

"This is not where we live": The Production of National Citizenship and Borderlines in Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*

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“This is not where we live”:
The Production of National Citizenship
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The Komagata Maru Incident

ERICA KELLY

IN MAY 1914, THE *KOMAGATA MARU* arrived in Vancouver’s harbour, carrying 376 Indian emigrants hoping for Canadian residency. After two months of governmental stalling and legal manoeuvring — two hot summer months during which the ship’s passengers went without sufficient food and water — Canada turned away 352 of those on board. Here was a moment of national definition and border patrol staged for all the country to see. As the *Komagata Maru* awaited official word on its fate, an audience of locals packed the harbour front, hoping for a view of the action. When the Canadian government decided in July to call in the Navy to intimidate the ship’s passengers, an estimated thirty thousand spectators lined local rooftops, hoping for a showdown. Sharon Pollock’s 1976 play, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, restages this moment of national boundary marking and invites audience members to reconsider their seats on the sidelines.

The fate of the *Komagata Maru* has been often documented. In 1913, Gurdit Singh arranged to charter a ship from Hong Kong to Vancouver on which Indian men wishing to immigrate to Canada could purchase passage. On 4 April, 1914, the first of 376 passengers boarded the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese-owned and -operated ship hired for the voyage (Johnston 25). The ship arrived at the Canadian coast on 21 May after almost two months at sea, and was instructed by Canadian customs officials to drop anchor two hundred yards from shore (Ferguson 20).¹ Here the ship and its passengers would wait while Canadian immigration officers kept the ship at bay for two months. Government officials denied the passengers contact with those who wished to support their cause, including members of Vancouver’s Sikh community and the lawyer working on behalf of the Indian men aboard. The situation grew

desperate. The government agreed to supply the passengers with food and water only on condition of the ship's departure. On 23 July, 1914, the passengers' legal recourse frustrated and their funds exhausted, the *Komagata Maru* sailed for Calcutta. All but twenty-four of its passengers were denied right of entry to Canada (Basran and Bolaria 100).

Pollock does not follow the entire trajectory of this history: her play does not detail the chartering or boarding of the *Komagata Maru*; she does not chart the ship's journey across the Pacific; she provides no view of the return passage to India. Instead, she narrows in on the border challenge, making the space in and around the Vancouver harbour the site of action. Pollock recognizes the national border as a location from which she can question regulations of belonging and begin to trouble assumptions of national identity. Borders are meant to mark inside and outside, authentic and other, but in its attempt to divide, the border zone itself becomes an ambiguous space between, neither here nor there. Border zones are sites of continual negotiation and redefinition. In her 2004 publication, *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler maintains that recent world events have prompted a rethinking of nationality: "topographies have shifted, and what was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site, if not the very definition of the nation, confounding identity in what may well become a very auspicious direction" (49). The *Komagata Maru* and its 376 passengers, forced literally to exist on the margins of the nation, make explicit the challenge to the country's identity posed by its populated borders.

It is not surprising that Pollock should choose to focus her drama on borderlines, as this is a history dependent on the parallel existence of borders which are both porous and impermeable. This is, after all, the story of 376 people caught between India and Canada, between sea and land, on the brink of World War One, a global threshold moment. Critic Anne Nothof has suggested that within Pollock's history plays, including *The Komagata Maru Incident*, "borders are imposed" (81) and "rigidly maintained" (84). While borders are important and recurrent sites in Pollock's work, I would suggest that this choice of location undermines the rigidity of boundaries and marks the productive potential of border zones that serve as sites of contestation. The space of the margin can be an especially productive place in which to question identity and national politics. Vijay Mishra, in exploring the relationships of diaspora to nation-state, argues that the border is "a space that is always

contaminated” (433). This is not to suggest that there are centred and “pure” spaces beyond the margins. Contamination, instead, speaks to the richness and productivity particular to border spaces. *The Komagata Maru Incident* is staged on multiple border sites: beyond being set on the geographical edge of the nation, this drama investigates the boundaries of theatrical performance, of individual understanding, and of national identity.

