Considering the Transnational Cultures and Texts of Canadian Youth

—Samantha Cutrara

Prominent transnational scholar Steven Vertovec identified six ways for understanding transnationalism: as social morphology, form of consciousness, mode of cultural production, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, or as reconstruction of place. Most simply, transnationalism is a theoretical concept that encapsulates experiences and identities that span across or beyond national borders. As James Clifford notes, transnationalism is "the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here)" (qtd. in Vertovec 450). As a settler state, Canada has always had a population that moved across and beyond borders (Dubinsky et al.). Before settlement, while not being organized along the same geographic and political concepts of borders, Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, the continent of North America ("The Story of Turtle Island"), moved across and beyond territories. The history of this land thus shows how people are not static. Experiences are not static. Texts, cultures, histories, and lives are not bound by political organizations and institutions. There is fluidity in the ways national boundaries shape the experiences and materials of people's lives, and this can especially be seen in the experiences of youth.

The literature linking youth and transnationalism highlights that young people experience movement across borders differently from adults, and therefore their experiences with transnationalism are different too. Researchers find a "fluid and complex interplay of culture and identity" in young people's negotiation and construction of a sense of self (Simmons and Plaza 144), and theorize that nationalities and ethnicities which young people are related to and to which they relate are part of this interplay (Somerville). Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder also remark that children often have a unique interaction with transnationalism because of formal schooling spaces. Within the space of the school, young people can encounter children from other countries and are inculcated in the particular national values of the nation in which they live as well.

As we move into the twenty-first century, transnationalism plays an even greater part in young people's lives. Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt identify transnationalism as an important concept for theorists, educators, and practitioners to contemplate because "while back-and-forth movements by immigrants have always existed, they have not acquired until recently the critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field" (217). In particular, the ubiquity of the internet and social networking technologies has meant that the texts and cultures that young people create, interact with, and participate in are not limited by political geographical divisions, but instead are developed based on their interests, desires, and place(s) for community. Given that youth can access texts and cultures from around the world through a click of a mouse, youth with the financial resources to do so can self-style their identities to align with global youth cultures (Warikoo, *Balancing*; "Gender"), enacting performative explorations of race, nation, and culture for themselves and others (Bondy; Somerville). Vertovec distinctly identifies that youth are bound into the literature on transnationalism because of how youth create their identities in ways that "are often self-consciously selected, syncretized and elaborated from more than one heritage" (451).

In this special section of *Jeunesse*, six scholars in four articles explore transnationalism in the ways the texts and cultures of young Canadians are "self-consciously selected, syncretized and elaborated from more than one heritage" (Vertovec 451). In Canada, diversity of cultures and nationalities is what many youth appreciate about their country (Ahmad Ali; Grant; Tastsoglou and Petrinioti; Lee and Hébert), guiding their "visions of Canada" (Ahmad Ali 99). I have also argued that transnationalism is one of the defining features of Canadian youth's experiences and identities in Canada today (Cutrara). Yet the literature of Canadian youth's transnationalism is scant. The contributions featured in this collection demonstrate innovative arguments for the ways transnationalism is enmeshed with young people's lives in Canada; and these arguments are not just based on the lives of immigrant or first-generation Canadians, but the lives of youth who were born in Canada as well.

In their introduction to a collection on transnationalism and Canada, Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong venture that perhaps because of Canada's official multicultural policy, the concept of transnationalism has not gained as much salience in Canadian research as it has in American research. By having an official policy that makes space for a plurality of cultures, having a theoretical concept for understanding peoples' experiences beyond or across national lines may seem repetitive. But the policy of multiculturalism has been shown to be restricting, essentializing people into racial terms (Mahtani) and centring whiteness as an arbiter of acceptable difference (Bannerji; Mackey; Paragg). Thus, in bringing the concept of transnationality into

how we talk about Canadians, Canadian youth in particular, we can highlight a greater diversity of texts, cultures, identities, and experiences that define and develop a young person's sense of self and the ways they navigate the world. The articles featured in this section demonstrate how transnationalism can elucidate new analyses that may not have been engendered through the lens of multiculturalism, and thus the ways in which transnationalism is an important theoretical concept for exploring the past, present, and future lives of Canadian youth.

