

At the Age of *Twelve*: Migrant Children and the Disruption of Multicultural Belonging

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*This paper troubles seductive discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and the centrality of whiteness to national belonging, highlighting how migrant children understand and navigate assimilation. Evolving out of childhood migration stories shared by 12 interviewees in the documentary *Twelve*, the article addresses the ways ‘childist’ logics are used to separate childhood from the realities of race and racism. In working towards anti-racist praxis, we address how storytelling challenges adult–child power hierarchies, exposing how childhood continues to be framed as a time of innocence, disconnected from the violence, danger and pain involved in migrating to Anglophone Canada. © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children’s Bureau*

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Introduction

When asked to reflect upon Canada as a nation, many citizens — despite their racial, ethnic, or national identities — articulate that Canada and its people are accepting of difference and diversity. Recently, the *New York Times* published ‘52 Places to Go in 2017’, with Canada being its number one destination: ‘In honor of the 150th anniversary of its confederation, when the original colonies came together as one country, Canada is rolling out the welcome mat’ (Bloch and others, 2017, np). Yet, packed into these narratives of progress and harmonious relationships remains the failure to understand Canada as a white supremacist and settler colonial nation, founded upon the death and disappearance of Indigenous peoples, and the labour and exploitation of people of colour (Cannon and Sunseri, 2011; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007). To this day, many children of colour and migrant children experience the adverse effects of racism and colonialism (Coloma, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Pon and others, 2011; Tutwiler, 2016). These effects come in the form of direct violence, microaggressions from other children and adults, and the larger structural concerns of assimilation to whiteness.

Lester Alfonso, Philippine-born director and filmmaker of the documentary *Twelve*, tackles the multifaceted ways 12-year-old migrant children experienced assimilation as they were transplanted to different parts of Anglophone Canada, through their now-adult views (except for Abi, who is 13, and Sushmita, who is 12) (Marin and Alfonso, 2008). The documentary *Twelve*, which was ‘produced as part of the Reel Diversity Competition for emerging filmmakers of colour’ (National Film Board of Canada, 2008), addresses the complex ways adults remember their childhood migration experiences in multicultural Canada. *Twelve* was funded by Reel Diversity, a National Film Board of Canada initiative, which is in partnership with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Newsworld. *Twelve* has been screened on university campuses and classrooms and in communities across Canada to raise awareness of the

multifaceted struggles of migrant children in so-called multicultural Canada. Despite the utility of *Twelve*, we nonetheless underscore the importance of understanding documentary film as situated within the broader social, political and economic contexts. As such, the arguments made in *Twelve* become mediated, constructed and edited by the filmmaker, the film crew, the participants and the funders. Thus, while we utilise the stories as the basis for our critique, we do so by highlighting that these stories are always partial truths.

The stories in *Twelve* give insight into how migrant children are integrated and racialised on individual and structural levels, providing an avenue to consider how quotidian narratives of assimilation become normalised in the process of becoming Canadian. As exemplified in Alfonso's documentary, children's experiences of migration shape their future adult sense of self, but also their understandings of what it means to be an English-speaking Canadian. We utilise the documentary *Twelve* as a text to theorise the narratives of migrant children as they occupy different subject positions, giving a glimpse into the ways the experience of migration in Canada is tied to race. In the film, a singular thread emerges: the interviewees, reflecting back upon their childhood, are aware of the assimilation process they endured to become 'Canadian'. Their stories of migration illustrate that one must erase one's difference and become 'colourblind' to the larger systemic apparatuses of white racism in order to feel a sense of belonging and attachment to Canada.

Reflecting on the stories from *Twelve*, we argue that the narratives of migrant children must be conceptualised within their own right, as one way to disrupt the white supremacist and settler colonial underpinnings of multiculturalism in Anglophone Canada. In other words, *Twelve* helps to prove that migrant children understand and are making sense of their own assimilation and what is required of them to belong in Canada. This reality also shatters 'childist' logics of 'age appropriateness' and 'childhood innocence' that adults use to discount and disengage with children's stories. By childism, we refer to the ways adults construct the "child" as an immature being, produced and owned by adults who use it to serve their own needs and fantasies' (Young-Bruehl, 2012, p. 36).