Mishra claims that the occupation of the border, the claiming of the hyphenated space, “is that which signifies the vibrant social and cultural spaces occupied by diasporas in nation-states” (432). Those aboard the *Komagata Maru* are denied the “vibrant” space of diaspora. Instead, these passengers are restricted to inhabiting only the hyphen: denied entry to Canada, prevented from re-entering India because they have become a threat to the British Empire, these colonial subjects are relegated to the space in-between, which, because it is made to exist in isolation, has been made an unproductive, stagnant, unlivable space.² Pollock privileges border space to demonstrate both the productive potential of the margins and the limitations of Canadian insistence on insulating itself from its boundaries. She explores the disintegration, the restriction, the limitation, and the violence of borders, as well as the renegotiation and reidentification of border spaces, and the self-critique that confrontation with such spaces demands.

Pollock does not bring her audience on board the *Komagata Maru*, instead charting the action at the ship’s own edges. One unnamed Indian woman represents the 376 passengers on board: she is confined throughout, as the stage directions call for her to be seated behind a “grill-like frame” which will signify “both the impression of a cage, and the superstructure of a ship” (Production Note in Pollock n.pag.). This woman, literally caged on stage, challenges the border as an impossible space. She says of herself and her fellow passengers, “This is not where we live” (Pollock 26). On one level, this statement positions Canada as foreign and exclusionary. But this also speaks to the impossibility of life in the isolated, in-between space to which these passengers have been confined. The caged woman yells, “Do you hear me ashore!” (26). The staged answer is no: the other characters take no notice of the woman’s cries, and seem to have no access to her voice. The audience, however, hears her pleas. As Pollock chooses to leave this woman on stage and visible during all action, she is a presence we cannot ignore.



Diana Belshaw as the Sikh Woman on board Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*: the continually caged Woman, representative of the confinement of all 376 passengers, is always present to the audience, but invisible to those on stage. Photo: Ian Lindsay, *The Vancouver Sun*. Reprinted with permission.

Pollock provides no direct dialogue for this woman, but we, the audience, are her projected interlocutors. She speaks to us, the modern equivalent of the 1914 onlookers, and challenges us to make room for her to be heard.

This line between audience and stage is continually overstepped. T.S., a character who serves as “Master of Ceremonies,” insists that his audience cross the threshold of the stage. T.S. watches from stage as the audience enters the theatre, and in some productions, he walks among the seats, both before and during the play. He opens the action by inviting viewers to look: “Right this way . . . First chance to view” (1). T.S. addresses us as though we are passersby on the street and he the doorman to a travelling circus, an idea underscored by the “strident circus music” (Stone) accompanying T.S.’s speeches in the original production. He advises onlookers to get their “Cotton candy, taffy apples, popcorn and balloons” (Pollock 41) before the show starts. His language tempts the audience to consider the spectacle that is being staged. T.S.’s tone jars the viewer; he turns the passengers’ misfortune into entertainment for the crowd. The circus atmosphere his character creates is Pollock’s rereading of the 1914 scene that the *Komagata Maru* staged on Vancouver’s harbour, as T.S. makes critically evident the spectacle into which the event was made.

T.S. (himself, perhaps, “The Spectator”), in positioning the conflict between government and immigrants as entertainment, calls us to witness our own position as spectators, both in 1914 and now. Pollock continually reminds us that we are watching a dramatic production, and forces us to realize our connections to the gawking 1914 crowds. In this way, critics Sherrill Grace and Gabriele Helms argue, T.S. “reminds us constantly that everything we see — *and live* — is theatre, that the Vancouver (or Canada) described in our history books and government policies is a deliberate construction” (Grace and Helms 87), a construction of which we are a part. T.S. challenges his audience to be self-con-

scious viewers, and to critique personal viewing habits: he demands that we see differently. He refuses to allow his viewers an unself-conscious seat on the sidelines; he insists that we enter onto the stage and act. Pollock chose the initials T.S. for the framing voice of the play, most suggest, to represent “the voice of the system she is attacking” (Bessai 50). As Nothof argues, there is also the possibility that he may represent the voice of Vancouver’s mayor at the time of the *Komagata Maru*’s arrival: T.S. Baxter (89). T.S.’s shifting position within Pollock’s play would seem to suggest that his initials combine these roles, standing for governmental officials and for The System, both embodied in “The State.” In disrupting the divide between audience and production, T.S., The State (who simultaneously represents The Spectator), reminds us that we play a role in the production of national identity.

