

BRITISHNESS, 'FOREIGNNESS', WOMEN AND LAND IN WESTERN CANADA

1890s–1920s

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In 1913 a petition bearing over 11,000 signatures was presented to the Parliament of Canada asking that homestead rights in Western Canada be granted to 'all women of British birth who have resided in Canada for one year'.¹ This was the unsuccessful culmination of a campaign to allow unmarried women of British citizenry the 'free' homestead grant that was offered to male immigrants (regardless of marital status or citizenship) from Europe, the United States and other regions of Canada.² The strategists behind this campaign (white, British-Canadian or British-women) were specifically asking that the privilege *not* be granted to 'foreign born' women. They keenly felt it to be an injustice that 'our own Canadian men — our fathers and our brothers — deliberately set us aside as undeserving of a share in our country' while permitting 'ignorant, uncouth, lawless foreigners to occupy lands that we desire, and that we have laboured for, yet cannot have'.³ They wished to offer 'inducements to better class Canadians and Britishers to settle here'.⁴

The unsuccessful 'homesteads-for-British-women' movement indicates that white women in Western Canada did not share in all of the privileges often associated with whiteness. They do not easily fit into what David Roediger has described as 'the central overarching theme in scholarship on whiteness [which] is the argument that white identity is decisively shaped by the exercise of power and the expectation of advantages in acquiring property'.⁵ Women of British ancestry in Canada had the expectation of privilege and advantages in acquiring property, and were frustrated that they had no such advantage, and exercised little power. Single women of all backgrounds were denied the right to homestead, and married women had no legal right to the homesteads they helped to acquire and maintain as dower rights were abolished in Western Canada in 1886.⁶ There was no white race privilege for the white women (and men) who were described and derided as 'foreigners'. 'Foreign' women were denigrated and maligned in much the same ways as Aboriginal women.⁷ To elevate their own

status and to bolster arguments for their entitlement, British-Canadian women (although not all) contributed to the denouncement of 'foreign' women. Because of the diversity of white people in Western Canada, whiteness alone did not mean power and privilege; the situation required different strategies of authority. The mainly British-Canadian elite that dominated business, politics, education, women's organizations and other realms worked to ensure that a sense of Britishness, combined with whiteness, became equated with Canadianness.

To consolidate their Empire, and legitimise the dispossession of Indigenous people, Britons of the late-nineteenth century constructed 'grammars of difference' that distinguished the elites who would rule in the colonies, from those who would be subject to this rule.⁸ As Catherine Hall has observed: 'One of the critical carriers of that difference became their white skin. As brown and black skin, particular hair types and bone structures, came to signify inferiority, so whiteness became a signifier of power.'⁹ But whiteness meant privilege and power for some and not others. The question 'who was white?' was seldom straightforward in any of the colonies. There were many people who fell short of standards and were, in Hall's words 'in danger of not being quite white enough', because of their class, ethnicity, occupation, lifestyle, accent, religion, table manners or 'suspect' ancestry.¹⁰ Gender further complicates any simplistic link between whiteness, power and privilege. White women did not enjoy the same advantages as their male counterparts, although they shared components of elite status. They also had reasons of their own to help construct and maintain 'grammars

of difference'. There were gender-specific ways of marking difference, of elevating some femininities and masculinities, while denouncing others. Whiteness had its own hierarchies. It was an unstable, moving category; its meanings and boundaries continually changing.

Equating whiteness with power and privilege is particularly problematic in any examination of Western Canada, particularly after 1896 when the Wilfrid Laurier liberal government adopted a new policy of recruiting immigrants from eastern and central Europe, many from impoverished backgrounds. They were welcomed 'as long as they had white skins'.¹¹ ('Visible' minority immigrants were not permitted to enter Canada in any significant numbers until the 1960s.) My previous work, which has centred on encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Western Canada in the late nineteenth century, with particular focus on women, stops at about 1900, before this diverse population took root. In *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*, I analysed the category of 'white woman' in the Canadian West of the 1880s and 1890s and found that during that time it was reasonably clear what it meant — women who were not Aboriginal.¹² The white women of Western Canada at that time were overwhelmingly British-Canadian and the 'other' women were Aboriginal. White women were cast as the pure, virtuous guardians of the 'race', symbols of the future health and wealth of this new corner of Canada and of the British Empire. Aboriginal women were their sinister and dangerous opposite, posing a threat to morality and prosperity. What it meant to be a white woman at that time took shape through a series of negat-

ive assumptions about the malign influence of Aboriginal women. These representations came sharply to light in 1885 during the Metis resistance that was defeated through an overwhelming military response. Negative representations of Aboriginal women, concerns about racial mixing, and intolerant attitudes were extraordinarily resilient and pervasive. Even Metis women who might, to all appearances, seem 'white' in their dress, deportment, and education risked detection and dismissal as 'half breeds' and impostors.¹³ But with the arrival of diverse white women, and as Aboriginal people became a minority isolated on reserves, white femininity no longer depended for its articulation on a sense of difference from Aboriginal women, rather a British-Canadian femininity was contrasted with negative assumptions about 'foreign' women.

