



• On to a new life, from Kurelek

by Ed Mathews

"It (is) the view of the Royal Commission, shared by the government and, I am sure, by all Canadians, that there cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origin, another for the original peoples and yet a third for all others. For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, all should be treated fairly."¹
 — Pierre Elliot Trudeau
 October 8, 1971.

"Canada is not obliged... to accept any specific number of refugees... It is not a fundamental human right of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege."²
 — William Lyon MacKenzie King,
 May 1, 1947.

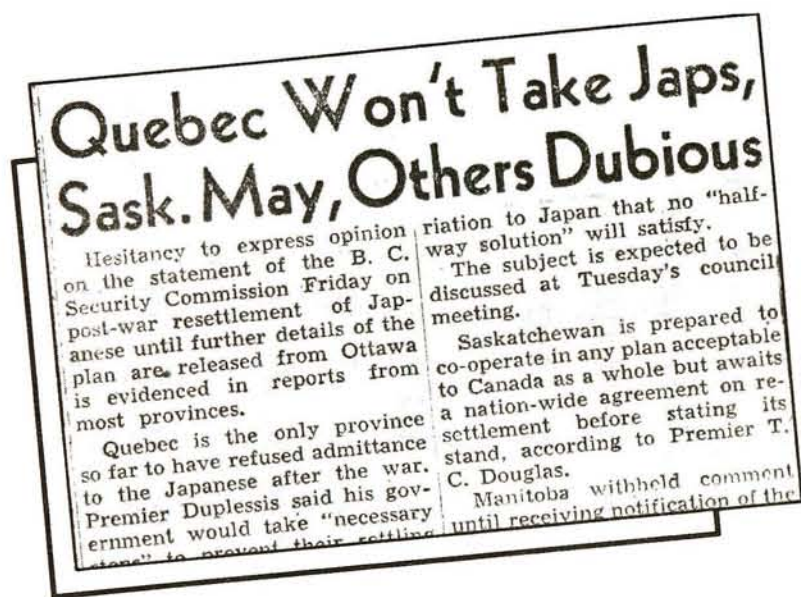
Immigrants are the subject of a film series called **Multiculturalism Canada** (1971-84) produced by the National Film Board and initiated by the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* in 1969. Recommendation 13 of the Report proposed:

"that the National Film Board continue and develop production of films that inform Canadians about one another, including films about the contribution and problems of both individuals and groups of ethnic origin other than British and French, and that the National Film Board receive the financial support it requires to produce such films."³

Since the implementation of recommendation 13 of the Royal Commission, the **Multiculturalism Canada** series has produced a substantial body of films. At a time when the NFB was chronically short of funds, the series received a yearly cash flow of a quarter-million dollars.

If Canadian literature and our visual and performing arts are all actively engaged in "mythmaking," how are immigrants represented in the operation of visual codes? Since visual rhetoric is used to depict immigrants in NFB films,

Immigrants and the NFB



a schema may organize and explain them. The first level are the images; below, their significations.

The schema is structured according to the historical development of immigration to Canada. The homeland, for example, is depicted partly by archival footage of the mother country, and partly by the display of material wealth acquired in the new homeland. Images of hands signify that immigrants have come to Canada to work. There are no lazy immigrants in NFB films. Ethnic food not only transmits a sense of cultural "otherness" but also acts as an incentive for others to enter that culture. Immigrants can also enter the

economic mainstream by selling this particular cultural difference at a delicatessen or restaurant. Lastly, the refugee problem is the most recent development in the history of Canadian immigration. Initiated by the aftermath of the Second World War and the decolonization of the Third World, immigrants who claim refugee status have found themselves at the mercy of political and social forces within Canada.

Although this article will focus on the **Multiculturalism Canada** series, I have also included immigrant films produced prior to 1972 in order to point out specific changes in the depiction of immigrants in NFB films. While early films such as **The Newcomers** (David Bennett, 1953) are characterized by a male voice-over, the **Multiculturalism Canada** series, on the other hand, uses

numerous formal strategies, including fiction, docudrama, on-camera interviews, and the introduction of a female voice-over.

History and the Homeland

Immigration — or, more accurately, emigration — began in earnest in nineteenth century Europe, a period characterized by colonial exploitation, social and economic conflicts, industrial accomplishments based on miserable working conditions, and a growing insistence on material wealth. In NFB films, the homeland is emphasized by images of written documents, posters, newspaper articles, letters, and archival photographs. In other instances, the homeland is represented through elements of fiction and docudrama.

Images of the homeland are historical, insofar as they depict "the contribution and problems of both individuals and groups of ethnic origin other than British and French." Although immigrants other than British or French may not qualify as "colonists" in the strictest sense of the word, NFB films in this category depict the reasons why a particular immigrant group has settled in Canada and how their presence has influenced the historical and economic development of Canada.