The State plays almost a shadow figure of Pollock’s other main character, William Hopkinson. Hopkinson, a Vancouver immigration official, seems to be the only character on stage granted access to T.S.’s speeches. T.S. becomes a voice internalized, at times putting words into Hopkinson’s mouth: in issuing his orders to board the *Komagata Maru*, it is as if Hopkinson has forgotten his lines, and T.S., the stage directions suggest, is “prompting” (Pollock 35) Hopkinson, providing him with the first few words to cue the rest. This makes two things clear: Hopkinson plays a role, and The State provides his lines. But if Hopkinson is infected by T.S., so too is the audience, since we are also granted access to T.S.’s machinations. We too are infected by the rhetoric of The State, and by virtue of our status as observers, we fit T.S.’s script.

Hopkinson is a character worthy of closer examination, since he provides perhaps the most localized exploration of borders in Pollock’s production. Though Pollock makes Hopkinson the centre of this story, the historical Hopkinson did not play as pivotal a role.³ Instead, Hopkinson was one of many Vancouver immigration officers, and was by no means chief of operations, as he is here. Pollock repositions the telling of the event to permit this historically marginal character to take centre stage. This positioning becomes doubly important with the realization that Hopkinson, so central to this drama, is himself a thoroughly in-between character. Though she heightens the impact of his actions, Pollock does not radically rewrite Hopkinson’s historical character, since the Hopkinson who exists within the pages of history conveniently fits with

Pollock's attention to border crossings. Hopkinson spent much of his life in India, and on his arrival in Canada, government officials saw his familiarity with Indian cultures as providing a possible window of opportunity. He was "fluent in Hindi" (Johnston 8), and worked as a translator and an immigration inspector for the Canadian government, while simultaneously "working for the Indian police" (1), employed in both countries in the service of the British Empire. Hopkinson, both the historical and the staged, works to gain intelligence from the Vancouver Sikh community, soliciting spies from within who are willing to report on the actions of fellow community members.

Hopkinson's task was largely to uncover connections between Sikh men of India and of Canada, and to expose possible sedition movements, a cause of fear to the Empire. To supplement the intelligence gathered through informants, Hopkinson himself worked "as an undercover spy" (Ferguson 158): he rented a small room within a Canadian Indian community and disguised himself as a Sikh man. Through this role-playing, Hopkinson attempted to gain the trust of the Sikh community, presenting himself as one of their own. Ironically, Hopkinson had more legitimate ties to the Sikh community than this costuming would suggest: though he denied his family history, Hopkinson's father was British, his mother Sikh (Johnston 37). Pollock picks up on the hints of the historical Hopkinson's repressed identity, and places this "'borderline' Canadian" (Nothof 89) in the central role of chief enforcer of Canadian immigration policy. Hopkinson's internal conflict has been often addressed by Pollock's critics. In fact, as he is central to her production, Hopkinson is most often the focus of critical investigations of *The Komagata Maru Incident*. Critics trace the transitions in Hopkinson's identity effected by the interruptions to his chosen self. Such breaks in his defensive Englishness include Evy's accusations — "Billy's mother's brown!" (Pollock 33) — a challenge to whiteness demonstrating that Hopkinson's "conflict is with himself" (Nunn 30), and that his racist views are ultimately self-destructive. These challenges build until Hopkinson's murder, by which time the authenticity of his armour of whiteness has been thoroughly problematized.

The historical and dramatic Hopkinson is killed by a Sikh man, Mewa Singh, in retribution for his betrayal of the Sikh community. In his death, some suggest, Hopkinson makes a clear choice to accept his mother and his Sikh connections, as well as his separation from the

white race on whose behalf he has been working to keep Canada “pure.” Critic Denis Salter suggests that Hopkinson at his moment of death “‘kills’ his father, ‘embraces’ his mother, and thus integrates the two sides of his racial identity which he was been struggling to keep separate” (xxx). This idea seems contradictory: if Hopkinson kills his father, his British self, his colonizer self, his ruling self, can he simultaneously integrate this self with his Sikh “other” within? I would argue that Hopkinson does not reject one half of himself for the other, nor does he achieve a utopian blending of identities. Pollock does not allow us such certainties: instead, Hopkinson dies, leaving his character forever on the border between the pieces of his identity, and suggesting that a closed border can be a deadly place to situate oneself.

