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RACE, NATION AND REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE: A SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF THE HÉROUXVILLE AFFAIR

Introduction

My study concerns itself with Hérouxville, a rural farming town in the region of Mauricie, Québec. In January of 2007, Hérouxville became a flashpoint for heated debate on immigration and reasonable accommodation in Québec when the town council adopted a five-page code of conduct for newcomers thinking of settling in the community. According to Town Councilor André Drouin, the document - entitled *Way of Life in Québec* - was intended to inform potential immigrants about the structure of society in Québec and how new arrivals should expect to comport themselves in a variety of fora including business, sports and leisure, food, road circulation, gender, religion and family. The code of conduct was based on the results of a twenty-question opinion poll undertaken by 196 of the approximately 1300 local town residents.¹

Surprises

What began as a local matter in a small town 165 km northeast of Montreal escalated into a controversial and high powered *to do* when Montréal's *La Presse* newspaper published a front-page story about the set of community standards that had been passed in Hérouxville two days earlier.² The 'Hérouxville Affair'³, as it came to be known, dominated the media and public discourse on immigration, reasonable accommodation, identity and belonging in Québec for some time.

¹ Benoit Aubin and Jonathon Gatehouse, "Do immigrants need rules? The debate rages on," Maclean's Magazine, 5 March 2007.

<http://www.macleans.ca/homepage/magazine/article.jsp?content=20070305_103084_103084> [27 March 2008].

² Katia Gagnon, 'Il est interdit de lapider les femmes!,' La Presse, 26 janvier 2007.

<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070126/CPACTUALITES/70126280/5025/CPDMINUTE> [26 March 2008].

³ I like the dual meaning of the term 'Affair' as a means of referring to the *deroulement* of events in Hérouxville. It has insinuations of illicit behaviour, of disloyalty, of seduction. An affair requires, at the very minimum, a presumption of a committed relationship that is being violated by at least one party. The other party then can then lay claim to a higher moral ground. Affairs need to happen somewhere, in some private space, hidden from the public but when they are 'discovered' and brought into the open they are scandalous, spectacular and someone always gets hurt. In positioning the Hérouxville 'Affair' temporally, spatially and socially within the context of post 9-11 global 'Affairs' where politics, religion, gender, geography, culture, "civilizations", violence, sex and oil (among others) mix to make a heady society-space cocktail, I think there is potential for an interesting metaphor to cohere here. This concept clearly requires more thinking on my part, but it's something I will be building on for my broader doctoral work on language, power and space in a Canadian context.

The ‘surprise’⁴ of the Hérouxville declaration in Québec was layered. At one level, the surprise took the shape of “astonishment [and] shock” at the blatant fear and racism expressed in the document: Hérouxville – some said – must be understood as an anomaly in Québec, the townspeople exceptional, for surely this kind of racism does not exist here. At another level, the surprise was expressed as “amazement” that anyone would dare to broach such an uneasy subject – that is, openly asserting the primacy of a dominant culture and insisting that immigrants conform to their rules. At yet another level, the surprise was the “unexpected success” of the document: counterbalancing the voices of shock and disavowal, the Hérouxville town council was, in fact, joined by many voices of broad support and agreement from Quebec, Canada and around the world expressed through public hearings through the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, online forums, letters and in the media⁵.

To my mind, the surprise of the ‘Hérouxville Affair’ resides at the heartland of a larger issue that Katherine McKittrick (in the footsteps of scholars such as Sherene Razack, Audrey Kobayashi and Eva Mackey) has named in her work. It “critically invoc[es] the recognition that Canada is, in fact, racially produced”.⁶ Hérouxville affirms that racialized subjects in Québec are paradoxically here and not here, that their imaginary presence – even when it coincides with their material absence – is required to produce and sustain homogenous, civilized spaces of Sameness wherein a select settler society (in this case, francophones of Franco-European descent) can collectively forget about their own histories of immigration, colonialism and violence and re-imagine/re-position themselves as indigenous to the spaces of the Québec ‘nation’.⁷ It is through these processes that impermeable zones⁸ are created wherein a specified group of people may

⁴ I apply the concept of ‘surprise’ as it is advanced in Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 91.

