

Assimilation Versus a Unique Community

An Examination of the Effects of Globalization and
Artistic Expression on New Canadians

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of globalization through the lens of the role the arts play in relation to the resettlement process of new Canadians. Data derived from field study interviews of seven immigrants and refugees originating from four different countries were examined in relation to selected readings and lectures explored in Module 3 of the McGill-McConnell Program. Using a “socio-political-economic storyboard” and a “character outline framework,” the author analyzes the informants’ personal stories in order to explore (1) the correlation between the desire for cultural assimilation into one’s new country versus the desire to protect one’s cultural roots; (2) how participation in the arts affects development and acculturation for new Canadians; and (3) what that participation brings to one’s new community. An important example with which several informants in this study are associated is the Broken English Theatre Company (Ottawa), which offers new Canadians the opportunity to share publicly their experience of “culture shock,” while presenting audiences with a new perspective on storytelling and performance.

Introduction

This paper examines the concept of globalization through the lens of the role the arts play in relation to the re-settlement process of new Canadians. The paper is based on field study interviews with seven immigrants and refugees originating from four different countries and now residing in Canada. The data, in the form of personal stories, collected from one-on-one interviews, are examined in relation to readings and lectures explored in Module 3 of the McGill-McConnell Program – primarily Thomas Friedman’s *The Lexus and the olive tree* (2000), Naomi Klein’s *No logo* (2000) and Travis Kroecker’s McGill-McConnell lecture on Diaspora Ethics (2001). Additional research materials include Mark Kingwell’s *The world we want* (2000), Annette Simmons’s *The story factor* (2001) and the CBC Newsworld documentary *Broken English* (2000).

The areas I seek to explore are (1) the correlation between assimilation versus a unique community; (2) how participation in the arts (voluntary or professional) affects development and acculturation as a new Canadian; and (3) what that participation brings to one’s new community. Although the authors cited above do not specifically address the notion of the arts as they pertain to new immigrants and the theme of globalization, I intend to explore the inherent symbiotic relationship between these two forces in relation to the experience of new Canadians.

Informant Selection

While it may have been interesting to interview individuals in the voluntary sector whose responsibility it is to assist new Canadians to find suitable placements and experiences (i.e., social service organizations such as the Catholic Immigrant Services Bureau), I chose to go directly to immigrants and refugees themselves for a more direct, personal perspective unencumbered by organizational assumptions, expectations or sensitivities. Accordingly I approached Ottawa’s Broken English Theatre Company (BET), a nonprofit, grassroots organization whose mandate focuses on giving voice to new Canadians through the art of theatre, to assist me in locating potential interviewees for

this project. Five of the seven informants (one of whom, Bernadette Hendrickx, was a founder of BET) were approached through BET. Other BET-related informants were Zahra (from Iran), Alhaadi (from Sudan) and Vasily and Yelena (from the former Soviet Union). Pragati and Rajeev (from India) were contacted through a mutual acquaintance and are not involved in the arts. They are brother and sister, and were interviewed together, as were Vasily and Yelena, who are a married couple. As each member of these pairs tended to express feelings and views very similar to those of his or her respective sibling or spouse, I shall consider them for the purposes of this paper as representing *two* interviews rather than four. Thus what is presented here is information culled from a total of five interviews. The informants represent not only a distinct range in terms of geographic location of origin, but also age, profession, and status. Five of the informants are immigrants and two of the informants are refugees.

Interview Outline and Questions

In designing the interviews, I was interested in acquiring as much information as possible from each informant on a fairly broad range of areas relating to lifestyle and cultural connectivity. For the first three interview sessions I established a list of twenty-eight questions, which would serve as points of departure for the interview, but to which I would not necessarily adhere strictly. I was expecting that a number of the questions and their responses would quite naturally lead to my being able to identify common themes and variances related to matters of culture and globalization. Subsequent interviews were more specifically tailored, with twelve to eighteen questions about the individual's experience in the arts.

In practice, although certain basic questions were consistently asked during the interview process, the interviews themselves (with one exception) were conducted in a conversational style, with informants being allowed to elaborate on areas of particular interest to them. The interviews that took place in this fashion were, I felt, much more successful. The one interview that more or less adhered to the question-and-answer format in fact provided less fertile data in the end than the others. Interestingly, this interview was conducted with the brother and sister who were not currently involved in arts-related activities.

Apart from general circumstantial information, interview questions covered three broad categories: (1) social-cultural (2) political and (3) economic. These questions were composed without any background knowledge of the informants, and were asked in random order; in many cases particular questions were either disregarded or else replaced by more appropriate questions as the interview progressed. In hindsight, if I had known a little more about each informant's background prior to composing the questions and the interview phase, I would have been able to sharpen the focus of the questions to elicit more detailed information on areas of particular interest. In most cases, however, this was not possible.

In some of the interviews, I deliberately chose not to identify the topic of globalization directly; rather I was hoping that discussions around a few specific topics would naturally evoke associations with globalization issues. In some instances this was the case; in others, the links were less obvious, and I have identified the potential connections based on my interpretation of the data.

Informant Profiles

Zahra

Zahra is a resident of Ottawa in her mid- to late fifties. She arrived in Canada in April 2000 as a refugee claimant from Iran, where her husband and teenage daughter are still living. She also has a son and a sister residing in Germany. She is well educated and speaks very good English. Her degree is from an American-based University in Iran. In Iran she taught English as a Second Language for fifteen years at a technical college.

Zahra does not consider herself a typical Iranian woman. She believes in one united “global kingdom” and is passionate about the work and ideas of Arthur C. Clarke, the prolific British author (now residing in Sri Lanka) perhaps best known for the science-fiction novel *2001: A space odyssey* (1968). Her favourite Canadian writer is Alistair McLeod, author of the award-winning novel *No great mischief* (1999), which recounts the history of a family immigrating from Glasgow, Scotland to Cape Breton Island. In Iran Zahra was a feminist and an activist, and spent a year and a half in prison because she “could not keep quiet.”

Zahra had originally intended to spend time working in Africa with a voluntary sector organization; but her family convinced her that it would not be a safe environment in which to bring up her daughter, at which point she abandoned the idea for the time being. After arriving in Canada, she spent three months on welfare, until she found a retail job in an Ottawa store, where she has since risen to the position of manager. Zahra has also done some volunteer teaching but has had to give this up because of the demands of her job. At the time of her interview, she had just recently joined the Board of Directors of a local professional arts organization.

Alhaadi

Alhaadi arrived in Canada from Egypt in October 2000. He is originally from Sudan but moved to Cairo in 1995. In Sudan he was an established theatrical figure – an actor, director and writer for more than twenty years. As a volunteer in Sudan, he used his theatre background to produce and direct a play for deaf children. Due to the political situation in Sudan, he was unable to continue his work as an artist, and decided to leave in order to be able to have the freedom to practice his art form. He won a “lottery” to go to the United States, but he refused to immigrate there because “anyone can shoot you in the street.” The United Nations Resettlement Program is what finally brought him to Canada.

In Ottawa, where he now resides, he is a member of the Broken English Theatre Company. He co-writes a weekly half-hour Sudanese show on a voluntary basis with Carleton University’s CKCU radio station, and is working on the production of an Arabic play to be staged in Hamilton. He also writes for a newspaper in Sudan, to which he posts weekly articles from Ottawa. As an author, Alhaadi has three published books to his credit and is working on a fourth, a novel in Arabic. Alhaadi’s wife (who was a professional actress in Sudan) and three children (ages ten, seven and six) reside with him in Ottawa. They are receiving welfare while the whole family goes to school: both Alhaadi and his wife take English classes daily and rotate shifts at home around housework and child rearing. Alhaadi has learned English mainly by reading books. He enjoys reading plays in the contemporary classic repertoire, such as those by Harold Pinter.

Pragati and Rajeev Gupta

Pragati and Rajeev immigrated from New Delhi, India, to Canada, where they joined their parents in Toronto just over two years ago. Although they were assisted by an immigration lawyer, the immigration process took three years to complete. Pragati is twenty years old and is in her second year studying electrical engineering at Ryerson University. Rajeev is eighteen years old and is in his first year at the University of

Toronto studying computer science. While in India, their education was conducted mainly in English. Thus their English is fairly good.

The Guptas initially had some difficulty in establishing themselves in Canada. It took two years for their father to find a job; although he had held a management position in India, in Canada he had to start at an entry-level position. Their mother, who owned and operated her own beauty salon in India, works in a beauty salon in Mississauga. While in university, both Pragati and Rajeev still manage to hold down part-time jobs. Pragati was a team leader at a summer camp and later a cashier at a movie theatre complex. Rajeev has been working part-time as a telemarketer. Since moving to Canada, the Guptas have moved from a basement apartment to a small condominium, and more recently to a house in Mississauga. Today three of the family members are interested in moving to the United States, where they believe there is more opportunity. Rajeev, however, would opt to stay in Canada.

