

Care, Identity and Inclusion in Multicultural Societies:  
A Response to Walter Benn Michaels' *The Trouble with Diversity*

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## Care, Identity and Inclusion in Multicultural Societies: A Response to Walter Benn Michaels' *The Trouble with Diversity*

In *The Trouble with Diversity*, Walter Benn Michaels (2006) argues that the politics of recognition is obstructing debate about economic inequality. The relativism implied by contemporary multiculturalism distracts public attention from the injustice of poverty and economic inequality by inviting the economically privileged merely to show respect for the group specificity of the poor without redressing the political-economic structures that perpetuate class inequality. He therefore recommends that we displace identity politics in favour of focusing entirely on economic inequality.

The strength of Michaels' book is that it draws greater public attention to a decade-old academic concern, one that Fraser (1997) coined the "redistribution-recognition dilemma." "Recognition claims," she observes, "often take the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group and then affirming its value. Thus, they tend to promote group differentiation. Redistribution claims, in contrast, often call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity... Thus, they tend to promote group *dedifferentiation*. The upshot is that the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution often appear to have mutually contradictory aims" (*ibid.*, 16).

While his book succeeds at increasing awareness about the problem, the remedy proposed by Michaels ignores the insights about intersectionality that Fraser and others advanced when first diagnosing it (see also Spelman 1988; Razack 1998). Most notably, Michaels invites us to ponder the question "Who are we?" and answers that we should not care so much about our ethnocultural or racial identities, regardless of how class privilege and/or disadvantage is moderated by gender and race. Despite the sympathy I have for some elements of his analysis, his answer I will show is far too blunt and his argument in favour of it is insufficiently supported by evidence. In response, rather than discourage identity transmission, as Michaels urges, I provide evidence that our commitments to social inclusion need to evolve so they provide sufficient support for the private caregiving time that enables cultural continuity.

While not the primary focus of the article, the position I defend confronts the growing dissatisfaction expressed about multiculturalism post-911. Contemporary security threats have moved British government officials to deem multiculturalism a failure (Kelly 2006). Similar misgivings are manifest in Canada following the arrest of more than a dozen citizens in the greater Toronto area in the light of evidence that they were plotting to bomb domestic targets. Hérouxville, a Quebec town, has gone so far as to propose a "code of conduct" for immigrants that would oblige new residents to assimilate core values of the community while rejecting any elements of their cultural upbringing that contradict local norms. In short, more citizens and political leaders are questioning whether multiculturalism promotes social cohesion in diverse, cosmopolitan, globalized populations, as opposed to a source of instability and, potentially, danger.

I don't pretend in this article to be an expert about terrorism, nor the seeds of hate, violence, etc. My defense of minority (and majority) cultural continuity in pluralist societies is thus not intended to rebuff the post-911 security concerns that are now attributed to multiculturalism. Rather, the article is better read as a reminder of what is at stake in the politics of recognition: most notably, the power of self-definition.

My analysis is developed in the light of insights shared by aboriginal women and women of colour who are participating in a qualitative study of the role that private caregiving time plays in producing personal and group identity, as well as social inclusion for themselves and their children. The sample was selected purposefully, because as minority ethnocultural women, the participants are members of the two paradigmatic "bivalent collectivities" that Fraser examines in her discussion of the redistribution-recognition dilemma: "gender" and "race" (1997, 19). The term bivalent signals the presumption that these collectivities "suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original." Women who are attuned the potential significance of racial and ethnic identity, the literature continues, are uniquely

positioned to reveal the political significance of caregiving which, while also germane for majority populations, is often overlooked (Collins 1991, 1994; Kershaw 2005, chapter 6).

The article is divided into five sections. The first describes briefly the Care, Identity and Inclusion (CII) HIPPY Case Study that has generated the evidence to which I turn to show the limitations of Michaels' analysis, and to support the thesis that social inclusion requires private time to care about identity transmission. The study engages 48 immigrant women of colour and aboriginal women living in the lower mainland of BC and in Toronto, Ontario. Their narratives, I will argue, collectively provide very different answers to the questions "Who are we? And Why do we care?," which Michaels answers in the fifth chapter of his book (2006). While he downplays the importance of cultural continuity, the women emphasize the role that their private caregiving plays in the retention of minority cultural identities. This retention is necessary, I recount in section two, to preserve over time the values and beliefs by which many of the participants live their own lives, and in regards to which they aspire for their children to abide. The same retention, I argue in section three, contributes to the strength and quality of intimate family relationships, to showing respect for the significant others or elders to whom many are indebted, as well as to the maintenance of self-esteem. The latter theme, many mothers imply, reveals a link between their private caregiving and the empowerment of their ethnocultural community, regardless of economic structures. This theme is the focus of section four.

Evidence supporting the thesis that time to care privately is necessary for social inclusion has important implications for debates about social capital and social cohesion. I therefore conclude in section five by inviting heightened theoretical attention to the role that bonding social capital may play in positioning members of different social groups to bridge with one another when residing in compositionally diverse political jurisdictions. The implications of any such invitation require that we attend both to the financial constraints that regularly constrain the time that citizens have available to foster the bonding capital that flows from private care, while showing due concern for the gender division of responsibility for such care.

