

## Chapter 1

# Canada: A Racialized Past

A source said one of the community members who might be at risk attends a downtown Hamilton school. A staff member at Ecole Notre Dame, a French elementary school, said they have two students who recently arrived from Congo — but neither had been contacted by public-health officials. In Hamilton there are as many as 300 residents originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to a representative for the Settlement and Integration Services Organization. (*Globe and Mail*, February 8, 2001a)

Immigration officials are investigating whether a Congolese woman who started an Ebola scare in Southern Ontario last month is a courier for a diamond smuggling ring. A Quebec man who was to host the woman during her stay in Canada is believed to have transferred US \$100,000 to a Kinshasa company called Isocool prior to her arrival. (*National Post*, March 3, 2001)

Hamilton is a southwestern Ontario town that has undergone social and economic transformation over time. It was one of the leading manufacturing towns of iron and steel until the decline of these industries in the 1980s (Livingstone and Magan 1996: 4–5). Hamilton, like many other Canadian metropolises, is ethnically and racially diverse. However, its ethno-racial diversity is not devoid of the social problem of racial intolerance that confronts other Canadian cities (Smith 2003). The possibility of an Ebola-positive patient from the Democratic Republic of Congo, on a visitor's visa, being admitted to a hospital in Hamilton first appeared in the print media on February 6, 2001. Newspapers indicated that while the woman was visiting an acquaintance in Hamilton on February 4, 2001, she fell ill: she was feeling unwell, could not eat and had a rising fever. According to her hostess, as reported in the newspaper stories, that Sunday night an ambulance was requested to transport her to the Henderson Hospital in Hamilton. Under medical examination, Ebola was considered as a probable cause of her illness by the medical practitioners who attended to her. The *Globe and Mail* of February 7, 2001, quoting a source familiar with the case, reported that on Monday, February 5, the woman's illness had become so severe that she was "bleeding from several sites on the body." Newspaper reports indicated

that the symptoms exhibited by the woman, coupled with her travel history, made doctors suspect the Ebola virus as the probable cause of her illness. After a series of tests, however, Ebola was ruled out.

This book is about the Canadian media's articulation of the suspected infectious disease with race and immigration and the resilience of the racialized Other to their representations in the media. Using the media coverage of the female Congolese visitor to Canada suspected of the serious contagious disease, the maintenance of race as an organizing principle in Canadian society is illustrated.<sup>1</sup> This study highlights the contradictions between the "ideals" of equality and the "reality" of inequality in Canadian society. Canada is a democratic modern society with the ideals of equality and freedom, yet there is race-based inequality (Bolaria and Li 1985; Mensah 2002; Henry and Tator 2006). This case study contributes to the scholarship on the discrepancies between those ideals of freedom and equality espoused in Canadian society and the realities and experiences of racism by Canada's visible minorities by focusing on the media's role in fanning an ember of racism in their representation of a non-Ebola<sup>2</sup> panic. This book is not only about the panic caused by media representation but also about how the panic was experienced by the Black community. The non-Ebola case was a proxy for expressing the anxiety and concern of Canadians over the growing presence of non-Europeans in this country. The media used the case as an analogy of all that is considered threatening to Canadian society, especially criminality, racial impurity, immigration and scarce social resources.

Canada has a racialized history of immigration (Bolaria and Li 1985; Li 1998; Li 2003). It has a recent history of excluding "peripheral Europeans" (Satzewich 2000) and non-Whites from immigrating to Canada. Satzewich (1991) documented different standards used by the Canadian state to incorporate different ethnic and racial groups in the post-war era. Throughout the history of Canadian immigration, race was one of the key ways that Canadians made sense of Self and their social world. Stanley Barrett (1994: 270) cannot be more explicit on this fact when he states that Canadians have a "racial capacity." The framing of the non-Ebola case in the media and interviews conducted with journalists affirm that many Canadians perceive the growing ethno-racial diversity in Canada, since the de-racialized immigration policy of the 1960s, as a challenge to Euro-Canadian hegemony (Hier and Greenberg 2002; Li 2003). The folkloric conception of Canada as "White" in Canadians' day-to-day living is shattered by the growing mosaic of cultures and "races." I argue that the non-Ebola case was a reaction to this dramatic change and that the media coverage of the case as a racial/immigration problem could only resonate with an audience that used the idea of race to make sense of its world.