Vasily

Vasily is in his mid-forties and a self-proclaimed jack-of-all-trades. He spent eleven years trying to leave the former Soviet Union and was finally successful in 1990. He arrived in Ottawa with \$470 to his name (the maximum amount Soviet officials would allow him to take out of the country) and landed a job within seven days of his arrival. He learned English by reading books and watching movies while in the Soviet Union. He is indebted to a friend of his who worked in the Soviet Union as a librarian in the “classified” section of the library and had access to materials and publications from the West that were not available to the general public but in which Vasily immersed himself.

Vasily was living with Yelena and her daughter and it was their shared dream to immigrate to Canada. Vasily arrived first, and in order to sponsor Yelena and her daughter, he had to prove that he would be able to support them. For the next three years, Vasily held down two full-time jobs, working sixteen hours a day, to make this possible.

While in the Soviet Union, Vasily began working on a film about borders. His aim was to travel the expanse of his country and document the experience of crossing borders. Aside

from not having adequate technical equipment at his disposal for filmmaking, the government put a stop to his artistic endeavours and he was no longer able to work on his artistic projects.

After five years in Canada, Vasily has worked in a number of businesses and organizations and already has a couple of independently produced films under his belt. His own initiative took him to Boston Massachusetts for a few months where he acquired additional professional training in filmmaking. Although he was unable to obtain a student visa, the organization offering the course decided to ignore his status and allowed him to attend “under the table.” He is now working at a nonprofit, artist-run centre in Ottawa that focuses on the production of independent film and video. Vasily is also working on completing his own documentary film.

Yelena

Yelena is in her mid-forties and has a young daughter. Like Vasily, she emigrated from the former Soviet Union but arrived three years after he did. They married three months after their arrival in Canada. Yelena is a trained professional theatre artist, specializing in acting and writing. Upon her arrival in Canada, she enrolled in an English as a second language course and through the instructor, Bernadette Hendrickx, discovered the Broken English Theatre Company. It was at that time Yelena resumed her theatre work, co-writing and acting in the Broken English Theatre Company’s inaugural production, entitled *Culture Shock*. Participating in the Canadian theatre scene at a local level was indeed culture shock for Yelena, who was used to working in theatres seating upwards of 1500 audience members; *Culture Shock* played to full houses of 130!

Although Yelena’s professional training is in theatre, she now focuses her energies and interest on film and the visual arts, and is working with her husband to develop film projects. She works at the same artist-run centre as Vasily.

The Broken English Theatre Company and Bernadette Hendrickx

The Broken English Theatre Company (BET) is a fairly young organization, established in Ottawa in 1995 as a professional multicultural arts organization that gives voice to the stories of new Canadians. BET's mandate is "to produce socially relevant, cross-cultural plays and to undertake theatre education projects that contribute to the development of cultural life in the Ottawa region and endeavour to provide employment opportunities for theatre professionals new to Canada" (<http://brokenenglishtheatre.com/BETishtm>). The bulk of their talent pool is drawn from new Canadians who were professional actors, directors, writers, musicians and designers in their countries of origin. BET artists hail from countries such as Mexico, Iran, Sudan, the Ukraine, Russia, Mozambique, Serbia and Montenegro, Venezuela, Germany, France and Poland. A number of these artists had reached "star" status in their homeland before arriving as unknowns in Canada. Other talent is drawn from Ottawa's local professional theatre community, and these artists are integrated with the new Canadian talent base to make up the full complement of personnel in any given BET production. Three permanent staff members (two full-time and one part-time) support the company's ongoing operations.

BET produces both original, new work as well as drawing from the international theatre repertoire. The new works it produces showcase and illustrate the stories of new Canadians and the challenges and issues surrounding their integration in Canada. Works drawn from the international repertoire highlight specific styles of performance and writing and afford audiences a new perspective on storytelling and performance. Additionally, BET performs workshops in local high schools and offers an annual drama camp (taught by artists from different countries) along with a writing competition open to new Canadians, sponsored by CBC Radio.

Since 1995 BET has staged over 100 performances at events, conferences, schools, community centres and theatres across the Ottawa region. While the company's writing competitions and its work with new Canadians and students have garnered media attention, considerable support for BET initiatives comes from local, provincial and

federal project grants as well as a wealth of community support through memberships, small business contributions and a significant volunteer base. BET's mandate and innovative approach afford it the distinction of being the only cultural outreach organization in Eastern Canada that consists mainly of new Canadian artists and which seeks to sensitize the community to newcomers' issues.

Bernadette Hendrickx is a founding member of BET and, from its inception until 2004, served as its Artistic Director. She was born in The Netherlands and after immigrating to Canada received her Bachelor of Arts with a specialization in Theatre from the University of Ottawa. She has been an actor, director, playwright and ESL instructor for a number of years. Married with three children, Bernadette was initially an administrative and artistic volunteer for BET while it gained momentum and support. Eventually she was able to draw a modest income from her role as Artistic Director with some staff support.

Summary of Interviews

A broad overview of the data and circumstances surrounding the informants arrival in Canada indicates three primary factors: (1) social-cultural (Alhaadi, Vasily and Yelena) (2) political (Zahra); and (3) economic (Pragati and Rajeev). As the interviews covered three of these significant areas, I have chosen to look at the relationship between the effect of economic, political and social-cultural influences on the informants with respect to their respective countries of origin. Although one pair of informants (Pragati and Rajeev) is not involved in the arts, it is interesting to examine their experience of immigrating and assimilating without the aid of participation in the arts, or volunteerism of any sort, as a buffer. For this reason, I have been able to make a correlation between their experiences and the role of the arts in a broader context.

The framework to analyze the data collected is a socio-political-economic storyboard, or grid in conjunction with a character-outline framework. The informants have one basic thing in common: they are all here. Their essential “stories” were first mapped out on a grid that identified what they have brought with them and what they have left behind, what they changed, and what is in flux. The Y axis of the grid includes the three positions or categories: Social-cultural, Political and Economic; the X axis identifies the informants’ countries of origin. The “Social-cultural” category becomes an examination of traditional and cultural values from the country of origin. “Political” in this context refers to the current and prevailing political atmosphere, including any religious circumstances. “Economic” refers to standard of living and status of future economic prosperity. Although many of the issues outlined below are more thoroughly reflected by a crossover between political, social, and economic factors, I have indicated the prevailing factor for ease of description.

Given the volume of material available for study and analysis, it is clear that the potential scope for such an examination far exceeds the limits of this paper. In seeking an approach to the material that would be both manageable and meaningful, I began to think about how theatre directors approach character analysis in a story, play, or performance piece.

When directors work with actors towards the development of a character in a story, they generally seek responses to five basic questions:

1. What is your objective? (What do I want?)
2. What is your motivation? (Why do I want it?)
3. What is your obstacle? (What stands in the way of achieving my objective?)
4. How are you going to get it? (Strategies and tactics for success)
5. What are the stakes? (What is at risk if I do not succeed in attaining my objective?)

In setting out to build the stories of the informants, I found that this set of questions was transferable to this field study analysis. Thus, I will be using my interpretation of the responses to the set of interview questions (attached) to construct a character outline framework from which to develop an individual story profile based on the individual's actions and motivations. These will then be analyzed in relation to the specific readings and lectures discussed in Module three of the McGill-McConnell Program, subsequent readings, and from information culled from the CBC video documentary on Broken English Theatre Company entitled "Broken English"(2000).

For the most part, the informants' stories are passionate and, in some cases, quite detailed. Within the context of this paper, it is impossible to represent the full spectrum and richness of their experience. The verbatim transcripts more fully provide a means of appreciating their respective stories and circumstances.