Equally important is the depiction of Canada as the new homeland, since this is, after all, the motive behind producing these films in the first place. Canada as the new homeland is depicted through the acquisition of material wealth and private property. In some cases, the extent to which Canada has been accepted as the new homeland is achieved by focusing on clothing, the retention of certain social customs, and successful linguistic integration.

The Settler as Image

The use of standardized images to portray immigrants creates a problematic relationship between the ability of the camera to penetrate beyond the surface quality of the subject(s) and the effectiveness of using an image to illustrate the integration of immigrants in Canada.

The Hutterites (dir: Colin Low, 1963), for example, depicts the exotic as the real, and the results are less than satisfying. The images denote but they never explain. How do Hutterites integrate socially when they fear that radio and television — negative social interaction — will undermine their hard work ethic? An 'improvised' conversation be-

Homeland	Hands	Food	Photographs
settler	migrant	immigrant	émigré
colonist	employee	family	réfugée
history	economics	society	politics

Ed Mathews is a film student at Concordia University.

Filmography

20 Years Later, Jacques Bensimon, 1977
90 Days, Giles Walker, 1985
Antonio, Tony Ianzelo, 1966
Bamboo, Lions and Dragons, Richard Patton, 1979
Bekevar Jubilee, Albert Kish, 1977
Bridges, Deepak Sahasrabudhe, 1982
Bubbie, David Troster, 1978
Christ is Risen, William Canning, 1976
Citizen Varek, Gordon Burwash, 1953
Dark Lullabies, Irene Angelico and Abbey Neidik, 1985
Fields of Endless Days, Terence Macartney-Filgate, 1978
Four Portraits, Jim McCammon and Richard Leiterman, 1978
Franco: The Story of an Immigrant, Salvatore Greco, 1977
Golden Mountain: The Chinese in Canada, Terence Macartney-Filgate, 1981
Haiti, Québec, Tahani Rached, 1986
The Hutterites, Colin Low, 1964
Immigration Law: A Delicate Balance, Arnie Gelbart, 1978
It Wasn't Easy, Nico Crama, 1978
The Jews of Winnipeg, Bill Davies, 1973
Kurelek, William Pettigrew, 1966
Laughter in my Soul, Halya Kuchmij, 1983
Memorandum, Donald Brittan and John Spotten, 1965
Mother Tongue, Derek May, 1979
The Newcomers, David Bennett, 1953
New Denmark, Andreas Poulssen and Torben Schioler, 1980
Other Tongues, Derek May, 1984
Our Street was Paved with Gold, Albert Kish, 1973
People of the Book, Felix Lazarus, 1973
Pies, Sheldon Cohen, 1983
Ravinder, Peter Rowe, 1978
Rosanna: A Portrait of an Immigrant Woman, Sharon McGowan, 1980
A Sense of Family, Paul Lang, 1980
Spirits of an Amber Past, Ramona MacDonald, 1977
Steel Blues, Jorge Fajardo, 1976
Teach Me To Dance, Anne Wheeler, 1978
Ted Baryluk's Grocery, John Pasiekovich and Mike Mirus, 1983
This is a Photograph, Albert Kish, 1971
Veronica, Beverly Shaffer, 1977
The Visit, Bernard Devlin, 1964
Waterloo Farmers, Italo Costa, 1976
The Way of the Willow, John Kent Harrison, 1981



• The exotic as the real in *The Hutterites*

tween a young man and a young Hutterite woman yields only dignified clichés. Faces are seen in close-up in an attempt to overcome the anonymity of their clothing. No matter how they are depicted, the faces of Hutterite children are a mask against social and historical influences. Granted, the Hutterites have successfully resisted contemporary social influences but the film does not explain how they have achieved this sort of self-preservation.

Teach Me To Dance (Anne Wheeler, 1978) is far more successful in its depiction of a Prairie community outside the English-speaking mainstream. Compared to *The Hutterites'* unfocused presentation, the script of **Teach Me To Dance** deals specifically with the pressure placed on Ukrainian immigrants to assimilate into English-Canadian culture. **Teach Me To Dance** is an historical drama about Sarah, a young English school girl who wishes to learn a Ukrainian folk dance. By concentrating on a specific cultural difference, the film argues that a culture which does not continue to develop will disappear.

The Assimilation of Asians and Blacks

Immigrants in the late nineteenth century came to Canada mainly from Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as England and France. When the First World War threatened the American labour market, Canadian recruitment efforts turned toward the Orient and the West Indies. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, however, virtually barred emigration from the Orient. The Great Depression subsequently intensified hostility toward immigrants in general.