### *Care, Identity and Inclusion: HIPPY Case Studies*

The HIPPY Case Studies are a community-driven initiative that invites academics from the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Simon Fraser University (SFU) to examine social inclusion for children and families from the perspectives of minority ethnocultural groups. The project is designed to be citizen-led and to foster local capacity by partnering with the program HIPPY: Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters. HIPPY is organized around the principle that facilitating the caregiver-child bond within the family home is a powerful intervention for increasing parental agency and child success in school and society. Home visitors meet weekly during the school year with participant families to enhance the opportunities, skills and comfort-level that parents require to nurture their relationships with their children. While the program targets lower-income families in general, the program has proven more popular in Canada with recent immigrants and Aboriginal communities. All home visitors are therefore women of colour or members of First Nations. Most share an ethnocultural heritage with the families that participate in HIPPY, in part to facilitate communication with participants often in a language other than English.

With the support of a \$700,000, three-year contribution from the federal Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the academic partners have engaged HIPPY home visitors and coordinators to serve as community researchers in four aboriginal communities in the lower mainland of BC, as well as among immigrant populations in Vancouver and Toronto. Four home visitors serve along side the UBC partner and SFU Director of Continuing Studies on an executive committee to provide leadership in determining how to conceptualize social inclusion and how to organize data collection among minority ethnocultural groups accordingly.

The initial stage of the project, months one through twelve, included the four home visitors on the executive and another six of their colleagues in a process of self-journaling through which they explored their understanding of the terms care, identity, and inclusion, as well as the interconnections between these concepts. Every two weeks for a three month period, the ten home visitors would submit journal entries by email to the UBC partner who would read them and respond with individually tailored questions that invited further exploration of themes raised in each writer's previous submission. Journaling thus emerged as an iterative, semi-structured interview that occurred in writing electronically with each home visitor. The process simultaneously provided training to home visitors in use of computers, email and word processing, which would become central to their role as interviewers with parents.

University partners in turn used the journal entries as a conceptual framework with which to train home visitors to serve as researchers who interview the parents with whom they already administer the HIPPY program. Sharing journal entries provided a method by which to work toward greater inter-interviewer consistency when facilitating semi-structured, qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of 38 parents. The interviews started in month 13 of the study, and generally occur twice every four to six weeks during the school year starting in October.

The research design capitalizes on the trust that home visitors have already established with HIPPY parents in order to explore sensitive issues that include how identity relates to experiences of inclusion and/or discrimination. Fifteen to thirty minute conversations about care, identity and inclusion are added to the end of two out of every four HIPPY home visits that unfold each month in parents' homes. The majority of the interviews are conducted in a parent's first language. In such cases, every four to six weeks during the school year, the home visitor interviews the parent in the first week; transcribes the interview into the parent's first language in the second week; re-visits the parent in a third week to verify the transcript and invite additions or revisions; transcribes the second meeting in week four; and, finally, translates both the first and second meetings into English. The final English transcript is sent to the UBC partner, who reads it in order to recommend additional questions for the home visitor to integrate into her interviews in the next four to six weeks of data gathering. The interviews thus interrogate the uniqueness of parents' circumstances, while also proceeding with a common set of questions that the UBC partner proposes for every interview in the light of previous transcripts with all participants.

Home visitor fluency in languages other than English is thus integral to the study design in order to access the experiential expertise of a group of Canadian residents who are less often heard in research and public dialogue about social inclusion. Eleven English-as-a-second-language parents, however, participate in interviews in English with home visitors. In such cases, the data gathering process unfolds as described above, with the exception that transcripts produced in week two and reviewed in week three are examined in English.

The arguments in this article draw on journal entries produced by home visitors and transcripts of planning and training sessions with the home visitors in the first year of the project, as well as transcripts of interviews that home visitors conducted with participant parents over months thirteen through eighteen. The total sample for which findings are reported is 48.

#### ***Discursive illogic belies beliefs and value commitments***

Michaels is very effective in his book at revealing the problems with how many of us talk about identity and diversity. His argument runs as follows (see chapter 5). Beliefs, he reminds us, are right or wrong. But the right/wrong binary is not one that sits comfortably in a society committed to multiculturalism. The latter is committed to diversity; it values difference. The opposite of difference is sameness. This difference/sameness binary permits us to differ, without disagreeing. We in turn find comfort in cultural diversity, rather than in debating beliefs, because the difference versus sameness binary does not require that we endorse our cultural views and practices. My culture is good for me because it is mine. Yours can be good for you, because it is yours. Ideological indolence becomes the norm.

Yet the moment we describe what we believe as expressions of our identity, Michaels astutely points out that we have no logical grounds on which to care what anyone does, or will do, with that culture. "The advantage of culture over ideology," he observes, "is that we do not need to find reasons to defend our culture. The fact that it's ours is all that matters; the disadvantage is that once we describe the things we believe as expressions of our identity, we can't logically care whether any one else does or will believe them" (157).