TABLE 1. Social-Political-Economic Storyboard Framework

	IRAN (Zahra)	INDIA (Pragati and Rajeev)	SOVIET UNION (Vasily and Yelena)	SUDAN (Alhaadi)
SOCIAL CULTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially neutral • Not her primary motivation for fleeing but there are some socio-political crossover issues • Socially never felt connected in Iran • Not concerned about preserving cultural heritage • Educated at American University in Iran, thus level of education is transferable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially neutral • Have been pre-westernized, as New Delhi has been more or less westernized • Feel rooted in their culture and do not fear losing traditional values; Canada also affords them the ability to connect to their roots via the Canadian cultural mosaic • Learned English in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially neutral • Was unable to continue artistic work with a sense of freedom of expression; • Desire to leave Soviet Union since early years; open to new traditions and experiences • Canada affords opportunity to explore artistic interests without fear of censorship • Learned English in Soviet Union via unauthorized access to cultural materials • “Freedom” is common thread of artistic work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trying to create a “Sudanese social institution” in Canada to replace the one destroyed in his country ▪ As a producer of cultural products, his work was censored ▪ Claims not to value his traditional culture but maintains connections to it via radio show and writings ▪ Learned some English by reading but must continue to take classes
POLITICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left due to her inability to live freely while promoting a feminist message as a teacher • Her politics are driven by culture • Finds freedom and safety in Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although corruption in gov’t. recognized in the data, this was not a motivating factor • Finds safety in Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left due to totalitarian government and inability to live freely and expressively; • Belief in art for art’s sake; belief that government should not support the arts as a political agenda will always be attached • View themselves as global citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government plays censorship role in arts and cultural products, making it impossible to work as an independent artist. ▪ Finds safety in Canada
ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not an articulated issue for this informant (an implied feeling that she was more economically advantaged at home) • Career and status of family members in flux 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left in search of better economic future, i.e., jobs • Discovery that newcomers start at bottom; not working at own level of competence; professional experience is not transferable • Ability to break into adequate job market unknown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a major factor for this couple; • Unclear as to what their dominant source of income is; they do not believe that it is important to make a living as artists but feel comfortable knowing that they are not restricted in the art they chose to create 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make a living at his profession ▪ Disadvantaged because Language skills prevent him from working in his profession in Canada ▪ Ability to function as artist in Canadian context in flux

TABLE 2. Character Outline Framework

	ZAHRA	PRAGATI/RAJEEV	VASILY/YELENA	ALHAADI
What did they want?	Escape oppression/repression	Ensure a better future	Freedom	Escape repression
What was their motivation?	Freedom to voice opinion & safety	Affluence and prosperity	Freedom of expression	Freedom of expression & ability to earn a living
What were the obstacle(s)?	Political & cultural situation in homeland	Economic situation in homeland	Political situation and artistic stagnation in homeland	Political, cultural (religious) situation in homeland
What was their strategy?	Refugee status	Emigrate	Emigrate	Refugee status
What were the stakes?	Life or death	Status	Quality of Life	Quality of life
Olive Tree Status	Olive tree is dead	Olive tree alive but is a hybrid	Olive tree is of little value	Olive tree is transplanted
Lexus Status	Livelihood jeopardized by government of Iran No longer teaches; now works in retail Pro-assimilation because she has no other choice	Still studies but sustenance affected by economy of India; improved with better standard of living infrastructure Pro-assimilation because India is not playing with the “Herd” fast enough	Not overly concerned about acquiring higher standard of living or “making it” as artists in Canada. Access to cultural products and ideas is paramount Pro-assimilation as they view themselves as global citizens and their work as having no borders	Livelihood jeopardized by government of Sudan Professional artist now living on welfare, but still writes and produces Sudanese cultural products Pro-assimilation while maintaining a link to his unique community

Overview of Reference Material

Thomas Friedman details his vision of globalization in his book, *The Lexus and the olive tree* (2000), in which he paints globalization as inevitable: its outcomes will ultimately be positive, and only those who do not subscribe to its conditions will lose out. In his view, the metaphor of the Lexus (democratization, Americanization, and technological progress) wins out against the Olive Tree (traditional roots and unique cultural differences).

Naomi Klein's vision of globalization, on the other hand, is largely negative: she argues that because of the transnational reach of today's free-market capitalism, there is little corporately-un-branded public space left (both tangible and metaphorical) in any society; at the same time there has been an increase in corporations' power to marginalize or suppress criticism of unethical (often government-enabled) labour practices. Klein's *No logo* (2000) is rich in descriptions of the political, socio-economic and cultural implications of a branded culture. What applies most directly to this paper is her theory that the global uniformization of taste and consumer options sets new local standards, which negate or obliterate peoples' and communities' stories – not only their histories, but the discourse in terms of which their personal and social awareness is framed. “Brands” such as Nike or The Gap, Coca-Cola or Starbucks, promote not merely products but standards that, when linked to the notion of the American Dream, wield tremendous power. These products are not being promoted and sold as is; they are being billed globally as a lifestyle. As a result, Klein suggests, the traditional means of achieving change – especially political change – are no longer working (Klein 2000, 29–30).

However, there is one point where Klein's and Friedman's models meet: this is in the notion of the “backlash” against globalization, which Friedman describes as a function of three motivating factors: economic, political, and cultural (Friedman 2000, 329). These are the same three factors that I have used as a framework to map the informants' stories and patterns. Many aspects of Friedman's model of globalization directly link to the informants' experiences. Those which I have identified as most useful to the experiences of the informants' stories are identified by Friedman's chapter titles: “Lexus and Olive

Tree” (ch. 3); “And the Walls Came Tumbling Down” (ch. 4); “The Backlash” (ch. 15); and “The Groundswell” (ch. 16). His chapter entitled “The Lexus and the Olive Tree” presents the information most directly relevant to the stories of these particular informants.

Klein also discusses a variety of forms of “backlashing” in *No logo* in the chapters titled “Culture jamming” (ch. 12); “Reclaiming the streets” (ch. 13); “Bad moon rising” (ch.14); “Brand boomerang” (ch. 15); and “Local foreign policy” (ch. 16). The overarching theme discussed in these chapters relates to the activist-based resistance individuals and organizations established to expose and combat corporate and governmental abuses of power. The examples cited run the gamut from guerrilla artists’ use of graffiti to deface billboards to more directed artistic expressions of subterfuge emerging from the disciplines of both visual and performing arts to global street party demonstrations.

In his McGill-McConnell Module 3 lecture (2000), Travis Kroeker spoke about “Diaspora Ethics,” where cultural diversity as a value is a crucial factor. As culture is something that is in constant evolution, tradition becomes difficult to define. Kroeker suggests that Diaspora Ethics provides a “paradigm of trans-national identity formation that focuses on particular communities” and the prophet Jeremiah’s advice to the Diaspora Jews vividly illustrates the concept: “*seek a life and make a home in Babylon and seek well-being where you are*” (Jeremiah 29:4–7). This statement has implications for certain values relating to globalization. It suggests that although you can’t bring material things with you into a foreign land, you may still bring your identity and principles, which are “portable.” It suggests that the Western notion of identity is based on meaningless, inconsequential “trinkets” rather than broader principles, philosophies and moral orientation. Diaspora Ethics are rooted in an acceptance of the value of plurality and diversity and point to acceptance of a diverse range of perspectives, the learning of local “languages” and social systems in order to communicate towards a shared good where no one is of more value than the other. Echoing Klein’s argument about the global eradication of local, culturally based practices in the growing trend towards standardization and westernization, Kroeker’s discourse can be understood as an appeal for the protection of singular cultures – a serious moral issue.

Political and cultural theorist Mark Kingwell's *The world we want* (2000) outlines his philosophical beliefs about the meaning and the responsibility of citizenship, and our collective responsibilities in creating a just and meaningful global existence. His style is dynamic, with a refreshingly off-the-cuff tone, and is infused with historical, contemporary, and mythological illustrations that range in subject from philosophy and religion to the performing arts. Kingwell reminds us that our future is one that is collectively created; he cautions that we have become so cynical as a society and accustomed to a state of self-absorption that, for the most part, we have fallen asleep at the wheel. Kingwell challenges us to address the injustice concerning the overabundance of wealth many nations enjoy in the "high speed first world" (Kingwell 2000, 172) as opposed to the nations that have few resources. He warns that "it's always too early to give up on the future of our dreams. The times could not be riper for a playful but serious utopianism, an open-minded but political consciousness and an imaginative but hard-headed idea of civic participation. How else can we hope to fashion the world we want?" (222). He feels that "Politically, we cannot begin elsewhere than with the surfeited social-cultural environment that already shapes us – and try to make it better"(172).

In many ways, Kingwell's views fall somewhere between the positions of Friedman and Klein. Although he is supportive of a globalized society and community, he cautions us about our collective complacency and lack of vision, and the repercussions of our excessively materialistic and unjust mindset; he laments the loss of critical thinking to the alluring comforts of passive consumption.