This layering of revealed, repressed, and reprised identity has led some readers to suggest that “Hopkinson’s private racial conflicts are at the heart of this play” (Bessai 48) and that his prejudice is distanced from the public realm. This separation, some argue, permits the audience’s dismissal of Hopkinson as suffering from a merely personal crisis. Hopkinson’s breakdown suggests to some that “We are being asked to think of racism as caused largely by personal neurosis” (Salter xix). We can, in other words, make excuses for Hopkinson’s condition, and the end result is that we do not need to see in him a reflection of ourselves. Salter phrases succinctly what he understands as the weakness of Hopkinson’s life and death as Pollock stages them. “The audience,” he suggests, “is in effect let off the hook: it doesn’t need to pass judgment on itself, since it can all too readily pass judgment on him” (Salter xix). However, the divide between Hopkinson and his audience is blurred, and in passing judgement on him, we also judge ourselves.

Hopkinson spends much of his time in a Vancouver brothel. Despite its grounding on Canadian soil, the brothel is relegated to the edges of the community and to the background of Pollock’s drama, serving primarily to set the stage for Hopkinson. The marginalized space of the brothel provides a fitting setting for the “peripheral perspective to the main events” (Bessai 48) that Pollock privileges throughout, and the voices of the two female prostitutes — Evy and Sophie, who play small but vital roles in the action — remind Pollock’s audience that society silences those it marks as other within as well as without. Through Evy, Pollock discloses a sample of the immigrant’s fate: Evy sees a Sikh man

standing in a Vancouver unemployment line. He and Evy make eye contact and smile, though Evy is merely passing by on a tram. As another man (presumably white, since Evy does not mark him as different) cuts in line, Evy witnesses the Sikh man attempt to defend his position. “The man in the turban started to speak, he got out a few words” before he was attacked: “They knocked him down, the man in the turban, they were kicking, and then pushing and shoving to get in a blow — and the tram pulled away . . . it was gone. As if I’d imagined it. It had never been” (Pollock 16).

This is a complicated moment: there is no room for the voice of the subaltern here, and the Sikh man is violently silenced when he attempts to challenge his invisibility. Evy’s position, too, is complex: she witnesses the attack, and wishes she had responded in the moment. On arriving home, she feels she must relate the details of the event to Hopkinson. But Evy, too, is silenced: Hopkinson does not have time for Evy’s questioning, and says “Drink your drink” (17) in an attempt to end her retelling. Most interesting, perhaps, is the audience’s position here. What we witness is distanced from us several times over: we hear only a fragment of the fate of this Sikh man, and his story is told to us through another marginalized character who struggles to be heard. Evy remembers this event “As if [she’d] imagined it,” as if it were part of a dream. Does the fact that we witness these exchanges create space for a subaltern voice? Though Hopkinson glosses over her story, the audience is left with the (indirect) image of the Sikh man, on the ground and being beaten. The “tram pulled away” (16) in the middle of the fight, which leaves the conflict ongoing. Like the Sikh woman on board the *Komagata Maru*, who testifies to suffering the audience does not see and that other characters do not acknowledge, Evy’s only hope of communication is with her audience offstage.