That there is no singular narrative of white experience in Western Canada has long been acknowledged in Canadian historiography. These studies begin with the first presence of Europeans in the fur trade era from 1670, as historians have examined the differential treatment of, and discord among, the Orkney labourers and the English or Highland Scot elites in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁴ Studies in the fields of immigration and labour or working-class history have, from the 1970s, examined the discrimination and prejudice faced by phenotypically similar but diverse immigrants because of their nationality, religion, or other factors.¹⁵ These included Mormons, Germans, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Jews, Doukhobors, and Hutterites. Historian Howard Palmer, drawing on the work of U.S. historian John Higham, employed the concept of 'nativism' to describe the 'op-

position to an internal minority on the grounds that it posed a threat to Canadian national life', noting that "'nativism" has wider applicability than "racism"; it encompasses attitudes toward "white" ethnic and religious minorities which cannot accurately be described as "racist"'.¹⁶ Western Canada has often been smugly depicted as a 'mosaic', where differences were respected and permitted to persist, in contrast to an alleged U.S. 'melting pot' where all had to conform, but this was not the case. As the historian Franca Iacovetta has written, the histories that document the 'usually hostile responses that each successive wave of immigrants encountered ... amount to a scathing indictment of Canadians' treatment of ethnic and racial minorities'.¹⁷ Studies of these dynamics long predated serious scholarly consideration in Canada of the contact or collision of the white presence with the Aboriginal presence. One of my earliest motivations for my own work was the absence in these studies of any consideration of Aboriginal people, and whether they were confronted by similar patterns of prejudice, discrimination and opposition. Palmer explained that the nativist focus of his study precluded 'discussion of the attitudes of the Anglo-Celtic dominant groups toward native peoples since the latter obviously could not be considered "foreign"'.¹⁸ Yet it has been my contention that Aboriginal people were considered 'foreign', and that assumptions about them helped to fashion responses to the later diverse immigrants.

Complicating the history of colonialism in Western Canada, and challenging the assumption that 'Britishness' was a static identity across the Empire, is the fact that in Western Canada the members of the

most powerful group were generally not directly from the 'Mother Country', but rather were what is often described as a Protestant British-Ontarian or an English Canadian elite. From the time of the Conquest of New France, this group fashioned an identity that was distinct from Franco Canada, the Americans and the British; ambiguous and even negative attitudes were directed toward each of these 'others'. This elite was predominantly Scots or Irish in ancestry, rather than English. The term 'English Canada' is often used to refer to the largest ethnic group at the time of Confederation, but in the 1871 census the English were only half the size of the combined Scottish and Irish groups.¹⁹ As the authors of *Colonies: Canada to 1867* argue:

The conventional picture is that a 'British' or 'English' culture, inherited from the homeland, was modified by the Canadian environment and catalysed by the War of 1812-14 and by Canada's western expansion and became thereby the English-speaking identity. The study of the process of cultural transfer in general and of ethnicity in particular indicates that the process was much more complex than that. There was no 'British' or 'English' culture to draw on, but, instead, several vigorous, distinct, and, in many of their details, incompatible Anglo-Celtic cultures found in the homeland. Therefore, an integral and absolutely necessary aspect of the development of an English-speaking sense of identity was the creation of a 'British' or 'English' culture in the new homeland, one that did

not in fact exist in the old. The melding of the several Anglo-Celtic cultures to establish a new and synthetic 'British' or 'English' culture was part of the creation of the English-speaking Canadian identity.²⁰

Religion played an important role in the formation of an English-Canadian identity that was distinct from the Americans — it was a society that reflected the conservative and pro-imperial view of the Anglican church.²¹ The Canadian brand of 'Britishness' was given further definition through a group of intellectuals who called themselves 'Canada First', and who sought to promote a national sentiment worthy of a great transcontinental nation, one that was independent of both Britain and the US. They were initially anti-American and were also wary of the British after the 1871 *Washington Treaty* that sacrificed Canada's interests in the cause of better British-American relations. At the same time however, they celebrated and promoted the great achievements of the Anglo-Saxon races and the British Empire. They believed, with other Canadian nationalists who were also imperialists, that Canada could achieve a 'sense of power' and fulfil its destiny as a great nation through the connection with Britain and the Anglo-Saxon race.²² Canada First presented Canada as a country made up of robust 'northern races', and expressed bigoted attitudes toward the people of 'southern' nations, French Canadians and Aboriginal Canadians. Poet Charles Mair declared that Canada was being held back by the inferiority of the North American Indian and the medievalism of the French Canadians whom he described as the principal 'bar to progress, and to the ex-