Two films which depict institutionalized racism against the Chinese are **Bamboo, Lions and Dragons** (Richard Patton, 1979) and **Golden Mountain: The Chinese in Canada** (Terence Macartney-Filgate, 1981). **Bamboo, Lions and Dragons** focuses on two families, the Changs and the Lims, and their assimilation into the Chinese community in Vancouver. Chang Yun Ho arrived in 1908 to work with the Canadian Pacific Railway. When his labour was no longer necessary, Chang was promptly ignored by both social and political institutions. Today, he can still barely speak English. Chang is reduced to an icon, a non-person within his own story. His domestic seclusion — he spends his time tending a tiny garden at his home — reflects his socio-economic marginalization.

Liz and Herb Lim are second-generation Chinese who are established in their suburban home and ways. During an interview, Mrs. Lim remarks that "Chinatown now seems so far away." As she speaks, the camera reframes her in suburban splendour. Compared with Chang's social immobility, the Lim's movement away from Chinatown characterizes Vancouver as a network of developing social relationships between Asians and the rest of the community.

Golden Mountain: The Chinese in Canada is a damning look at economic exploitation. Pencil drawings, watercolours, archival photographs and dramatic recreations all blame government officials for encouraging a climate of fear and hate. As ultraracist 'Plain' Bill Smith of British Columbia pushed for the expulsion of the Chinese from Canada, an 1885 Royal Commission con-

cluded that "Christ would have approved of self-protection." **Golden Mountain** is particularly effective in subverting images of the homeland (using a voice-over commentary of interviews and testimonials) to depict the clash between Asian railway workers and the more 'settled' British and Scottish immigrants of British Columbia. **Golden Mountain** is also an excellent example of the ideology behind the use of historical representation and actuality. The NFB is willing to address past injustices but their critical stance softens considerably when it comes time to address contemporary social and political problems.

Fields of Endless Days (Terence Macartney-Filgate, 1978) portrays Black-American slaves living in Canada. In the style of Alex Haley's **Roots**, dramatic recreations and interviews unfold a Black history that is often suppressed by traditional European interpretations of history. While elders sit and talk, younger Blacks are seen working hard to raise Black consciousness in Canada. Although Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association is briefly mentioned in an interview with an older woman, it might have been interesting to clarify the extent to which Marcus Garvey did influence social and economic improvements for Blacks living in Canada.

The Cost of Integration

Until the First World War, immigrants numbered 70 percent of Winnipeg's population. But their presence was seen as a liability, since Winnipeg's meagre social aid programs were already strained beyond capacity. Moreover, in terms of the schema introduced at the

beginning of the article, the movement of 'immigrant workers' may be interpreted as a move from the individual to a larger social group.

The Jews of Winnipeg (Bill Davies, 1973) documents how the Jewish community found it necessary to sacrifice rapid assimilation for cultural and religious survival. Although British and American immigrants usually arrived with adequate capital and assumed employment, the Slavs and Jews, often arrived penniless and from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. By retaining cultural and religious differences, the Jews of Winnipeg faced social intolerance and the denial of job opportunities. After the First World War, the Jews eventually managed to employ and integrate themselves into the community.

The film, however, avoids overt depictions of Jews involved in unions, the

less, the first wave of immigrant workers in the early twentieth-century – young, single males – initiated a sustained flow of manpower which lasted until the '50s.

If we refer back to the schema, we may see how images of hands effectively communicate the need for low-paid, unskilled labour. Images of hands serve a whole range of economic roles. One may also understand how the success of an individual 'immigrant' worker might eventually lead to the establishment of an ethnic community within a social environment.

The Italians as Workers

One of the more prominent immigrant groups in NFB films are the Italians. The Italian community is held together by the Church, social assistance groups, the media (such as Italian-language newspapers and television programs),

Franco considers quitting his job at the construction site and leaving his wife and children. Depressed, he spies a beautiful Italian woman (a metaphor for unrealistic expectations) and immediately lapses into an ambiguous sexual fantasy. Franco somehow manages to resolve his depression and settle into the contentment of Canadian life. Needless to say, he remains a laborer.

Rosanna: A Portrait of an Immigrant Woman (Sharon McGowan, 1980) characterizes the way in which marital separation can suddenly thrust a woman into economic self-reliance. Unlike Franco, Rosanna is not a laborer. The film cannot easily summarize or categorize her dilemma into a single image of hands. As well, Rosanna's emotional and economic struggle is accentuated by the loss of the traditional extended family.

In reality, Italian immigrant women

reactions to "dépaysement." Reactions to emotional "dislocation" are evident in the creation of cultural and religious artifacts by immigrants out of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In **Christ is Risen** (William Canning, 1976), the icons and frescoes which decorate a Russian Orthodox church in Montreal have both emotional and psychological implications. The icons and frescoes are expressions of an artist's faith, while their physicality lessens the shock of dissociation and creates a familiar environment for Russian immigrants.