⁵ See, for example the following website: Hérouxville Town Charter, <<http://herouxville-quebec.blogspot.com>> [2 April 2008]. In addition, the political fallout from the Affair also played a pivotal role in Premier Jean Charest’s decision to establish the Commission on Reasonable Accommodation, a series of public hearings on cultural difference and immigrant integration in Quebec moderated by Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard. The hearings came to a close in late 2007 and at the time of this writing, the final report is pending.

⁶ McKittrick, 95.

⁷ I have grappled with the use of ‘nation’ in this paper. The mobilizing of the rural imaginary as a means of socially and spatially constituting the ‘nation’ in a specifically Québécois context – which I am aiming to do – has different and often opposing (political, historical, social, linguistic, cultural) reference points to the ways in which the rural imaginary in Quebec constitutes the ‘nation’ in a broader socio-spatial Canadian context. Though I still haven’t resolved how I will deal with this slippery issue in my expanded body of doctoral work in this area, I have decided that in this paper I will refer to the Quebec ‘nation’ as a distinct concept (i.e., the Quebec nation within the Canadian nation). I also draw here on Monica Heller who has noted the following: “L’espace québécois, étatisé, correspond à une nation, à laquelle correspondent une langue et une culture. Sa langue est normale et normable (et éventuellement normée), et disponible comme outil de reproduction de cet espace unilingue. La responsabilité de ce processus est partagée entre l’Etat qui, de toute façon, représente les citoyens et citoyennes, et ces derniers en tant qu’individus, dont le bien-être découle du statut de la collectivité dont ils et elles sont membres”. Monica Heller, “Langue, communauté et identité: le discours expert et la question du français au Canada,” *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 31, no. 1 (2007): 45

⁸ The term ‘impermeable zones’ is drawn from Phyllis Dalley, “Définir l’accueil: enjeu pour l’immigration en milieu minoritaire francophone en Alberta,” *Francophonies d’Amérique* 16, 2003: 67-78.

live a bounded private *way of life* hemmed in by clear social boundaries and given effect in material spaces.

Theoretical Framework and Argument

The perspective through which we choose to interpret the relationship between society and space informs the way we understand power, knowledge and place in any given context. For this study on the Hérouxville Affair, I have chosen to draw from geography and employ a framework that views society-space as a strategic field.⁹ Influenced by poststructuralist and Foucauldian theories, Susan Ruddick notes that this approach sees society as being underpinned with a social power structure (or *dispositif*) that produces and is produced by space. Certain spaces are invested with varying degrees of status depending on the historical period (i.e., schools, churches, prisons). Power – as it passes through individuals and groups of people with a symbiotic relationship to strategic spaces - begets “specific subjects” (i.e., the insane, the doctor, the criminal, the teacher) which are produced *vis a vis* their relationship to “societal determinations of normal and abnormal”. Societal boundaries and transgressions are policed, regulated and positioned in space, hemmed in by discursive logics and linked to “the viability of the state”.¹⁰

An application of this theoretical framework to present day Québec brings into relief a unique set of identifiable strategic spaces, specific subjects and the intricacies of their relationships. In this paper, I will focus on the rural as a strategic space in Québec, one which has been invested with iconic status. I will also focus on the production of the immigrant as a specific subject, also invested with an iconic status but of a ‘different’ sort. An analysis of their relationship to one another – a relationship that is in itself spectacularly iconic in this context – exposes some central elements of the “underlying discursive logic of an entire society”.¹¹ As Henri Lefebvre first suggested over thirty years ago: “the space of a (social) order is hidden in the order of space”.¹² The Hérouxville Affair activates this theory.

I argue that the Hérouxville Affair offers up one of the clearest expressions (to date) of the relationship between space and society in Québec. I intend to demonstrate that the Hérouxville Affair must be theorized spatially in order to draw out the full range of complexities that the case engenders.¹³ The central occupation of this paper is to consider how the Hérouxville Affair gives effect to the imagining of rural spaces in

⁹ Susan Ruddick. *Philosophy: Society-Space Entry for Encyclopedia of Geography*. Available online: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/smrgeography/Site/Select_Publications.html> (February 2008).