Annette Simmons' *The story factor* (2000) focuses on the ancient tradition of storytelling as a powerful tool and skill that can and should be used to influence and ignite change. Connecting to the personal using methods that motivate, inspire and persuade through stories can be transformative for both the teller and the audience. Although the material is geared toward coaching methods, it cites numerous examples of the use of storytelling to advance personal and professional goals and objectives. Artists working in the disciplines of theatre and film rely primarily on the power of storytelling to convey their message to an audience. Simmons' work breaks down the process into its individual elements and examines the value of each in relation to the overall effectiveness of the whole. Most appropriate to this paper are Simmons' observations on the nature of storytelling, how it allows one to leverage truth and experience to influence others and how this relates to our

collective sense of interdependence (Simmons 2001, 188). In today's world, alienation has tended to replace community; disconnection from others, rather than the value of connection, is thus the norm. This idea is especially interesting in the light of the immigrant's agenda, which is very much concerned with establishing connections through individual and collective experiences. And indeed a concrete example of this is the common agenda of the immigrants and refugees who participate in the Broken English Theatre Company, and whose stories resonate with a passion to find common ground and understanding.

The Stories

Zahra

Zahra was a teacher in Iran. Her opinions and activism in the feminist arena led to the loss of her job and economic independence, to torture and, finally, to imprisonment. Her family also suffered the consequences of her activities; her son was not allowed to enter a school for gifted students for which he was eligible. She claims, however, that she did not fight against the government; in fact, she felt that the current situation in Iran was manageable and that it would just take some time and effort to “massage” the Islamic fundamentalist belief system – as she was trying to do from the ground up. Referring to the current government of Iran, she revealed her situation as follows:

Whatever fault we see with it, we as the people are responsible to try and refine it . . . to polish it . . . to push it toward what is good . . . so I never believed in fighting against them. I always believed you had to walk with them and try to push them towards the right direction instead of standing against them. In my classes I never encouraged my students to stand against all of these discriminations. . . . I always had these discussions . . . that whatever change we are looking for, we are looking for them for our children or grandchildren. Not for ourselves. So the first thing that we have to do and our first duty as the citizens of this country is to treat our sons and train our sons in a way that they back their sisters and their wives in the future fight. No fight now. But they put me in prison for this. They tortured me for this. Taken my most basic rights, my social rights, from me.

As a result of the oppression she faced, Zahra fled Iran, leaving her family behind, and claimed refugee status in Canada, which she describes as a “haven for women.” In conversation, Zahra truly comes across as an “international woman.” She describes herself as “not a typical immigrant” and feels she “was never a typical Iranian woman.” Her family discouraged her from going against the grain in Iran and wanted her to “behave.” However, Zahra’s personality and strength of character prevailed:

[I] always told them that I . . . feel like I am a piece of a puzzle which you are trying to fit in the wrong setting . . . no matter how hard you push, it will not go. This is not my puzzle. I am a piece from another puzzle. So I won’t fit. Don’t ask me to try because I won’t fit. But here, I really feel like I fit.

There is “nothing” that she misses about her home country as she was “really hurt there and didn’t deserve what they did” to her for promoting a feminist message as a teacher and a citizen.

The current Iranian government and cultural system is such that Zahra is unable to be her own person. She spent much of her time organizing programs, which would improve and assist the plight of women in her country. She was instrumental in seeking out women who were illiterate to attend literacy classes and skills-based training so that they could become economically independent. However, the government put a stop to her group’s activities. “They don’t want women to be educated . . . there are hundreds of these readings of the Koran classes for women. But no classes to teach them how to type.” Zahra’s view of the world is partly a product of the conditions reigning during the tenure of the Shah of Iran when westernization at the cost of the Iranian “olive tree” was the objective. However, since the fall of the Shah in 1979, Iran has reverted back to its strict, Islamic religious and cultural politics. Although Zahra believes that the situation in Iran has a chance at improving, especially for the status of women, she was unable to continue to live there under the existing conditions. In her view,

The Shah went too far . . . didn’t look whether society is ready for this westernization. At that time you would walk in the streets of the capital, in Tehran, you would say you were walking in the streets of London. The mini-est of skirts, the nicest cars, everybody in couples, no matter how old they are . . . Well, this country was a Muslim country and it was in the Middle East . . . there was no similarity between the way you see how people looked in Iran . . . in Tehran, and in the rest of the Islamic world . . . I mean . . . even in Egypt, in Syria, you would see women with scarves but in Iran, never . . . The Shah was pushing this. And this was only in the capital. You drove one hour to outside capital to one of the smaller cities and everything changes . . . The majority of the people didn’t like what the Shah had made in the capital and the capital became bigger and bigger. You know, there was like contradictory conditions in there that people needed to go to the capital because capital was like Toronto – it was where all the business was, it was where all the jobs were and at the time, when they moved to the capital, they had their families with them and their wife would never talk to a man before then. Now in capital they walked in the streets, they see women half-naked . . . so these tensions and these contradictions just pushed, like thesis and antithesis. I mean, they cannot exist this way. So that is what actually caused the revolution.

After the fall of the Shah, the socio-political situation reverted back to the oppressive and repressive pre-Shah conditions. Iran had attempted a move towards liberalization, at least in Tehran, but a serious backlash resulted in the revolution. Zahra's comment – "this was a Muslim country in the Middle East" – suggests that there are some cultural elements that cannot be made to change, and that it would be inconceivable that any attempt to cave in to globalization at that level would be successful. There was no attempt to establish a balance for those, like Zahra, who were caught in the middle. Thus leaving was her only option. She feels no need to protect Iranian culture, about which she takes a rather Social Darwinist viewpoint:

If something is to stay, it has the strength to stay and it applies to the changes of the time, it will stay. If you cannot adapt to the survival of the fittest, culture is the same . . . humanity is bound to go forward, science-wise, technology-wise, whatever. You have to go forward. There is no way out. Human being has to go as far as it can go. You . . . either go with it or you will be vanished. The elements that are the heartiest will survive.

My analysis of Zahra's situation in relation to the readings and lecture is that she is not opposed to globalization. In fact she is pro-globalization as it relates to acceptance of new ideas and philosophies, but only if it occurs at a pace that the social system can sustain. In her homeland, the tensions between "Lexus" versus "Olive Tree" were too great and she was unable to reconcile the lifestyle demanded by the current government and cultural system. The structural economic problems in Iran are a result of an overwhelming public enterprise system in which everything is owned and controlled by government and there is little or no foreign or private investment. This reflects a style of government control and corruption which Friedman (2000, 146) calls "kleptocracy."

As Zahra has no attachment to her homeland, apart from missing her family, I classify her therefore as one for whom the Olive Tree is dead. Unfortunately, she is still unable to continue her profession as a teacher but finds that the freedom to be her own person is worth the sacrifice of living away from her family. She is open to the diversity of the world and desires to know, understand, and value other cultures and traditions while maintaining her own set of principles. When she first arrived in Ottawa, Canada, she spent full days, weeks, travelling on the local bus system – not to tour the area, but to "talk to people, get to know them" because she was interested in new perspectives and ideas. She is aligned with the beliefs and theories of Arthur C. Clarke who, for her,

presents an ideal vision of a culturally diverse world unfettered by political and social borders. For Zahra as for Clarke, the idea of a country isn't as important as the notion that we are all citizens of the world.

Zahra's views, in some ways, are in line with those expressed in Naomi Klein's *No logo*. Zahra is a first-hand example of Klein's suggestion that the traditional means of achieving change – political and social action at the grassroots level – are no longer working. Additionally, she was caught between Friedman's notions of “backlash” and “groundswell” or “backlash against the backlash” (2000, 348). During the reign of the Shah, there was a significant movement toward the homogenization of economics and cultural politics. For Zahra this presented certain opportunities, but also the realization that her society and culture were not prepared for such drastic change. This proved true with the fall of the Shah and the reinstatement of strict Muslim rule. Today's Iran is not part of the “electronic herd” which Friedman (2000, 209) describes as the democratization of finance, technology and information. Rather, it functions as a totalitarian state that allows for certain types of thinking as long as its public remains helpless. Iran is a country that has elected to avoid participation at the “herd” level in favour of forwarding its own, isolated political agenda, which for many people contributes to sustaining an oppressive regime. With the government maintaining its strict control over the economy, limiting foreign participation or investment and avoiding the free-market economy model, this is achieved.

In speaking about the role of the voluntary sector in Iran, Zahra pointedly claims “there is not voluntary work,” as it is corrupted by political intervention. However, she went on to explain that

You do volunteer for a job only when you have a political point of view and that's the only way you can apply your political point of view. . . . [T]here are some religious organizations that these women, mainly wives of parliament members, they work their charity . . . they collect money from the richer people and they make this big fuss out of it and they film it and they distribute it among the poor people . . . very, *very* degrading.”