I raise no problems in this paper with Michaels' concerns about relativism, nor his read of what we are logically committed to when we express our beliefs in terms of identity claims. The problem in the analysis is his conclusion: that we are actually committed to the logic implied by the relativist discourses with which some affirm diversity. Since it is illogical to differ without disagreeing *and* still care that at least some others identity with one's culture, Michaels implies that no one committed to the relativist interpretations of multiculturalism that he critiques should logically care about what culture they belong to. As he argues:

Think... of the difference between being convinced (by someone else's argument) and being assimilated (into someone else's culture). None of the pathos that attaches to the loss of a culture attaches to the change in beliefs that involved in losing an argument. How could it? Since the phenomenon of changing one's beliefs irreducibly involves the sense that the new beliefs are better than the old ones—after all, the new beliefs are ones that now seem to you right and the old ones see wrong; that's why you changed them—it makes no logical and not much emotional sense to mourn the passing of the old beliefs... But culture and cultural identity seem to us very different. Because we don't think of cultures as right or wrong, we don't necessarily experience the passage from one to another as progress... (147).

[W]e can love the differences between cultures because cultures (and the identities they give us) make no claim to being either better or worse. They're just ours or not ours (148).

These are strong claims, which require substantial evidence to verify. Regrettably, there is a dearth of evidence in Michaels' analysis. His observations about the problems in logic are well-taken. However, we are ill-advised to confuse, as he does, people's illogic with the idea that people don't think their cultures are right – and not just for them.

Jacqueline, a resident originally from the continent of Africa, illustrates the point. She explains that she thinks it...

is very important for me to pass on this [my] culture... to my son. Taking into consideration the fact that I'm an African who is residing in Canada...and when you want to compare both cultures they are like really, really different in a lot of ways. And to be proud of my African Heritage I must do everything to instil my culture in my child so that he grows up with it. Because if I compare the way children in Africa are raised, their culture values versus the Canadian values it's so different. I wouldn't want my child to grow up with a culture that is just flat. The African culture is very rich and I wouldn't want him to get lost on that part.

I'm saying this because I've lived in Canada for a while and I've seen the way, I'm not criticizing the way they raise their kids. But I'm saying that if you put an African child side by side with a Canadian child, the respect the African child has for elders is 100% more than the respect the Canadian child has."

Jacqueline's remark that she is "not criticizing the way they [Canadians] raise their kids" implies precisely the sort of unwillingness to engage in normative debate that frustrates Michaels. But the entire passage belies the very strong beliefs that she holds about what is right and wrong in terms of discipline and values. Jacqueline emphatically favours the disciplinary patterns evident in her culture of origin. These values are not merely good for Jacqueline because they are hers. She thinks they are better than the disciplinary values with which she identifies the majority population. Accordingly, she is very concerned that at least some people internalize "this African culture" – her children.

Ramona, a mother originally from the Philippines, affirms Jacqueline's view:

As we can see... the Canadian kids... their attitude, how they communicate with adults...

they are very wild, compared with our kids, [who] still have their manners, ... they

know...how to communicate with other kids too. So when my kids see that attitude they

told me mom, "why he is doing like that. I get an example from them, and I asked them do

you think it is right or what?... They said no. Most Filipinos put much time to monitor their

kids, what they are doing... not to spoil them. Canadians spoil their kids, especially when

they are little ones. They give them everything they want. Not like us. We only give what

we can. The only thing we can share with our kids, it is how they do with their manners.

Michaels rightly critiques in his book the income inequalities that permit some to give their children "everything they want," while Ramona must retain content to "only give what we can." But even if she could give more, Ramona is not suggesting that the discipline and manners with which she associates Filipino culture would be any less important to transfer. She doesn't merely think that such cultural values are good for her because they are hers. She thinks they are good, period; better than others. Hence, she aims to pass them down to her children in response to majority values in Canada.

### ***Who are we? Why do we care?***

Since Michaels wrongly interprets the relativism implied by the difference/sameness binary to imply that we don't, or at least shouldn't, care much about our cultural identity, he dismisses the value that some theorists have previously ascribed to the objective of cultural survival to which the politics of recognition contributes. Charles Taylor (1994, 40), for instance, contends that "if 'we're concerned with identity, then what is more legitimate than one's aspiration that it never be lost?" But Michaels acknowledges no such legitimacy. Rather, he replies (2006, 156), "the things we don't want to lose are the things that have nothing to do with our identity."

We don't, for example, want to lose great works of art—not because they're part of our culture but because they're great. If we just thought that Shakespeare was good *for us*, we would naturally want his play around as long as we were around, but we wouldn't care if subsequent generations preferred, say, David Mamet. It's only because, rightly or wrongly, we think Shakespeare is good for everyone—regardless of identity—that we want his plays to survive... [T]here's no loss worth mourning if the things we love die with us and are just replaced by the things our descendants love instead.

Again, this is a very strong claim for which Michaels marshals little evidence when defending his view of what does and does not matter to 'us' when thinking about loss of identity, cultural or otherwise. Nor is his cavalier attitude about cultural survival shared by the CII participants. Instead, their expertise about the importance of cultural continuity alerts readers to its tremendous psychological significance in their lives. Three themes are particularly noteworthy.

First, Lela, a mother originally from Albania, anticipates significant relational challenges with her daughter if she is not successful at passing down her culture of origin.

She will lose Albanian culture and I think we will have a big problem to understand each other because I grew up in Albania that has different culture to Canadian culture. If she does not grow up in Albanian culture, we will have two different ideas. I think we will never be on the same page. We can't be on the same page. She will think in the Canadian way and I will think in the Albania way. So it will be hard to find the right way.