While Pollock undermines the boundary between actor and spectator, and, through her staging of Hopkinson’s internal divisions, locates borders even within individual subjects, there are border questions raised by the arrival of the *Komagata Maru* that Pollock leaves unexplored. Most significantly, her framing of *The Komagata Maru Incident* largely overlooks the fact that this ship represented the story of Canada as a nation at a border moment. Pollock’s focus is not on the ship, but on the shore: she does not address the passengers’ reasons for having left India. The written histories of the event, however, pay much attention to

this question. Gurdit Singh, the Sikh man who chartered the *Komagata Maru* to make the trip to Canada, makes no appearance in Pollock's play, despite his starring role on board the historical ship. Living in Hong Kong, Singh was motivated to take action by the hardships of his fellow Sikhs who were being denied passage to Canada aboard other ships (Dhillon 106). Though some historians accuse Gurdit Singh of harbouring financial motives, Singh himself suggested that the voyage was undertaken to challenge the validity of colonial rule. "If we are admitted," he explained, "we will know that the Canadian government is just. If we are deported we will sue the government" (qtd. in Johnston 30). On the ship's arrival in Vancouver's harbour, Singh said in a speech to the Canadian press that he and his fellow passengers "are British citizens and we consider we have a right to visit any part of the Empire. . . . We are determined to make this a test case and if we are refused entrance into your country, the matter will not end here" (Johnston 37-38). From the moment it sailed from Hong Kong, the *Komagata Maru* set out to challenge Canadian law and, by extension, to challenge imperialism at large.

Pollock suggests in her introduction to the play that "the radicalization of those aboard" was one of the "repercussions of the government's actions" (Playwright's Note). This explanation disregards the true nature of the "radicalization" on board the ship and distances passengers from their politics. Admittedly, many of the men aboard the *Komagata Maru* travelled to Canada in pursuit of economic opportunity, and did not leave India with revolutionary dreams. Some, however, sailed because of their political convictions. Many of those on board were adamant *Ghadr* supporters, a movement that sought to end British rule in India by whatever means necessary (Johnston 16). Canada's place in this revolution was not yet defined: Canada could provide refuge for Indian men, siding with the subaltern, or Canada could reaffirm its British ties and mark itself a colonizing nation.

By shifting her attention away from the politics on board the ship, Pollock chooses to avoid comment on the production of the system of colonialism. Her focus on Canada and Canadian identity allows her audience to almost forget that this nation, too, was a British colony, and that, like Hopkinson, it exists in between, both building and being built by the colonial project. Vancouver's *Ghadr* movement, however, cannot forget Canada's border position, and though the political motivations

of those on board are not Pollock's focus, they were of chief interest to the Canadian government of the day.⁴ The 1914 national inquiry into the actions surrounding this ship's arrival and departure is essential to a historical retelling, as its tone and focus speak not only to Canada's official policy, but also to its racist rhetoric and practical methods of exclusion. The inquiry's report frames its investigation self-defensively, repeatedly highlighting the possibility that passengers were breeding seditious intent. The report calls Gurdit Singh and his men trespassing "sedition mongers" (29), troublemakers who work to incite general dissatisfaction among Canadian immigrants. The report goes on to detail the growing revolutionary movement among Vancouver Sikhs (39), and suggests the possibility of Sikh collaboration with German forces in an attempt to overthrow the British, and all those who would align themselves with the Empire, Canada included. The Report's conclusion clarifies the official Canadian opinion on Indian immigration:

The inference to be drawn from the facts presented is that, though a number of East Indians are no doubt quiet, and contented to work without trouble, the poison of sedition must have affected the greater number, and that these men . . . have been and are a danger to British rule in India, and a trouble to Canada. (42)

Canada, in other words, is not the place for Indian immigrants. The government focused closely on the possibility of sedition on board the *Komagata Maru*, but Pollock relegates this element of the plot to the sidelines of her retelling. This marginalization permits audiences to forget that this event challenges not only Canadian borders, but the limits of colonialism, and to overlook Canada's own role in the production of Empire.

While anti-colonial politics do not take centre stage, Pollock does include hints of the possibilities of revolution in veiled references to *Ghadr* influence. For instance, Pollock writes Georg, a German character, into the play. Since its inception, the *Ghadr* movement "looked to Germany for help" (Johnston 134) in its anti-British campaign. This was just before the outbreak of World War One: Germans and revolutionary Indians, wherever else they might disagree, could share the hope of overthrow of British rule. Georg is not, however, a *Ghadr* sympathizer, and Pollock's use of his character is not a simple acknowledgment of possible German-Indian connections. Instead, Georg becomes another pawn in the imperial game, as Hopkinson attempts to trap Georg in a

manufactured “plot between the Germans and the Sikhs” (Pollock 29) and so provide an excuse for raiding the *Komagata Maru* and ridding Canada of outsiders.