Zahra went on to state that government shuts down any voluntary activities it deems inappropriate, such as the activities she was involved with in furthering the status of women. Zahra's vision is more in keeping with Friedman's Groundswell notion, where

one would be able to use the system, use progress, on one's own terms and the society as a whole should be allowed to decide.

Klein (2000, 123) suggests that, as the traditional means of achieving political change are no longer working, the unfortunate uniformization of taste becomes the new global standard. Although Zahra subscribes to the idea that all tastes and philosophies should be accepted and engaged, she is open to the notion that "progress" is at the very heart of being human and those cultures or cultural elements that cannot move forward are not to be mourned. Through her participation with BET, she is trying to grow personally by taking advantage of the multi-ethnic, globalized culture that Canada provides. Further, she believes that any philosophical, religious, moral or cultural value that is strong enough will survive. In fact, in many ways, Zahra is rejecting her cultural heritage and seeking a new paradigm. In this way, she is more aligned with the notion of Diaspora Ethics in that it is not the tangible manifestations of culture that are important but rather the intangible, core personal values which can be transferred.

Pragati and Rajeev

Pragati and Rajeev Gupta are young adults who grew up in a middle-class household in New Delhi and who have learned English at young ages through their schooling. The family immigrated to Canada a few years ago in search of a "better future."

From their perspective, New Delhi was pretty much westernized in terms of the services and consumer products available; but the family were not avid consumers of non-Indian products, most of which were far too expensive for them to afford. The family had a television, connected to a trade cable system on which Western programs such as "Ally McBeal" and "The Bold and the Beautiful" were broadcast; however, Pragati and Rajeev claim never to have watched these programs, as they were too young. They are very connected to their culture and feel that there is no danger in assimilation as their cultural roots are very strong. They were in fact surprised to discover that the Indian population in Mississauga was so large and extensive. "It's totally Indian there," says Rajeev. Pragati is confident in her statement that "we can't be swayed by a different culture . . . when I

came here I was nineteen and I was completely rooted in my culture, my language, so for me, I wouldn't be changed now."

Throughout our interviews, it became very clear that Pragati and Rajeev were in Canada chiefly to improve their economic status. They are seeking a good education that would enable them to attain excellent job prospects. Essentially, the Guptas are in search of the American Dream (even to the point where the family would consider moving to the United States). They were assured by their professional immigration consultants that the whole family would have no difficulty finding suitable employment upon entering Canada. However, their parents have had to accept work below their expectations. Even Pragati and Rajeev have had difficulty finding jobs. They sought help from a voluntary organization in Toronto that offered services, such as résumé writing assistance, to immigrants. However, they soon became disappointed with the service as it did not do enough to actually find them what they felt was appropriate, well-paid work.

In discussing the economic and political differences between Canada and India, Pragati and Rajeev feel that Canada is generally "better" overall but "economically Canada is not that good . . . there are not any jobs . . . like everyday we hear that so many jobs are going down and like many of them are going bankrupt."

They are more comfortable with the political system in Canada than they were with politics in India. Rajeev says, "In India . . . politics is corrupted. That's why India is going down. . . . If the leaders were good there, India would have been good too but . . . like they mostly take money for themselves. They rule for, like, five years and they take all the money, whatever they can get." Pragati adds, "I think money is the language they understand."

Their experience with the voluntary sector in India was non-existent. Our attempts to discuss the enormous gap between the wealthy and the poor in their home country left them at a loss as to how to express their understanding, apart from acknowledging that whenever they did come into contact with the poor, "it was kind of depressing." Nor did the voluntary sector in India factor into their own lives; efforts to discuss it did not produce an active response. However, Pragati did acknowledge that she would like to

engage in working with people who are poor and mentally disabled, now that she is in Canada, but that she is far too busy with school and work at the present time.

It is my sense that as Pragati and Rajeev are much younger than the other informants, they have not as yet developed a significant sense of a moral agenda and thus appeared to be uncomfortable discussing issues relating to the disparity between the wealthy and poor in India and their understanding of their home country's voluntary system. An unanticipated outcome of immigration for the Guptas may also have been that when they decided to adopt the American model, they sacrificed their class position in India. This would be a cost of globalization for them. Alternatively, their seeming indifference may be culturally based in that the caste system in India may be a factor in determining their attitudes toward what Westerners view as an unacceptable disparity.

Pragati and Rajeev come from a country that is one of the largest in the world; yet, because of its economic problems, it is still considered part of the Third World. Friedman (2000, 38) indicates that India is desperate for foreign investment and is looking for respect from the international community. However, rampant governmental corruption makes it difficult for India to achieve the status it desires. Like Iran, it can be viewed, in Friedman's terms, as a "kleptocracy." However, India appears, in many ways, to be resisting cultural homogenization but desires the status globalization can bring. For Pragati and Rajeev, their home country cannot bring on globalization fast enough. Although they are aware of the infiltration of American products and services in their home country, they are not concerned that there is any danger to their existing culture. They are well acquainted with the name brands that Naomi Klein discusses, but they did not express any opposition to these brands' presence in New Delhi; rather they see it as a natural facet of globalization. They wish only that they could have afforded to "purchase" America through the products that have been slathered on their cultural landscape. Now that they live in North America, their purchasing power is greater, and the major brands are of course readily available. They are not willing to wait in the wings for the chance for an economically affluent future in their homeland. They will not accept working for international corporations that use cheap but "educated" (i.e., English-speaking) Indian labour to churn out products for the international market. Clearly they have little enthusiasm for Friedman's model of digitized, networked systems that allow production work to be performed in remote locations, while transnational corporations take

advantage of cheaper labour outside the country housing their corporate headquarters (Friedman 2000, 44). In this sense, Pragati and Rajeev are here because their home country has not been able to homogenize and globalize fast enough to meet their economic requirements.

From what I can assume from our conversation, their sense of the relevance of the arts in their lives is connected to the Western world's entertainment industry – that being Hollywood films and American television. They are not participants in the arts, nor are they consumers of artistic products apart from the commercial variety. In focusing so predominantly on gaining a better economic future, they have sacrificed even their own sense of identity by not being particularly active in the social life and cultural traditions of their homeland that are readily available in their new environment. Although they have found it difficult to make connections, they have not endeavoured to seek out those individuals and organizations within the Canadian arts and cultural industries that could act as conduits for linkages, thus facilitating their integration into the broader community. In our interview session, they also appeared to give the impression that their personal stories, feelings and experiences are not important factors while trying to steer their lives towards their goal of economic stability.

Alhaadi

Alhaadi and his wife were professional artists in Sudan. He was a well-known, respected writer, actor, director and manager of a cultural centre. Some of the cultural projects he worked on in Sudan were initially government supported. There came a time, however, when the government stopped payment for previously contracted work. This appears to be the catalyst that caused Alhaadi and his family to seek refugee status. Alhaadi describes the baleful influence of the government of Sudan in suppressing the voices of Sudanese artists:

I could not keep on my career because I met many difficulties with ways to stop my works in acting and directing because of political trouble. The government of Sudan is so dogma[ti]c against arts – writing, poetry, all the arts. . . . Then the damage continued . . . in Sudan, there is no way for us, no freedom to express yourself, express your ideas to discuss all artists always against that . . . because of the dogma religion . . . one point, one idea.

He has not held any job except as an artist, which makes it very difficult for him to work in Canada. Although he speaks English, he is not yet proficient enough to work professionally in the arts and cultural sector. Alhaadi recognizes that he must upgrade his language skills and continue to seek professional development opportunities. In the meantime, he and his family must rely on Social Assistance.

Through the Broken English Theatre Company, Alhaadi has been able to plug into the artistic community by volunteering to work on productions that tell the stories of new Canadians. In March 2001 he performed at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa as part of BET's contribution to the World Theatre Day program. He has also found an outlet for his work with CKCU Radio at Carleton University, where he co-writes and produces a weekly half-hour Sudanese show. He maintains a direct link to Sudan where he regularly sends written copy for publication in a Sudanese newspaper. Although he has managed the beginnings of suitable artistic outlets, he has not been as successful in establishing connections with other Sudanese immigrants.

It is so difficult. Yesterday we had a meeting about the Sudanese community and many troubles related to that about divided ideas of political Sudanese people deal with political matter with rough and they not accept each other. If you are from south, if you are from . . . I say to them, "Is there any way to be Sudanese?" This is one of our problems as a community. People came here to Canada with a political reference and want to deal with this reference in a different country. I think Canada is a multicultural country and we have to make it a benefit for us . . . multicultural is a way of unity, not of divided. But it is so difficult to find a good community. . . . I notice that I have many friends from Iraq and they have the same problem. They divide themselves . . . I try to make a new Canadian friend or another country because I think it is good for me to know different type of character, get to know different stories.