On a more personal level, **Spirits of an Amber Past** (Romona MacDonald, 1977) portrays Antonas and Anastasia Tomasaitis, two immigrant artists who create elaborate religious tapestries in their Kingston, Ontario studio. Long takes focus on the artists hands as they embroider Biblical images based on Uk-



• Less for more in **Ted Baryluk's Grocery**



• Keeping the old culture alive with food in **Bekeva Jubilee**

Winnipeg General Strike (insofar as it related to the Jewish community), and the subsequent 'Red Scare.' No mention is made either of the Citizen's Committee of One Thousand or xenophobic attacks by the *Winnipeg Free Press*. In terms of cultural integration, these events should not have been treated simply through the insertion of archival photographs – especially in a film which implies the sacrifice of ethnic identity for religious survival.

The Hands of the Worker

Immigrants have profoundly affected the economic base of Canada. In clearing land, cutting timber, harvesting wheat, laying tracks, or extracting coal, immigrants have always provided the labour pool necessary for economic development. Few immigrants experienced economic prosperity. Neverthe-

and social clubs. In 1971, principal employment included craftsmen and laborers; only 15 percent held managerial positions. By the early '70s, more than a quarter-million Italians were settled in the Toronto area alone.

Antonio (Tony Ianzelo, 1966) depicts the last years of an Italian immigrant. An abundance of religious artifacts and photographs, ever-present Italian folk music, and a detached voice-over narrative by the film's subject all create a tension between Antonio's past life and his present loneliness. The film's insightfulness is due in part to the fact that Antonio is the filmmaker's father. Speaking about his late wife, he says, "I built with my hands a house for my Elizabetta." Both his hands and face have strongly iconic qualities.

Franco: The Story of an Immigrant (Salvatore Greco, 1977) is a fictionalized account of an Italian laborer's attempt to cope with the emotional commitment of work and family. Denied social and economic privileges,

are located mostly at the bottom of the labor force with little representation in the middle and upper levels. Immigrant women are over-represented in low-wage service and manufacturing jobs.⁴ Despite the fact that men such as Franco may integrate more readily than women, Rosanna's volunteer work eventually leads to a full-time job as an interpreter and co-ordinator of a special program for immigrant women and children.

The Artist as Worker

Although images of hands signify employment and economics, the schema is problematic when the need arises to depict artists who are not necessarily laborers. Creative artists need to assert their role in the chain of production, since they cannot singlehandedly affix a monetary or cultural value on the skills.

Historically, a large percentage of Canadian art and literature, visual and performing arts created by immigrants are

rainian legends onto richly-coloured fabrics.

Kurelek (William Pettigrew, 1966) evokes the transformation of European Realist painting into a specifically Canadian context. Shifting from still photographs of the Prairies to details of Kurelek's paintings, such as hands, faces and gestures, the film documents a period in the late 1940s when immigrant farmers could live on modest means. It was a time when ethnic, cultural, and ideological acceptability temporarily triumphed over economic reality.

Laughter in my Soul (Halya Kuchmij, 1983) chronicles the life of Jacob Maydanyk, a 90 year-old Ukrainian who achieved fame as an icon painter and cartoonist for a Ukrainian newspaper published in Winnipeg. His most famous creation is *Shtef Tabachniuk*, a cartoon folk hero. *Shtef's* trademark is the 'dulia' hand gesture, for centuries the Ukrainian symbol of defiance.

The Changing Role of Immigrant Farmers

In terms of semi-skilled laborers, farming represents one of the most visible types of employment in NFB films. It also signifies a deeper socio-economic tendency in post-war Canada; namely, that farming is often the difference between cultural expectations and economic reality. Farming could be considered as a kind of final option. For immigrants living in post-war Canada, farming provided quick, unskilled job opportunities.

In early NFB films such as *Citizen Varek* (Gordon Burwash, 1953), farming provides a necessary alternative for immigrants who might otherwise be qualified as journalists or professors. Farming is the rude awakening from "the dream called Canada." In *The Newcomers* (David Bennett, 1953), on the other hand, farming (as unskilled

'otherness.' In terms of the schema, images of ethnic food not only transmit a sense of a different culture but also act as an incentive for others to enter that culture.

Granted, one may come upon immigrants at an economic level – for example, as fellow workers and consumers. However, elements of family and society also fall under this category: ethnic food provides a social opportunity for immigrants to invite friends and neighbors into their homes and celebrate their cultural otherness in the form of an elaborate meal. As well, ethnic food provides an economic opportunity for immigrants to open a delicatessen or restaurant and join the business mainstream through a celebration of their distinctiveness.

More important, a table laden with ethnic food is a 'safer' social image than immigrants actively involved in politi-

fact that the men interviewed are speaking English – are the antithesis of consciousness-raising strategies used by feminist filmmakers in the same period to break out of their social silence.

The Social-economic Role of Bakeries

In the same way baking may be used in NFB films as a sign of social integration, bakeries are exemplary economic models which allow a greater social visibility and an opportunity for immigrants to integrate into the local economy.