In order to think critically of multiculturalism and migration as they pertain to the lives of migrant children, we ask: In what ways do migration stories challenge national narratives of racial harmony and belonging in what is now known as Canada? And, in an effort to work towards anti-racist praxis, how can adults challenge discourses of multiculturalism within their work with (migrant) children? To answer these questions, we base our inquiry within the fields of critical race studies and critical whiteness studies by providing some background and literature on migrant children's experiences of migration, racism and belonging. Next, we explicitly connect the narratives of migration offered in the documentary *Twelve* to the complex and contradictory discourses of multiculturalism in Anglophone Canada and beyond. This logic has negative repercussions for all, and thus, we conclude by theorising how the praxis of anti-racism might engage with children's migration stories as one way to challenge the pervasiveness of white supremacy and settler colonialism in Canada.

In our commitment to anti-racist praxis, we intend to use this paper as a platform to speak out against the racist and colonial conditions plaguing the lives of children of colour and migrant children. We address the need to think critically of belonging as it pertains to children's lives — particularly within the larger global arena — as many efforts are being made to cultivate a singular, unified understanding of nationalism. For example, under President Donald Trump, many efforts have been made to legally restrict Muslims from travelling to the United States through the implementation of a travel ban. This ban has normalised white supremacist logics surrounding racial purity to pigeonhole Muslims, and effectively all migrants, as threats to the nation. Thus, while we address the particularities of the Canadian

landscape, we understand that similar logics are being implemented in other settler colonial nations.

Racism and multiculturalism in childhood

Much of the literature surrounding the identities and subjectivities of children habitually disregards or minimises their experiences of race and racism — often coming from the vantage point of childhood developmental theories and perspectives. Normative logics such as maintaining ‘developmental appropriateness’ and avoiding ‘tarnishing children’s innocence’ are typically evoked by adults as ways to minimise and even dismiss discussions with children regarding difficult topics such as race and racism (Kelly and Brooks, 2009). And, while adults have a great fear of the unknown regarding children’s comprehension of difficult material, to disregard the effects that race and racism have on their lives can do a disservice to all children. Dismissing these realities in the lives of children — specifically, children of colour and migrant children — further perpetuates the perception that we live in a post-racial and post-colonial society.

As Kelly and Brooks (2009) make clear, all children share difficult, and oftentimes traumatic, stories with adults regarding their comprehension of death and war. The authors illustrate that children are able to comprehend and make sense of their own life and the negative events that touch it, such as a family member dying, or realising particular people are targeted and killed due to their race or religion. One teacher in their study noticed that at age six, children tease and bully each other in an effort to sustain racial hierarchies (e.g. calling someone ‘brown in a really mean way’) (Kelly and Brooks, 2009, p. 206). As Ferguson (2001) notes, children of colour have very serious and difficult conversations with their parents of colour regarding their race and how other children (and adults) treat them. Some parents of colour teach their own children of colour about the realities of racism and how to navigate adult authority, as they do in fact encounter racism early on (Ferguson, 2001). Ferguson noted that parents of colour often address racism with their children in divergent ways: they make sure that their children pick ‘good’ friends and that they pay attention to their language use (e.g. not swearing), and they stress how racism and oppression operate within the school itself (e.g. being bullied for having dark[er] skin). Thus, in connection with Kelly and Brooks (2009), Ferguson’s research illustrates that children of colour experience and can understand the complex reality of racism and oppression in their lives. Despite some of the literature exposing children of colour’s understanding and experience of racism, however, the relationship to multiculturalism and diversity in Canada has yet to be fully examined.