¹⁰ Ruddick, 4.

¹¹ Ruddick, 12.

¹² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 289.

¹³ And there are many: the ‘Hérouxville Affair’ is a rich case study. It has broad implications for considerations of – among other issues – the complexities of urban/rural and public/private divides in Quebec, civic and ethnic conceptions of citizenship, secularism, race and space, multiculturalism, language, culture, identity and belonging in Quebec and Canada. That said, I recognize that this topic begs a much deeper investment in time and empirical investigation than is possible for me to devote at this time and, as such, my aims here will be considerably more modest.

Québec and the threat that immigrants – whether real or imagined – pose to these strategic fields.

Drawing on the readings and the central problematics of this course, this paper will proceed as follows: I will begin by considering how and why the rural – as it exists both in imaginary and material realms – is constructed as a strategic field in Québec. Applying Lefebvrian theories on the production of space as a fulcrum for my analysis, I will continue with a discussion of how the Hérouxville code of conduct contributes to the production of a “social world in which there are more black representations than real black people”.¹⁴ How does the code of conduct (a discursive space) give effect to the Hérouxville society-space as an impermeable zone, a ‘space of the Same from which the Other is excluded’?¹⁵ I will then touch briefly upon the visit of members from the Canadian Islamic Congress to Hérouxville. Without the benefit of empirical research, I must stress that this section will not be as substantive as is its due. Still, I feel it is important to comment – however briefly – on how the appearance of the Muslim delegation sponsored by the Canadian Islamic Congress momentarily disrupted the organization of the society-space couplet as represented by the Hérouxvilleois, re-scribed the rural as a paradoxical space, a site of resistance, engagement and re-interpretation, and re-produced the space of Hérouxville as one in which black bodies are not only *not* there, but actually on site. Forced to contend with the ‘surprise’ of real and materially present transgressive bodies, not just the specter of imaginary immigrants, the geographies of the Québec nation are negotiated, jostled, unmapped.

Background

The relationship between the social and the spatial in Québec is, in part, the product of a complex, politically charged history. While it is beyond the means of this paper to engage in a full historical overview, I will summarize a few of the main points that will help to inform my argument here.

Following the collapse of the Patriot Revolt of 1837-1838, the French language, traditional Catholic and rural values were bundled and mobilized to promote a sense of bounded cultural identity in the French Canadian community. Mediating the link between nation and territory, this cultural identity was constructed and defined in part through expressions of music, poetry and literary works. A prominent example is the literary ‘roman de la terre’ (novel of the earth) genre. Characterized by a romantic portrayal of nature and the rural, the ‘roman de la terre’ was an important representational tool in creating and maintaining a cultural and national identity that was territorially bounded. In French Canada, the ‘roman de la terre’ genre was typified by Lionel Groulx’s ‘L’Appel de la race’ (The Call of the Race)¹⁶. Written in 1922, ‘L’Appel de la race’ remains a seminal piece of writing (and, as Lefebvre might argue, a Representational

¹⁴ Peter James Hudson, “The Lost Tribe of a Lost Tribe: Black British Columbia and the Poetics of Space,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, eds. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 155.

¹⁵ Derek Gregory, “Space and Human Geography,” in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th ed, eds. R.J. Johnston, Derek Gregory, Geraldine Pratt and Michael Watts. (Blackwell Publishing, Malden MA: 2006), 770.

¹⁶ Lionel Groulx, *L’Appel de la race* (Montreal: Editions Fides, 1980).

Space) for proponents of the Quebecois nation, with unrepentant links between the naturalness of race, language, nature, identity and national territoriality in the colony of Nouvelle France¹⁷.