One could argue that Canada's story of two founding nations—English and French—already affirms transnationality as a central part of national identity.

In her article "'International Friendliness' and Canadian Identities: Transnational Tensions in Canadian Junior Red Cross Texts, 1919–1939," Sarah Glassford explores the ways in which Canadian youth in the interwar period developed and demonstrated transnational links through their work in the Junior Red Cross. Using the *Canadian Red Cross Junior* magazine and youth-created scrapbook portfolios as evidence, Glassford shows how the aims of the Junior Red Cross propagated a transnational ethic of humanitarianism within a framework of white, anglophone, British Canadian identity. By developing a mechanism for Canadian children to become aware of, and develop a concern for, children around the world, Glassford argues that the Junior Red Cross put forth a mindset of "international friendliness" that emphasized a transnational/national Canadian citizenship. Canadian children who participated in the Junior Red Cross then came to understand their connections outside national borders as concurrent with the white, British-inspired Canadian identity put forth by the Junior Red Cross. Like the young people featured in other articles in this collection, youth who participated in the Junior Red Cross did not

accept the duality of national identity with transnational connections straight on, but often challenged and resisted this duality through local and personal interventions and interpretations. While showing the ways in which youth involved with the Junior Red Cross were encouraged to engage in local actions that served the national good in ways that had international ramifications, Glassford shows how transnationalism and Canadian identify have had a close relationship in a transnational vision of Canada, not just today, but also historically.

One could argue that Canada's story of two founding nations—English and French—already affirms transnationality as a central part of national identity. With both French and English as our official languages, the concept of transnationalism complements the country's linguistic diversity. However, English and French are not the only languages spoken in Canada. As of 2011, over 200 languages were spoken in Canada, and English and French were the mother tongues for just under 21% of the population (Statistics Canada). Thus, as Geneviève Brisson shows in her article "Plurilingualism and Transnational Identities in a Francophone Minority Classroom," transnationalism as a theoretical concept also highlights the ways in which the diversity of languages becomes a core element of young peoples' (trans)national identities in Canada.

Brisson identifies that there are few studies on plurilingual, transnational youth in schools. She uses her analysis of "Alexandra," a child in a French-language elementary school in British Columbia, to strengthen the literature on plurilingual, transnational youth in schools by arguing that transnationalism can be activated in plurilingual ways, and that plurilingualism can become more present with a transnational lens. Brisson shows how Alexandra negotiated her transnational subject position at school by speaking French, English, and her family's native Polish. She used these languages to communicate with adults and peers, but also to demonstrate and preserve affective bonds to her family's country of origin. Brisson observes that when Alexandra was able to draw on her plurilingual, transnational identity, she participated more frequent and deeply in class interactions because of the presence of her unique linguistic and cultural resources. However, Brisson also observes that Alexandra's transnational subject position was not understood as legitimate in a school setting that privileged monolingualism. From this observation, Brisson argues that bringing language awareness, dual-language books, and multilingual or dual-language identity texts into the classroom can invite young Canadians' plurilingual and transnational lives to be more present in the classroom in ways that support greater student success.

Out of the classroom, transnationalism also operates as a way for Canadian youth to build and develop a multifaceted, and potentially reconciliatory, Canadian identity. As Marcia Ostashewski, Heather Fitzsimmons

Frey, and Shaylene Johnson show in their article, "Youth-Engaged Art-Based Research in Cape Breton: Transcending Nations, Boundaries, and Identities," an extra-curricular arts-based encounter with identity invited transnational connections in how young people talked about the concepts of migration and encounter in their lives. Their project, *Songs and Stories of Migration and Encounter*, involved performance, discussion, and reflection by and for youth in Cape Breton, Canada. Authors and project leads Ostashewski, Fitzsimmons Frey, and Johnson highlight that the youths who participated in the project expressed their transnational connections as legacy as much as experience. In other words, while almost all the youths were born and raised in Cape Breton they still expressed allegiance and connection to multiple transnational communities in their families' past and their presents. The authors observed the ways transnationalism became a way for young people to speak about cultural differences and, from this, the authors suggest an expansion of how we can understand the operation of transnationalism in youth's lives. They state that as a "relationship dynamic," transnationalism can resist and subvert the ways settler colonialism operates in a Canadian national identity. In particular, their work with *Songs and Stories* demonstrates that creating spaces for transnational conversations to happen can provide a stronger sense of a reconciliatory Canadian identity. The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada emphasizes that reconciliation is not a moment or an end point, but an ongoing relationship that must be nurtured to survive. In their article, the authors argue that for youth, transnationalism can be a way to develop reconciliatory relationships and understand the links of identity and connection across lines of nationality.