Cultural transmission is thus important to Lela because of the intimacy it permits her with her daughter. In Lela's view, the very quality of this fundamental relationship in her life requires identity maintenance over time between generations.

Bibi, a mother who immigrated from Congo, agrees, suggesting that nothing less than the "loss" of her children is at stake when it comes to identity transmission. "I want my children to identify themselves as Congolese before thinking they are Canadian," she explains, "because culturally being born from Congolese parents they are Congolese and I don't want to lose them. They have to accept and learn our culture to be able to pass it down to their children too." When asked to clarify what she means by the phrase "lose them," she explains that "I identify myself as a Congolese. Logically they have to identify themselves as Congolese. If they do not see themselves as Congolese, for me they don't have any identity. They are not proud of us as their parents, they won't learn my culture (language, food, costume, stories...) and follow advice provided by us. This explains the words 'lose them'."

While cultural transmission over time is seen as critical for the quality of the parent-child bond, CII participants emphasize that immersion in minority culture is equally necessary to foster familiarity and closeness between child and grand-parents. Dong Dong, a Canadian originally from China, regards herself as having a "responsibility to pass our Chinese culture and traditional habits to my children." "If I don't fulfill my responsibility, how can my children communicate with their relatives in China? How can they keep their relations with their relatives in China?... I want my children to know their kinship."

Dong Dong's rhetorical questions signal that family remains a key site of social belonging for herself and children, regardless of the geographic distance between members. Debbie, originally from Africa, corroborates this view, emphasizing the social security that persists in relational bonds. She insists that her children must learn her first language, "Twi," in part out of concern that something may happen to her, which would require her children to rely more on family members back home. "[In case I am not around," she explains, "so long as my children speak Twi "my mum or any other person in my family who cannot speak English... will be able to communicate with my kids any way."

Debbie and Dong Dong thus both emphasize that honoring and maintaining a cultural connection between generations can be sufficient to sustain membership in an extended family network that transcends national borders. Lela articulates a similar position when explaining the importance of minority language retention. Her interview is worth quoting at length:

Q: Why is it important that your daughter be able to talk directly to her grandparents in your language?

Lela: I want her to talk to my parents directly because they are her grandparents. She has to communicate with them; they have to know each other because it is her family. They have to have memory between them, of their granddaughter. One day my parents will die, and she will have something to remember about them and they will have something to remember about her. I think it is very important to have that blood connection because in Albania we respect very much the family...

Q: Do you think that the blood connection cannot exist if for example she talks in English and then you translate for her grandparents?

Lela: No, it cannot, they have to hear her voice. There is something special for them to keep that. I can't say it. Each child has different age. There is something special they have to enjoy. It is ok they are not here [in Canada] but they can hear that on the telephone and they can enjoy anyway. Something special that I can't do, except her voice makes that.

Q: What, if anything, would be lost if your daughter couldn't talk directly with the grandparents?

Lela: They won't have the love of each other, if they don't talk, they won't have any memory of each other, and they won't have any connection between each other because they have never talked.

Q: Is that the same for both/grandparents and her?

Lela: It is the same. The grandparents want to hear the granddaughter what she thinks, what she say. They want to hear anything about her. They want to have a nice knowledge that may be one day when we go there, they can remember that one day grandmother told me about this on the telephone, or granddaughter told me about this. Even they are not here, but still have connection with each other. It's important for me, for my daughter and for my parents.

The limited value that Michaels assigns to cultural identity retention over time thus reflects that he, like many theorists blinded by the public/private divide, neglects the importance of family and other intimate relations when theorizing about (in)equality and (in)justice. In our web of close relationships, Bibi, Dong Dong and Lela remind us that some absolutely fundamental things we don't want to lose have everything to do with our identity: literally, our ability to relate with others who are often particularly dear to us. And since these relationships occur across generations, it is inadequate for Michaels to claim that "there's no loss worth mourning if the things we love die with us and are just replaced by the things our descendants love instead." His assertion misses the point: the object of love that matters so regularly to CII participants is in fact *the love between generations*. And, contrary to Michaels, CII participants emphasize that cultural transmission from one generation and adoption by the next is often critical for sustaining such relationships.

Appreciation for those most dear underpins a second, related reason that many CII participants resist Michaels' denigration of cultural continuity: namely, their interest in showing due respect for the sacrifices that others have made on their behalf. Debbie makes this point eloquently: my "ancestors... did something important to us the young ones (those now present). They put their lives, all they had and even died for our sakes. So that is why it is important for me to stick to it and teach my children also [their culture]. What they did was about love, caring and devotion, and I will like my children to understand..."

Jenny, an aboriginal mother of two girls, asserts a similar appreciation for past suffering by family members. In her case, the object of respect and appreciation are elders who ensured some cultural continuity in her community despite the destruction of aboriginality sponsored by the residential school system in Canada. "I am vigilant," she explains, "about ensuring that my children know the culture, that they value their grandmother's knowledge, their families' suffering so that we could exist (the history of Aboriginal people, the history of the Musqueam people)."

The respect for elders and others who made past sacrifices which pervades their narratives anticipates a third, and perhaps the most important, reason why CII participants insist that we should ignore

the limited importance that Michaels places on cultural identity: maintenance of *self*-respect and personal pride. Recall Jacqueline's observation that "to be proud of my African Heritage I must do everything to instil my culture in my child so that he grows up with it." Or Bibi's claim that if my children "do not see themselves as Congolese, for me they don't have any identity. They are not proud of us as their parents."