tension of the great Anglo-Saxon Dominion across the continent'.²³

These attitudes were at the foundation of the suppression of the first or Red River Metis resistance and the subsequent erosion of the French language, and Catholic education rights promised in the 1870 *Manitoba Act*. As J.E. Rea has argued, Manitoba served as the prototype for similar action further west.²⁴ These attitudes were also at the foundation of the immigration policy pursued by Canada until 1896 that was highly selective and confined to Great Britain and to northwestern Europe, or those supposedly vigorous northern races cherished by Canada First. As Prime Minister Macdonald stated in 1890, deploring the influx of millions of Slavic and northern Europeans to the U.S.: 'It is a great country, but it will have its vicissitudes and revolutions. Look at that mass of foreign ignorance and vice which has flooded that country with socialism, atheism and all other isms.'²⁵ These same concerns were expressed about Western Canada not many years later. As J.W. Sparling wrote in the introduction to J.S. Woodsworth's 1909 *Strangers Within Our Gates: Coming Canadians*: 'Either we must educate and elevate the incoming multitudes or they will drag us and our children down to a lower level. We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of Southeastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil.'²⁶ As diverse white immigrants made Western Canada home, the term 'white' was used less often to denote the privileged group. In *Strangers within Our Gates* for example, Woodsworth used the term right at the beginning of the book: 'What does the ordinary Canadian know about our immigrants? He classifies all men as white men

and foreigners. The foreigners he thinks of as men who dig the sewers and get into trouble at the police court.' But the term 'white' was not used again until the chapters on 'The Orientals' and 'The Negro and the Indian'. The latter chapter began for example with the sentence: 'Neither the Negro nor the Indian are immigrants, and yet they are so entirely different from the ordinary white population that some mention of them is necessary.'²⁷ 'English' or 'English-speaking', 'British', 'Canadian' or 'pioneer' were used instead of 'white' to mark the distinction from the 'foreigner' or 'stranger'.

Women's organizations, made up predominantly of Protestant British-Canadians of the middle or upper classes, shared concerns about the health and vitality of the imperial 'race' in the face of the influx of new immigrants, and fears that the 'race' was in imminent peril of 'degeneration'.²⁸ The white ribbon worn by members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was 'a symbol not only of the healthy pure milk they would substitute for alcohol but also of the kind of racial composition they favoured for Canada'.²⁹ Prominent Western Canadian feminist Emily Murphy believed, along with Canada Firsters, that the Nordic races were inherently superior: 'The best peoples of the world have come out of the north, and the longer they are away from the boreal regions in such proportion do they degenerate.'³⁰ Many British-Canadian women were staunch imperialists. The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), popular in Western Canada, was dedicated to implanting 'in every Canadian, man, woman and child the grandeur of our heritage as a British people ... [who are] bound by tradition, loyalty and gratitude

to the Motherland'.³¹ The assimilation of 'foreign' immigrants was a top priority of the organization, although these immigrants were not permitted to join. The IODE also denied membership to women of British birth who married 'foreigners'. Members handed out 'Be British' pins at local fairs, and they also promoted the history of the British Empire in the schools. Prominent women activists promoted the idea that women of the Anglo-Saxon race were treated well and held in high esteem compared to their 'foreign' counterparts. As Nellie McClung wrote to solicit support for Methodist missionary work:

Take the treatment of women! Even the most rabid suffragist who ever scorned our man-made laws will agree that women are treated with greater respect in Christian and Anglo-Saxon countries than in any other ... Child marriages, the burning of widows, the throwing out of girl babies ... are all, I believe, reasons for our effort to extend Christianity and its humanities.³²

But being white and British did not guarantee privilege, power or even acceptance in Western Canada. Just as whiteness had its own hierarchies so too did Britishness. There was no unified British community whose superiority was unquestioned. Class distinctions remained sharp, and there was pervasive anxiety about degeneration from less desirable and poor British immigrants. There clearly was a variant of what Ann Laura Stoler has described as the 'sustained presence of a subterranean colonial discourse that anxiously debated who was truly

European and whether those who were poor and white should be included among them'.³³ Not preferred were the urban working classes, those unaccustomed to working on the land. The English were particularly discriminated against. In *Strangers within Our Gates*, J.S. Woodsworth wrote: 'Generally speaking, the Scotch, Irish and Welsh have done well. The greater number of failures has been among the English. This is due partly to a national characteristic which is at once a strength and a weakness — lack of adaptability.'³⁴ He continued that the trouble was largely with the 'class' of immigrants from England who were the 'failures of the cities'. Woodsworth described a common lament of the English labourer that 'On many western farms, certain Englishmen have proved so useless that when help is needed "no Englishman need apply"'.³⁵ By the time of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, there was also grave concern in elite circles about the preponderance of British immigrants who were schooled in trade unions, socialism and militancy in their struggles with both the business community and the state.