In her article "Anarchist Youth in Rural Canada: Technology, Resistance, and the Navigation of Space," Jayne Malenfant also examines how youth can develop space for new futures through transnational connections. Malenfant explores how anarchist youth—that is, youth who believe in challenging hierarchy and political authority that undermine personal freedom—defied and/or resisted strict boundaries to push against a political system they find oppressive. Malenfant found that youths' movements between rural and urban spaces and their heavy online participation demonstrated practices and ideologies that subverted national boundaries and national identities. Anarchist youth saw these practices and ideologies as combating inequitable social structures of the State. Malenfant shows that this subversion was a way for the youth to move across and beyond borders and thus participate in and learn from a wider, punk, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) community. In this way, Malenfant surmises, anarchist youth develop and occupy liminal, transnational third space(s) that facilitate a sense of community for youth who are not defined by borders. Transnationalism, broadly defined, belongs to "genealogies of anti-imperial and decolonizing

thought" (Briggs et al. 628). Thus it is not surprising that the youth Malenfant spoke to in her research—youth who resisted an imperial, capitalistic state—demonstrated a fluid understanding of borders that they may feel restrict their lives. This article shows how moving across and beyond borders becomes a way for youth to challenge the restrictions borders provide.

Much of the literature on youth's transnational identities focuses on immigrants or first- or second-generation populations with fluid or flexible identities or identities that straddle or inhabit two worlds.

The articles in this section provide fresh analyses to the literature on transnationalism and youth. Much of the literature on youth's transnational identities focuses on immigrants or first- or second-generation populations with fluid or flexible identities[1] or identities that straddle or inhabit two worlds.[2] This place "in-between worlds" has been called a contact zone or a hybrid third space,[3] drawing directly from Homi Bhabha. However, articles in this collection demonstrate that transnationalism in young Canadians' lives is not just an experience for immigrants or first-generation Canadians, nor are transnational identities binary. Rather, these articles show that for youth in Canada, transnationalism becomes enmeshed as a singular, yet multivalent experience of how they understand themselves to be in Canada: that Canadian means *transnational* for youth in Canada, and that the cultures and texts that young people both interact with and create go across and beyond borders in very ordinary, yet important ways.

As theorists, educators, and practitioners, bringing a lens of transnsationalism to our praxis may better enable us to embrace national and cultural diversities in Canada without limiting the conversation to being about race, as multiculturalism is wont to do. Singular national identifications, even ones that embrace multiculturalism as an element of their identity, are designed

around racial discourses, and racial discourses are designed around national identification. As Oren Howlett writes about both Canada and Australia, “race creation is and has been central to civic nationalism’s exclusions” (64). It is through a singular vision of nation and national identity that “governmental regimes are able to build nation-states that reinforce the race solidarity engendered by nationalism and harness its power and strength to maintain legitimacy and ruling power” (Howlett 69). Embracing the transnational texts and cultures that young people develop can create greater spaces for speaking with and through inclusion and diversity and lay the groundwork for a future that embraces difference as a marker of strength. As G. Sue Kasun writes,

> [i]nterrogating the sense of transnationalism can allow students to develop and understand multiple allegiances to multiple identities, allowing for a broader sense of citizenship, one that allows for critique as well as richer participation in society. (231)

The articles in this section reveal how young people carry these multiple allegiances with them and expand the ways they come to know themselves as Canadians.