These comments remind us about the tremendous importance that Rawls ascribed to "self-respect" in *A Theory of Justice* (1971, 440). He argued that some social locations are advantageous because they provide greater access to primary social goods (*ibid.*, 62): things that every person is presumed to want because they "normally have a use whatever a person's rational plan of life." In a Rawlsian framework, primary social goods included not only "rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth" (*ibid.*), but also the conditions required for self-respect, "the most important primary good" (440). In his view, self-respect "includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out," as well as the "confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions." Without these two qualities, Rawls observes, "nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain and we sink into apathy and cynicism."

Wary of the kinds of constraints on agency that Rawls attributes to self-doubt, CII participants reveal that identity retention and transmission by some minority ethnic women assumes as one purpose the prevention of apathy and cynicism among citizens whose self-worth is not necessarily validated in public structures. As Bibi explains:

By knowing who I am, my history, background, culture I become proud of myself. Knowing who I am helps me to accept myself and address any negative attitudes from racists; it helps also to contextualize successes and failures. Being able to ask myself why I succeed or why I did not will help me to conclude that success and failure are not a matter of color or culture, or gender... So for me self-esteem and ability to cope with racism become tools which help me to navigate or find the way to live in any society.

Similarly, Megan, an aboriginal woman in the lower mainland of BC, speaks to the connection between personal respect and cultural identity by highlighting the humiliation that flows from cultural loss. "I think that our culture and language can bring pride to our community, and if everyone took the time to learn more, teach more, there would be much *less shame* in our culture" (emphasis added).

Since personal pride is rightly considered among the things that Michaels should concede "we don't want to lose," CII participants like Megan and Bibi give him considerable reason to revisit his assertion that such things "have nothing to do with our identity." Michaels may respond, however, that "ethnic, cultural and linguistic resistance" are favoured by such women because it "is not tired old political or economic resistance. No need to worry about socialism here or the redistribution of wealth. It's the culture, stupid—when the problem is inequality, the solution is identity."

Notwithstanding the condescension implied by this quote, Megan's narrative reminds us about the specifically cultural attacks her people and other First Nations endured as a result of the residential school system:

We were banned from our own traditions, values and language and taught to think that we had no rights... After the Indian Act our land was taken away, Natives were titled as less than human, and were treated more as savage animals. We were restricted to reserves in which we were not allowed to leave, though our way of survival was to hunt, fish and gather. Natives had to have written approval to leave, which meant that they could not go to traditional hunting, camping, fishing, gathering grounds, or even leave for medical attention. If Aboriginals were caught practicing any traditions they would be arrested.

While her narrative is sophisticated in that it acknowledges explicitly the economic underpinnings of Colonialism in Canada, Megan is adamant that the harm her people have endured is not merely economic. She describes the residential school system as being particularly hurtful and damaging because of the attack on cultural transmission that it represented:

In BC the first Residential School opened up in 1861, this truly is one of the greatest tragedies that First Nations people have had to face... First children were separated from their family and home, this was not a choice for most parents. This caused a change in their physical conditions, confinement, clothing, diet and sleeping quarters. There was a loss of Native Language, they were ridiculed for speaking their mother tongue and forced to speak English, though some did not know a word of it. There was abuse of all sorts. The emotional abuse may consist of public humiliation, lack of comfort, no privileges or privacy. The physical abuse may consist of physical confinement, strapping, beating, withholding of food.

The last Residential School did not close in BC until 1983. Residential School survivors struggled with raising their own families, they did not grow up in a loving home and so they themselves struggle to create a loving home for their children. Traditions were lost and in most families not passed down. These are some of the many challenges in passing down a culture and language that was stolen and banned for us to practice.

### *Care, Resistance and Community Development*

The teaching of culture with which Megan associates restoration of pride in her aboriginal community is precisely the sort of teaching that many CII participants identify in their child care. As Nancy, another aboriginal mother, explains about her people's efforts to rediscover culture: "I think there is a connection between what you do as a parent and your community's ability to regain what is lost because I think that it is going to have to start somewhere. Like the parents, like the parents like myself. Otherwise how do the teachings get passed on."

Jenny echoes this sentiment. She explains that:

As a mother, one of the most important tasks that I have undertaken is the role of creating identity in my children. When the girls were very young, I began exposing them to every possible element of their culture; the longhouse practices, funeral celebrations, dance groups in the community, and the maintenance of strong ties with family...

In supporting the development of my children's identity I have chosen to introduce culture first, and allow this to guide all other aspects of their individual identity. For far too long, my extended and immediate family has had our culture taken away, by banning our culture and the use of our language. I guess you could say that I have turned the tables and made 100% certain that my children have seen and heard and tested every aspect of their cultural identity. And then the other elements of their unique identities can be shaped by their decisions...

Public resistance through private care is by no means characteristic only of childrearing patterns among aboriginal women. Danielle remarks that "in a society where you are looked upon as a 'black' or second class, one needs a lot of self-esteem and positiveness in order to live freely as well as to accomplish your goals in life, since it is a daily struggle." "My children," she adds, "though born in Canada from African parents are faced with occasional biases and struggles... I try to teach them at their level to accept criticism and use it as a tool to become stronger when faced with discrimination. I constantly teach them about their origin, educate them to appreciate their identity, especially as name calling is common

among young children. I teach them to be smart about themselves and constantly praise them for their efforts and the open communications, thus building their self-esteem and confidence."