Within the context of Canada, multiculturalism is typically evoked as a framework to bring about racial harmony among vastly different racial, ethnic and cultural groups. Indeed, this narrative of cohesion is used to erase differences by producing and normalising a complex rhetoric of tolerance and diversity, which trickles down to affect the treatment of all children (e.g. manifesting in celebratory ‘diversity’ events). Thus, it is not only the ‘childist’ treatment of children as innocent and as unable to comprehend racism that fuels discourses of multiculturalism in Canada, but also the climates in which children come to learn about themselves and each other. The desire — on the part of adults and children alike — for multiculturalism (and its reproduction) in Canada shifts attention away from the violent realities of nation building and everyday experiences of racism and colonialism, and brings the focus towards the acceptance and perpetuation of children’s differences, through a logic of diversity. Focusing on sameness (i.e. on who is the same and who is different) within the discourse of multiculturalism sets up children of colour as the Other to that of the national order of things — they are made to feel and be different. This difference making process naturalises whiteness, whereby the proper national subject is, and will always be, white

(Thobani, 2007). Through this framework of creating and maintaining difference, Canada's appeal as a tolerant and diverse multicultural nation is grounded in the requirement that migrant children assimilate into whiteness. And, as depicted in the documentary *Twelve*, the process of assimilation takes many forms — with the end goal being to shape migrant children's sense of self, but also the 'Canada' to which they wish to belong.

Considering the ways multiculturalism shapes dominant understandings of Canadian culture and belonging, Sartia Srivastava (2007) outlines how particular tropes under the rubric of multiculturalism are used to depoliticise and trivialise racial, ethnic and cultural difference. Srivastava notes that multiculturalism typically emerges through a 3D approach: *dress, dance and dining*. Srivastava contends that these approaches typically belittle people's familial, cultural, and land-based traditions, turning their 'culture' into something that can be consumed. These kinds of approaches to learning and teaching about 'culture' exist within children's lives too. Within schools, children learn about race through routine participation in events, holidays and celebrations (Azzam, 2011; Srivastava, 2007).

As Azzam (2011) argues, newcomer children are expected to participate in holiday celebrations during the time of Christmas and Halloween, for example, even if they do not practice these holidays at home. Azzam emphasises that obligatory participation in holiday celebrations within schools creates a homogenised 'core culture' that is centred on white civility. This 'core culture' facilitates absurd and oftentimes racist celebratory festivals, whereby adults (placed into positions of authority as teachers) decide how and what children need to learn about Canadian culture and multiculturalism. These events facilitate the common perception that racial and cultural difference can be consumed and segmented, erasing the historical and contemporary realities of racism and settler colonialism in Canada.

Similarly, Raby (2004) notes that the focus on multiculturalism constructs schools as racially neutral spaces. Consequently, calling someone out as racist can have negative repercussions in the lives of white children insofar as they learn that racism is something bad people do. For all children, focusing on tolerance and diversity can have grave repercussions as they develop a fear of talking about race and racism. For children of colour and migrant children, the celebratory focus of multiculturalism can diminish the very real consequences of the racism they experience, and also locate for them the problem of racism within a few bad white people. This individualistic understanding of racism neglects an analysis of how racism is deeply entrenched in structural apparatuses and conditions.

Moreover, locating racism within a small group of bad white people fails to address the centrality of whiteness in multiculturalism's promise of belonging. In Canada, the realities of racism experienced by children of colour and migrant children are routinely made invisible — bringing attention instead to the celebration of difference (i.e. focussing on how the Other children are 'different' than 'normal' white children) and the development of harmonious relationships. Indeed, the focus on progress, then, normalises and naturalises the whiteness of the nation — making race (and addressing racism) a problem. Through this construction, the white subject becomes normalised as the proper national subject — to be Canadian, one must be white (Thobani, 2007).