Georg’s presence highlights the degrees of citizenship possible within the state. At the opening of the play, T.S., The State, literally holds Georg’s passport (Pollock 2), reminding the audience that Georg too is in a vulnerable position as an immigrant. Georg is a white immigrant, and as such, not subject to the same discrimination as are those aboard the *Komagata Maru*, yet as an immigrant, Georg is vulnerable. When he learns that Hopkinson is “with immigration” (4), Georg asks, “Sophie, do you think—?” (4). The unfinished sentence communicates the vast possibility: Hopkinson could erase any technical irregularities of Georg’s Canadian residency. Hopkinson, able to grant or withhold Canadian citizenship at will, holds a position of power in the state, and Georg, aware of this power, does all he can to win Hopkinson’s favour, ending each of his obsequious questions and agreeable comments with “sir.” The role of race in national belonging is underscored when the two men change stations entirely after they confront the *Komagata Maru* together. Canadian officials sail out to intimidate the ship a final time, and Georg offers to “volunteer [his] services” (35) for the effort, again attempting to align himself with those who patrol Canadian borders. As the company reaches the *Komagata Maru*’s edge, “All hell broke loose” (36). Those on board the *Komagata Maru* threw “scrap iron and coal” (36) at the Canadian ship, and the coal projectiles leave Hopkinson looking as dark as “a chimney sweep” (38). In reporting the details of this defeat back in the safety of the brothel, Georg clearly understands his position relative to Hopkinson to have changed. Hopkinson, literally blackened by his encounter with border space, is no longer firmly representative of national belonging. Georg no longer fawns over Hopkinson with “sir”s but instead mocks his tactics: “That’s called diplomacy, eh Bill?” (41). Georg’s position remains unresolved at the close of the play, although he hints at hopes of becoming the next Hopkinson to the Canadian government. The upcoming war, he tells Hopkinson, “shall increase my use to your department” (43), as Georg will have inside information to offer. Like Hopkinson, Georg will sell his divided self to the government in exchange for a place on the inside.

In an interview about her relationship to Canadian history, Pollock says of the *Komagata Maru* event: “I was angry at my own ignorance,

and that the historians hadn't told me" (Page 13). Pollock is angry at her audience's ignorance as well. Writing in the Vancouver of the early 1970s, she was witness to a hostile outburst of racism against Vancouver's Sikh community. The source of the violence, she contends in interviews, is a ubiquitous and sanctioned ignorance of Canadian history. Pollock writes, "As a Canadian, I feel that much of our history has been misrepresented and even hidden from us. Until we recognize our past, we cannot change our future" (Playwright's Note in Pollock n.pag.).

Her production tells us about the production of our own identity, both individual and national. She calls us to be a different kind of spectator than was present at the *Komagata Maru's* mooring in 1914. *The Komagata Maru Incident* recovers and re-covers Canadian history, responding to the racism of then and of now, challenging audiences to see the national identity that is being produced and staged. And yet Pollock limits her critique. Her production could, by considering the revolutionary goals of the *Ghadr* movement, have positioned all of Canada as border space, extending her analysis of the border to the entirety of Canadian identity, caught between historical imperialism and modern claims to multiculturalism. With its limited exploration of the stories of sedition and the possible political motives of the potential-immigrants, *The Komagata Maru Incident* sacrifices the big-picture view of colonialism, permitting viewers to overlook their nation's role in the system, but what Pollock provides instead is a focus on the individual, a reflection to audiences of internal borderlines, and the dangers of divisions.