Bibi similarly describes the care she provides for her child's identity as a source of resilience.

For me, building my children's identities is as important as providing them food and water because it will help them develop survival strategies... I know from life experience that a strong ethnic identity can help anyone to develop self-esteem, the ability to cope with discrimination and racism, and succeed in life...

When they [my children] talk to me about being different, sometimes with strong emotions, I try to tell them that the only way for them to feel good about themselves is to accept themselves as they are and be proud of it. My objectives is to help them to control their emotions and behavior when they are confronted with discrimination because of their race and also when they have a strong ethnic identity, the connection will be easier with other ethnic groups...

My responsibility as a parent is to help them be stronger inside so they can be able to deal with any kind of exclusion or when they face exclusion, the shock will be less or they may not even be in shock because they are prepared and learned from me that they are Congolese because we (parents) are and it's important to stay in connection with us (parents) than being with connection to the Land (Canadian because they are born in Canada)...

For Bibi, the concern she shows to nurture her children's Congolese identity in Canada is largely pragmatic in recognition that her children are sometimes viewed as outsiders regardless of their Canadian birthplace. I want my "children to identify themselves as Congolese before thinking they are Canadian," she explains, in part "because the mainstream society identifies them from somewhere else even though they are born in Canada."

When I was new in Canada, people were asking me where am I from. It was a pleasure to tell them that I am from Congo. After living a number of years as I was becoming more integrated into the Canadian society, I started to hear from black or African children born in Canada, even those of third generation that they were shocked being asked where there are from. In their effort to try to prove that they were Canadian, black children feel like they are being put aside by those questions that remind them sometimes of what they have tried to put aside to fit in the large community.

My daughter... already experienced those kind of reactions. During a show and tell activity her classmates didn't believe that she was born in Quebec City. She proved that with her birth certificate. For me the exclusion is present in our daily life.

That is one reason why "I don't want my children to think that they are Canadian without putting BUT FROM CONGO because the mainstream society will never call them or consider them as Canadian when it's come time to identity them" (emphasis in original).

The connection between identity transmission and resilience that CII participants emphasize lends credence to Collins' (1994, 49) insight about "the significance of self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity." A proud sense of self that is indexed to a strong attachment to one's ethnic

heritage positions some women of colour to function as cultural workers within their families and broader communities. The care that some women in minority ethnic groups provide in their domestic spaces contributes significantly to the development of a sense of self worth among the children in their care. The failure of schools, the media and other public institutions to validate the identities of some racialized ethnic groups requires mothers to compensate by shouldering what Roberts (1995a, 225) describes as "the incredible task of guarding their children's identity against innumerable messages that brand them as less than human." The care work of minority ethnic mothers thus encompasses the responsibility to cultivate "a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color" (Collins 1994, 57): mothers must teach their children "to survive in systems that oppress them," while ensuring that this survival does "not come at the expense of self-esteem" (*ibid.*). By instilling within children the confidence to trust their own self-definitions and values, minority ethnic mothers, like those who participate in the CII HIPPY Case studies, equip their offspring with "a powerful tool for resisting oppression" (Collins 1991, 51).

The extent to which private, domestic time may serve as a site of self-definition in which some minority ethnic women resist externally imposed denigrating images thus reveals that their "subjective experience of... motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial ethnic communities:" as Collins (1994, 47) observes, one does not exist without the other. This insight suggests that domestic care has the potential to function as a form of resistance to oppression that stretches well beyond the particular homes in which the work is performed because it contributes to a broader project of community development. *Qua* cultural workers, mothers contribute significantly to the project of "group survival" by transmitting an ethnocentric worldview to the next generation (*ibid.*; Collins 1991, 145-54). Collins (1991, 143) attributes the survival of certain African customs in North America to the conscious effort made by Black women to preserve specific traditions. This observation draws attention to the role served by women from minority ethnic groups as cultural conduits in polyethnic countries such as Canada and the US which have been built on immigration. By working to ensure that children cultivate a proud affiliation with their cultural history, ethnic minority mothers help to preserve the distinctness of the minority collective racial identity.

Jenny confirms this interpretation of mothering as community development work. She explains that:

Caregiving is the grounding force to identity. It is here that we shape and mold the beginnings of our children, a beginning that allows them to later re-mold, re-shape and alter their own personal identity. When the caregiving denies the development of identity or when it denies identity it is merely survival, food and shelter, the bare necessities. This might have been my mother's existence, a survival mode for years [in the residential school].... When we nurture our children in a positive, strong sense of culture, aboriginal culture the community development is inherent, it is one and the same. In my teaching, very rarely do we separate one's self from the family, from the community, it is all so connected. When we build identity in the home (caregiving) we build community and when we build community, we strengthen the power of the whole.