For migrant children in Anglophone Canada, the discourse of multiculturalism typically fails to address the relevancy of race and racism in their lives. As we discuss in our analysis of *Twelve*, many stories of assimilation shared by the white migrants fail to consider how their whiteness mediates their capacity to gain a deeper sense of belonging. Their own embodied whiteness as children facilitated interesting reflective responses from the white adults, such as 'be patient', in offering support and guidance for their younger self's survival. For migrant children of colour, it is within their experiences of race that they encounter the challenges of assimilation and survival. As theorised by Brabant and others (2016), migrant

children of colour become easy targets of microaggression at school because their race and language are markers of difference. The authors argue that migrant children of colour learn to adopt strategies to improve their behaviour, learn English, and develop mannerisms that will minimise the likelihood of exclusion in the future. In essence, and in connection with *Twelve*, migrant children of colour are forced to develop strategies for survival, including around the language they speak. As powerfully outlined by Nakassis (2016), in South India, English has come to signal progress and prestige, making learning the language seemingly necessary among youth, as they attempt to transcend their locality by becoming 'global citizens'. The power of knowing English makes assimilating even more 'necessary' for migrant children in order to facilitate their survival in a culture that makes their difference distinct.

Yet, for white migrant children, they can employ their whiteness as a strategy to minimise the appearance of difference, ultimately increasing the likelihood of peer acceptance and being able to 'fit in'. Carranza (2007) highlights the pressure among Salvadorian female youth assimilating in Canada. Despite attempts to preserve their culture and language at home, Salvadorian female youth emphasise the need and desire to adopt the Anglophone 'Canadian culture' to belong among their peers (Carranza, 2007). As one Salvadorian youth indicates, there are conflicting tensions that arise in the migration process: remaining close to one's ethnic roots (e.g. language, traditions, and clothing) versus erasing one's difference in order to be accepted by white peers. Carranza outlines how migrant youth learn early on in their time in Canada that, to be understood as normal, one needs to fit in and become the norm, alluding to the ways youth of colour consciously assimilate to belong or blend in. Since the norm has been constructed around whiteness, this particular Salvadorian student, like the migrant youth in *Twelve*, learns that more harm than good will occur if one sticks to one's roots — highlighting the power and promise of whiteness. Migrant youths' experiences of racism, in the form of microaggressions, as a result of language and cultural differences prevent migrant children of colour from feeling a sense of belonging among their white peers in Anglophone Canada (Carranza, 2007). The centrality of whiteness is apparent in the migration stories provided in *Twelve*, since the majority of the stories shared revolve around the naturalisation of assimilation in the lives of migrant children.

Thinking through *Twelve*

Twelve provides a powerful depiction of the migration experience of 12 individuals, 10 adults and 2 youths — Abi, Bea, Bronwyn, Charlie, Erin, Frances, George, Iga, Mahleej, Roland, Ruby and Sushmita — who migrated to various parts of English-speaking Canada when they were 12 years old. Each of the 12 participants Alfonso interviews shares the story of how and why they migrated to Canada and focuses on the challenges as well as triumphs of their childhood migration. For example, Figure 1 shows Iga, Lester, Roland, and Erin on the couch sharing their emotional experiences of childhood migration — that migration in Canada will 'benefit.' During each interview, the interviewees construct identities and anecdotes of assimilation by recalling their childhood. A powerful theme of survival develops throughout the documentary. These 'survival stories' highlight how migrant children are encouraged to adapt and try to assimilate into Canada's 'core' culture. The narratives provide an opportunity to deconstruct what it means to be Canadian and critique the requirement of assimilation into whiteness for migrant children, particularly those of colour. *Twelve* also allows for the migrants themselves to reflect upon their experiences and share their childhood migration stories, which offer the viewer a glimpse into the seemingly invisible struggles experienced by children who migrate to Anglophone Canada.

While we cannot provide a summary of the documentary, we address some of the stories shared as a way to articulate the complexities of childhood migration experienced by



Figure 1. Shifting Perspectives. Starting from the left, Iga, Lester, Roland and Erin connect by sharing their experiences of childhood migration.

children of colour and white children. For example, Charlie, a white male from Malta, discusses his experiences of migration, particularly his experiences of exclusion at school. Charlie shares how he was ostracised by school peers and teachers for having a 'big head'. Charlie's teacher used Charlie's 'big head' as an example to argue that he was not necessarily intelligent, even though he possessed a large head for a child. Charlie's story illustrates how white migrant children are rendered Other by adults (e.g. teachers) and by their peers. Despite Charlie's experience of being Othered, he has since found solace in Canada and is now a proud father and school bus driver.