At the other end of the spectrum, and equally unwelcome, was the English upper class remittance man. Newspaper cartoons and articles, plays and books satirized the English gentleman, always comparing them unfavourably to the shrewd, capable and egalitarian Canadians. *The Englishman in Canada*, by an unidentified writer, was a satire of travel literature about a bumbling young English bachelor who was 'oblivious to his own boorish manners and inability to comprehend that the self-confident, capable Canadian men and women he encounters have no need of his British ways or civilization'.³⁶ Sell-out crowds at

music halls laughed uproariously at the 'antics of English characters who strode about wearing monocles and outlandish tweed costumes, stammering and ranting such lines as ... "Oh I say! How deucedly unsporting"'. The remittance man was lampooned in Western Canada's entertaining and wildly popular paper, Bob Edwards' *Eye Opener*, published in High River and then Calgary. In 1903-4 a series of (fictitious) letters appeared from Albert 'Bertie' Buzzard-Cholomondeley, originally of Skookingham, Leicestershire, England to his father from whom he was always trying to solicit more money. Scotsman Bob Edwards made merciless fun of the fox-hunting and pheasant-shooting society, class distinctions, privilege and aristocracy through Bertie's letters.³⁷

Class distinctions, as well as shifting hierarchies of Irish, English and Scottish identities, remained sharp among British women as well. There is a popular myth of the West as a place where class distinctions disappeared. This is, in part, promoted by the letters, diaries and memoirs of well-to-do British women who described the difficulties they had keeping servants.³⁸ If they brought maids with them, or succeeded in hiring in the West, the servants never stayed long as they married hastily, often to neighbours, rising (in the view of the former servants) to a position of social equality with their former employers. While there is evidence for this, the situation was much more complex. Class distinctions remained, although they might be contested by those who wanted to rise in status. An example of this is provided in a letter written in 1878 by Colonel James F. Macleod of the North West Mounted Police. While visiting at Fort Walsh, he met the wife of the fort's

tailor, Mrs Stuttaford, an Irish woman, and thought she would make a 'capital servant' for his wife Mary. Macleod asked Mrs Stuttaford if she would like to 'stay with Mrs Macleod' and she said she would be 'delighted', but when he added that, 'Mrs Macleod would be glad to get you as a housemaid and I suppose you can cook also', her attitude changed. Macleod wrote:

Lord bless us — if you had seen her nose go in the air and sweep a curve half way across the room. 'Ah no' says she 'my people are quite above that, they would never hear of me going as a servant.' I very nearly told her that my wife could hardly think of meeting a tailor's wife on terms of equality and that she would not find such society very congenial to her tastes ... but I simply said I never had the least thought Mrs. S of receiving you in my house except as a servant ... The whole thing was so rich that when I returned to the Fort I had all the fellows in fits over it.³⁹

The issue of which classes of English women ought to be encouraged to emigrate as domestic servants (virtually the only opportunity for single women) was hotly debated. While the work might not appeal to 'gently-reared' women, these women were, it was thought, better reproducers of the 'race' than lower-class women. In *A Woman in Canada*, Mrs George Cran argued that middle-class women were essential to 'race making', warning that if 'ignorant women of our lower orders go out and marry — as they will — farmers, who are often of decent breeding, their

children will go down, not up, in the scale of progress; a woman of refinement and culture, of endurance, of healthy reasoning courage, is infinitely better equipped for the work of homemaking and race-making than the ignorant, often lazy, often slovenly lower-class woman'.⁴⁰ There were fears that working-class British women might have 'serious mental and moral disabilities' and were more likely to be 'diseased prostitutes than healthy "mothers of the race"'.⁴¹ Others argued that the 'degeneration' of the urban poor could be reversed after immigration to Canada, as 'they belong to a race which is the first among the strong ones of the earth ... Blood will tell. The race will assert itself and reproduce in the children of these people the old English character and the old English strength'.⁴²

English women, too, were viewed as poor workers. 'We don't want any English here' was the rude remark of a Canadian woman who ran a hostel to one young English woman applicant. English farmer Georgina Binnie-Clark discovered that the English were not popular among her neighbours in the Fort Qu'Appelle district of Saskatchewan. One explained that, 'You know the English ain't much considered out here. The Scotch is highly respected, and the Irish is well liked. But there is too much affectation and nonsense and laziness about the Englishmen.'⁴³ Binnie-Clark wrote in her 1914 book *Wheat and Woman*:

Canadian opinion divides the English into two groups, the ignorant English who can work, or the English wasters, who, having been dowered with every advantage which wealth can procure in a highly civilised country, won't

work ... We are dumped together as the helpless English, affected or ignorant, helpless or hopeless, snobs or slaves, and every one of us has to make his or her way through that barrier of prejudice.⁴⁴