The Quiet Revolution in Québec during the 1960s prompted a radical shift away from overtly ethnic and religious forms of membership within a broader French Canadian identity towards ideals of secularism, and civic membership in a territorially bounded 'Québécois' identity. During this period, sweeping social boundaries were scribed along linguistic lines between 'les Anglais' and 'les Québécois', with the English positioned as a hegemonic Other to be resisted in the dominant political discourse in Québec. These linguistic divisions were understood along Euro-centric ethnic lines and were at the root of a growing sovereigntist movement that sought to establish a Québec nation state independent from Canada.

Previously unacknowledged boundaries between immigrants of non-Anglo-European descent and the dominant francophone population were illuminated, however, following the outcome of the 1995 referendum when Jacques Parizeau, then Prime Minister of Québec, blamed the failure of the 'yes' side on "money and the ethnic vote". Immigrants and Québécois of non-Franco-European descent had thusly been openly indicted for getting in the way of the legitimate Québécois subject (the Québécois *de souche, pure laine*) to establish a sovereign state whose primary goal was to ensure the survival of the French language and culture. In this moment, real immigrants and imaginary immigrants (read: racialized people) supplanted 'les Anglais' as the discursive Other in the Québec society-space.

The Rural as Strategic Society-Space

A recent study conducted by Marc Termote, a professor and demographic expert at the University of Montréal, indicated that "less than 54 per cent of residents on the Island of Montréal speak French at home".¹⁸ The study suggests that the number of Montréalers who use French at home has steadily declined over the last 15 years and will likely fall below 50 per cent over the next ten years. Professor Termote notes that "as the number of immigrants increases in Montreal, the percentage of those who use the French language declines".¹⁹ Immigrants, in other words, pose a threat not only to the survival of the French language but also to the geographical and cultural territories of Québec.

The fact that the majority of immigrants to Québec are concentrated in the city of Montréal is central to a growing cleavage between rural Québec, produced in space as the heartland of an unadulterated 'francité'²⁰ of the Québec nation and urban Montréal,

¹⁷ Caroline Desbiens, "Naturally Yours: Nature and the National Subject in L'Appel de la race and Facundo," presented at the Inaugural International Conference in Critical Geography, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, August, 1997. <www.geog.ubc.ca/iiccg/papers/Desbiens.html> [14 April 2008], p. 1-4.

¹⁸ Rheel Seguin, "Study on decline of French in Montreal hidden, PQ says," Globe and Mail, 25 January 2008, sec. A6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The term 'la francité' refers broadly to French culture, identity and a transnational francophone community.

where hybridized subjects are multiplying, unsettling the imagined homogenous, uniform relationship between society and space²¹. As a concept, the rural has been resuscitated as the primordial space of culture and legitimacy of belonging in and to Québec. Material rural spaces – such as the town of Hérouxville and its ‘natural’ environs - have thus emerged as strategic and invested sites through which representations of the Québec nation are imagined, understood and produced.

So why Hérouxville and why now? It is important to situate the current swathe of moral panic in Quebec and Canada concerning immigrants and racialized people (Muslims in particular) both spatially and temporally within the global context of the moment. The post 9/11 era in the West has been characterized by a heightened climate of fear, xenophobia and racism. Bombings carried out by Muslim extremist groups in New York, London, Madrid and Istanbul, for example, have played a spectacular role in galvanizing the bright conflation of immigrants and racialized people (who are, at any rate, generally assumed to be immigrants) with terrorists in media, policy and public debate in Western Europe, the US and Canada. Nation states have shifted towards a global politics of protectionism, and a rethinking about how far ‘host’ societies should go in accommodating cultural difference. The ‘Herouxville Affair’ was catalyzed by a series of happenings that took place in Montreal, including requests for the YMCA in Outremont to shade its windows so that boys from the Hasidic Jewish community would not be distracted by women exercising there, and requests from some Muslim groups to remove men from pre-natal classes. These requests generated lively debate about ‘reasonable accommodation’ and carried a subtext of moral panic over just who has control over the cultural and geographical territories of Quebec. Real or imaginary immigrants (I use imaginary because the Jewish community in Outremont is, in fact, a long standing and established community and the vast majority of its members are full Canadian citizens), were seen to pose a threat to the Quebec society space. The code of conduct, in other words, was developed as a warning.

