1928](http://www.stevenwbeattie.com/?p=1928).

@Rooster\_Monkey. "In terms of style and storytelling, #Ru is amazing. I love the micro-stories-with-a-novel format. #CanadaReads." *Twitter*, 17 March 2015, 7:45am.

Rowland, Wade. *Saving the CBC: Balancing Profit and Public Service*. Linda Leith Publishing, 2013.

Schwartz, Daniel. "Canada's Refugees: Where They Come From by the Numbers." 4 Oct. 2015.

[www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-refugees-1.3239460](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-refugees-1.3239460)

@selinayoung. "@iamsambee before hearing your defense of Cockroach I hated the book. You opened my eyes. Thank you. #CanadaReads2014" *Twitter*, 6 March 2014, 3:21pm.

Sharma, Nandita. "Canadian Multiculturalism and Its Nationalisms." *Home and Native Land:*

*Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada*, edited by Lisa Helps, May Chazan, Anna Stanley, and Sonali Thakkar, *Between the Lines*, 2011, pp. 85-101.

---. "Canadian Nationalism and the Making of a Global Apartheid." *Women + Environments*

*International Magazine*, no. 68, 2005, pp. 9-12

---. "On Being *Not* Canadian: The Social Organization of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada\*."

*Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2001, pp.

415–39.

Shukla, Nikesh. *The Good Immigrant*. Unbound, 2016.

Siemerling, Winfried. *The New North American Studies: Culture, Writing, and the Politics of*

*Re/cognition*. Psychology Press, 2005.

Smyth, Heather. "'The Being Together of Strangers': Dionne Brand's Politics of Difference and the

Limits of Multicultural Discourse." *Studies in Canadian Literature.*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2008, pp.

272-290.

@SocMedGirlyyj. "How #Canadian that a book about the immigrant experience wins

#CanadaReads! Congrats panelists." *Twitter*, 19 March 2015, 7:59am.

Sugars, Cynthia Conchita. *Home-Work : Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*.

University of Ottawa Press, 2004, [muse.jhu.edu/book/4460](http://muse.jhu.edu/book/4460).

Szeman, Imre. *Zones of Instability : Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation*. Johns Hopkins

UP, 2003.

@taraenmurphy. “@iamsambee just watched day 1 #CanadaReads2014 So great! Emotional accessibility is important to me as a reader & you brought that today.” *Twitter*, 3 March 2014, 3:46pm.

Taylor, Charles, and Amy Gutmann. *Multiculturalism : Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

@TGHKXL. “@iamsambee battling uphill all the way. Absolutely right why this challenging book about unwelcoming guy should be read.” *Twitter*, 5 Mar 2014, 9:46am.

@thepolicircus. “#Ru is the easiest book for liberal white Canadians to read and feel comfortable.” *Twitter*, 19 March 2015, 6:04pm.

“The Canada Reads Effect.” *BookNet Canada*, 17 Aug. 2018,

[www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2015/3/23/the-canada-reads-effect.html](http://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2015/3/23/the-canada-reads-effect.html).

Thompson, John B. “Introduction.” *Language and Symbolic Power*, Harvard UP, 1991.

Thúy, Kim. *Ru*. Translated by Sheila Fischman, Vintage Canada, 2012.

Tronto, Joan. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 1993.

Ty, Eleanor. “Representing ‘Other’ Diasporas in Recent Global Canadian Fiction.” *College Literature*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2011, pp. 98–114.



Ty, Eleanor and Donald C. Geollnicht. *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*.

Indiana UP, 2004.

Vernon, Karina. "To the End of the Hyphen-Nation: Decolonizing Multiculturalism." *ESC: English*

*Studies in Canada*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2016, pp. 81–98.

Walcott, Rinaldo. "Disgraceful: Intellectual Dishonesty, White Anxieties, and Multicultural

Critique Thirty-Six Years Later." *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in*

*Canada*, edited by Lisa Helps, May Chazan, Anna Stanley, and Sonali Thakkar, *Between the*

*Lines*, 2011, pp. 15-30.