## The Non-Ebola Case

Ebola is a virus named after a river in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire, where it was first recognized in 1976. Subsequent outbreaks occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1977; Sudan in 1979; Gabon in 1994 and 1996; Democratic Republic of Congo in 1995; Uganda in 2000–2001; and on the border of Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2001–2002. The Ebola virus and the Marburg virus are two members of a family of viruses called “filoviridae,” and they can cause severe hemorrhagic fever in humans and nonhuman primates. The etiology of Ebola is unknown. In the realist sense of risk (see Lupton 1999), the Ebola virus can be deadly; its mortality rate ranges from 50 to 90 percent. While Ebola is very lethargic, its spread is highly localized.

Joffe and Haarhoff (2002) refer to Ebola as one of the “far-flung illnesses” because it breaks out in places that are geographically remote from the West. However, members of Western societies are aware of Ebola through the mass media (Ungar 1998). Based on Western media coverage of the Ebola outbreak in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1995, Ungar (1998) argues that in the early stage of the coverage, Ebola was constructed as very deadly or in a “mutation-contagion” phase, but after a few days the media allayed the fear of the Western public by reporting that Ebola was an African problem and was of no danger to the Western audience. Allaying the fear of the Western audience is accomplished through what he refers to as the “containment package.” Ungar’s (1998) study makes one realize that Canadians had some knowledge of Ebola as a deadly disease prior to the breaking news of a possible presence of Ebola in Canada in the winter of 2001. The news coverage of a suspected Ebola case tapped into Canadians’ pre-existing knowledge of Ebola as a deadly disease and created fear and anxiety, but it was the association of the disease with a foreign ecology in prior and current media coverage that reinforced racial discrimination in a segment of the population.

The local newspaper, the *Hamilton Spectator*, a widely read newspaper in Hamilton and the surrounding area, published stories on how a panic-stricken community was reacting to the news of Ebola in their neighbourhoods. According to the *Hamilton Spectator*’s and other news media reports, the situation had become serious enough that those who came in contact with the woman, including five ambulance workers, were immediately identified for isolation; the ambulances in which she was transported were taken out of service; and some hospital staff who came in contact with the patient voluntarily quarantined themselves to protect their family members from contracting the virus.

As the media placed emphasis on Ebola as the possible cause of the patient’s illness in their coverage, public reaction in the Hamilton area grew.

The Heritage Front, a self-acclaimed White supremacist group, picketed the hospital and distributed racist pamphlets in the vicinity of the hospital; hospital workers panicked and threatened legal action against the hospital for exposing them to danger; Black children in some elementary schools in Hamilton were shunned by their fellow White students; and an acquaintance of the patient in the Congolese community is reported to have lost jobs and moved out of her residence.

Subsequent newspaper articles reported that after a series of medical tests, Ebola and other suspected hemorrhagic fevers were ruled out. As soon as Ebola and these other hemorrhagic fevers were ruled out by the medical experts, the news quickly dropped off the media radar, just as suddenly as it was brought to light. But then news reports brought to public attention that the woman's medical care had been costly and also that she was being investigated by the authorities for diamond smuggling.

For members of the Black community in Hamilton, the coverage of the event by the media was not only racist but fanned an ember of racist prejudice and discrimination in the community. They deplored the implied relationship between the suspected disease, immigration and race. Members of the Black community also felt that the disclosure and publication of the patient's name and the display of photographs of where she stayed was "un-Canadian," that is, she was singled out for special treatment because of her racial background. They also expressed dissatisfaction over the way that the hospital and its physicians handled the case. Murdocca's (2003: 29) comments on the case offer an insight that is congruent to the feelings of frustration expressed by members of the Black community in Hamilton:

It is imperative to point out that the conceptual link that the Heritage Front made between a Congolese visitor and racialized immigrants and refugees from "high risk" areas is the same connection made by immigration officials, medical experts, journalists and those who wrote letters to the editor. Instead of producing incompatible versions of the threat of contagious disease, the ideological intersections of "far right" organizations, mainstream media and medical and government officials suggest that these seemingly disparate political agendas in fact promote analogous agendas that use racialized bodies as vectors of disease as their narrative core.