I hope that these articles spark a continued discussion of the ways transnationalism operates in the lives of Canadians, especially Canadian youth, and how this key element of Canadian experiences in the past and present will play an even greater role in youth’s lives in the future.

Notes

[1] See Borrero et al.; Endo; Fruja Amthor and Roxas; Plaza; Sánchez; Tastsoglou and Petrinioti; Warikoo, *Balancing*, “Gender”; Zhang and Guo.

[2] See Codjoe; Erdal and Oeppen; Lam; Plaza; Portes et al.; Tindongan; Yankova and Andreev.

[3] See DeJaeghere and McCleary; Kasun; Lam; Peck; Plaza; Pratt; Shin; Tastsoglou and Petrinioti.

Works Cited

Ahmad Ali, Mehrunnisa. "Second-Generation Youth's Belief in the Myth of Canadian Multiculturalism." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2008, pp. 89-107.

Bannerji, Himani. *On the Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Canadian Scholars P, 2000.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Bondy, Jennifer M. "Latina Youth, Education, and Citizenship: A Feminist Transnational Analysis." *Theory and Research in Social Education*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2016, pp. 212-43, doi:10.1080/00933104.2016.1170644.

Borrero, Noah, et al. "School as a Context for 'Othering' Youth and Promoting Cultural Assets." *Teachers College Record*, vol. 114, no. 2, 2012, pp. 1-37.

Briggs, Laura, et al. "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis." *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2008, pp. 625-48. *Project Muse*, doi:10.1353/aq.0.0038.

Codjoe, Henry. "The Role of an Affirmed Black Cultural Identity and Heritage in the Academic Achievement of African-Canadian Students." *Intercultural Education*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2006, pp. 33-54, doi:10.1080/14675980500502271.

Cutrara, Samantha. *Imagining a New "We": Meaningful Learning in Canadian History Education*. UBC P, forthcoming.

DeJaeghere, Joan G., and Kato S. McCleary. "The Making of Mexican Migrant Youth Civic Identities: Transnational Spaces and Imaginaries." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2010, pp. 228-44, doi:10.1111/j.1548-1492.2010.01085.x.

Dubinsky, Karen, et al., editors. *Within and Without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History*. UTP, 2015.

Endo, Rachel. "Counternarrating Racialized Expectations at School: The Diverse Enactments of 'Non-Dominant' Identities among 1.5-Generation Japanese Immigrant Youth." *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2016, pp. 201-15, doi:10.1080/15348458.2016.1193440.

Erdal, Marta Bivand, and Ceri Oeppen. "Migrant Balancing Acts: Understanding the Interactions between Integration and Transnationalism." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 39, no. 6, 2013, pp. 867-84, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2013.765647.

Fruja Amthor, Ramona, and Kevin Roxas. "Multicultural Education and Newcomer Youth: Re-Imagining a More Inclusive Vision for Immigrant and Refugee Students." *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2016, pp. 155-76, doi:10.1080/00131946.2016.1142992.

Grant, Peter R. "'Canadian, Eh?': An Examination of the Multidimensional Structure and Functions of the National Identity of Immigrants and of Those Raised in Canada." *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2016, pp. 45-75.

Harzig, Christiane, and Dirk Hoerder. "Transnationalism and the Age of Mass Migration, 1880s to 1920s." *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada*, edited by Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong, UBC P, 2006, pp. 35-50.

Howlett, Oren. "Racial Origins of Civic Nationalisms: Exploring Race Creation in Australia and Canada." *Alternate Routes*, vol. 21, 2005, pp. 63-81.

Kasun, G. Sue. "'We Are Not Terrorists,' but More Likely Transnationals: Reframing Understandings about Immigrants in Light of the Boston Marathon Bombings." *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2013, pp. 227-33.

Lam, Wan Shun Eva. "Border Discourses and Identities in Transnational Youth Culture." *What They Don't Learn in School: Literacy in the Lives of Urban Youth*, edited by Jabari Mahiri, Peter Lang, 2004, pp. 79-98.

Lee, Jennifer Wenshya, and Yvonne M. Hébert. "The Meaning of Being Canadian: A Comparison between Youth of Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Origins." *Canadian Journal of Education*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2006, pp. 497-520.