Wills, Jenny Heijun. "Competing Nationalisms in Ru and La Trilogie Coréenne: Francophone

Asian Québécois Literatures." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 227, 2015, pp. 75–95.

Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar. "The Internalized Vermin of Exile in Montréal: Rawi Hage's

Cockroach." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2017, pp. 168–82.

@WordsofMystery. "As someone who is Viet, I LOVE that Ru won #CanadaReads! Hopefully

we'll see more books written on the lesser known immigrant experiences." *Twitter*, 19 March

2015, 9:20am.

Woodward, Kathleen M. *Statistical Panic : Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions*. Duke UP, 2009.

@wudasie. “@cameron\_tiff doing a great job discussing diversity of immigrant experience at #CanadaReads #TeamRu.” *Twitter*, 15 March 2014, 8:27pm.

@zengarden17. “Incredible for me, as an Asian and child of immigrants, the diversity of the #CanadaReads panel. And to see @WabKinew hosting was awesome.” *Twitter*, 16 March 2015, 4:00pm.

## Appendix A

### Detailed Descriptions of *Canada Reads* Seasons 2002-2019

The tables below detail the authors represented in each season of *Canada Reads*, as well as the panelists defending their texts. This is the information I have used to determine the percentage of white authors and panelists in each season in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Below, I have indicated the authors and panelists who are white in parentheses next to their names. After each table, I have summarized the number of white vs. non-white panelists and authors. I use the term ‘non-white’ here to include Indigenous and Black people, as well as people of colour.

#### 2002

Author	Panelist
Michael Ondaatje	Steven Page (white)
Margaret Atwood (white)	Kim Campbell (white)
George Elliott Clarke	Nalo Hopkinson
Margaret Laurence (white)	Leon Rooke (white)
Rohinton Mistry	Meagan Follows (white)

Authors: 2 white, 3 non-white

Panelists: 4 white, 1 non-white

**2003**

Author	Panelist
Hubert Aquin (white)	Denise Bombardier (white)
Paul Hiebert (white)	Will Ferguson (white)
Helen Humphreys (white)	Mag Ruffman (white)
Wayne Johnston (white)	Justin Trudeau (white)
Yann Martel (white)	Nancy Lee

Authors: all white

Panelists: 4 white, 1 non-white

**2004**

Author	Panelist
Guy Vanderhaeghe (white)	Jim Cuddy (white)
Thomas King	Glen Murray (white)
Alice Munro (white)	Measha Brueggergosman (Black)
Monique Proulx (white)	Francine Pelletier (white)
Mordecai Richler (white)	Zsuzsi Gartner (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 4 white, 1 non-white

**2005**

Author	Panelist
Frank Parker Day (white)	Donna Morrissey (white)
Margaret Atwood (white)	Olivia Chow
Leonard Cohen (white)	Molly Johnson
Jacques Poulin (white)	Roch Carrier
Mairuth Sarsfield	Sheraine MacKay (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 3 white, 2 non-white

**2006**

Author	Panelist
Miriam Toews (white)	John K. Samson (white)
Joseph Boyden (white)	Nelofer Pazira
Frances Itani	Maureen McTeer (white)
Al Purdy (white)	Susan Musgrave (white)
Mordecai Richler (white)	Scott Thompson (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 4 white, 1 non-white

**2007**

Author	Panelist
Heather O'Neill (white)	John K. Samson (white)
David Bezmozgis (white)	Steven Page (white)
Anosh Irani	Donna Morrissey (white)
Gabrielle Roy (white)	Denise Bombardier (white)
Timothy Taylor (white)	Jim Cuddy (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: all white