In *The Visit* (Bernard Devlin, 1964), Francesco Amundo is a Toronto baker who wishes to return to Calabria to answer a nagging question: Should I have come to Canada? In the course of the film, Francesco does visit Calabria (where money sent back by Italian-Canadians help to sustain the local economy) but he returns to Canada a

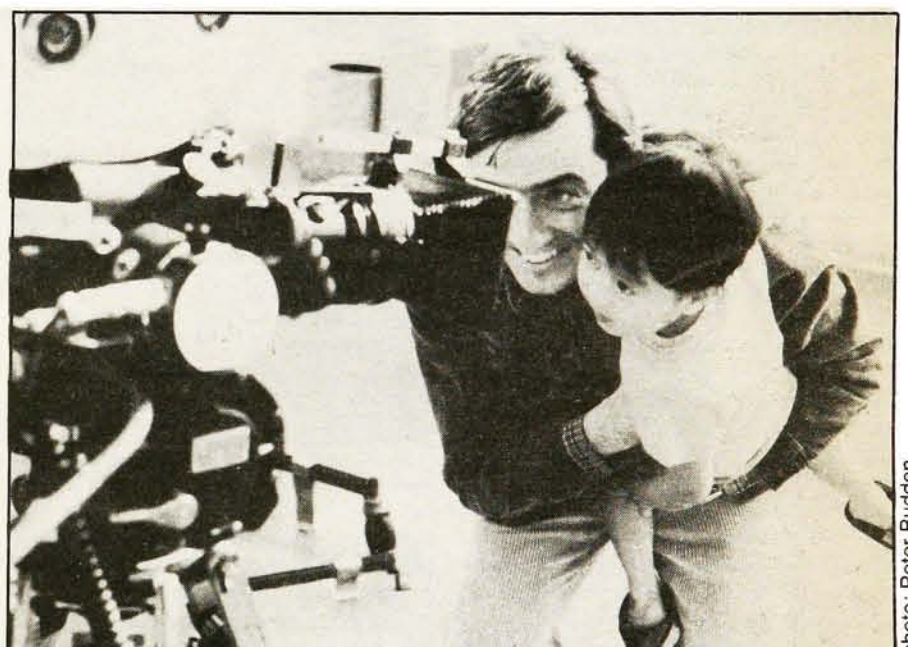
practicality. "I work now," says one man, "get credit – good system!"

Our Street was Paved with Gold (Albert Kish, 1973) portrays Montreal's St. Lawrence boulevard – 'the Main' – and its northward path toward potential economic success. Despite an absence of archival footage and a voice-over in the present tense, the narrator is doubtful that 'the Main' will continue to retain its distinctive ethnic flavour. 'Dépanneurs' and bakeries owned by second-generation immigrants will be forced out of business by rising operating costs.

In *Ted Baryluk's Grocery* (John Paskievich and Mike Mirus, 1982), Paskievich's voice-over evokes the flux of Winnipeg's socio-economic reality: urbanism, the breakup of the family, and changing demographics. The film, however, is not without criticism. The male voice-over effectively silences Ted's



• The new country's welcome committee in *Home Feeling*



• A peek at things to come in *The Way of the Willow*

photo: Peter Budden

labor) ranks equally with industrial achievements and artistic creation.

Waterloo Farmers (Italo Costa, 1976), *It Wasn't East* (Nico Crama, 1978) and *New Denmark* (Andreas Poulssen and Torben Schioler, 1980) all contrast immigrants with the rest of the community, cultural traditions with economic reality and, most importantly, free enterprise with needless government intervention. Compared with the economic opportunities provided by farming in NFB films of the '50s, the films in the *Multiculturalism Canada* series argue that Federal government quotas have restricted free enterprise and thus the immigrants desire to work on the farm.

The Social Aspects of Food

In the paradigm of immigration, the sale, preparation and consumption of ethnic food signify a cultural paradox. Within a pluralistic society, immigrants need a sign to indicate their cultural

cal discourse. Images of ethnic food in NFB films reflect elements of family, society, geography, economics and, in some cases, religion.

Baking

Pies (Sheldon Cohen, 1981), for example, is a funny, garishly-coloured animated film which uses characterization and attention to immigrants' verbal language to express the need for tolerance. Without condescension, *Pies* explores prejudice, ethnic stereotyping (often done by other immigrants), and the danger of emphasizing certain cultural values over others.

Bekevar Jubilee (Albert Kish, 1977) centers around a single image – women preparing food – which effectively points out degrees of social integration. Hungarian women are assigned to the kitchen because they have not yet transcended traditional social-gender roles. Their foreign voices – despite the

somewhat happier man.