But it was 'foreign' women who were subjected to the most pejorative descriptions. These negative representations, which were very similar to the descriptions of Aboriginal women, pervaded newspaper accounts, missionary publications and popular literature. Like Aboriginal women, they were compared unfavourably with the supposedly elevated position of the British or British-Canadian woman. Derogatory representations included Mormon women, who were from the U.S., spoke English and many of whom had British backgrounds.⁴⁵ They were depicted as enslaved, servile women.⁴⁶ The Doukhobors were criticized for allegedly making draught animals of their wives and daughters, in much the same way as Aboriginal women were depicted as drudges and beasts of burden.⁴⁷ Newspapers such as the *Edmonton Bulletin*, in an area where many Ukrainians settled, regularly ran stories of 'diabolical' crimes among the 'Galicians', where the alleged perpetrators were women.⁴⁸ Sometimes crimes were petty but were minutely described such as the activities of a Russian woman and her four sons who were an 'industrious gang of sneak thieves'.⁴⁹ She did washing and scrubbing in Edmonton homes and allegedly stole a huge variety of personal possessions that were itemized in great detail, emphasizing how she had invaded and violated the privacy of her decent employers: 'The list is varied ran-

ging from babies' slippers to the old Saskatchewan district court seal, used here in 1880. A few of the stolen goods are: Jewelry [*sic*], including a number of wedding rings ... babies shoes ... silver spoons with monogram ... childrens [*sic*] dresses ... photographs.⁵⁰

'Foreign' women were depicted as abused and ill-treated by their own men, as in the report in 1899 of a 'Galician woman, half starved and thoroughly exhausted, with three small children', who was deserted by her husband, who walked 20 miles hauling a 'primitive home-made cart, and applied to the North-West Mounted Police for relief'.⁵¹ Often they were cast as poor mothers, again in much the same way as Aboriginal women. The *Edmonton Bulletin* reported on July 20 1899, for example, that a 'Galician' woman had left her four-month-old baby under a wagon while she ran after a cow that broke free during a storm. 'The baby remained under the wagon during the terrible wind, dust and rain and when found by a man who was passing after the storm subsided had been badly buffeted by the elements and completely exhausted, besides being almost smothered by the dust.' They were also, and again in virtually the same way as Aboriginal women, castigated as poor housekeepers. As reported in the *Bulletin* of February 23 1899, the 'Galicians' 'are, from the point of view of civilization, ten times lower than the Indians. They have not the least idea of sanitation. In many cases they have been content with building themselves holes in the ground, where the family consorts with the animals — all in one common apartment.'

One of the most popular authors in Western Canada was Presbyterian minister and Winnipegger (originally Ontarian)

Charles W. Gordon, who published numerous novels under the pseudonym Ralph Connor. A central character in his novel *The Foreigner* is Paulina Koval, a Hungarian woman who is 'slow-witted', 'undoubtedly slovenly', 'dull' and 'apathetic'.⁵² Her son Kalman, however, becomes ambitious, hardworking, devoutly Presbyterian and Canadianized. The hope of the future is symbolized through Kalman's marriage in the last chapter to Marjorie, a Scottish-Canadian, who represents all of the virtues of the Canadian nation. Marjorie had once declared that 'never could she love one of those foreigners', but in the last line of the book Kalman has become, she says 'my foreigner, my Canadian foreigner'.⁵³ This was the 'making of a nation', Gordon explained in his preface. 'Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all'. Ralph Connor's solution however, would not have been palatable to the social reformers of the day who were concerned with 'race' regeneration.

The targets and nature of the condemnations of 'foreign' women varied according to the needs of the hour. In his 1920 book *Breaking Prairie Sod: The Story of a Pioneer Preacher in the Eighties* with the subtitle 'With a Discussion of the Burning Question of To-Day: "Shall the Alien Go?"', Wellington Bridgman provided a detailed description of 'alien' women, interchanging the term with the 'Hun'. They appear as poor housekeepers, who were 'not used to a floor in the house, or a stove, or a broom, or a churn'.⁵⁴ None had ever had a bath. They were physically

strong, being used to outdoor work but 'No care is ever taken with the shape or form of the body, so she just grows and develops. In domestic life she thinks of nothing, and is trained to nothing but subserviency.'⁵⁵ They could often be found in court, having assaulted their neighbours or family members. He described at great length a fight between two women in the north end of Winnipeg:

One who felt the spirit of her throbbing strength claimed to hold the 'belt' for a considerable district in the north end. Another woman of the same nationality 'doubted if she could do her'. Gossips carried the doubtful challenge. The burly defender of the belt went down. The backyard formed the arena, and there, without rules and with only females present, they contended to a finish.⁵⁶

None of this, Bridgman wrote, contributed to 'good motherhood', and the children of these women fell even lower into 'vice and looseness of morals'. He concluded his section of women by asking why people of 'such low character and breeding should have been inflicted on this fair Dominion? ... There is not a cog of their primeval being that fits into the machinery of Canadian civilization.' Bridgman argued that the 'aliens' should all be sent home and urged that British war widows and their families be placed across the prairies.