The Hérouxville Code of Conduct as Representation of Space

I move now to a discussion of the Hérouxville code of conduct *Way of Life in Québec*, which I consider to be an example of what Henri Lefebvre has termed a ‘Representation of Space’. Eugene McCann, in his use of Lefebvrian frameworks to analyze race, space and public protest in the US, synthesizes this complex moment in the production of space. He writes that a Representation of Space is

the space of planners and bureaucrats, constructed through discourse. This space always remains abstract since it is *conceived* rather than directly lived. It is only encountered through the understandings and abstractions contained in plans, codes, and designs that shape how we conceptualize ordered space. This form of

²¹ On this note, it is interesting to connect the growing rural/urban divide to political discourse and related social movements in Quebec. The rise of Mario Dumont’s Action Democratique du Quebec (ADQ) speaks directly to this issue: the ADQ is a centre right party based outside of the urban Montreal area, speaking to and for people in rural areas and small towns whose population is largely *de souche* (in other words: white, francophone of European descent, Roman Catholic). The ADQ is actively opposed to increasing immigration in Quebec. See, for example, Lysiane Gagnon, “Quebec’s own two solitudes,” Globe and Mail, 28 January 2008, sec. A15.

social space is the dominant form and is central to the production of abstract space²².

In the absence of internationally recognized borders that would mark Québec as a sovereign, territorially bounded nation, certain spaces have indeed become battlefields upon which certain groups in possession of varying degrees of power (sovereignists, federalists, nationalists) strategize and invest. As an example of a Lefebvrian Representation of Space, the Hérouxville code of conduct²³ is an expression of the Québec's "desire to merge both geographical and cultural territories as one and the same entity".²⁴

Understood in this manner, *Way of Life in Québec* discursively represents Hérouxville as a romantic rural space, culturally pure, unmarked, unsullied by immigrants, untouched by difference. Hérouxville appears frozen in time, socially and culturally impenetrable, strong and stoic, purged of any history of violence or oppression wrought under, among others, French colonialism, domination of the Roman Catholic Church, or gendered inequalities.

As a means of animating this argument, I will enter into the Hérouxville document to draw out and discuss two main themes that emerge as central to the *Way of Life* in Québec society as it is conceived by the planners/bureaucracy of the town council: women's rights and secularism. I will show how Québec society as it is represented in the code of conduct both constitutes, and is constituted by, the material spaces of Hérouxville.

Putting Women's Rights in Place

The Hérouxville document is very clear in its assertion that males and females in Québec "share the same status of equality".²⁵ This gendered brand of equality is asserted across spaces of schools, where boys and girls attend together and where "men and women can teach to boys and girls without sexual discrimination"²⁶; homes for the elderly, hospitals and shelter homes, where "men and women are treated by responsible men and women"; in places of sports and leisure, such as "public pools" and hockey rinks²⁷; in places of business, such as grocery stores where "male or female personel (*sic*) can handle" all

²² Eugene McCann, "Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the US City," *Antipode* 3, no. 2 (1999): 172. As McCann notes here, Lefebvre advances a theory of three moments in the production of space: Representations of Space (perception); Representational Spaces (imagination); Spatial Practices (experience).

²³ Other representations of space here might be *Bill 101: The Charter of the French Language* (granted royal assent in 1977) or *Bill 195: The Quebec Identity Act* (introduced by the Parti Québécois in 2007 but never passed).

²⁴ Desbiens, 1.

²⁵ Andre Drouin and Bernard Thompson, Citizens of the Municipality of Herouxville, Quebec, Report presented to Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences 8 September 2007, p. 8. <<http://municipalite.herouxville.qc.ca/bouchardtaylorenglish.pdf>> [11 December 2007].

²⁶ Drouin, 9.