Pollock's invitation to question definitions of national belonging and to confront historical declarations of (non-)citizenship is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. Though the continuous-passage clause has been revoked, contemporary parallels to this veiled attempt to restrict immigration remain.⁵ While dangerous policies persist, a national staging of reconciliation has begun: in June 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued on behalf of the nation an official apology to Chinese Canadians for the head-tax they were forced to pay on entry to Canada between 1885 and 1923. Each surviving head-tax payer is to receive a token of compensation for the nation's racism, and further funds are allocated for a national memorial and public awareness campaign. In August 2006, Harper promised to similarly address the Canadian treatment of the *Komagata Maru's* passengers. But what can

such official attention actually correct? Do these speeches constitute real redress? Pollock asks her audience to offer more than polite acknowledgment: she asks us to watch and to listen as citizenship is played out, and to recognize our role in the production of national belonging. Her dramatic engagement with this history challenges her audience to become more than passive spectators, and to admit complicity in border patrol.

The audience becomes Pollock's means of disrupting the border, of creating a relationship where it has previously been denied, of generating a positive, creative, productive meeting place. The witnessing audience transforms the border from a fixed and reductive space to a space of possibility. This relationship rewrites Hopkinson's concept of the "Gift of Responsibility" (Pollock 12). Hopkinson understands this "Gift" as "the difference between white and coloured" (12), and the justification for colonial rule. Through the dialogue that crosses the boundaries of the stage, Pollock rewrites this relationship as the Gift of Response-Ability (to borrow Kelly Oliver's term): the audience is permitted a relationship of witness bearing, and is extended the responsibility of response. We witness the struggle for place, and the racism of "a nation-state that always privileges the citizen who is not hyphenated" (Mishra 432), who is not in-between, but firmly planted within. Pollock's attention to audience undermines this fixity by demonstrating the impossibility and undesirability of closed borders. Her retelling of this history underscores the fact that the border defines the nation, that we all produce and are produced by the space between.

NOTES

¹ Ted Ferguson's *A White Man's Country*, one of the sources from which I cite details of this history, may have been instrumental to Pollock's selection of the *Komagata Maru* affair for attention. Published in 1975, just a year before Pollock's play was staged, Ferguson's text is an accessible and engaging (though occasionally, it seems, fictionalized for dramatic effect) account of the history of the *Komagata Maru* incident. Ferguson's title, lifted from a line of Mackenzie King's 1908 report on Canadian labour, finds its way into one of T.S.'s speeches. Anne Nothof suggests the possibility of this influence in her 2000 article, "Crossing Borders."

² Reviews of the original production regularly comment on the feel of decay that designer Jack Simon achieved on set: the set and costume design "give the impression of being made of rotting material that is beginning to fall apart," a stylistic decision that "comment[s] on both the fading British Empire . . . and the state of white civilization"

(Wyman), and that also serves as a warning to Canada that to close its borders is to stagnate. Clearly, this sense of decay is a fitting addition to the production.

³ Interestingly, Pollock's centring of William Hopkinson has led to historical revision: Sherrill Grace and Gabriele Helms, in their article "Documenting Racism: Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*," claim: "The records tell us that one man, Inspector William Hopkinson of the Immigration Department, was charged with handling the crisis" (85-86). This staging of Hopkinson as the key governmental figure in the affair seems purely a result of Pollock's rewriting. In historical accounts besides Pollock's, Hopkinson is relegated to the sidelines, and Malcolm Reid becomes the central official figure of the event. It is important, I would suggest, to note that Pollock's work is taken by some as historically accurate, despite her preface warning that her play "is not a documentary account" (Playwright's Note). This makes Pollock's telling of history all the more important: if Canadians are citing her as a source of information on this event, the angle she chooses to pursue shapes popular understanding of the *Komagata Maru* affair, and of Canadian immigration policy and national racism. A consideration of her framing, then, is essential.

⁴ Again, Pollock's rewriting has replaced historical recordings. Critic Denis Salter suggests that in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Pollock has written "the theatrical equivalent of the kind of task force inquiry which the government should have commissioned" (xvi). While this comment rightly praises Pollock's attention to Canadian history, it seems to overlook both Pollock's revisions to that history and the existence of an actual government-commissioned report.

⁵ The Safe Third Country agreement, for example, will mean that refugees who arrive first in the United States will not be permitted to seek Canadian residency. As well, echoes of the racism exercised in the name of border security since 11 September 2001, continue to impact Canadian citizens and potential immigrants. Pollock's querrying of border patrol in the building of a nation is perhaps even more important today than it was at the time of the play's first production.

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