Veronica (Beverly Shaffer, 1977) portrays the life of Veronica Makarewicz, a nine-year old who balances respect for her Polish-speaking parents and customers at their Toronto bakery with a contemporary attitude influenced by her English-speaking school friends. The most interesting sequence in the film is "Foods of the World," a show-and-tell presentation by immigrant children in Veronica's class. Paradoxically, the common bond between these immigrant children is that they each share some kind of cultural difference.

The Future of Ethnic Neighborhoods

This is a Photograph (Albert Kish, 1971) recalls the elliptical memories of immigrants' first impressions of Montréal. Betrayed by unrealistic expectations into low-paying jobs such as cooks and bakers, the film's subjects balance their critique of socio-economic integration with humour and

daughter, Helen, and her own doubts and fears – which is what the film is really about.

Religion and Food

Regardless of social and cultural influences, religion may sometimes affirm the ultimate dignity and importance of the believer, whatever one's status. Ethnic food prepared and served during religious festivities also strengthens immigrants' sense of cultural 'otherness', as well as an individual's social and familial ties.

Bubbie (David Troster, 1978), for example, portrays Sarah Salberg, a ninety-six-year-old Jewish immigrant from Eastern Eastern Europe who has dedicated her life to feeding and caring for homeless immigrants. *People of the Book* (Felix Lazarus, 1973) and *20 Years Later* (Jacques Bensimon, 1977) examine a specific dilemma within the Jewish faith; namely, social integration in spite of strongly-held religious beliefs. In both films, however, scenes of women preparing and serving food

once again define the limits of women's socio-economic integration.

Well-versed in the English language, East Indian immigrants have integrated into Canadian society with relative success. In *Ravinder* (Peter Rowe, 1978) and *A Sense of Family* (Paul Lang, 1980), first-generation immigrants have found it easier to enter Canadian society through their children's lives while, at the same time, striving to retain cultural and religious differences at home. "Culture should not oppose," explains an East Indian man during an on-camera interview, "it should only be different – and differences should be shared and understood."

Bridges (Deepak Sahasrabudhe, 1982) effectively depicts the way in which East Indian food not only signifies cultural 'otherness' but also acts as an incentive for others to enter that culture. While one family hosts a regular "open-house" which features traditional ceremonies and dances, another couple who like to entertain prepare special Indian dishes for their non-Indian friends. *Bridges* is distinguished not only by its sense of exotica but also by its value of the immigrants' enthusiasm to integrate into Canadian society.

Politics and the Photograph

Since the Second World War, refugees have been persons who have felt directly threatened by their own government for racial, religious or ideological reasons. As the colonial areas of Asia and Africa have acquired independence, the refugee phenomenon has found itself increasingly at the mercy of political and social forces within Canada, as well as the availability of 'sponsored dependents.' Entrance into Canada is no guarantee of acceptance.

Often arriving with little more than a suitcase filled with keepsakes and memories, refugees have had to calm their anxieties and learn to function in Canadian society. Until they are reunited with their families, however, refugees are fuelled by a consuming passion for those they have left behind. In this context of alienation, keepsakes such as photographs begin to take on a greater signification. Granted, photographs may depict family and friends but, to the viewer, they function as a reminder of the reasons why the refugee had to leave in the first place.

In terms of the schema, photographs are political not by whom they represent but by what they represent. In NFB films which deal explicitly with the plight of refugees, photographs are like a mirror which reflect the viewer's relation to the subject(s) and the absurdity of their political situation.

Although a large majority of immigrant films rely on archival photographs to situate and strengthen historical analysis, those which deal with political refugees, on the other hand, are characterized by the use of personal and archival photographs inserted in the mise-



• Immigrant as icon in *Bamboo, Lions and Dragons*

en-scène. These take on a greater significance partly because they serve both narrative and decorative functions, and partly because the montage often links the viewer and the photographs within the same space.

Narrative voices and/or voice-overs are equally important to the 'politicization' of photographs: the soundtrack may include a political voice-over commentary by the filmmaker on the photographs in the mise-en-scène (eg. *Memorandum*, *Dark Lullabies*), a political voice-over commentary by a subject in the photograph (eg. *Steel Blues*), or a political commentary by a film's subject within the story who is holding the photographs (eg. *Haiti, Québec*).

Jewish Refugees in Canada

In *Memorandum* (Donald Brittan and John Spotten, 1965), exposure to archival footage and museum photographs taken of concentration camps is the best defence against moral complacency. Engulfed by photographs of concentration camp victims, Bernard Laufer, now a Toronto glass-cutter, is nearly pushed aside by events he personally witnessed. Through the depiction of a 'civilized' and guarded Germany, the cruel irony of *Memorandum* rests on the notion of having a

survivor such as Bernard Laufer witness the 'institutionalization' of Nazi atrocities. The cumulative effect of the museum photographs and archival footage only serve to tighten the ironic tension.