While Charlie's story highlights the ways white migrant children are Othered and ostracised due to their difference, Bea's story underlines how learning English becomes either the marker of success or failure for all migrant children. Bea, a white female from Hungary, talks about how, for her, learning English was a necessary component to belonging in Anglophone Canada. Bea, along with her two older brothers, escaped Hungary and ended up becoming a refugee in Canada. Bea felt she was able to learn English quite easily because she was still young. However, as Bea explains, her older brother Andrew did not have the same success, leading to his further exclusion and a severe form of depression. To combat the harsh torment he experienced, Andrew swallowed a cyanide tablet to end his life. Through Bea's story, it becomes clear that language differences and insufficient English proficiency result in loss of mental health and even death when it comes to Canadian belonging.

Frances, a white female from Macedonia, shares a similar story of migration and struggles with language. Frances talks about how she too had some challenges developing friendships with her peers at school because she did not speak English. Frances' story powerfully explains how English is valued in the school setting, but also within the larger landscape of multicultural Canada. Francis states that as a result of her inability to understand and speak English, she was placed two grade levels lower than others of her age. Frances expresses that

this correlation between English proficiency and intelligence is somewhat fabricated insofar as being placed into a lower grade level does not guarantee that any student will learn English any differently. Frances also explains how, in an effort to 'blend in', she changed her name to a more 'Canadian' name to avoid exclusion and ostracism from peers.

An orphan from Yugoslavia, George articulates the subtle advantages of being a white migrant. Upon arriving to Canada, George spent one and a half years living in an orphanage in Ancaster, Ontario. George explains how he was lucky to be adopted by a young family. Packed into his description of having a 'lonely appearance' is his invisible white privilege, which may have motivated his adoption. Throughout George's narrative, he explains the importance of not feeling sorry for oneself during the migration process, because those feelings do not change the difficulty of migration for children. George's story highlights how despite all the odds against him, his whiteness marked him as desirable. Overall, in spite of the vast differences between their experiences of migration, all of the white interviewees Alfonso speaks with address with seeming ease how they were able to 'overcome' their deficits and fit themselves into (white) English-speaking Canadian society.

Yet, along with this ease and comfort, the viewer can also perceive an overwhelming sense of conformity: the migrants explain that in order to fit in and become 'Canadian', they needed to erase their differences. For example, Ruby, a Filipina woman, explains her discontent with the high representation of migrant families and families of colour within her apartment complex when she first arrived in Anglophone Canada. Ruby states: 'It felt like I wasn't in Canada'. Here, Ruby highlights that the construction of Canada for her at age 12 was white, which illustrates that children of colour do not belong in such a Canada — or, if they do, they are confined to racialised spaces. Ruby's discussion of racial belonging in Canada is juxtaposed with her advice to 'be a kid', as she wishes for all children to live a life outside of the harm of racism by engaging in activities and games that are perceived to be for children. Ruby's interview emphasises the power of 'childhood innocence' discourses in shaping children of colour's understandings of self, as well as the realities of racism in their lives.

Moreover, Sushmita, a Filipina girl, shares her experiences of being bullied and teased by classmates on the basis of her name and her accent. Sushmita speaks of her disappointment in the hostile environment at her school, arguing that her name is respected in the Philippines, but mocked in Canada. At the core of her story is the argument that it is difficult to be a Filipina girl in Anglophone Canada. This difficulty arises in the tension between being produced as Other vis-à-vis one's race and the desirable discourse of Canadian multiculturalism's tolerance — a discourse that underscores the importance of whiteness to national belonging. In conjunction with Sushmita's story, for the first time in the film, we see Lester open up in a different way. Exemplified in Figure 2, Sushmita asks Lester, 'Have you ever been bullied before?' He replies, 'Yes'. Lester shares an emotional story of a group of boys throwing stones at him. Lester says that he did not know what to do, until he finally heard one of the boys yell, 'He's going to do karate on you and beat you up!' Although Lester was produced as different under the umbrella of the all encompassing 'Asian' identity given to him, because of that difference he was able to flee the boys and their violent acts. Thus, the stories offered by some of the migrants of colour emphasise in different variances and degrees the ways that race matters in the migration process.