The non-Ebola case raises a set of questions relating to identity, race, racialization, racism, immigration, insecurity and safety. This book aims to answer three questions. What is the Canadian media coverage of Ebola in the winter of 2001? How was the non-Ebola case explained by journalists, physicians and members of the Black community? How was the non-Ebola panic experienced and constructed by members of the Black community? Apart

from addressing the issues of the *mechanisms* of media representation and the *effects* of the coverage on a segment of the population, this book situates the case within the larger literature on Canadian immigration, race, racial categorization and health panics. The major thrust of the point sustained throughout the book is that the non-Ebola case was used by the media as a proxy for expressing the anxiety and insecurity that Canadians feel over the changing racial composition of Canada.

### Immigration, Race and the Imagined Canadian Nation

The non-Ebola narratives can be placed in the larger context of signification of race and its cross-articulation with social problems not only in news reporting but also in everyday life in Canada (Henry and Tator 2002, 2006). The concepts of racism, racialization and race are germane to the process of “Othering” the social problems of crime (Henry and Tator 2002: 163–204; Tator and Henry 2006), “illegal” migration (Hier and Greenberg 2001, 2002), deception (Pratt and Valverde 2002) and infectious diseases (Power 1995; Ungar 1998; Joffe and Haarhoff 2002; Washer 2004) in Western societies.

Social scientists conceive of race as a label that has been employed to differentiate human beings on the basis of skin colour or culture (Satzewich 1998b; Miles and Brown 2003). According to Miles and Brown (2003: 88–89), race is a product of “signification.” That is, it is the attribution of meaning to “certain somatic characteristics,” most especially skin colour. The biological definition of race did not emerge until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but by the second half of the twentieth century, an essentialist definition of race in terms of biology had been rejected in social science. Classifying human beings into different races has never been fortuitous because the race idiom has always served the purpose of including the “desirables” and excluding the “undesirables.” Although social scientists have discredited the biological basis of race, it has remained one of the fundamental coordinates of modern societies.

Historically, race was an imposition on the Other, but it has not always exclusively been a discourse of oppression. In the words of Miles and Brown (2003: 91):

During the twentieth century, those who have been its object have often accepted their designation as a biologically distinct and discreet population, as a “race,” but have inverted the negative evaluation of their character and capacities. Consequently, the discourse of “race” has been transformed into a discourse of resistance. Certain somatic characteristics (usually skin color) have been signified as the foundation for a common experience and fate as an excluded population, irrespective of class position and cultural origin.

Miles and Brown (2003: 101) define racialization as “those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated collectivities.” Racialization entails the attribution of social meanings to somatic variations in a human population. Satzewich (1998b: 32) presents this point more clearly by stating that the “process of racialization is the delineation of group boundaries and identities by reference to physical and/or genetic criteria or by reference to the term race.” Racialization is a “dialectical process,” that is, “to define the Other necessarily entails defining ‘Self’ by the same criteria” (Miles and Brown 2003: 101). Whereas racism is about negative evaluation of racialized Others, racialization is not necessarily racist because people can classify themselves or be classified by others on the basis of physical or cultural characteristics without imputing negative meanings to the categories. As Satzewich (1998b: 34–35) points out, many Canadians use the marker of race to categorize themselves or others without necessarily being racist. It is not the classification that is problematic (Hall 1996) but the advantages that classifications confer on one collectivity at the expense of another.

As has been pointed out above, races of people do not exist in a biological sense, but people think and behave as though they exist. People hold racist prejudices and single others out based on the notion that they are biologically different. There is no agreed upon definition of racism (see Satzewich 1998b: 34–36), but most social scientists would not dispute the fact that racism is grounded in a belief of a natural sub-division of the human population into discreet races that can be ranked hierarchically. Racism is therefore a form of racialization that conceives of the world as having multiple races, and one or more of the races identified “must be attributed with additional (negatively evaluated) characteristics and/or must be represented as inducing negative consequences for (an)other group(s)” (Miles and Brown 2003: 104). Racism may select either cultural or biological characteristics in a population as the basis for singling out the Other for special treatment.

Martin Barker (1981) uses the concept of “new racism” to distinguish the contemporary strain of racism from the old-fashioned racism. Rather than focusing on biological superiority of one race, the former dwells on cultural superiority of one collectivity over others. Barker (1981) alludes to the expression of anti-immigrant sentiments by British politicians in the 1970s as instances of racism. He states that the new form of racism does not talk about ‘race’ as the ranking of human collectivities in a pecking order on the basis of skin colour. Rather, hierarchies of groups are expressed in terms of cultural differences. Thus, he describes the concept of the new racism as a

theory of human nature. Human nature is such that it is natural to form a bounded community, a nation, aware of its differences from other nations. They are not better or worse. But feelings of antagonism will be aroused if outsiders are admitted. And there grows up a special form of connection between a nation and the place it lives. (Barker 1981: 21)

Barker's idea of new racism provides an interesting insight into understanding the currents and undercurrents of contemporary racism. Most importantly, it points out that an attitude or behaviour does not necessarily have to be grounded in biological discourse to qualify as racist.