Americans were welcomed as hard working farmers but at the same time they were cast as a danger to the purity of Canadian women. The Canadian West was frequently depicted as a young white woman, a 'beautiful, wholesome, hopeful

maiden', the offspring of Mother Britannia. She was pure, pristine, virginal, naive and vulnerable. The masculine U.S. was base, rapacious, debauched and menacing. There were fears and anxieties in Western Canada about young girls and women being enticed into 'white slavery' by unscrupulous Americans.⁵⁷ British traveller Bessie Pullen-Burry's 1912 book of her trip across Canada was full of warnings about the danger from undesirable Americans. Americans lurking about Winnipeg were connected to a 'hideous traffic south of the line, the result ... of an insufficient supply to meet the demands of the immoral men of cities like Chicago, which send well-dressed emissaries into Canada to entrap the unwary and ignorant into life-long bondage'. Pullen-Burry also described the experiences of an English girl, a doctor's daughter, who had shared a room at a YWCA in Vancouver with a young woman from Seattle: 'in a day or two the American girl's condition, aptly described as a "menace to the town", was such that she was sent to the hospital: the matron of which whom I afterwards met, confirmed in every detail the account I had previously heard, which is absolutely unfit to be recorded.'⁵⁸

'White' slavery was one example of the continued use of the term 'white' into the twentieth century. Another was a feature apparently unique to Canada, the 'white women's labour laws' that were enacted in the western provinces and Ontario beginning with Saskatchewan in 1912.⁵⁹ These prohibited Asian owners of restaurants, laundries or other businesses, from hiring white women. The legislation was the result of lobbying by labour and business interests concerned about 'unfair competition' from Asians, as

well as moral reformers and middle-class white women's groups. Hysteria about the dangers to white women from Asians were kept alive in the press through 'sordid and revolting' stories of women being lured away and tragically transformed into drug fiends. But authorities had difficulty deciding just who was a 'white woman' as the statutes provided no definition. In 1912, a Saskatoon police magistrate adjourned a trial professing great confusion over the question of the 'whiteness' of the female employees involved who were described as Russian and German. The Crown attempted to provide a definition, arguing that the court should 'give these words the meaning which is commonly applied to them; that is to say the females of any of the civilized European nations'.⁶⁰ The adjournment, and the judge's confusion, indicates that in his mind these women were not quite 'white', although he eventually decided that Germans and Russians were indeed members of the 'Caucasian race'.

Similar legislation was proposed in Western Canada that would prohibit 'white' girls from working in Greek restaurants. Lobbying for such legislation in the town of Lethbridge provoked this letter to the *Lethbridge Daily Herald* of January 7 1913, from Miss Bessie Carter under the headline 'White Girls in Greek Restaurants', which indicates the confusion over just who was considered part of the 'white race':

Dear Sir,

In regard to the local council of women of Lethbridge, on the proposition of girls help in Greek Restaurants, who do you refer to in the original Greeks in such cases? Do they not belong to the

white race? The difference is, we came east generations ago and are somewhat more advanced. Because they came from a foreign country, they are not of the dark race. History and geography of the US will give evidence to that effect. If they are respectful enough to join the allies and fight for your country, surely they are good enough for the employment of our girls. What are we girls going to do? Quit working nine hours a day, wages \$60 a month, and do housework and slave for \$15 a month and work 15 hours a day, no! We will go where we can get wages. Who will take the place of the girls when all the men are called to the front?

The issue was still being debated in Lethbridge in 1918 when the local Council of Women urged the city police to exercise more power over the employment of 'white girl help' in restaurants owned by Chinese and Greeks.⁶¹

The participation of British-Canadian women in the promotion of negative representations of the 'foreigner' is illustrated in the campaign for homestead rights. In Western Canada persons who were heads of families or males over 18 could make an entry for a homestead of 160 acres upon payment of an entry fee of \$10. After fulfilling certain duties of residence and cultivation during a three-year 'proving up' period, the entrant could receive patent to this land (or ownership in fee simple). Unmarried women could not apply for homestead land, nor could married women. The only women who qualified were those who were heads of families — widows and in some cases divorced or separ-

ated women — but in all cases they had to have a minor child or children. Women such as Georgina Binnie-Clark had to *purchase* land, as they were not eligible for ‘free’ homesteads. A woman wanting to farm was denied a ‘fair start’, Binnie-Clark argued, as she ‘has the killing weight of extra payments thrust on her at the very outset. She may be the best farmer in Canada, she may buy land, work it, take prizes for seed and stock, but she is denied the right to claim from the Government the 160 acres of land held out as a bait to every man’.⁶²