The migration stories shared also point to the complexity of whiteness, as whiteness is not simply something kids have or do not have. Instead, whiteness is a complex process that can be learned and negotiated. That is, migrant children of colour can begin to perform whiteness in order to navigate shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. For example, we briefly hear from Abi, who is an Anglophone black migrant youth from Australia. She shares with Alfonso that her peers saw her accent as an asset, and that although she was made out



Figure 2. Building Relationships. From the left, Sushmita and Lester find hope in their shared experiences as Filipinos in Canada.

to be different, her difference was familiar enough to fit into the national order of things — as Australia is a settler colonial nation. Instead of being made fun of for her accent, like Sushmita, Abi was able to blend in enough and gain a new peer group despite being different. The utility of an accent — constructed to be useful or interestingly foreign — highlights the ways children of colour can, with relative comfort and ease, utilise the offerings of whiteness, despite being marked as Other. The utility of whiteness, here, connects back to the theoretical underpinnings of multiculturalism that bring children of colour into the Canadian nation's construction of itself.

Feelings of home

The migration stories in *Twelve* stress how 'home' is powerfully positioned and reimagined by migrants. All of the migrants interviewed provide stories of loss and of making a home in Anglophone Canada despite instances of being made to unbelong. Making, creating and finding a home were their ultimate goals — the experiences of displacement, violence and culture shock fuelled the seeming need to conform and assimilate into whiteness. The image of the proper Canadian naturalises whiteness by obscuring the ongoing violence experienced by migrants. Despite this exclusive nature of Canadian homemaking, home (and its doings) has become synonymous with belonging, and more importantly, belonging in Canada.

Yet, the narratives shared in *Twelve* highlight the precarious relationships migrants have with Canada. Narratives of homemaking are juxtaposed with narratives of exclusion — 'having a big head', 'changing one's name', and 'wearing the right kind of clothes' — making whiteness much more seductive. But the promise of a 'better life' in Canada comes with particular conditions and restrictions. As Ahmed (2003) notes, parents often 'act out of love' for their children — they make the decision to move to Canada with the hope of achieving something better (whatever better entails for them). However, once they are in Canada, Ahmed emphasises that multiculturalism's promise evokes a desire on the part of migrants to

'act out of love' for the nation and all that it has to offer, despite being made to be 'out of place' as migrants. Experiencing placelessness (or homelessness) within the nation fosters even stronger investments in the nation, as migrants are routinely expected to love the nation without receiving love in return (Ahmed, 2003). Indeed, many of the migrants in *Twelve* contribute stories of loss, discomfort, and trouble with identifying Anglophone Canada as their 'home'.

Home, then, becomes something both material (one must settle and root oneself) and ideological (one must belong in a community). Home, as it is imagined and enacted within the lives of migrant children of colour, is produced through race. For the white migrants, the migration process was difficult, and in the case of Andrew, deadly. Couched in their narratives of difficulty and discomfort, however, is an overwhelming desire to assimilate (and to encourage other [all?] migrants to do so). For the white migrants, their whiteness is advantageous; they continue to feel a greater sense of belonging in Canada because they are not racially marked as 'Other'. Thus, while white migrants experience horrors in the Canadian migration process, their experience of assimilation and overall belonging within Canada is eased through their whiteness. For their part, migrants of colour often feel heightened discomfort, exclusion, and uncertainty, despite the national narrative of Canada as a country welcoming and tolerant of all.