²⁷ Ibid, 10.

different food products, including “different kinds of meat”.²⁸ The section on business also specifies that some businesses where physical activity takes place, such as gyms or fitness clubs, “consists of both men and women that wear appropriate clothing for their physical exercise”. The document is also clear on Hérouxville’s rejection of violent practices such as “killing women by lapidation or burning them alive in public places, burning them with acid, excising them, infibulating them or treating them as slaves”.²⁹ The original document – though this reference has since been removed – that it is unacceptable to cover one’s face in public places, with the sole exception of Hallowe’en.

By superimposing the language of mainstream liberal feminism (women’s rights) atop the list of community standards, Quebec society is reinforced as a superior space in contrast to immigrant producing nation-spaces in the East or the South (‘We’ protect our women, ‘They’ persecute their women). The code of conduct frames Hérouxville (and Quebec by extension) as a civilized space free of women’s oppression, where men and women are equal and where violence towards women is simply not tolerated. I suggest that Quebec, in fact, does not provide an unequivocal safe space for women fearing violence: violence against women takes multiple forms and place in societies and nation-spaces around the world. This is an unacceptable reality.

Let me be clear here. I do not think that gender or women’s rights should be understated in varied considerations of immigration. On the contrary, I hold that an integrated analysis of how gender helps to shape the social connections between and amongst individuals and collective groups affected by immigration, and the multiple connections between people and the spaces they inhabit and move through is critical in discussing, among other issues, power, knowledge, violence and place and the systems that help to define and regulate them.³⁰ However, while I believe that gender and rights should be an essential consideration in discussions of immigration and society, I also insist that they should not be misrepresented or essentialized.

Thus, I am critical of the way in which the Hérouxville code of conduct seems to conflate acts of atrocious violence against women – which are, at any rate, criminal offenses in Canada – with specific unnamed religions, rather than the practices of a few regions of some Muslim and Hindu countries³¹. When acts of violence perpetrated against some women immigrants in their countries of origin are exoticized, or their Otherness emphasized, the violences experienced by women in Québec are discursively suppressed.

²⁸ Ibid, 11.

²⁹ Ibid, 8.

³⁰ I concur, for example, with Alejandro Portes and Lingxin Hao in their assertion that gender can play a significant intergenerational role among immigrant families. Many immigrants derive from countries with traditional sex roles and “distinct socialization patterns for males and females”. Patterns of divergent gender socialization among and between cultural or ethnic groups may lead to varying degrees of language adaptation, psycho-social adjustment to a new culture, as well as social interaction between men and women in their families and communities. Alejandro Portes and Lingxin Hao, “The Price of Uniformity: Language, Family and Personality Adjustment in the Immigrant Second Generation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 6 (2002): 893.

³¹ Dr. Mohamed Elmasry, “Would the real Quebecker Please Stand Up?!” *The Canadian Islamic Congress* 10, Issue 2 (6 February 2007- 28 Muharram 1428) <www.canadianislamiccongress.com/fb/friday_bulletin.php?fbdate=2007-02-16> [9 April 2008].

Rape and assault are not unknown in Québec. Neither are the events of December 6th, 1989 when fourteen women at the École Polytechnique in Montréal were singled out because they were women and gunned down by Marc Lepine. While I am somewhat uncomfortable applying these disturbing examples to support my argument here, I do not call them up frivolously. I include them to insist that, contrary to the representation of space provided by the code of conduct that paints Québec as an idyllic sanctuary where violence is far, far away from the *Way of Life in Quebec* – so far away that “in certain townships” immigrants should note that women are “even allow[ed]...to circulate bare breasted in public” presumably with no fear of physical or emotional security - violence against women *happens* in the society-space of Quebec. Perhaps it might have been more practical, as one example, for a code of conduct to offer immigrant women information about where to go if they encounter violence (such as the existence of shelters and support networks for women wanting to leave abusive relationships). This kind of information is simply absent in the Hérouxville document. Why? I suggest because at some level, admitting that it does *happen* here would constitute a ‘different’ kind of society-space that is less pure, tainted, with less claim to moral high-ground. The omission in this Representation of Space is strategic.