What is interesting about Alhaadi's viewpoint is that although he is pro-assimilation in many respects – he is unconcerned about his children maintaining cultural and linguistic links to their homeland – he himself is clinging to his own cultural background - the culture of the "olive tree" – by continuing to pursue creative expression through the Sudanese community in Canada and Sudan. At the same time he chastises his fellow Sudanese for attempting to transfer what they find most important about their "olive tree" to the Canadian experience.

It is interesting to note that originally Alhaadi won a lottery to go to the United States, but decided against the move, feeling that Canada was a more suitable, safer place for his family: “America is not safety, many troubles . . . Anyone can shoot you in the street but in Canada...” He describes his Canadian experience warmly: “people deal with you with warm greeting . . . you feel that anybody here has a good contact with you, he can help you . . . ” He sees Canada as “a land for all . . . a world village . . . not for the English or French or Arab . . . [but] for human beings . . . here you can feel that it is yours.” His only real difficulty is reconciling the fact that despite his twenty years’ work experience he still cannot make a living from his profession in his new homeland.

For Alhaadi, the arts function as an opportunity to recreate home in his new country. Like Zahra in Iran, Alhaadi had lived in Sudan without being able to plug into the “electronic herd.” Alhaadi is an experienced cultural producer trying to find a market here in Canada through BET and other sources. He volunteers his time to furthering his creative voice and energies in his own language and sharing it on stages and radio stations. He hopes that eventually all ideas will shed their cultural boundaries and find a place in his new homeland. Like Zahra, his understanding of the world also ends to exemplify the key concept of Diaspora Ethics. He is open to receiving ideas from all over, and is not overly concerned with the tangible elements of his native culture; he is more attached to the ideas and philosophies he articulates through his artistic medium. This would appear to be his personal concept of globalization.

Vasily and Yelena

Vasily and Yelena are both currently working on film and video projects through a grassroots artists co-op organization in Ottawa that facilitates the work of independent artists. Since the age of sixteen, Vasily had dreamed of leaving the Soviet Union for the West, with personal freedom and artistic expression being the motivating factors:

My story is really complicated because I was one of the bad guys . . . so I get in trouble with the State and they also give me a hassle . . . I wasn’t able to make a career, there was no way . . . so I had no choice I guess. There was no life here, no breeze. But all my life since I guess I can remember myself I was interested in the film as a form of art. And despite living in a totalitarian state I was kind of open to the different art influences . . . Generally I left my country to make, to work independently. I had big projects in Russia

which I never actually completed. I filmed a lot but I wasn't able to work on anything or compile anything or make a kind of finished film. I can make it in the basement and nobody sees it. It was the only way.

Limitations on his expression through filmmaking were a constant obstacle in the Soviet Union, where he found it impossible to pursue any kind of valuable artistic work. Although the signature message or theme in his work is freedom, Vasily says:

The general thing is . . . it's not local. It is more than local because what art is, it's the expression of the human being . . . You can do beautiful building or write a book and it will express not only your own feelings about things but also your time and the value of the society you live in. and it will probably stay forever . . . I never see myself as part of a social structure. The most thing in my life I was involved in was personal feelings, desire . . . I know I am on the right path because what I am actually doing it not belong to Russia or Canada. Rather it belongs to human beings.

Vasily describes the incident that was the last straw – the defining moment when he knew he must leave his country in pursuit of his artistic vision:

The project was to film along like a few parts of a documentary about the border as a symbol of Soviet life. The border as a fence. Compared to the other social things, you know? And for this purpose I was planning to travel around, and it was completely illegal. Like no way! Even to film something in Russia you need to get permission from the state. Even if you go in the street with a little camera you need to have some permission when you film something . . . I was planning to break through and do this, but knowing I would never finish it there . . . so the only way was to compile the work and get it out of the country, and finish it in the West . . . It was preparation of almost three years for this and I wasn't able to travel after . . . It was a curious reason for this. Because at one night, the State changed the gas price, in one night, for no reason. In one night an increase of three hundred percent. So all calculations or whatever went out of budget. I did a small part of the shooting and I still have it but it wasn't the whole idea.

Arriving in Canada, he made connections fairly easily, got a job and sought advanced training that would allow him to make a short, professional-quality film to serve as an audition piece or promotion for his work. For a time, filmmaking had to take second place while he worked two separate jobs in order to sponsor the arrival in Canada of Yelena and her daughter from the Soviet Union. Now that they are both here, Vasily and Yelena are working together to develop independent film projects.

Yelena worked full-time as an actor in the Soviet Union. The major culture shock she experienced upon her arrival was the scale upon which the performing arts function in Canada, compared to the former Soviet Union. Her first experience with a theatre production in Canada illustrates the shock she felt when confronted with the size of our stages and with the level of interest in artistic education:

I was actually surprised because it is so small, Arts Court, a small place you know? It is like 100, very small for me, and I worked in Moscow and it was like 2000. . . . The way of thinking about art here in Canada, when you go to the University of Ottawa, nobody in art because of money. Very few people take the education. In my home like it was 100 persons to get one place. There was such competition to get into the schools . . . here it is different. There is the same competition to get into high-tech.

Both Vasily and Yelena value the freedom they now enjoy to create and produce their projects in Canada. Although they have been fortunate enough to obtain project grants from the federal government through the Canada Council for the Arts (Vasily recently received funding to make a short film), they are not convinced that government or charitable organizations have any place in support of the arts, as there are too many strings attached. “I don’t think it is important that the state supports the arts,” says Vasily, “because from my experience in most cases it was damaging, it was damaging for the art . . . but rather by understanding this it has really made me more stronger believer in the duality or the uniqueness, individuality or about the individual voice.” They see Canada as an “untouched field” in most cases because we have very few established institutions for particular styles of artistic work, unlike Russia, France or Germany, where there are long-established official academies, traditions and techniques that have been developed to create a particular national culture. This untouched field is what makes Canada so attractive. As Vasily says, “If you have a lot of energy and ideas you can work out real fast generally. Like me. I was able to do my work just like as myself.” The couple also believe that artists should be able to make a living by selling their product to interested individuals. Both suggested that if artistic work is not supported by the public, the work is either inferior or too innovative and thus is not understood. They believe the true process of arts funding in Canada is similar to that of the former Soviet Union – an insider culture, where government will support an arts project if the work falls within the interests of the political agenda. Although they recognize that in Canada the arts funding establishment is much more open to ideas that challenge, they are not convinced that

support from government or corporate sponsorship is compatible with the free creation of artistic products. Vasily explains: “ I know at first it is ideal and it is utopia but generally I know that things change when you go after it. It changes people around you and changes situations. . . . I think the funding part is unimportant. It also gives you more freedom if you have no string attached.”

When asked what they would change in Canada, Vasily and Yelena commented on the lack of value Canadian society placed on arts and arts education. Vasily said that he would “support a culture of education to put more money into the schools for kids to learn about art, to think, to learn how to do things, how to create things. . . . As soon as they realize the beauty of creation it will change his life completely. Never will he become a drunkard or a drug abuser, because as soon as a person becomes creative it changes his life.”

Yelena was one of the co-writers and actors in *Culture Shock*, the 1995 inaugural production of the Broken English Theatre Company. *Culture Shock* incorporated dance and music, and featured a cast of new Canadians and their own stories of moving to Canada. It was a collective creation by a large group of professional artists who were longing to work in the arts and have their stories told. In reminiscing about the show, Yelena described how the process worked from her perspective:

I was working, more absorbing, and trying to get the language from very different sides. Because for actors it is very important to express, to say . . . it is not pronunciation. Pronunciation doesn't matter actually, but to express exactly it was very, very hard. . . . When I see people, when they did their stories, I thought about globally about our world, about people and this movement around the world and what people were trying to find. This and about cultural differences . . . life difficulties as well . . . it is not just showing culture. It is everything brought together. And because of that, it is like connecting all the people and try to find the way to them, to communicate and sometimes it was very hard . . . because of just a different kind of thinking. . . . It was also the desire of everyone to do something new and good. Kind of perspective view and I would say a natural way of communication between people.

What came through in our discussion was the passion that each immigrant (or storyteller) had about their experience, and how important it was for them to be heard and validated. Yelena described how she used basic story telling techniques to find a common ground, ensuring that the final product was not only a tapestry of the individual's experience but

also had enough conflict, drama, romance, characterization, and “food” (as a symbol of culture and sharing). The individual stories came from the performers themselves, with Yelena creating the “throughline” connections. The process took over a year and a half; but the *Culture Shock* production played to sold-out houses.