All in all, the ideas of race, racialization, racism and new racism inform the classification of the human population and have patterned relationships between and among groups of people in modern societies. These notions of race, racialization, racism and new racism have played a major role in organizing social relations in the historical formation of Canada.<sup>3</sup> Bolaria and Li (1985), for example, document the differential incorporation of non-European immigrants into Canada in the period before 1962. The discrimination against immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean was racial in the sense that they were exploited in the labour market and were excluded from circulating freely in the labour market and becoming members of the "Canadian imagined community." In the case of the Chinese, their immigration to Canada before 1923 was mainly based on the intermittent labour demand of the Canadian economy. Their immigration started around 1858, when some of them came from the west coast of the U.S. to work in the gold mines of Fraser Valley in British Columbia. Subsequent Chinese immigration, directly from China, followed between 1881 and 1885, during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (Bolaria and Li 1985). Couched in a strict political economy perspective, Bolaria and Li (1985) argue that anti-Chinese sentiments expressed by the public and the Canadian state were induced by their presumed competition with White workers in times of surplus labour supply. To prevent the Chinese from competing with Canadian workers, anti-Chinese bills were passed by both the provincial legislature and the federal parliament. When the CPR was completed in 1885, a head tax of \$50 was imposed upon Chinese entering Canada (Bolaria and Li 1985). The Chinese head tax was increased to \$100 in 1900, and to \$500 in 1903. In 1923, the Canadian parliament passed the Chinese Immigration Act, which barred all Chinese from entering the country. This racist ban was not lifted until 1947.

The role of the Canadian state in differentially incorporating immigrants into Canadian society after the Second World War is extensively discussed by Satzewich (1991). According to Satzewich, post-war immigration to Canada

was driven by the Canadian state's notion of Canadian identity. While Bolaria and Li (1985) consider labour need as the main variable driving the immigration policy at the time in question, Satzewich (1991), based on a mode of incorporation typology of "free immigration," "unfree immigration" and "unfree migration," posits that it was a combination of economic, cultural and ideological factors. Thus, people of European descent were allowed to immigrate to Canada based on the criterion of their perceived cultural and physiological similarities with "Canadians." The Dutch, British and Germans gained access to Canada as free immigrants. They were expected to become naturalized Canadians after five years of residence in Canada. The Polish and those of Southern and Eastern European descent were incorporated as unfree immigrants. They arrived in Canada under certain conditions and, after three years of residency, could circulate freely in the labour market and become naturalized Canadians. In Satzewich's (1991) study, Blacks constituted the unfree migrant category. They were only allowed to migrate to Canada on conditions that precluded them from becoming permanent Canadian residents. Caribbean farm workers were classified as "unfree migrant labour" because "they have been defined as temporary entrants to Canada without the right of permanent settlement, and because it is not intended that they become citizens of the country and parts of the imagined community of the Canadian nation" (Satzewich 1991: 111).

In what Satzewich (1991: 116) referred to as the "racialization of permanent settlement," the Canadian state separated labour force renewal from labour force maintenance: the migrant's family is left in the Caribbean, exonerating the Canadian state from assuming responsibilities for the physical reproduction of the worker's family and reproduction costs of the labourer when he/she is unemployed. Satzewich (1991) finds that the differential incorporation of Blacks, compared to European migrant labourers, into Canadian society stemmed from exploitation but was also motivated by the imagined conception of Canada as a society of White people. Thus he argues that the barring of Black migrants from assuming permanent resident status is blatantly racist:

They were defined as unable to "assimilate," unable to adjust to the Canadian climate, and as the cause of potential social and "racial" problems in the country, all of which were negatively associated characteristics linked to "race." Very generally, "black" people were not allowed to become members of the Canadian imagined community. (Satzewich 1991: 128)

From the public policy perspective, in the period before 1962, it was overtly expressed that Black immigration could constitute a risk to Canada. Canadian public officials often referred to their notion of threat in terms of

a race relations problem, which they claimed had gestated in the U.K. and the U.S. Anxieties over racial diversity at the time were expressed by a high level public functionary. Satzewich (1991: 139) notes:

It should also be mentioned here that one of the policy factors was a concern over the long range wisdom of a substantial increase in negro immigration to Canada. The racial problems of Britain and the United States undoubtedly influenced this concern which still exists today.