A homesteads-for-women campaign gained momentum in the years leading to the First World War and was an important component of the feminist movement in Western Canada. The injustice of the situation was heightened by the fact that just across the 49th parallel in the U.S. West, single women could homestead and did so in the thousands.⁶³ Many women moved from Canada to the U.S. in order to homestead.⁶⁴ The campaign was centred in the Western Canadian press, particularly farmers’ journals such as the *Grain Growers’ Guide*. Supporters of homesteads-for-women drew on a number of arguments. The opportunity to farm would help the weak and weary office worker. Sanatoriums would be emptied. Families with daughters could not expand their holdings in the way that families with sons could by occupying adjoining sections. Greater gentility would be introduced to the homosocial frontier. As one supporter wrote in 1911 to the *Grain Growers’ Guide*, there were hundreds of ‘bright, intelligent girls and women’ in Canadian cities who would be ‘more valuable citizens than the drinking, swearing, carousing, cigarette-smoking young fellows who loaf about

bar-rooms, and yet the latter have votes and homesteads, and the former have neither’.⁶⁵ The resultant influx of women would also solve the ‘bachelor’ problem that was much lamented in the Canadian press. As another supporter wrote: ‘It would make the country very much more sociable and perhaps prevent a lot of the bachelors from going to the insane asylum for want of sociability.’⁶⁶

But increasingly the most forcible argument made was that homestead rights should not be given to ‘foreign’ men when British-Canadian and British women were denied that right. ‘We women of the west feel that our rightful inheritance is wrested away from us and given to strangers and all because we have committed the sin of belonging to the “female species”’, wrote a supporter of the cause in a 1913 letter to officials in Ottawa.⁶⁷ Isobel Graham, women’s editor of the *Grain Growers’ Guide*, was the most prominent and dedicated activist for this cause. She wrote in a 1913 letter to the President of the National Council of Women Mrs F.H. Torrington:

Are we Western farmers so cultured, so steadfast, so loyal, so philanthropic that we can bear dilution by the ignorance, low idealism, and religious perversity of the average foreigner? ... Keep back the foreigner. Give us good, sound British stock — women already British, already civilized, already subjected to both earth and heaven for conduct.⁶⁸

This line of argument reached a new level in 1911 when African-Americans from Oklahoma expressed an interest in homesteading in Western Canada. Graham stressed the threat to ‘white’ women on

isolated homesteads, writing about 'the atrocities committed by these terrible communities the only corresponding punishment for which is the lawless lynching, and even burning at the stake. Already it is reported that three white women in the Edmonton and Peace River districts have been victims of these outrages accomplished in peculiarly fiendish abandon.'⁶⁹ These and other allegations proved to be fabricated, but they successfully built up pressure to halt most of this immigration.

One of Graham's proposals was to discriminate against 'foreign' women wishing to homestead by requiring them to make a deposit of not less than \$500 to hinder them from the start.⁷⁰ She wrote: 'It is not desirable to grant homesteads wholesale to foreign women who know nothing of the rigors of the country and who are bound to fail through the discouragements of unexpected hardships.' Graham claimed sole responsibility for the clause in the petition asking that homestead rights be reserved to women of British birth, arguing that Canada 'would really suffer from any other course'.⁷¹ There were thousands of women and men who agreed with Graham as they signed the petition, which was not circulated in any of the areas settled by the 'foreigners' or 'new' Canadians. One supporter declared that he signed only *because* the petition stated 'women of British birth', as he did 'not believe in giving the same rights to foreigners or Americans as I do to our "women of British and Canadian birth"'.⁷²

But there were many who disagreed, arguing that changes to the homestead laws should benefit all women, and they expressed concern that this narrowness might diminish their own quest for equity

and justice. H.G. Ahern wrote from Claresholm, Alberta in July, 1911 to object to the wording of the petition:

The women of British birth should not be so selfish and short-sighted as to try to put through a law of this kind with the words 'of British birth' therein, for if they succeed it will be a blot on the degree of their intelligence, and a factor of their lack of Christianity as practised by them, which our historians will be sorry to relate. It will also retard the development of Canada.⁷³

Mrs L. Doran wrote to the *Grain Growers' Guide* in 1912 to say that she would agree to circulate the petition:

If the words 'of British birth' be eliminated ... I can only explain that clause as being the result of prejudice ... The Canadian government could not make a greater mistake than to grant the petition as originally worded for what have women of British birth done that entitles them to the land more than the thousands of women of other nationalities ... Let us be consistent and not let the men have a chance to accuse us of being narrow-minded.⁷⁴

In a 1913 letter to the Minister of the Interior, V.C. Bedier of Chauvin, Alberta wrote that the right to homestead should be open to all women, and expressed the opinion that 'foreign' women would likely do better than English women, reflecting the widely held view that the English were poor workers: 'It certainly would be hard to find women less suitable to help build

a country than some of these very ones she [Isobel Graham] so very narrowly tries to favor [sic].'⁷⁵ Americans and 'ex-Americans' were disappointed that they were excluded along with 'foreign' women. One reader wrote to Graham that when she read the petition 'all my fondest hopes were crushed for the petition reads that women of British and Canadian birth be allowed the privilege of homesteading and I first beheld the light of day under the Stars and Stripes. But, pray tell me, would you not vouchsafe for American girls to homestead as well?'⁷⁶