Irene Angelico's *Dark Lullabies* (1984) depicts a new generation of Jews and Germans coming to terms with the Holocaust. But unlike the ironic stance in *Memorandum*, the questioning stance in *Dark Lullabies* presupposes naiveté on the part of the filmmaker, her subjects, and the film's audience. Innocence and on-camera tears do not a film narrative make. How could a filmmaker so determined to discover the truth of Germany during the Second World War remain oblivious to countless war documentaries (such as *Memorandum*) and newsreels of Nazi war atrocities? One would have expected a deeper analysis of the socio-political climate of Germany, especially after forty years of hindsight.

Granted, Angelico's introductory voice-over multiplies the political connotations inherent in a personal snapshot of her parents, both of whom survived several concentration camps. The filmmaker's personal touch, however, is overwhelmed by the numbing horror of larger-than-life museum photographs of gas chambers, torture instruments,

hangings, etc. The failure of *Dark Lullabies* to attain an adequate political critique may originate in the naive belief that a walk through a war museum can explain why a particular event has occurred – when in fact it may only explain where or how the event took place.

Government Response to Third World Refugees

In 1973, the Federal government announced plans to evaluate immigration policy and practices. A Green paper entitled *The Canadian Immigrant and Population Study* was tabled in Parliament in early February 1975. The Green paper was designed to facilitate refugee movements from Chile and Vietnam during the second half of the decade. Canada has originally responded to an American request by admitting several hundred Vietnamese refugees, many of whom already had relatives in this country.

Although *Immigration Law: A Delicate Balance* (Arnie Gelbart, 1978) is designed to sell Canada's new Immigration Act and Regulations passed in April 1978, the Federal government's newfound attitude is lost within complex legal jargon.

Four Portraits (Jim McCammon and Richard Leiterman, 1978), on the other hand, is far more effective in emphasizing personal lives over political expediency. This shift in emphasis is interesting, considering that *Immigration Law* and *Four Portraits* were both commissioned by the NFB for Employment and Immigration Canada. While *Immigration Law* outlines the reality of government legislation, *Four Portraits* provides hope to successful candidates for refugee status.

The most explicitly 'political' portrait in the film depicts a Chilean family who came to Canada as refugees in 1977. Settled in Calgary, Alberta, the family's new home is graced with personal snapshots of family and friends. Politics, however, is something the family would rather not discuss. Seated in front of a wall filled with snapshots, the husband talks at length about his plans for the future – including the desire to see his relatives and friends. As he walks away from the camera, however, he mentions only briefly that "we had some political problems in our country – and that's why I'm here."

Haiti, Québec (Tahani Rached, 1986) also alludes to politics, but the film's depiction of Haitian refugees lacks a political context, and does not interpret the socio-economic implications of their working-class lifestyle. Politics hover at the edge of the frame. However, it is the viewer who is expected to arrive with preconceived political ideas about Haitian refugees and provide a link between the film-reality and the lived-reality.

In the same way Irene Angelico multiplies the political connotations of a personal snapshot in *Dark Lullabies*,

the diegetic commentary heard in *Haiti, Québec* attempts to depict personal snapshots as representative of a larger, already-understood political context. Somehow, the film cannot seem to reconcile the personal with the political. If *Haiti, Québec* intends to document the discrimination against Haitian taxi drivers in Montreal, then why has this profession been chosen over others? The film is, at best, a dif-fused attack on racism.

Silence and the Political Photograph

One way around the complexity of political analysis is to allow the images to speak for themselves. *The Way of the Willow* (John Kent Harrison, 1981) is an eloquent testimony to Vietnamese refugees, a testimony worded in silence and refusal.

Shocked and terrified by the murder of their child during the last year of the Vietnam war, the Trans, a young Vietnamese couple, arrive in Canada with little more than a photograph of their dead child. Mrs. Tran's refusal to speak, coupled with an emotional distance expressed by unbalanced compositions, emphasize a double tragedy of 'dépaysement' and the loss of their child. Scarce moments of peace are spent in front of a homemade Buddhist altar made out of candles, incense, and a black-and-white photograph of her dead child. These quiet scenes are poignant and unsettlingly real.

Jorge Fajardo's *Steel Blues* (1976) captures a similar sense of isolation, in this case, Pedro, a Chilean refugee newly-arrived in Canada. Rather than express alienation with trite phrases, the film pummels the viewer into isolation with a cacophony of industrial sounds.

Finally home after a horrible first day at the steel mill, Pedro sits down and quietly reads a letter written by his wife, Elena. As Elena's voice-over is heard on the soundtrack, the camera zooms in slowly on a photograph of her face, then across a magazine layout of students demonstrating against the Chilean military regime. Thus the montage links Pedro's political commitment with his personal sacrifice.

Summary and New Directions

In the '80s, NFB films about immigrants have tended to situate their subjects within a larger socio-political context. In *90 Days* (Giles Walker, 1985) and *Sitting in Limbo* (John N. Smith, 1986), immigration is secondary, or at best a subtext to the film as a whole. With the possible exception of *90 Days*, viewers do not have to question who the subjects are, who their parents were, how they came to Canada, and so on.