A few years later, Yelena is now working with her husband on various artistic projects. She feels comfortable in her environment, though she is not involved in theatre or acting. Vasily has begun to gain recognition in the arts community; but he still feels a sense of disconnection, since he believes that what he wants to do artistically will never be accepted by the mainstream and will never pay the bills. His work, he says, will “maybe be appreciated by a small number of people but in general streams, whatever it is, the individuality, uniqueness, it is not supported. It is supported as long as you follow the rules and I found that really quickly when I came to Canada.” It is this lack of vision and individuality that he was so vehemently opposed to in Russia; to some degree he is disappointed to be facing the same problem in his new country:

This is what I was running from, and I found in Canada the very same, or very familiar situation as in the USSR. Differently, but still restricted. But I would not say, *if I don't write I will die*. No, I will go and work. It will just take longer for me to do something. . . . Besides, I am working for the arts organization, which is really good because it is better, you are surrounded by people who are doing something the process of which is creative.

Vasily and Yelena do not appear to be overly influenced by the notion of either the Lexus or the Olive Tree but their primary motivation has been to escape their totalitarian environment – culturally, another instance of Friedman’s “kleptocracy.” My sense is that, for them, the notion of “The Lexus” is appealing only insofar as it has opened the door onto the “electronic herd,” which is critical to their to their work of producing films as an art form ensuring their dissemination in a technologically advanced environment.

Although Vasily and Yelena reside in Canada, they view themselves as global citizens and consider their work to be borderless. They do not identify themselves as “Canadian” artists, let alone local ones. Their vision for the world may be more aligned with Mark Kingwell’s views whereby one’s responsibility to society rests in creating a just and meaningful global existence – one that is drawn from a sense of open-mindedness and

creative imagination but one which does not shield itself from, but rather explores, the tough questions in a broader context (Kingwell 2000, 5). Clearly Vasily has not found the utopia he was hoping for. But he has come closer to his ideal of being able to work as part of an artistic community, with access to the tools and technologies of his art, and greater freedom of movement and expression.

Broken English: The Documentary

The 2000 CBC Newsworld documentary on the Broken English Theatre Company, entitled *Broken English*, portrayed a company of New Canadian actors desperate to communicate their stories and to connect to the new world in which they found themselves living. None of them were financing their lives by working in the arts; instead they were bicycle repairmen, cooks, cleaners, music teachers, and so on. What came across most strongly, from a viewer's perspective, was their need to be seen, heard, recognized and validated as individuals within a new system.

The video chronicled the origins of BET and their production of the play *Culture Shock*, about the immigrant and refugee experience. The video defines culture shock as what immigrants experience as they adapt to their new country and culture: "It reveals the shock of arrival in a new country; of dreams of freedom and new opportunity; of confronting the reality of building a new life and of belonging...The documentary also revisits the troupe one year later to see what has happened to them." Dimitri, the director of the production, left Sarajevo because of his pacifist beliefs. For him, the notion of culture shock came into play at home in Sarajevo, when he found himself "being required to kill another human being." This was not an option; so he and his wife "ran away." He went on to describe how desperate they were for money – how, when they were without food and he had decided to sell his violin for 1,000 Deutsche Marks, his wife resolutely refused to allow it to be sold. Today he makes his living by teaching violin lessons privately. In speaking about the play, he said, "Of course, like every artist, I hoped I'd have the opportunity to work in theatre again. And of course when that opportunity came, I was so happy. I started to live again."

One of the video's most powerful and moving moments involves actor Jafar Vali, a highly respected director and actor from Iran, whose monologue as a character in the play *Culture Shock* went as follows:

Hello, hello, do you hear me? Please answer me. Please! I am crying. Shame on yourself! You are alive. This is a new country, new world. Everything is beautiful. Everybody always are waiting [sic] for something. The letter is always a symbol of anything.

Everything. I'm waiting always for a letter because I want to connect to other people." I shave my face. I put on my best dress and I am going to open the mailbox. It is always empty. Always. Am I being forgotten? Is anyone anywhere waiting for me? Hello out there. I smile. A mask. This is better.

This need to connect, to share, to belong is central to the immigrant and refugee experience, something that is often taken for granted by non-immigrants. The isolation and alienation of their experience comes across loud and clear. One character explains that "in this country you feel like you may be forgotten. . . . When I found this group, I found myself again." Such is the power of storytelling.

According to Simmons (2001, 31),

A story is a narrative account of an event or events – true or fictional. The difference between giving an example and telling a story is the addition of emotional content and added sensory details in the telling. A story weaves detail, character, and events into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts . . . Picasso's painting *Guernica* is a story . . . a persuasive story is any narrative account from your own experience, your imagination, a literary source, or oral tradition ...

Listening is an important factor in storytelling and Simmons also links the storyteller with his or her audience (187):

To listen is to support the speaker in connecting to his or her own wisdom and creative intelligence so he or she can play with new responses, new thoughts, and new behaviours. To listen is to bear witness and validate someone's fear, sadness or anger at injustice in a way that allows the individual to move past these paralyzing emotions and regain their power and will to act anew.

For the participants who were sharing their individual experiences with audiences in *Culture Shock*, the sense of being a part of something that is greater than the sum of its parts, and the ideas of bearing witness, validation and regaining power, as described by Simmons, are clearly central to the messages new Canadians wish to impart. The *Culture Shock* participants' stories clearly influenced not only the capacity audiences in the theatre, but also one another: together, they have found a community that now speaks a common language and shares an understanding and acceptance of individual identities and histories.

Through the educational arm of BET, the work continues to spread beyond their own community to include schools, government agencies and workshops for youth. In many ways, the participants in BET have not only found community and an artistic outlet to voice their ideas and experiences in an artistic milieu but also validation as contributors to Canadian society. Themes of alienation, poverty, racism, education and language are not restricted to newcomers and thus the work of BET and of artists transcends borders and cultural differences. As Dimitri says, “we may not speak English perfect but we are artists and we want to say to you something . . . we *have* to say something because we are artists. Artistic language is the same all over the world.” It is through the vehicle of storytelling in the theatrical form that the connection can be made. If done well, it can be powerful and transformative for both audience and performer.

Oleg, an actor and comedian from the former Soviet Union, says that “the main message of our play is that we have an opportunity to talk and to say we are here, we are listening, we are beside you, behind you, and we are on the right and left. We would like to say to you hello as much as you are ready to say hello to us.” Oleg’s view suggests that inasmuch as new immigrants are generally looking to integrate and be part of the community, there are obvious barriers, for the desire does not necessarily go both ways.

The personal stories and excerpts from the play *Culture Shock* as documented in the CBC Newsworld video illustrate clearly Annette Simmons’s view that storytelling is a means of leveraging truth, has the means to influence others and establishes a basis for acknowledging our collective sense of interdependence (Simmons 2001, 188). It is the desire for an acknowledgment of the interdependence of the human race that is at the root of what these immigrants and new Canadians want to bring to light in their new country. Through sharing stories, perhaps the barriers people of different cultures face will break down, allowing a more inclusive experience for all. In view of the events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent debates and actions surrounding racial profiling and targeting, the time could not be more appropriate to further engage efforts to educate and influence public understanding. The art of storytelling in a theatrical context is one such vehicle to achieve a dialogue at the grass roots level. In the meantime, the most basic value of participating in the arts, whether as a professional artist or as a volunteer, is clearly something that has aided many a new Canadian in gaining a sense of place, community and self-worth.

Conclusion

Because the arts operate as a buffer against the engine of globalization, they help immigrants and refugees with the process of integration into the multiple cultures of Canada – an experience that, in itself, is central to a common understanding of globalization. Organizations such as BET allow those who have arrived here the ability to connect to a community and maintain their hope of achieving, through various means, their respective dreams of security and success in a globalized world. For some, the arts are a step towards economic independence through job opportunities, professional development, networking or showcasing of their artistic work. For others, the arts are a symbolic medium through which freedom may be exercised. Participation in an arts organization or community of artists also enables new Canadians to take advantage of the services and resources of the voluntary sector on their own terms, meaning that no matter what the status of one's "olive tree" – whether flowering, bearing fruit, dormant, transplanted, or dead – there is an individual or organization one can align oneself with.