The 'homesteads-for-women' campaign was unsuccessful. The petition was shelved away and forgotten. The First World War interrupted the momentum of the campaign, and after that the response of the federal government was that any remaining homestead land should be occupied by returned soldiers.⁷⁷ It is difficult to say whether the strategy to campaign on behalf of British women only damaged the cause but it would certainly have been a nightmare to administer a system that welcomed all white males, but denied all but British women. It would also have seemed very unfair in the U.S. where British, Canadian and other women were permitted to homestead. The narrowness of the campaign clearly alienated potential supporters. But the response of the federal government, who had control over dominion lands, never wavered both before and after this strategy of exclusion was adopted. Politicians and government officials did not want women to deviate from ideals of proper femininity. When Georgina Binnie-Clark brought the issue before the deputy-minister of the Department of the Interior, the reply was that women 'are already averse to marriage,

and he considered that to admit them to the opportunities of the land-grant would be to make them more independent of marriage than ever'.⁷⁸ A similar response was given in the House of Commons in 1910 when Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver stated that in order to make a homestead productive there should be 'not a single woman upon it, nor even a single man, but there should be both the man and the woman in order that the homestead may be made fully advantageous to the country'. It was the job of the single man 'to get the woman, and for the woman who wants to settle on land in the Northwest to get the man, rather than that she shall have land of her own'.⁷⁹ White women of British ancestry were viewed as the key to order and civilization, but only if they were firmly tied to the home and the domestic sphere. Land, and the potential wealth and independence this could mean for women, was a male preserve.

Linda Colley has explained 'Britishness' as being forged between 1707 and 1837 in a series of conflicts with an external other (Catholic France). This sense of a shared identity permitted diverse inhabitants to focus on what they had in common, rather than what divided them.⁸⁰ In the case of Australia, Marilyn Lake has argued that by the late-nineteenth century the 'emergent identity of the 'white man' began to complement, and then displace, the figure of the Britisher in Australian cultural and political discourse'.⁸¹ In Western Canada, however, Britishness supplanted whiteness by the early-twentieth century. This was a unique brand of Canadian Britishness that took shape first in opposition to French Canada and the U.S.; in the West it was shaped in opposition to Aboriginal people and the 'foreign-

ers'. It was a strategy of authority that divided the residents of the West into the deserving and the less deserving in a place where white skin could not be a critical carrier of difference. But the British community too was divided by class, gender and ethnicity. British-Canadian women enjoyed a much more privileged position than Aboriginal and other immigrant women, but they too were subject to complex gender and racial ideologies.

In *Capturing Women*, I wrote about an Aboriginal woman known as 'Liza' who lived on the outskirts of the Manitoba town of Virden.⁸² I saw much of her symbolic importance in the fact that she was an Aboriginal woman, writing that her presence continued to feed the community's stereotypic view of the deficiencies of Aboriginal femininity, while bolstering the ideal of white femininity. Liza served to sharpen the boundaries of community membership, to articulate what was and what was not considered respectable and acceptable.⁸³ But this is not the complete story. At the turn of the century Caroline 'Mother' Fulham was the young city of Calgary's 'Liza', but she was Irish. She was white, but not properly white, and not properly British. She had fallen from grace. Fulham kept pigs in her backyard, and collected garbage from Calgary's hotels and restaurants. She was called the 'Queen of Garbage Row', and she was frequently prosecuted for her disorderly conduct. She visited the bars of the hotels and was often the objects of pranks when she unsteadily emerged. 'Mother' Fulham celebrated St. Patrick's days in outlandish green clothing and on that day she sang Irish songs while intoxicated from her 'throne' on top of her democrat.⁸⁴ Lawyer and senator James Lougheed, in one

courtroom exchange in 1891, called Mrs Fulham a 'moral leper', and he regretted 'the liberty or rather the licenses granted to such a woman who made herself a notorious nuisance'.⁸⁵

Although white and British, Caroline Fulham was an outcast, a blight and 'moral leper' to the emerging community of Calgary, founded on a strong British-Ontarian foundation. But like Liza, she performed a valuable function. Her behaviour, which was in contrast to and in conflict with norms of respectable white, British femininity, functioned to confirm these norms, attesting to the value and sanctity of traditional domestic arrangements that implied little freedom or independence for women. Fulham's independent living as a pig farmer, her drinking, and transgressions of the law were all powerful explorations of an alternative femininity, helping to maintain the overall equilibrium within the community by mapping out what was permitted, and what had to be repressed. Caroline Fulham points to the complexities of the 'grammars of difference' that were established in Western Canada. Clearly we need to look beyond the collision of the white presence with the Aboriginal semblance in understanding marginal identities in this corner of the British Empire.

ENDNOTES

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