Newer films now focus on individuals rather than ethnic groups in general.

Regardless of ethnic origin, immigrants (and native Canadians in general) are affected equally by unemployment, changing demographics, urbanism, bilingualism, and uncertain social and gender roles. Granted, immigrant women working in the manufacturing sector will be harder hit by unemployment, but unemployment affects all women in all sectors of the economy, regardless of ethnic origin.

In Derek May's *Mother Tongue* (1979) and *Other Tongues* (1984), for instance, ethnicity is secondary to the question of language rights and social interaction. The English-speaking men in Derek May's films are grouped together by a critical inquiry into changing social and gender roles, and by an inability to communicate with women in either French or English.

In a 33-year period (1953-86), immigrant films have changed little in terms of form and content. Only recently have they stopped relying on unidentified archival footage to validate a subject's oral testimony. The tendency had been to appropriate archival photographs and drop them into an interview sequence only to have the same images reappear in a different film – and in a completely different context.

Allowing for exceptions, immigrant films tend to fall into three general categories: the subdued 'voice of God,' the direct cinema synch-interview, and, most recently, hybrid documentaries which feature nonprofessional social actors in realistic situations. In particular, films produced in the '50s are characterized partly by a male voice-over (eg. *The Newcomers*), and partly by a scripted, male voice-over by the film's subject (eg. *Citizen Varek*). The optimism expressed in these films is usually tempered with a sobering dose of reality.

Films produced in the '60s are characterized by a combination of male voice-over and direct cinema synch-interviews (eg. *The Hutterites*) and, in terms of content, by a return to the mother-country (eg. *The Visit, Memorandum*).

An attempt is made to narrow the credibility gap between the omnipotent male narrator and statements made by immigrant subjects.

Initiated by *Multiculturalism Canada*, films produced in the '70s utilize numerous formal strategies, including fiction (eg. *Teach Me to Dance*), synch-interviews (eg. *It Wasn't Easy*), and the introduction of a female voice-over (eg. *Immigration Law*). The proliferation of styles may have been a direct response to the pervasiveness of the *Multiculturalism Canada* program.

Unfortunately, only a third of immigrant films produced by the NFB are directed by filmmakers who share an ethnic or familial relationship with the films' subjects. To advance beyond a strictly historical analysis of immigrants, ethnic filmmakers will have to become more involved in the operation of cul-

tural languages and the production of social codes. The on-screen involvement of immigrant filmmakers such as Derek May and Irene Angelico is one way to develop the subject of immigrants into a more open, autobiographical style. Hybrid documentaries produced by the private-sector, such as Paul Tana's *Caffé Italia* (1985) and Atom Egoyan's *Next of Kin* (1984), have already begun to emphasize the individual within the confines of a particular ethnic group.

The schema outlined in the introduction is helpful to isolate and understand how social and visual codes create a 'mythology' of immigration. While images of ethnic food and photographs are particularly effective in the medium of film, the notion that hands equal work, for instance, is ineffective if immigrants happen to be out of work. The schema is restrictive because it invites repetition and narrows the possibilities of alternative images and ideas. How, for example, can a filmmaker reduce the psychology of an immigrant to a single image?

The *Multiculturalism Canada* series can be seen as a chance for the NFB to redefine its mandate of "interpreting Canada to Canadians." At first glance, the series appears to expand the traditional image of the Canadian cultural fabric. In doing so, the NFB's rhetoric of visual codes has simplified – in every sense of the word – the physical, psychological and emotional experience of immigrants. The ease with which the NFB has relied on the restrictive nature of these visual codes reveals the nature and purpose of the *Multiculturalism Canada* series. Judging by its substantial body of work, the series clearly illustrates the Federal government's desire to increase immigration from select Eastern and Western European countries, as well as restricting immigration from the Third World to those with technical and mechanical skills. In this context, how does the Federal government perceive immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, Central and South America? Can we expect to find NFB films in the

near future that will depict the plight of Sri Lankan or Turkish refugees currently seeking asylum in Canada? The Canadian cultural fabric is far richer and more complex than NFB films lead us to believe. Demographics are one thing; exclusion is something else entirely.

Footnotes

1. Pierre E. Trudeau, quoted in *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, (ed. Howard Palmer), Toronto, Copp Clark Publishing, 1975, p. 136.
2. William Lyon MacKenzie King, quoted in *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.
3. *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Vol. 4*, Ottawa, 1969, p. 196.
4. Joel Clodman and Anthony H. Richmond, *Immigration and Unemployment*, Toronto, York Institute for Behavioural Research, 1981, pp. 74-6.
5. Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy*, Montréal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977, p.252.

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• Laughter in My Soul



• Dark Lullabies