Spacing a Sacred Secularism

Material sites constituted by religion and secularism are also very clearly invoked in the code of conduct as spaces where social behavior will be regulated, policed and ordered to conform with the *Way of Life in Quebec*. For example, the following is from the section ‘About Festivities’:

We feast, dance, and towards the end of our calendar year, we individually or collectively decorate a fir or a spruce tree with ornamental [*sic*] balls and lights. This is what we commonly call ‘Christmas decorations’ or ‘Christmas trees’ which recalls our notions of patrimonial rejoicing but does not necessarily confer to this practise [*sic*] a religious character. These festivities are authorized as much in public spaces, schools, institutions or private places. In these places, no area is reserved for prayer or religious manifestations³².

The excerpt demonstrates that the spaces and places through which ‘secularism’ takes place in Hérouxville are strategic and, in matter of fact, sacred. There are interesting parallels that can be drawn between Hérouxville and France in terms of the state-religion relationship in a society that views itself as secular. Richard Alba suggests that in France, strict secularism is central to the state with respect to religion. However, “in a society where a single religion, Roman Catholicism, has for centuries been paramount...the recognition of the major Christian holidays is taken for granted – in school and workplace schedules, for example”³³. We see these same processes at work in Hérouxville. The subtle normalization and institutionalization of Christian practices in the code of conduct draws bright boundaries of exclusion around zones of membership for non-Catholics, such as Jews, Muslims or Sikhs whose religious practices (carrying the symbolic

³² Drouin, 8.

³³ Richard Alba, “Bright vs. Blurred Boundaries: Second-Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 33.

kirpan³⁴, keeping kosher³⁵, requiring public places of prayer³⁶) are referred to in the Hérouxville code of conduct. The maintenance of these social boundaries requires a policing and regulating of public and private space wherein these unruly rituals might take place, thereby infecting the purity of the society-space couplet in rural Québec.

In the Hérouxville code of conduct, then, the identification and regulation of sites that people come into contact with on a daily basis (grocery stores, roads, schools) makes clear the social and spatial boundaries, thereby allowing impermeable zones to cohere both materially and temporally. These boundaries are intended to “legitimiz[e] processes of social selection which reproduce the social order as the dominant groups intend it to be”³⁷. Hérouxville is marked as a private space, and trespassers (or transgressors) will be prosecuted.

While there are veiled references to the ‘abnormal’ practices of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Jewish immigrants – their worshiping, eating and drinking practices, manner of dress – it is hard to deny that there seems to be a distinct preoccupation with the Muslim woman in the Hérouxville declaration³⁸. The Muslim woman - her precarious rights, her veil, her submission, the spectacular violence she endures from her men – is produced in this document as the uber-Other, the iconic immigrant whose veiled and shadowy specter seems to haunt the *Way of Life in Quebec*. The subtext of the code of conduct suggests a violent desire to unveil, to possess, to show this woman who is in charge.

So how might it be interpreted when Muslim women take on animated bodily form, travel out of the imaginary and urban spaces and smack into the material, physical spaces of rural Hérouxville?

The Week the Women Went...to Herouxville

On Sunday February 11 2007, a delegation of Muslim women, students and supporters sponsored by the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) traveled to Hérouxville, some wearing headscarves and bringing traditional sweets to share with the Hérouxvilleois.

I draw again on McKittrick, who asserts that black women have always been implicated in shaping space and been materially situated in place: they are “everywhere and

³⁴ In ‘About Education’: “*Students are prohibited from carrying weapons or imitations of such, loaded or unloaded, real or fake, symbolic or not*”, 9.

³⁵ In ‘About Food’: “*the majority of our restaurants use recipients and kitchen tools to cook meat dishes of all kinds, and also a variety of dairy products in the process. Regardless of the shape of the animal or its hooves...we will enjoy eating its flesh if it is prepared properly and presented tastefully*”, 13; In ‘About Business’: “*No state laws exist concerning the disposition of dairy products in businesses in relation to meat products*”, 11.

³⁶ In ‘About the Workplace’: “*No collective labour agreement should authorize employers to assure their employees of special space(s) reserved for praying, or leaves of absence for religious motives.*” (Herouxville, 11).