### *Private Time for Social Inclusion*

Recognition of the domestic sphere as a locus of identity politics turns the public/private divide inside-out, as I have argued elsewhere (Kershaw 2005, chapter 5). Contra dominant liberal and civic republican traditions, this recognition propels domesticity into the realm of the socio-political for the purposes of evaluating and facilitating social inclusion. Processes of identify formation that unfold in domestic spaces are crucial for understanding the ability of some individuals and the social groups in which they are members to claim and exercise power in welfare states.

Such processes remain hidden, however, by androcentric norms that continue to underpin political economies and generate a wide range of economic inequalities for diverse groups of women. Michaels' recommendation that we focus almost exclusively on economic inequality at the expense of identity politics implies that the overcoming market inequalities is the key to social inclusion. This understanding of inclusion receives considerable attention in the literature, including among leading scholars like Esping-Andersen (2002, 21). He remarks, for instance, that "Paid employment remains, as always, the basic foundation of household welfare and it is hardly surprising that more jobs are seen as the *sine qua non* in the pursuit of an inclusive society." Although this observation signals the heightened level of attention that Esping-Andersen gives to feminist critiques that his initial, ground-breaking work in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen 1990) failed to address sufficiently that women struggle with more tenuous attachments to the labour market than men, his sympathy for an employment-centred vision of inclusion indicates an ongoing resistance to elements of feminist research that require a more dramatic departure from androcentric assumptions. While the unequal commodification of some groups of women in the labour market is an important aspect of feminist critique of mainstream welfare research, a second integral element is the concern to properly value the political, social and cultural significance of the informal care that women disproportionately perform in the domestic sphere.

From feminist perspectives, care is both labour and love; a site of exploitation and, just as importantly, satisfaction, refuge and inclusion. Exploitation must be acknowledged given the unequal sexual division of care that poses a barrier to women's autonomy. But the exploitation does not negate what Elshtain (1981, 333) refers to as the "humanizing imperative" of the activity, its importance for social reproduction, labour supply and economic growth, nor the fulfillment that citizens may derive through care provision. Accordingly the ethic of care literature motivated by Gilligan (1987, 32) accommodates what she terms an "essential ambivalence of human connection." which now guides much comparative feminist welfare regime research (Jenson and Sineau 2001; Lewis 2007).

But an appreciation for this ambivalence remains absent in the thinking of many leading scholars of welfare and economic inequality (eg. Mead 1997). The alignment of employment with inclusion obfuscates the potential to experience care for and connection with others as protection from isolation, a source of comfort, pleasure and resistance. Instead, care and connection are conveyed more often as impediments to autonomy and independence, while domesticity is predominantly something for citizens to overcome. Esping-Andersen (1999, 59-60, italics added) captures this sentiment explicitly. "Clearly," he states, "mothers' employment prospects (and the family economy) would be better served by daycare than by encouraging fathers to put in more unpaid hours. Policies that advocate more male participation within the household may appear egalitarian from a gender point of view, but they do not appear to be a 'win-win' strategy. Most households, we can assume, *would prefer to reduce the necessary unpaid hours for both partners if that were possible.*"

The CII participants invite us to challenging the adrocentrism inherent in this characterization of domestic time. They provide evidence that social inclusion is theorized too narrowly by academics and policy makers whenever they fail to appreciate the extent to which full membership in society requires sufficient access to, and time in, a fluid family network of one's choosing; and the role this 'private' family time plays in shaping identity, which in turn mediates their participation in state, market and community sectors. We risk continuing to obscure this element of social inclusion the more we retreat to unidimensional arguments about economic redistribution, as urged by Michaels. In particular, such a singular focus risks ignoring Jenny's insight that:

Home and my community [are] a sort of centering ground, a safe place for me and I put that although my community... had many struggles. It's a home, and it's a place that I can identify with, and it's a place where I feel safe. Even closer inside of that is my home, and it was always a safe place. I lived with my grandmother, she lived, was always in the home

with us, with our family, through the same time that all these negative forces were happening *outside the home and the community*, my grandmother was always someone who drove home the importance of us being proud of who we were. So, she made life easier *out there* (emphasis added).

The recognition that domesticity is a locus for social belonging and identity politics lends strong support for institutionalizing what Knijn and Kremer (1997, 332) have described as "the right to time for care" so that citizens enjoy adequate opportunities to participate in the group membership practices that occur in family and other intimate relational settings. Knijn and Kremer treat this right as a constitutive element of "inclusive citizenship." This citizenship vision, they argue,

should be based on the assumption that every citizen, whether male or female, could claim the right to give care to people in his or her immediate context when circumstances demand it. The notion of citizenship should contain the idea that every citizen at some time or another has to take care of people they care about. At some point within a citizen's life, people have to care for young children, and at other times close friends or elderly parents need personal care (*ibid.*, 331).

While one cannot overstate how critical it is that any such right be advocated in full recognition of the deleterious consequences for women's economic security and their inclusion in a range of public places that flow from the gender division of care (for a detailed discussion of this theme, see Kershaw 2006), some CII mothers nevertheless express frustration about financial constraints that limit the time they have available for private caregiving. Natasha, a mother who emigrated with her family from Vietnam, articulates this frustration most forcibly. "Currently," she explains:

my husband and I are taking turns working on different shifts so when I go to work there isn't much time for my children. For example, when I come back home after evening shift, my children have already went to sleep. In the morning, I have to prepare breakfast, and drive them to school. In that time, I don't have much time to converse, and teach them Vietnamese.