However, immigrants and refugees will encounter discrimination on multiple levels – ethnic, linguistic, social, political and economic – and these remain obstacles that most newcomers must work to overcome. Zahra from Iran is encountering racism; Pragati and Rajeev believe their inability to find a "good job" is also a function of racism; Alhaadi's barrier is language-based. The barrier confronting Vasily and Yelena is perhaps more difficult to identify; but it appears that it is linked to a self-described "innovative" approach to their artistic work that many find difficult to understand and accept, even in a country as liberal as Canada.

Although barriers may be overcome during one's lifetime in a new country, globalization is still based around these concepts in that "Glocalization," which Friedman defines as the "ability of a culture, when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture, to resist those things that are truly alien and to compartmentalize those things that, while different, can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different" (Friedman 2000, 295). While some cultures may be more flexible and adaptable than others, social and cultural anxieties around new economic or cultural phenomena inevitably arise when people cannot tell for sure whether the innovation originates in their home culture or has been introduced – even imposed – from

outside. Friedman cites the example of a young girl from Japan who, upon encountering a MacDonald's restaurant in America, exclaims, "Look, they have MacDonald's in this country too!"(296). This example also speaks to Klein's view of globalization, where outside products produced by large American corporations have infiltrated international communities to the extent that the indigenous culture is at risk (Klein 2000, 117). Although many non-English speaking nations provide English-language training to their populations, language will probably remain a significant barrier to globalization. The informants studied here were all relatively fluent. For them language – even for a semi-proficient speaker such as Alhaadi – is less of a factor than for someone who arrives speaking and understanding no English whatsoever.

Friedman's projection of a globalized world does not include a significant role for government. In fact he maintains that government will become increasingly irrelevant. Although Canada poses some barriers to globalization on the Friedman model (i.e., significant government controlled industry, tariffs, etc.), we have a government supported social safety net that enables immigrants like Alhaadi and his family to survive here. Canadian artists also enjoy the benefits of public support for the arts. Artists such as Vasily and Yelena may say they are opposed to government support of the arts; but they still apply for and accept public dollars in order to produce their work. Thus Canada's "olive tree" includes our social safety net, free health care system and a demonstrated value of quality of life through the arts and cultural support resources in all social and economic sectors. Given the ability to survive either independently or via our social safety net, newcomers still find language and systemic racism at the heart of the challenges they face. Newcomers can find community through the voluntary sector and, more specifically, through the arts subsector. Four of my informants found community through the Broken English Theatre Company, where they find reassurance in a shared creative exchange with people of races and cultures other than their own.

The Guptas, however, have not tapped the potential of our voluntary sector. Instead they have sought their community connections via a paid immigration consultant who has linked them to other Indian immigrants. Nor did they heed the suggestions of the immigrant career service organization that advised them to build their résumés (which, to my understanding, would include seeking volunteer opportunities enabling them to network and gain work experience). As a result, these young people are acquiring only

friends and contacts within their own ethnic community; they are paying a social as well as an economic price to remain closely attached to their “olive tree.” What they don’t realize, however, is that Canada’s arts and cultural festivals, which they cited as important to them, are generally operated by charitable organizations, which in turn are funded by government. Thus even the Guptas enjoy community connections and benefits, albeit indirectly, through the voluntary sector’s initiatives.

While globalization and the arts are, in many ways, different entities, a strong link exists between the movement of people with artistic objectives and their ability to integrate into specific new communities and – as an extension of their artistic efforts and projects – to broaden their fields of influence across borders. The basic links between new immigrants and refugees are the stories they carry with them and their need to be heard – whether through their own cultural network, through social service organizations, or through expression and community developed through their participation in the arts. When new Canadians participate in arts-related activities, whether as volunteers or as professionals, their own stories and message have the potential to reach a broader public and thus their desire and efforts toward finding connection can indeed have a farther-reaching impact than those who choose more isolated forms of engagement.

Mark Kingwell defines citizenship as “a way of meeting one of our deepest needs, the need to belong; it gives voice and structure to the yearning to be part of something larger than ourselves” (Kingwell 2000, 5). Kingwell’s definition of the role citizenship plays in our lives echoes Annette Simmons’ definition of storytelling; and the point on which they agree lies in the notion of sharing in, or becoming part of, a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Simmons 2001, 31) – a sense of belonging sought by all the informants and artists in the “Broken English” documentary.

While the objective of some newcomers is to assimilate, others choose to maintain their strong cultural traditions and connections. Either way, the majority of informants examined here have found a mechanism via the arts, either as professionals or as volunteers, that affords them a means to enter into a two-way dialogue with others in similar circumstances, and with the public at large.

Identity is a major factor in the models of globalization of both Friedman and Klein, and it is also the crux of the idea behind Kroeker's lecture on Diaspora Ethics. Those that I interviewed have no personal struggle with identity; but for them to have identity in Canada, the arts and the voluntary sector play a major role, albeit unacknowledged in some cases. Although new Canadians are often challenged and restricted by situations in which they feel helpless, they are able to maintain their respective traits and find community and connection through their activities in this country. Alhaadi is able to translate his Sudanese plays into English for our audiences, while Zahra is able to pursue her interest in feminist ideals and contribute to the broadening of her community through volunteer work as a director of an arts board. The Guptas are able to enjoy Indian cultural festivals replicated here in Canada, while Vasily and Yelena are able to pursue the development of independent film projects. All of these are expressions of identity which have no real tangible essence but which serve to promote links to one's home culture, beliefs, traditions and values. Storytelling, in any format, is central to this expression of identity and all of the informants have, in one way or another, employed it as a means of establishing a voice and acquiring recognition and validation in their new country. Although spoken languages can be a barrier to communication and integration in everyday life, the language of the arts is relatively universal, and is able to convey a story but also ideas, passion, emotion and soul. Through shared experiences of storytelling and/or artistic endeavours, barriers can be broken down, bridges built and souls healed.

Globalization requires integration. The arts, as a subsector of the voluntary sector, assist in this integration process. However, the models of globalization presented by Friedman, Klein and Kingwell do not include the voluntary sector as a major player in the forces at work (apart from their role in working to ensure human rights and environmental protection in areas being taken serious advantage of by free-market forces). It can be concluded therefore, that that which is excluded by globalization assists both globalization and "glocalization." In this way the arts, as a part of the voluntary sector, fulfill the coping mechanisms for new Canadians.

While conducting the field interviews, I was struck by the number of individuals who were surprised at being asked to tell their story. Apparently they had rarely been asked about themselves, and the idea that someone *wanted* to know was exciting to them. This reaction indicates to some degree the level of alienation many feel in a new environment.

Making the choice and committing to the ordeal of leaving one's country for the uncertainties of a new home is a daunting and enormous undertaking that leads me to believe any research paper recounting their stories makes the theory of globalization paler in comparison to the realities of the lives of these individuals. The sacrifices that they have made and the stories they have to tell through their respective art forms will, hopefully, contribute to our combined betterment.

Appendix

Field Project Interview Questionnaire

1. Describe a typical day in your home country.
2. What is your strongest cultural association with your home country?
3. When did you first hear about Canada and what made you decide to come to Canada?
4. Describe a typical day in Canada; what do you do?
5. What is your strongest cultural association with being a Canadian or North American?
6. Did you get any help from the Voluntary sector in coming to Canada? If so, How?
7. Did you volunteer in your home country? Are you volunteering in Canada?
8. What is the greatest hurdle you have had to overcome in coming to Canada?
9. What books and/or media did you bring with you?
10. What similarities do you find between Canada and your home country? Art/culture?
11. Did you have a television in your home country? What shows did you watch?
12. How did your understanding of our culture via the media, film & TV. shape your expectations of Canada before you arrived?
13. What are your greatest regrets or fears about coming to Canada?
14. Are you practicing the profession you had in your home country while here in Canada?
15. Do you think we are free in Canada? Are we free economically? Politically?

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16. Many people come here to escape oppression. Do you think this is a country where someone can escape oppression?
 17. Have you connected with your community here? How have they supported you?
 18. What businesses does your ethnic community here participate in?
 19. Some immigrants come here for economic opportunity. Is this a country of economic opportunity?
 20. If you could move to America tomorrow, would you? (What do they have that we don't have? Do you see us as equal countries – or is Canada just an extension of the US?)
 21. Do you feel any ethnic conflict in this country? How do you feel when you see the enemies in your country here?
 22. If there were one thing you could change about Canada, what would it be?
 23. If there were one thing you could change about your home country, what would it be?
 24. How many family members came with you? Were there any family members already in Canada before your arrival?
 25. What do you think of our food in this country? What do you think of your food here? What do you like to buy?
 26. How does your lifestyle in Canada compare to that in your home country?
 27. How has participating in the arts in Canada helped bridge your home culture to the new one?
 28. What does being a Canadian mean or symbolize for you?

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