Unfree immigrants also experienced racialization because of their cultural difference from the French and the British. In a different study by Satzewich (2000), “European ethnics” as varied as Italians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Polish and Irish are referred to as “peripheral Europeans” because of their racialized experiences in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his assessment, Satzewich (2000: 275) observes that some scholars tend to “fall back on old essentialist and reified understandings of ‘race.’” He uses the experiences of racism by “peripheral Europeans” to show that the ontology of race is a social construction. Whiteness was an achieved status, and European ethnics could choose to be non-White. In an example of the former, the Irish did not automatically qualify as White; they fought and struggled to become White. On the other hand, Ukrainians made their national identity a priority over a White racial identity.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s, the Canadian immigration policy was de-racialized owing to the need for skilled labour, not enough of which was available from Europe, and an aversion to racism worldwide. As a result, immigrants of non-European descent were allowed to immigrate to Canada based on a universal points system. The points system assessed prospective immigrants on “objective criteria,” such as age, skills, education and language proficiency. Since then, Canada has experienced growth in immigration from non-traditional sources such as Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The next section discusses the growth of the non-European population in Canada, public perceptions of racial diversity and the reaction of the Canadian population.

### Racial Diversity, Anxieties and Racial Categorization

Since the de-racialized immigration policy of the 1960s, Canada has experienced immigration from the non-traditional sources of Asia and Africa. As a result, anxieties have emerged among the Canadian public around the changing nature of the racial composition of Canada (Li 2003). Familiar social spaces, such as neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools are becoming racially diverse due to immigration from non-European countries. Consequently, there are growing feelings of insecurity and unease as racial

diversity is considered a challenge to Euro-Canadian supremacy (see Creese and Peterson 1996; Hier and Greenberg 2002). Concerns and anxieties over immigration have also been expressed in other Western industrial societies during the past few decades. They have been expressed in the form of racist backlash and anti-immigration sentiments in the public speeches of politicians (see Barker 1981) and in the media. In the contemporary West, crass anti-immigrant sentiments, or what Husbands (1994) refers to as the “new moral panics,” are not unconnected to shifting broader social, historical, economic and cultural conditions of “late modern societies”<sup>5</sup> (Wodak and Matouschek 1993; Zong 1994; Simmons 1998a, 1998b; Hier and Greenberg 2002).

Li (2003) distinguishes between racial and ethnic diversities in the Canadian context. He argues that, as an immigrant country, Canada has always been linguistically, ethnically and culturally heterogeneous but that it was not until the de-racialized immigration program of the 1960s that racial minorities became visible. Li argues that the growing presence of people of non-European descent, distinguished by their discernible physical features, has become a source of anxiety for White Canadians. Over time, the growing population of non-Europeans has shifted the boundary of who is “White” to include groups such as Italians, Greeks, Irish and Ukrainians, who were once constructed as the Other in relation to “White Europeans” (see Porter 1965; Satzewich 2000).

At the early stage, during the period before the 1960s, there was a deterministic relationship between racial identity and socio-economic location in most Western industrial societies. Since the 1960s there has been no *necessary* association between class location and cultural background under the regime of what Miles and Satzewich refer to as “postmodern capitalism” (1990). As in the analysis of Simmons (1998b) of post-1960s Asian immigrants in Canada, many recent Asian immigrants have overcome their confinement to low-wage and dangerous jobs. Their pre-migration affluence has enabled them to challenge old stereotypes. However, this has generated what Simmons (1998b) calls “reactive racism,” a replacement of old racist stereotypes. Simmons (1998b: 47) states that “contemporary racism is based on the stigmatization of people who cannot be faulted in terms of their work-ethic or productive contributions.” It is “reactive,” as it is based increasingly on resentment against more affluent and successful immigrants. Issues of concern are diverse and rest “on cultural biases, fears, distortions and misunderstandings” (Simmons 1998b: 47). In spite of empirical evidence to show that new immigrants challenge old racist stereotypes with their relatively high education, skills and capital acumen (in the case of some Chinese, for example), ethno-racial background still largely accounts for social and economic inequalities in Canadian society (see Li 1998; Ornstein 2000; Galabuzi 2006).