Specifically, after talking with Sushmita, Lester has an epiphanic moment where he comes to feel more comfortable — 'out of the woods' — in Anglophone Canada. Not only did Lester, at the age of 12, struggle to navigate Canada as his home for many years, he was only able to feel comfort upon talking to people who were like him — migrants of colour and/or those who were Filipina/o. Through discussions with those who were familiar to him, Lester was assured that he could find his way. However, it is not until Lester is reunited with his partner and child that he comes to this realisation. As such, Lester required the confirmation of other migrants of colour that things would be 'okay' and that it was possible to survive in a racist universe. However, wrapped up in Lester's narrative is the requirement of 'loving the nation' in order to find 'self-love'. That is, Lester has had to succumb to a life of assimilation, whereby his body will always be rendered out of place, despite the promise of multiculturalism's love and acceptance of it.

Anti-racist praxis: listening to and learning from migration stories

Despite some of the unhelpful conclusions made in *Twelve*, and in our analysis of the migrant stories shared, we wish to use the documentary as a platform to ask critical questions of multiculturalism's promise, and also to ask how the violence of multiculturalism might be shattered. The migration stories offered in *Twelve* highlight the complex realities of English-speaking Canada, in which belonging is tied to assimilative practices of whiteness. The stories do particular work in addressing the desirability of whiteness, but also underline possibilities for resistance: children are conscious of and can speak to their experiences of violence, danger and pain related to their migration to Canada.

In an effort to address the need to think critically of Canadian multiculturalism and honour children's stories of migration, we conclude by considering how adults might listen to and encourage children to speak of their migration experiences in order to trouble multicultural whiteness and engage in anti-racist praxis. Powerfully depicted in *Twelve* is how stories can challenge hegemonic constructions of childhood migration by offering a glimpse into children's personal struggles and triumphs. These stories challenge discourses of Canadian multiculturalism, breaking narratives that depict Canada as welcoming of all. Instead, engrained in each story is a theme of survival, wherein the objective was to simply find a way to exist in Anglophone Canada. Woven into the narratives shared is the frustration that

nobody was there to hear their stories; thus, perhaps storytelling might be a therapeutic and liberating experience for those going through the migration process. The stories shared by the adults and adolescents interviewed, in reflecting upon their experiences of childhood migration, draw attention to how we need to engage migrant children in conversations surrounding race, racism and belonging in Canada. If migrant children are able to tell their own stories, they will be able to feel a sliver of hope and self-love amidst the pressure to assimilate into whiteness. Moreover, bringing to the fore the troubles of assimilation experienced by migrant children can allow adults (if they intend on truly listening) to work with children where they are at, without the assumption that they need to fit into some kind of normalcy. This kind of anti-racist approach to childhood migrant stories would do away with totalising narratives of harmony and progress, and allow for children to communicate — on their own terms — their own (dis)satisfactions with migration, Canada, and the adult world.

Storytelling thus has the potential to become a counter hegemonic force for discourses of multiculturalism, as migrant children begin to speak about the conflicting desires to fit in while honouring their differences. Storytelling provides a platform to trouble narratives of racial harmony and progress by centring the storyteller — they are the authority of their own story. Through storytelling, children may come to accept their migration journey, despite their differences that mark them as 'Other'. It is within moments of storytelling that migrant children might encourage adults to reconsider the seductive nature of multicultural whiteness. We call upon adults to recognise that, by truly listening to and creating space for the stories of migrant children, they can question the centrality of whiteness in the migration process — and in the making of Canada. It is only through such spaces that children can honour their own authenticity and migration story as one way to break away from the violent tropes of Canadian multiculturalism and belonging that require their assimilation.

Indeed, the migration stories shared by the adults and adolescents in *Twelve* address how childhood — as innocent as adults make it out to be — is a time when racism is known about, talked about, and negotiated on the part of (migrant) children of colour. And, while migrant children of colour experience racism, they may strategically utilise the workings of whiteness in an effort to assimilate and 'blend in' to Canada. We are not advocating for children to assimilate and erase their differences in an effort to become 'Canadian'. We are not advocating for children to assimilate and erase their differences in an effort to become 'Canadian' — nor are we suggesting their 'differences' should become a focal point. By doing away with 'childist logics', storytelling can bring to light the ways whiteness works in the migration process, and can challenge the discursive regime of multiculturalism, which continues to separate childhood from race and racism — in thought, if not in action.

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