**2008**

Author	Panelist
Paul Quarrington (white)	Dave Bidini (white)
Timothy Findley (white)	Zaib Shaikh
Mavis Gallant (white)	Lisa Moore (white)
Nalo Hopkinson	Jemini
Thomas Wharton (white)	Steve MacLean (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 3 white, 2 non-white

**2009**

Author	Panelist
Lawrence Hill	Avi Lewis
David Adams Richards (white)	Sarah Slean (white)
Gil Adamson (white)	Nicholas Campbell (white)
Brian Francis (white)	Jen Sookfong Lee
Michel Tremblay (white)	Anne-Marie Withenshaw (white)

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 4 white, 1 non-white

**2010**

Author	Panelist
Nicholas Dickner (white)	Michel Vézina (white)
Wayson Choy	Samantha Nutt (white)
Douglas Coupland (white)	Cadence Weapon
Marina Endicott (white)	Simi Sara
Ann-Marie MacDonald (white)	Perdita Felicien

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2011**

Author	Panelist
Terry Fallis (white)	Ali Velshi
Angie Abdou (white)	Georges Laraque
Jeff Lemire (white)	Sara Quin (white)
Ami McKay (white)	Debbie Travis (white)
Carol Shields (white)	Lorne Cardinal

Authors: all white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2012**

Author	Panelist
Carmen Aguiere	Shad
Dave Bidini (white)	Stacey McKenzie
Ken Dryden (white)	Alan Thicke (white)
Marina Nemat	Arlene Dickinson (white)
John Vaillant (white)	Anne-France Goldwater (white)

Authors: 3 white, 2 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white



**2013**

Author	Panelist
Lisa Moore (white)	Trent MacLellan
David Bergen (white)	Ron MacLean (white)
Hugh MacLennan (white)	Jay Baruchel (white)
Jane Urquhart (white)	Charlotte Gray (white)
Richard Wagamese	Carol Huynh

Authors: 4 white, 1 non-white

Panelists: 3 white, 2 non-white

**2014**

Author	Panelist
Joseph Boyden (white)	Wab Kinew
Margaret Atwood (white)	Stephen Lewis (white)
Esi Edugyan	Donovan Bailey
Rawi Hage	Samantha Bee (white)
Kathleen Winter (white)	Sarah Gadon (white)

Authors: 2 white, 3 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2015**

Author	Panelist
Kim Thúy	Cameron Bailey
Kamal Al-Solaylee	Kristin Kreuk
Thomas King	Craig Kielburger (white)
Raziel Reid (white)	Lainey Lui
Jocelyne Saucier (white)	Martha Wainwright (white)

Authors: 2 white, 3 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2016**

Author	Panelist
Lawrence Hill	Clara Hughes (white)
Anita Rau Badami	Vinay Virmani
Tracey Lindberg	Bruce Poon Tip
Saleema Nawaz	Farah Mohamed
Michael Winter (white)	Adam Copeland (white)

Authors: 1 white, 4 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2017**

Author	Panelist
André Alexis	Humble the Poet
Madeline Ashby (white)	Measha Breuggergosman
M. G. Vassanji	Jody Mitic (white)
Katherena Vermette	Candy Palmater
Sheila Watt-Cloutier	Chantal Kreviazuk (white)

Authors: 2 Indigenous, 3 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2018**

Author	Panelist
Mark Sakamoto	Jeanne Beker (white)
Sharon Bala	Mozhdah Jamalzadah
Craig Davidson (white)	Greg Johnson (white)
Cherie Dimaline	Jully Black
Omar El Akkad	Tahmoh Penikett

Authors: 1 white, 4 non-white

Panelists: 2 white, 3 non-white

**2019**

Author	Panelist
Max Eisen (white)	Ziya Tong
Abu Bakr Al-Rabeeh and Winnie Yeung	Chuck Comeau (white)
Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette (white)	Yanick Truesdale
Lindsay Wong	Joe Zee
David Chariandy	Lisa Ray

Authors: 2 white, 3 non-white

Panelists: 1 white, 4 non-white