³⁷ Heller, 15.

³⁸ I recognize that this statement regarding the preoccupation with the Muslim woman in Quebec begs a positioning of Quebec within a larger discussion of French colonial history in the Arab world and the socio-spatial relationship of Quebec to the francophonie. Due to the limited scope of this paper, however, I am unable to engage in a sustained analysis of this topic here and will have to engage it at a later date.

nowhere, north and south, unvisibly present across the landscape, in the last place they thought of”.³⁹ I would argue that in this context, Hérouxville and its place in the rural imaginary of Québec may just be “the last place they thought of” - a paradoxical space, a strategic site, a battlefield. As Radhika Mohanram reminds us “[r]acial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races”.⁴⁰ When the women from the Islamic delegation went to Hérouxville, the bare assertion of their presence was a rejection of their captivity and ossification in discursive, material and symbolic spaces. As May Haidar, a member of the delegation noted, “It’s apparent there is a misconception and a wrong view of Muslim women, so we want to open a dialogue to let them know us and, of course, we want to know them”.⁴¹ By choosing not only to insert their physical bodies into the material spaces of the rural imaginary, but also challenging the means of knowledge production as it is generated by the *dispositif*, the women of the CIC actively disrupted the production of society-space as it is represented in the Hérouxville code of conduct. Their physical presence recasts the geographic constitution of the nation space. Québec’s eschewal of its colonial history and the processes whereby rural Québec in particular is able to “forget” about blackness, to imagine that blackness is “not really here/there at all”⁴² underpins the argument that the imaginary immigrant - who, I reiterate, is often not an immigrant but a racialized citizen - occupies a great deal of discursive rural real estate in places such as Hérouxville, which in turn work to define Québec as a nation-space.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Hérouxville Affair is a microcosm of the consanguineous relationship between space and society in Québec. Without a sustained spatial analysis, any of the perpetual discussions that have occupied the social and political discourse for decades and beyond in Québec and Canada - citizenship, secularism, multiculturalism, language, culture, nation, identity, belonging and now reasonable accommodation - remain groundless and suspended. While language and ethnicity appear as fairly consistent units of analysis in existing literature on society in Québec, I suggest that we need to push this and look at the complexities between language, power and space in the Québec context and the ways in which they bring into relief the role that race plays in imagining and producing the nation.

When the marginalized character of the French language and its cultural attendants are what lends Quebec identity its legitimacy, what happens when members of this group - viewing themselves as oppressed by an Anglo-hegemony - are shifted into the dominant status? As Monica Heller has reminded us, the concept of a linguistic minority “only makes sense in the context of the discursive formation of the nation state, understood as

³⁹ McKittrick, 42.

⁴⁰ Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 3.

⁴¹ Staff writer, “CIC Women Members Visit Herouxville”, *The Canadian Islamic Congress* 10, Issue 2 (16 February 2007- 28 Muharram 28 1428) Online at: www.canadianislamiccongress.com/fb/friday_bulletin.php?fbdate=2007-02-16 [9 April 2008].

⁴² McKittrick, 99.

linguistically and culturally homogeneous”.⁴³ When asked why the delegation from the CIC decided to make the trip to the rural town of Hérouxville, May Haidar said “[w]e came here to confirm and affirm that we are Quebecers too”.⁴⁴ When real or imaginary immigrants speak back to the society-space couplet in Quebec, they expose the tenuous links between geographical and cultural territories as they are given effect in Quebec through the production of space “precisely because they have been relegated to the margins of knowledge and have therefore been imagined as outside of the production of space”.⁴⁵ They rupture the notion of who is indigenous or natural to the nation, they poke holes in the impermeable zones – sometimes with more than their mother tongues, and they ask: where is imagining happening?

⁴³ Monica Heller, “Language, Education and Citizenship in the Post-National Era: Notes From the Front,” *The School Field* 13, no. 6 (2002): 18.

⁴⁴ Staff writer, CBC.

⁴⁵ McKittrick, 54.

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