Q: How do you feel about not having enough time to communicate with your children?

Natasha: "Very sad. Many times I think that I don't know English, and my children don't know Vietnamese. I don't know how my children will be when they grow up. When I want to speak with them, how I will I do it? So I can't express my thoughts, and feelings. In the future, if they want to confide to me, they won't know how to express in Vietnamese language. Therefore, I feel very sad when I don't have enough time for my children."

Q: What kinds of support or changes would make more time available for you and your husband to have more time for this communication with your children?

Natasha: "I have three children. I work full time. If I want more time for my children, then I have to quit my job. If I quit my job, then the family budget is short. Is there any support or any compensation to help my family if I quit my job?"

The answer is 'not much', as Natasha knows about Canadian policy. Like many of the CII participants, she is very sophisticated in her analysis of income constraints and class inequality, despite Michaels' concern that their interest in identity politics is likely to distract their attention from economic

justice. But Natasha, again like so many of the CII mothers, does not subscribe to the either/or thinking that Michaels recommends in urging focus on economic distribution over the politics of recognition. Rather, it is a concern for minority cultural continuity within Canada that partly motivates Natasha's frustration with the current market paradigm as it is regulated by redistributive public policy. Contrary to Michaels, then, the vision of inclusion and justice to which she aspires is one in which there is sufficient time to care (for identity), in keeping with the inclusive vision of citizenship that Knijn and Kremer recommend.

But is enhancing entitlement to time for care on the grounds that it would contribute to minority (and majority) cultural continuity worth contemplating at this historical juncture where insecurity is attributed intra- and trans-national cultural and faith-based cleavages? While a conclusive answer is beyond the scope of this argument, the CII participants provide reason to take the question seriously. Recall Bibi, for instance, who is determined to have here children identify as Congolese before Canadian. She nevertheless insists that "when they have a strong ethnic identity, the connection will be easier with other ethnic groups." Renata, a mother from South America, echoes this sentiment. She explains at some length that minority cultural continuity actually facilitates bridging with members of other cultural communities. "I've thought of all the advantages of creating bilingual children with two cultures," she comments.

Renata: I think that my kids will have an opened mind to the people who don't only know Spanish but that also know Korean, Punjabi, and Chinese... because my kids had the experience of being bilingual with two cultures. To raise a child with two cultures it helps them to become tolerant because they have gone through that process in the house where only one language is spoken but outside there is another language. [This] helps them to become tolerant people.

Q: Respectful?

Renata: Yes, respectful of other cultures because my kids will ask for respect for their culture, their background and this will make them respect other backgrounds. They will learn to treasure the family traditions. This will give them lots of self-esteem towards knowledge of their tradition and maybe they'll feel curiosity for other cultures. I hope that my kids will grow up like adults with less stereotype-likeness in their lives because this damages the society... One has to be opened to a world that is new to them. I hope that my kids will learn this though being bicultural.

The idea that minority identity retention promotes tolerance emerges in narrative after narrative among CII mothers who immigrated to Canada. They thus invite scholars of social cohesion to query more carefully the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital. The mothers in the CII HIPPY Case Study consistently insist on the importance of their children assimilating their parents' culture of origin. But they do so out of an appreciation for the role minority cultural immersion will play in fostering (a) a centrally important setting for social belonging, the family; (b) the self-esteem to which pride in one's identity will contribute; and/or (c) a corresponding familiarity with the importance this same pride will play in the lives of members of other social groups. Thus, rather than create barriers, CII participants suggest that minority cultural continuity provides citizens with the confidence to engage with others on equal terms, to show respect for differences that aren't worth disagreeing about, while also empowering individuals to resist and demand redress for things that are disagreeable, including any injustices they endure, economic, cultural or otherwise. We can thus read their narratives to impart the insight that "bonding may enhance bridging." This observation merits heightened attention as the debate about multiculturalism and insecurity evolves in Canada and elsewhere.

### ***Epilogue: The Truth about Stories***

"The truth about stories is that that's all we are." This is the thesis of Tom King's Massey Lectures and subsequent book, *The Truth About Stories* (2003). Methodologically, the thesis is noteworthy whenever narratives are drawn on for evidence in academic debate, as is the case in this article, because the ontological claim lends credence to the validity of the qualitative data.

But in the context of this paper, King's thesis conveys more than just methodological insight; it encapsulates content. From the perspective of CII participants, identity development and transmission between generations can be some of the most important story telling we perform, particularly in the case of citizens who cannot count on public validation of their identity. They therefore lend support for King's restatement of Newton's dictum, 'To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.' "Had he been a writer," King (*ibid.*, 28-29) replies, "he might have simply said, 'To every action there is a story.' The actions that CII participants highlight in their narratives include the exclusion or race-based discrimination that some continue to confront in pluralist societies like Canada. Such acts, they explain, require stories in response – stories that promote self-esteem and resistance by means of identity validation and self-definition.

So, in the spirit of King's narrative approach to academic analysis, I invite you to take Jenny's story, or Bibi's, Danielle's or Natasha's. Do with them what you will. Tell them to friends. To colleagues. Turn them into a policy brief or undergraduate lecture. Even forget about them, as Michaels may urge us to. But don't say in years to come that you would have taught, governed or lived your life differently if only you had heard their stories.

You've heard them now.

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