Mackey, Eva. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. 1999. Routledge, 2005.

Mahtani, Minelle. "Interrogating the Hyphen-Nation: Canadian Multicultural Policy and 'Mixed Race' Identities." *Social Identities*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2002, pp. 67-90, doi:10.1080/13504630220132026.

Paragg, Jillian. "'Canadian-First': Mixed Race Self-Identification and Canadian Belonging." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2015, pp. 21-44.

Peck, Carla L. "'It's Not like [I'm] Chinese and Canadian. I Am in Between': Ethnicity and Students' Conceptions of Historical Significance." *Theory and Research in Social Education*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2010, pp. 574-617.

Plaza, Dwaine. "The Construction of a Segmented Hybrid Identity Among One-and-a-Half-Generation and Second-Generation Indo-Caribbean and African Caribbean Canadians." *Identity*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2006, pp. 207-29, doi:10.1207/s1532706xid0603_1.

Portes, Alejandro, et al. "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, pp. 217-37, doi:10.1080/014198799329468.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.

Sánchez, Patricia. "Urban Immigrant Students: How Transnationalism Shapes their World Learning." *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, vol. 39, no. 5, 2007, pp. 489-517, doi: 10.1007/s11256-007-0064-8.

Satzewich, Vic, and Lloyd Wong. "Introduction: The Meaning and Significance of Transnationalism." *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada*, edited by Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong, UBC P, 2006, pp. 1-16.

Shin, Hyunjung. "From FOB to Cool: Transnational Migrant Students in Toronto and the Styling of Global Linguistic Capital." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2012, pp. 184-200, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9841.2011.00523.x.

Simmons, Alan B., and Dwaine E. Plaza. "The Caribbean Community in Canada: Transnational Connections and Transformations." *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada*, edited by Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong, UBC P, 2006, pp. 130-48.

Somerville, Kara. "Transnational Belonging among Second Generation Youth: Identity in a Globalized World." *Journal of Social Sciences*, Special Volume, no. 10, 2008, pp. 23-33.

Statistics Canada. *Linguistic Characteristics of Canadians: Language, 2011 Census of Population*, 2012, www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011001-eng.pdf.

"The Story of Turtle Island." Turtle Island Native Network, 2016, www.turtleisland.org/front/article3.htm. Accessed 26 Nov. 2018.

Tastsoglou, Evangelia, and Sandy Petrinioti. "Multiculturalism as Part of the Lived Experience of the 'Second Generation'?: Forging Identities by Lebanese-Origin Youth in Halifax." *Canadian Ethnic Studie*s, vol. 43, no. 1, 2011, pp. 175-96.

Tindongan, Cynthia White. "Negotiating Muslim Youth Identity in a Post-9/11 World." *High School Journal*, vol. 95, no. 1, 2011, pp. 72-87.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2015.

Vertovec, Steven. "Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, pp. 447-62.

Warikoo, Natasha Kumar. *Balancing Acts: Youth Culture in the Global City*. U of California P, 2011.

—."Gender and Ethnic Identity among Second-Generation Indo-Caribbeans." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2005,

pp. 803-31, doi:10.1080/01419870500158752.
Yankova, Diana, and Andrei Andreev. "Cross-Cultural and Transnational Identity: A Case Study of Bulgarian Immigrants in Canada." *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2012, pp. 37-56.
Zhang, Yan, and Yan Guo. "Becoming Transnational: Exploring Multiple Identities of Students in a Mandarin-English Bilingual Programme in Canada." *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2015, pp. 210-29, doi:10.1080/14767724.2014.934071.

With a Ph.D. from York University in Education (2012) and a focus on meaningful learning in Canadian history education, Dr. Samantha Cutrara has become an expert in her field of teaching and learning history in both traditional and non-traditional sites of education. Dr. Cutrara is currently a Curriculum Specialist in the Office of the Vice Provost Academic and Office of the Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning, at York University. Her first full-length manuscript, *Imagining a New "We": Canadian History Education for the 21st Century*, will be published by UBC Press in 2019. Visit www.SamanthaCutrara.com for more details.